

## **ACTION PLAN**

### **How GAO Will Strengthen Its Strategic Planning Process**

As the U.S. General Accounting Office prepares to update its strategic plan, it is acting in a number of ways on the five suggestions offered by George L. Ward in his case study of how the initial plan was developed. This action plan discusses GAO's efforts to continue improving its strategic planning process. Some of the actions described were planned or under way independent of the case study's suggestions but relate to the issues Ward raised.

#### **Engage More Staff Earlier in the Next Planning Process**

To foster ownership of the plan by staff at every level in the agency, GAO is engaging more staff earlier in its strategic planning process. Headquarters and field staff have played a significant part in the planning conferences conducted by their teams. Headquarters and field staff also participated in two workshops conducted by Toffler Associates as part of GAO's "environmental scan," which seeks to identify factors outside the agency that should be considered in updating the strategic plan. In addition to the overall scan, field office staff—including newly hired personnel and interns—are conducting regional scans of major developments occurring in state and local governments and significant regional trends. To encourage continuing, broad-based involvement, an internal Web site on strategic planning has been created to give staff another mechanism for providing input to the update process and for commenting electronically on the draft plan once it is developed. In addition, the Employee Advisory Council established by the Comptroller General provides GAO's leadership with the viewpoints of a number of employee groups on a variety of issues pertinent to strategic planning.

#### **Engage More External Stakeholders in Planning**

To broaden the external input to its next strategic plan, GAO is engaging a wider array of stakeholders and outside experts. In 2000, the Comptroller General established a 42-member Advisory Board of widely recognized experts in areas pertaining to each of GAO's strategic objectives. Among the board's responsibilities is assisting in the revision of GAO's strategic plan. At its April 2001 meeting in Washington, D.C., the board reviewed GAO's strategic planning framework and discussed current and emerging issues affecting the agency's work. GAO has brought together other groups of outside experts as well to advise on issues relevant to the strategic planning process. The 17-member Educators' Advisory Panel, for instance, has examined GAO's strategies for dealing with its human capital challenges. The five-member Accountability Advisory Council will advise GAO on vital and emerging issues concerning financial management and performance and accountability reporting, primarily related to the annual consolidated audit of the U.S. government. The Comptroller General has also established an informal domestic working group of six federal inspectors general and audit officials from six state and six local governments and a global working group that includes the heads of audit agencies from 14 countries. These groups, too, will advise GAO on the update of its strategic plan. As mentioned previously, GAO engaged Toffler Associates to assist with the environmental scan phase of the agency's strategic plan update. Toffler's resulting study outlines the key dimensions of the knowledge-based economy, relating them to the themes of GAO's strategic plan. Separately, staff drawn from a number of GAO's units at headquarters and field offices are conducting the environmental scan at national and regional levels, gathering information from numerous outside sources. As during the preparation of the original strategic plan, GAO's senior executives are continuing outreach

activities with congressional clients in addition to their fundamental, continual consultation with the Congress.

### **Work With Other Agencies in Achieving Objectives**

GAO is working with other government agencies in a number of ways to achieve its strategic objectives. For example, the Comptroller General and the Chief Operating Officer are holding a series of meetings with newly confirmed cabinet secretaries and their agencies' senior executives to discuss cross-cutting issues, among other matters. They are also engaged in discussions about the major management challenges and program results across the federal government with the senior executives of the Office of Management and Budget and the President's Management Council, which comprises the chief operating officers of all cabinet-level agencies. Through a recently established External Liaison office, GAO is enhancing its relationships with local, state, and foreign accountability agencies and with selected colleges, universities, and nonprofit organizations. Separately, senior managers from GAO meet quarterly with managers from its sister agencies—the Congressional Budget Office and the Congressional Research Service—to identify opportunities to work together to better serve the Congress. GAO's Applied Research and Methods team helps other agencies improve their analytic capacities, while GAO's Office of Special Investigations collaborates with inspectors general at other executive agencies and with law enforcement agencies to coordinate work and refer investigative findings. Finally, GAO uses, when appropriate, a "constructive engagement" approach with executive branch agencies to help them improve their programs and operations. Rather than waiting for the agencies to produce results that can be analyzed to pinpoint weaknesses, GAO conducts constructive engagements to help agencies obtain positive results the first time. A set of agency protocols is being developed to structure and clarify how GAO works with other agencies and what other agencies can expect of GAO.

### **Facilitate Internal Collaboration and Cooperation**

Since late 2000, GAO's senior leadership has been meeting weekly as a group to discuss new congressional requests for work and the progress of engagements already under way. To carry this collaboration forward into the process for updating GAO's strategic plan, the meetings in summer 2001 also include discussions of the plan's themes and strategic objectives. To prompt staff to plan—and subsequently act—beyond the "stovepipes" of individual units, GAO selected four of its senior executives to serve as goal coordinators, each leading the collaborative planning efforts conducted under the agency's four broad strategic goals. At the staff level, cross-cutting "communities of practice," such as GAO's new Infrastructure Network, are organizing to facilitate collaboration on strategic issues that cross organizational boundaries.

### **Refine Performance Measures and Tracking**

To improve how GAO's performance is measured and tracked, the agency has teams evaluating and refining the existing measures and developing additional ways of documenting and assessing the agency's performance in terms of its clients, its results, and its people. Following a "balanced scorecard" approach, GAO intends to gauge its performance from the perspectives of those the agency serves, its staff, and what the agency is trying to achieve. GAO is also developing a new personnel appraisal and compensation system that more closely and clearly ties the performance criteria for individual staff members to the agency's strategic plan.