

Why GAO Did This Study

Program managers are an important part of the federal government's workforce. They interact with project managers to provide support and guidance on individual projects but also must take a broad view of program objectives and organizational culture. NNSA, a separately organized agency within DOE, is responsible for managing DOE's nuclear security missions. Since 1990, DOE's management of major contracts and projects, including those executed by NNSA, has been on GAO's list of areas at high risk for fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement. DOE and NNSA have undertaken steps to address these challenges but have focused primarily on project management issues.

Senate Report 114-49 includes a provision for GAO to review NNSA program management capabilities. This report examines the extent to which DOE and NNSA have established (1) policies addressing internal control standards and leading practices related to program management and (2) training programs for program managers. GAO reviewed DOE and NNSA policies, consulted internal control and PMI standards, and interviewed DOE and NNSA officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOE establish (1) a program management policy addressing internal control standards and leading practices and (2) a training program for program managers. DOE had no comments on a draft of this report.

View [GAO-17-51](#). For more information, contact David Trimble at (202) 512-3841 or trimbled@gao.gov.

PROGRAM MANAGEMENT

DOE Needs to Develop a Comprehensive Policy and Training Program

What GAO Found

The Department of Energy (DOE) and the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) have not established policies addressing internal control standards and leading practices related to program management. There are no federal government-wide standards specifically addressing program management. However, federal internal control standards include principles that are relevant to key roles such as program managers, and the Project Management Institute (PMI) has established a standard on program management that is generally recognized as a leading practice for most programs. Specifically, internal control standards state that management should assign responsibilities, delegate authority, and establish expectations of competence for key roles such as program managers. According to leading practices, organizations develop program plans, capture and understand stakeholder needs, and establish processes for maintaining program management oversight, among other activities. DOE has not established a department-wide program management policy, and NNSA cancelled its program management policy in 2013 without establishing a new one. A policy incorporating key internal control standards and leading program management practices may help ensure that DOE and NNSA program offices are better able to achieve their missions, goals, and objectives. For example, in a 2016 report examining NNSA's plans to build a plutonium analysis facility, GAO found that the agency had not clarified whether the project would satisfy the mission needs of other NNSA and DOE programs. NNSA might have been better able to clarify this project's mission needs if DOE and NNSA had been operating under a DOE-wide program management policy incorporating leading practices. DOE and NNSA officials said that they recognize the importance of establishing a program management policy, but DOE has not taken steps to do so.

DOE and NNSA have not established training programs for program managers. According to federal internal control standards, management should train key staff to enable them to develop competencies appropriate for key roles, which would include program managers. In addition, according to PMI, a successful program manager exhibits certain core competencies, such as leveraging a strong working knowledge of the principles and process of both program and project management. NNSA's cancelled program management policy also required the agency to develop standardized training materials for program managers and track the training requirements for each program manager position. However, according to DOE officials, the department has not developed a training program for program managers. In contrast, DOE has developed a training program for project managers and established an office responsible for managing this program and certifying the qualifications of DOE and NNSA project managers. NNSA officials said that they were unsure if NNSA had ever developed training materials for program managers and that the agency does not track the training requirements for its program manager positions. Of the 15 NNSA program managers GAO interviewed, only five individuals stated that they had received training related to program management. In the absence of a training program for program managers, NNSA may have difficulty developing and maintaining a cadre of professional, effective, and capable program managers.