

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-15-579](#), a report to congressional addressees

Why GAO Did This Study

How federal leaders manage the operations and performance of their agencies significantly affects their ability to achieve important outcomes critical to public health and safety. GAO's previous work has identified weaknesses in agencies' use of performance information that can hinder achievement of critical results.

This report is part of GAO's response to a statutory requirement to review GPRAMA implementation. It examines (1) the extent to which agencies are conducting data-driven performance reviews consistent with GPRAMA requirements, OMB guidance, and leading practices; and (2) how reviews have affected performance, collaboration, accountability, and efficiency in agencies, and how positive effects can be sustained.

GAO surveyed PIOs at 23 agencies, followed up to clarify responses, and interviewed officials involved in reviews at 5 agencies. These agencies were selected based on size and the extent to which leaders use reviews, as reported on a 2013 survey. GAO also reviewed OMB guidance and relevant documentation from agencies.

What GAO Recommends

To ensure that agency reviews are consistent with requirements, guidance, and leading practices, GAO is making recommendations to five agencies. DHS, HHS, and USDA concurred with the recommendations. DOD and State concurred with all but one recommendation—to ensure the COO leads the reviews—with which they partially concurred. GAO believes these recommendations are valid, as discussed in the report.

View [GAO-15-579](#). For more information, contact J. Christopher Mihm at (202) 512-6806 or mihmj@gao.gov.

July 2015

MANAGING FOR RESULTS

Agencies Report Positive Effects of Data-Driven Reviews on Performance but Some Should Strengthen Practices

What GAO Found

The GPRA Modernization Act of 2010 (GPRAMA) requires that federal agencies review progress on agency priority goals (APG) at least once a quarter. GPRAMA requires that reviews be conducted by top agency leaders, involve APG goal leaders and other contributors, and be used to identify at-risk goals and strategies to improve performance. While GPRAMA requires that agencies conduct reviews, it also required the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to prepare guidance on its implementation. Since 2011, OMB has provided guidance on how reviews should be conducted, specifying they should be held in person. Further, GAO previously identified nine leading practices for reviews.

Agencies Reported Review Practices Consistent with Requirements and Guidance. Of the 23 agencies GAO surveyed, most reported conducting data-driven reviews consistent with requirements, guidance, and leading practices. Specifically, most agencies reported:

- conducting data-driven review meetings at least once a quarter, with several agencies holding them more frequently (20 agencies);
- conducting Chief Operating Officer (COO)-led reviews, or reviews led jointly by the COO and Performance Improvement Officer (PIO) (19);
- always or often involving PIOs (22) and APG goal leaders (21) in reviews;
- always or often collecting and analyzing relevant data in advance of reviews, and incorporating these data into meeting materials (22);
- always or often using review meetings to assess APG progress (20); and
- always or often identifying follow-up actions to be taken after review meetings (18), an action that is positively correlated with the reported impact of reviews on agency performance improvement.

Agency Review Practices Inconsistent with Requirements and Guidance.

Some agency practices were inconsistent with requirements or guidance. For instance, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) reported that it does not hold in-person reviews, and the Departments of Agriculture (USDA) and Health and Human Services (HHS) reported that they do not hold regular, in-person reviews each quarter. The Department of State (State) reported that progress on each APG is only reviewed in an in-person review once a year, rather than each quarter, as required. The Department of Defense (DOD), USDA, and State also reported that their reviews are not led by their agency heads or COO. DOD also reported it rarely identifies follow-up actions to be taken after meetings.

Agencies Reported Positive Effects of Reviews. Most agencies reported their reviews have had positive effects on progress towards agency goals, collaboration between agency officials, the ability to hold officials accountable for progress, and efforts to improve the efficiency of operations. According to agency officials, reviews can bring together people, analytical insights, and resources to rigorously assess progress on goals or milestones, develop collaborative solutions to problems, enhance individual and collective accountability for performance, and review efforts to improve efficiency. Agencies reported that sustaining these effects requires ongoing leadership commitment, institutionalizing review processes, and demonstrating value to participants.