

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-15-602](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

The GPRAMA Modernization Act of 2010 (GPRAMA) provides important tools that can help inform federal decision making. In implementing GPRAMA, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) established a strategic review process in which agencies, beginning in 2014, were to annually assess their progress in achieving each strategic objective—the outcome the agency is intending to achieve—in their strategic plans.

GPRAMA requires GAO to periodically review its implementation. This report identifies and illustrates practices that facilitate effective strategic reviews.

To identify such practices, GAO analyzed and synthesized information from a variety of sources, including GPRAMA's requirements; OMB guidance; a review of relevant literature; and interviews with experts in performance management and evaluation and OMB staff. To refine and illustrate the practices, GAO reviewed strategic review documentation and interviewed relevant officials from six selected agencies: USDA, Education, DHS, HUD, EPA, and NASA. GAO selected these agencies based on several factors. This included the extent to which agency strategic review processes had a greater chance of addressing areas identified in GAO's work on fragmentation, overlap, and duplication or high-risk issues, and agency results on selected items in GAO's 2013 survey of federal managers on performance and management issues.

In commenting on a draft of this report, OMB and the six selected agencies generally agreed with the findings.

View [GAO-15-602](#). For more information, contact J. Christopher Mihm at (202) 512-6806 or mihmj@gao.gov.

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MANAGING FOR RESULTS

Practices for Effective Agency Strategic Reviews

What GAO Found

GAO identified seven practices federal agencies can employ to facilitate effective strategic reviews and illustrated aspects of those practices through examples from the strategic review processes conducted at the Departments of Agriculture (USDA), Education (Education), Homeland Security (DHS), and Housing and Urban Development (HUD), and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA).

- 1. Establish a process for conducting strategic reviews.** NASA developed a strategic review process that involved senior leaders in individual assessments and a rating of each strategic objective, a crosscutting review to identify themes and provide independent rating recommendations, and a briefing to the Chief Operating Officer to determine final ratings.
- 2. Clarify and clearly define measurable outcomes for each strategic objective.** NASA officials defined what would constitute success in 10 years for each strategic objective and used underlying performance goals, indicators, and milestones to better plan for and understand near-term progress towards their long-term scientific outcomes.
- 3. Review the strategies and other factors that influence the outcomes and determine which are most important.** USDA's Food and Nutrition Service developed a model showing how the output of its programs contribute to relevant near-term and long-term outcomes related to the department's objective to improve access to nutritious foods. The model also identifies external factors that could influence progress, such as food prices.
- 4. Identify and include key stakeholders in the review.** Contributors from various agencies, levels of government, and sectors may be involved in achieving an outcome. While the six agencies involved internal stakeholders in their strategic reviews, GAO did not find instances of external stakeholder involvement. In some cases, agencies took steps to incorporate external perspectives, such as HUD leveraging its existing relationship with officials at the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness to better understand how other federal programs are contributing to progress towards its objective to end homelessness for target populations.
- 5. Identify and assess evidence related to strategic objective achievement.** For EPA's objective to promote sustainable and livable communities, officials developed a framework and inventory of relevant performance information, scientific studies, academic research, and program evaluations, which they then assessed and categorized by strength.
- 6. Assess effectiveness in achieving strategic objectives and identify actions needed to improve implementation and impact.** For DHS's goal to safeguard and expedite lawful trade and travel, officials determined that sufficient progress was being made, but identified gaps in monitoring efforts, such as a lack of performance measures related to travel. DHS officials are taking steps to develop measures to address the gaps.
- 7. Develop a process to monitor progress on needed actions.** HUD broadened its existing process for tracking progress on actions items identified at its quarterly performance reviews to also cover those from strategic reviews. HUD staff update the status of each action item regularly—planned to be biweekly following the 2015 strategic reviews.