GAO Highlights

Why GAO Did This Study

The federal government plans to invest almost $96 billion in IT in fiscal year 2018. Historically, these investments have too often failed, incurred cost overruns and schedule slippages, or contributed little to mission-related outcomes. In December 2014, Congress and the President enacted FITARA, aimed at improving covered agencies' acquisitions of IT. Further, in February 2015, GAO added improving the management of IT acquisitions and operations across government to its high-risk list.

This statement summarizes agencies' progress in improving the management of IT acquisitions and operations. Among others, GAO summarized its published reports on (1) data center consolidation, (2) incremental software development practices, (3) IT acquisitions, (4) IT workforce, and (5) legacy IT.

What GAO Recommends

From fiscal years 2010 through 2015, GAO made about 800 recommendations to OMB and federal agencies to address shortcomings in IT acquisitions and operations. Among other recommendations, GAO made recommendations to improve the oversight and execution of the data center consolidation initiative, incremental development policies, the review and approval of IT acquisitions, implementation of key workforce planning activities, and aging federal IT systems. Most agencies agreed with GAO's recommendations. In addition, from fiscal year 2016 to present, GAO has made more than 200 new recommendations in this area. GAO will continue to monitor agencies' implementation of these recommendations.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Further Implementation of Recommendations Is Needed to Better Manage Acquisitions and Operations

What GAO Found

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and federal agencies have taken steps to improve the management of information technology (IT) acquisitions and operations through a series of initiatives, to include (1) data center consolidation, (2) implementation of incremental development practices, (3) approval of IT acquisitions, (4) implementation of key IT workforce practices, and (5) addressing aging legacy IT systems. As of March 2018, the agencies had fully implemented about 59 percent of the approximately 800 related recommendations that GAO made during fiscal years 2010 through 2015. However, important additional actions are needed.

- **Consolidating data centers**. OMB launched an initiative in 2010 to reduce data centers, which was codified and expanded by a law commonly referred to as the Federal Information Technology Acquisition Reform Act (FITARA). GAO has since noted that, while this initiative could potentially save the government billions of dollars, weaknesses exist in areas such as optimization and OMB's reporting on related cost savings. Accordingly, GAO has made 160 recommendations to OMB and agencies to improve the initiative; however, about half of GAO's recommendations have not yet been implemented.

- **Implementing incremental development**. OMB has emphasized the need for agencies to deliver investments in smaller increments to reduce risk and deliver capabilities more quickly. Further, GAO has issued reports highlighting actions needed by OMB and agencies to improve their implementation of incremental development. In these reports, GAO made 42 related recommendations, but the majority of GAO's recommendations have not yet been addressed.

- **Approval of IT acquisitions**. OMB's FITARA implementation guidance required covered agencies' chief information officers (CIO) to review and approve IT acquisition plans. In January 2018, GAO reported that many agencies' CIOs were not reviewing and approving acquisition plans, as required by OMB. GAO made 39 recommendations to improve the review and approval of IT acquisitions, but they have not yet been implemented by the agencies.

- **Implementation of key IT workforce practices**. Effective IT workforce planning can help agencies improve their ability to acquire IT. In November 2016, GAO reported on agencies' IT workforce planning activities. GAO noted that five selected agencies had not fully implemented key workforce planning activities and recommended that they do so, but the agencies have not yet addressed the recommendations.

- **Addressing aging legacy IT systems.** Legacy IT investments across the federal government are becoming increasingly obsolete and consuming an increasing amount of IT dollars. In May 2016, GAO reported that many agencies were using systems which had components that were, in some cases, at least 50 years old. GAO noted, however, that several agencies did not have specific plans with time frames to modernize or replace these investments. GAO recommended that 12 agencies plan to modernize or replace legacy systems; all of which have not yet been implemented.

_____ **United States Government Accountability Office**