

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-13-517](#), a report to congressional addressees

Why GAO Did This Study

Congress took steps to improve federal performance reporting through GPRAMA by requiring that OMB provide performance information via a publicly-available central website, Performance.gov. GAO is mandated to review GPRAMA's implementation at several junctures; this report is part of a series doing so. The report examines the extent to which Performance.gov incorporates leading practices for the development of federal websites. To address this objective, GAO compared the design of Performance.gov to GSA's Top 10 Best Practices for federal websites on HowTo.gov; reviewed performance reporting literature and OMB guidance; collected information from 13 national, state, and local performance reporting website practitioners; and interviewed federal and nonfederal groups most likely to use the information on the website because of their management, oversight, advocacy, or academic interests. These groups included officials from five selected agencies, staff from 13 U.S. Senate and House of Representatives congressional committees, and representatives from 10 transparency organizations and academic institutions.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that OMB should work with GSA and the PIC to (1) clarify specific ways that intended audiences could use Performance.gov and specify changes to support these uses; (2) systematically collect information on the needs of intended audiences; and (3) collect recommended performance metrics and, as appropriate, create goals for those metrics. OMB staff agreed with these recommendations.

View [GAO-13-517](#). For more information, contact J. Christopher Mihm at (202) 512-6806 or mihmj@gao.gov.

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MANAGING FOR RESULTS

Leading Practices Should Guide the Continued Development of Performance.gov

What GAO Found

The GPRAMA Modernization Act of 2010 (GPRAMA) requires Performance.gov to provide program and performance information accessible to the public and members and committees of Congress. GAO used leading practices from HowTo.gov, a key source of guidance for federal website development and management, to assess the website and found that although Performance.gov incorporates some leading practices, opportunities exist to further incorporate them through continued development. For example, consistent with leading practices, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), working with the General Services Administration (GSA) and the Performance Improvement Council (PIC), provided information about the purposes and audiences for the website, but they have made limited efforts to clarify how audiences can use the information provided. If the specific uses of Performance.gov are not clarified, while taking into consideration what the law requires, it could lead to varying ideas and expectations for how Performance.gov should be developed.

Leading practices also recommend that developers engage potential users through focus groups and other outreach and regularly conduct usability tests to gather insight into areas such as navigation and the organization of website content. Efforts to collect input and feedback from potential audiences of Performance.gov, however, have been limited to the collection of suggestions through the website's "Feedback" page and briefings for selected audiences. Similarly, OMB has not yet conducted any usability tests of the website, although staff said that usability testing is being planned for September 2013. Without this information, the needs of the audiences and how they are using or want to use the website cannot guide further improvements.

In addition, leading practices recommend that agencies collect, analyze, and report on a baseline set of performance, customer satisfaction, and other metrics. Of the 24 recommended metrics, 15 are currently tracked for Performance.gov. Leading practices also recommend setting goals for metrics and making sure these align with the website's objectives to help prioritize and guide design changes. These goals can be identified based on prevailing practices or the desire to improve a particular metric over time. Except for the area of customer satisfaction, OMB has not established performance metric goals, which may make it more difficult to analyze the effectiveness of the website.

OMB staff stated that, thus far, the specific legal requirements of GPRAMA have been the primary framework used to guide efforts to develop Performance.gov. They said they have been focused on compliance with these requirements by providing information on agency and cross-agency priority goals and by establishing a phased development plan for integrating additional information from agency strategic plans, performance plans, and performance reports. OMB and GSA staff members said, however, that the leading practices provided by HowTo.gov will help guide the development of Performance.gov. They also noted that as the phased development of Performance.gov unfolds, they expect to use broader outreach to a wider audience, including members of the public, to make Performance.gov more "public-facing" and "citizen-centric."