

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-14-436T](#), a testimony before the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

The federal government is one of the world's largest and most diverse entities, with about \$3.5 trillion in outlays in fiscal year 2013, funding an extensive array of programs and operations. Moreover, it faces a number of significant fiscal, management, and governance challenges in responding to the varied and increasingly complex issues it seeks to address.

This statement focuses on (1) GAO's work related to the President's Management Agenda, and (2) additional opportunities for decision makers to address major management challenges.

This statement is primarily based upon our published and ongoing work covering GAO's High Risk List; fragmentation, overlap, and duplication reports; and managing for results work. The work upon which these published reports and preliminary findings were based was conducted in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

GAO has made numerous recommendations to OMB and executive branch agencies in these areas and reports in this statement on the status of selected key recommendations.

View [GAO-14-436T](#). For more information, contact J. Christopher Mihm at (202) 512-6806 or mihmj@gao.gov.

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GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS

Views on the Progress and Plans for Addressing Government-wide Management Challenges

What GAO Found

A number of areas on the President's Management Agenda are consistent with issues highlighted by GAO's work on the High Risk Program, its annual reports on fragmentation, overlap, and duplication, and other work related to long-standing management challenges. These include, for example: using information technology to better manage for results; addressing improper payments; expanding strategic sourcing; strengthening strategic human capital management; and improving the Department of Defense's weapon systems and services acquisitions. Lasting success in addressing the difficult and longstanding issues on the Presidents Management Agenda will hinge on effective implementation, including sustained top leadership attention. GAO and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) have agreed to hold a series of high level meetings on the issues on GAO's High Risk List to discuss progress and actions that are needed to fully address high-risk issues. Further, the executive branch has taken a number of steps to implement key provisions of the GPRA Modernization Act by developing cross-agency and agency priority goals; assigning performance management roles and responsibilities to leadership; conducting agency quarterly performance reviews; and developing Performance.gov, a website that provides quarterly updates on the priority goals.

However, additional opportunities exist for decision makers to address major performance management challenges, including, for example:

Developing a comprehensive inventory of federal programs. GAO's preliminary review of the program inventories produced by 24 large federal agencies identified concerns about the usefulness of the information provided in these inventories for addressing crosscutting issues.

Enhancing the use of collaborative mechanisms. Addressing many of the challenges government faces requires collaboration across agencies, levels of government, or sectors. Yet the mechanisms the federal government uses to collaborate do not always operate effectively.

Effectively implementing strategic reviews. Starting in 2014, agency leaders are to annually assess how relevant organizations, programs, and activities, both within and outside of their agencies, are contributing to progress on their strategic objectives and identify corrective actions where progress is lagging. Such reviews could help address fragmentation, overlap, and duplication issues.

Improving capacity to gather and use better performance information. GAO's work has found that federal decision makers often lack complete and reliable performance data needed to address the government's management challenges.

Furthermore, the administration needs to accelerate progress in (1) addressing major impediments preventing GAO from rendering an opinion on the U.S. government's consolidated financial statements and risks to the government's future financial condition; (2) elevating top leadership attention to the areas identified in our annual reports on fragmentation, overlap, and duplication; and (3) responding to pressing challenges with its cybersecurity, such as evolving cyber threats to systems supporting government operations and critical infrastructure. Congress also has key roles in addressing each of these issues.