



September 2015

# MANAGING FOR RESULTS

Greater Transparency  
Needed in Public  
Reporting on the  
Quality of  
Performance  
Information for  
Selected Agencies'  
Priority Goals

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-15-788](#), a report to congressional committees

## Why GAO Did This Study

Federal agencies have not always clearly and transparently explained to Congress and the public how they ensure the quality of their performance information. GPRAMA requires agencies to publicly explain how they ensure the accuracy and reliability of their performance information used to assess progress for their APGs.

This is one of a series of GAO reports examining the implementation of GPRAMA, as required by the act. This report assesses how well selected agencies publicly reported on the quality of performance information used to measure progress on APGs. GAO selected six agencies—the Departments of Agriculture, Defense, Interior, and Labor, and NASA and DHS—based on GAO’s 2013 federal managers survey on their agency’s use of performance information. GAO reviewed information concerning these agencies’ APGs published on Performance.gov and in their annual performance plans and reports.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that all six of the agencies work with OMB to describe on Performance.gov how they are ensuring the quality of their APGs’s performance information, and that all agencies, except for DHS, also describe this information in their annual performance plans and reports. GAO also recommends that OMB, working with the PIC, focus on ways the PIC’s data quality working group can improve public reporting for APGs. OMB did not comment on the recommendations, but the six agencies generally concurred or identified actions they planned to take to implement them.

View [GAO-15-788](#). For more information, contact J. Christopher Mihm at (202) 512-6806 or [mihmj@gao.gov](mailto:mihmj@gao.gov).

September 2015

## MANAGING FOR RESULTS

### Greater Transparency Needed in Public Reporting on the Quality of Performance Information for Selected Agencies’ Priority Goals

## What GAO Found

The six agencies GAO reviewed generally did not publicly report on how they ensured the accuracy and reliability of performance information used to measure progress on their highest priority performance goals, referred to as agency priority goals (APGs). The GPRAMA Modernization Act of 2010 (GPRAMA) requires agencies to identify the following when publicly reporting on their APGs: 1) how performance information was verified and validated; 2) data sources; 3) level of accuracy required for intended use; 4) any limitations at the required level of accuracy; and 5) how the agency will compensate for such limitations (if needed) to reach the required level of accuracy. GPRAMA requires agencies to provide this information to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for publication on Performance.gov. GPRAMA also directs agencies to provide this information for performance goals, which include APGs, in their annual performance plans and reports. While all six agencies described how they ensured the quality of their performance information overall, GAO found discussions about performance information quality addressing all five GPRAMA requirements in only the Department of Homeland Security’s (DHS) performance plans and reports.

#### Agency Priority Goal (APG) Performance Information Quality Discussion in Selected Agencies’ Performance Plans and Reports for FY13-FY16

| Agency   | Description of how agency ensured performance information quality overall | Number of APGs for FY14 and FY15 | Description of how each APG met GPRAMA performance information quality requirements |
|--|---|----------------------------------|---|
| Agriculture  | Yes   | 3                                | 0   |
| Defense  | Yes   | 4                                | 0   |
| Homeland Security                                    | Yes   | 3                                | 3   |
| Interior   | Yes   | 6                                | 0   |
| Labor  | Yes   | 3                                | 0   |
| National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) | Yes   | 4                                | 0   |
| <b>Total</b>   | <b>6 yes</b>  | <b>23</b>                        | <b>3</b>  |

Source: GAO analysis of selected agencies’ performance plans and reports. |GAO-15-788

OMB and the Performance Improvement Council (PIC)—a cross-agency council of agency performance improvement officers—established the Data Quality Cross-Agency Working Group in February 2015. The group has identified several goals, such as improving the reliability and quality of performance information, and could serve as a vehicle for disseminating good practices in public reporting on data quality.

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### **Abbreviations**

|          |  |
|----------|--|
| APGs     | Agency Priority Goals                          |
| A-11     | Office of Management and Budget Circular A-11  |
| BLM      | Bureau of Land Management                      |
| CDC      | Centers for Disease Control and Prevention     |
| DOD      | Department of Defense                          |
| DHS      | Department of Homeland Security                |
| GPRA     | Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 |
| GPRAMA   | GPRA Modernization Act of 2010                 |
| IG       | Inspector General                              |
| Interior | Department of the Interior                     |
| Labor    | Department of Labor                            |
| MDAPs    | Major Defense Acquisition Programs             |
| OMB      | Office of Management and Budget                |
| NASA     | National Aeronautics and Space Administration  |
| PIC      | Performance Improvement Council                |
| PIO      | Performance Improvement Officer                |
| USDA     | U.S. Department of Agriculture                 |

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September 10, 2015

Congressional Committees

The federal government is one of the world’s largest and most complex entities. To ensure that federal agencies are effectively meeting their missions, both top leaders and agency managers must have accurate and reliable performance information to monitor and track the progress they are making on achieving their goals. For Congress and the public to have confidence in the quality of the performance information that federal agencies are using to assess and achieve results, that information must be publicly reported in a clear and readily accessible way. Further, our work examining fragmentation, overlap, and duplication in federal government programs has demonstrated the need for more reliable and consistent federal data.<sup>1</sup>

Our previous work has shown that federal agencies do not always explain how they ensure the quality of their publicly-reported performance information.<sup>2</sup> Our previous work also identified practices that enhance the credibility of performance information—such as agencies discussing data limitations and the actions they are taking to address these limitations.<sup>3</sup> To improve federal transparency and Congress’s and the public’s ability to understand how federal agencies ensure the quality of performance information, the GPRAMA Modernization Act of 2010 (GPRAMA)<sup>4</sup> requires agencies to provide this information on a public website—Performance.gov—and in their annual performance plans and reports.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>GAO, *2015 Annual Report: Additional Opportunities to Reduce Fragmentation, Overlap, and Duplication and Achieve Other Financial Benefits*, [GAO-15-404SP](#) (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 14, 2015), and *Fragmentation, Overlap, and Duplication: An Evaluation and Management Guide*, [GAO-15-49SP](#) (Washington, D.C., Apr. 14, 2015).

<sup>2</sup>GAO, *Performance Reporting: Few Agencies Reported on the Completeness and Reliability of Performance Data*, [GAO-02-372](#) (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 26, 2002).

<sup>3</sup>GAO, *Results-Oriented Government: GPRAMA Has Established a Solid Foundation for Achieving Greater Results*, [GAO-04-38](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 10, 2004).

<sup>4</sup>Pub. L. No. 111-352, 124 Stat. 3866 (2011).

<sup>5</sup>31 U.S.C. §§ 1122(b)(5), 1115(b)(8), 1116(c)(6), respectively.

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These GPRAMA requirements expanded upon earlier requirements in the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (GPRA).<sup>6</sup>

We are required by GPRAMA to periodically report on the implementation of the act, and this report is part of that series.<sup>7</sup> The objective of this report is to assess how well selected agencies publicly reported on the quality of performance information being used to measure progress for their highest priority performance goals—which GPRAMA refers to as agency priority goals (APGs). To conduct our assessment, we selected six agencies' APGs for review based on responses to the following question from our 2013 federal managers survey: "I have sufficient information on the validity of the performance data I use to make decisions."<sup>8</sup> Our analysis indicated that a manager's response on this question was the strongest predictor of how a manager ranked his or her agency on its use of performance information. We used responses to this question to select six agencies in the following manner:

- Ranked on their responses to this question, we selected two agencies from the top third of agencies: The National Aeronautics and Space Administration and the Department of Labor.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Pub. L. No. 103-62, § 4, 107 Stat. 285, 287 (1993). GPRA required agencies to describe in their annual performance plans the means used to verify and validate performance information.

<sup>7</sup>GPRAMA, § 15(b). See, for example, GAO, *Managing for Results: Executive Branch Should More Fully Implement the GPRA Modernization Act to Address Pressing Governance Challenges*, [GAO-13-518](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 26, 2013), which summarizes our work on the initial implementation of GPRAMA. We will issue an updated assessment of GPRAMA's implementation in September 2015. <sup>8</sup>GAO, *Managing for Results: Agencies' Trends in the Use of Performance Information to Make Decisions*, [GAO-14-747](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 26, 2014).

<sup>8</sup>GAO, *Managing for Results: Agencies' Trends in the Use of Performance Information to Make Decisions*, [GAO-14-747](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 26, 2014).

<sup>9</sup>We grouped individual manager's responses on this question by agency to develop an overall response for each agency. We then added the percentage of managers at each agency who agreed to a very great or great extent that, "I have sufficient information on the validity of the performance data I use to make decisions." For full survey results, see our e-supplement to [GAO-13-518](#) at <http://www.gao.gov/special.pubs/gao-13-519sp>.

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- Ranked on their responses to this question, we selected two agencies from the middle third of agencies: The Departments of the Interior and Defense.
  - Ranked on their responses to this question, we selected two agencies from the bottom third of agencies: The Departments of Agriculture and Homeland Security.

We reviewed all the APGs these six agencies had identified for fiscal years 2014 and 2015. This made for a sample of 23 APGs, which is approximately one-quarter of all federal APGs identified for fiscal years 2014 and 2015.<sup>10</sup> To assess how well the selected agencies publicly reported on the quality of performance information for each of their APGs, we reviewed the information published on Performance.gov concerning the APGs in our sample.<sup>11</sup> We also reviewed the information the selected agencies published in their annual performance plans and reports concerning these APGs. We reviewed, if available, the agencies' most recent performance plans for fiscal year 2015 and agencies' updated performance plans for fiscal year 2014. We also reviewed, if available, agencies' performance plans for fiscal year 2016 and updated performance plans for fiscal year 2015. We also reviewed the agencies' most recent performance reports which covered fiscal years 2013 and 2014.<sup>12</sup>

We reviewed this information to see if it addressed the relevant requirements of GPRAMA and Office of Management and Budget (OMB) guidance to agencies. Because both the act and guidance state that agencies should report on performance information quality for

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<sup>10</sup>Twenty-three agencies identified a total of 91 APGs for fiscal years 2014 and 2015. OMB is requiring agencies to publish an updated set of APGs for fiscal years 2016 and 2017 in October 2015.

<sup>11</sup>We focused on the information that was available on Performance.gov as of December 2014 and January 2015, which describes the agencies' respective performance on their APGs through the fourth quarter of fiscal year 2014. We also reviewed updated information in June 2015, which focused on the second quarter of fiscal year 2015, to see if agencies had provided additional information on Performance.gov explaining the quality of their APG performance information.

<sup>12</sup>We determined that five of the six agencies' performance reports for fiscal year 2013 were relevant for our objective. We determined USDA's fiscal year 2013 performance report was not relevant because the APGs USDA identified for fiscal years 2012 and 2013 were different than the APGs identified for fiscal years 2014 and 2015.



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performance goals, including for each APG, we first looked for an explanation of how the agency ensured the quality of performance information for each of its APGs on Performance.gov and in agency performance plans and reports. For each APG, we determined whether the agency addressed all GPRAMA requirements for its performance information quality discussion. If we did not find the required performance information quality discussions for an agency's APG, we next looked for statements in performance plans and reports of how agencies said they were ensuring the quality of their agencies' performance information overall. We focused on assessing agencies' public reporting. Therefore, our report makes no assessment of internal processes the selected agencies may have for ensuring the quality of their performance information.<sup>13</sup>

We interviewed officials at each of the selected agencies and staff from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), who are responsible for working with agencies to implement GPRAMA requirements, and staff from the Performance Improvement Council (PIC), an interagency council comprised of agency performance improvement officers (PIO). We shared the preliminary results of our review with agency officials and asked them to direct us to additional information, if they believed we had missed anything in our review.

We conducted this performance audit from August 2014 to September 2015 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

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<sup>13</sup>For more information on agencies' internal processes to assess the progress of achieving their APGs, see GAO, *Managing for Results: Agencies Report Positive Effects of Data-Driven Reviews on Performance, but Some Should Strengthen Practices*, [GAO-15-579](#) (Washington, D.C.: July 7, 2015).

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## Background

GPRAMA requires agencies to publicly report on how they are ensuring the accuracy and reliability of the performance information they use to measure progress towards APGs and performance goals.<sup>14</sup>

**Priority Goals and Performance Measures:** GPRAMA requires agencies to identify their highest priority performance goals as APGs and have ambitious targets for these APGs that can be achieved within 2 years.<sup>15</sup> In addition, agencies are expected to identify performance measures to track the progress they are making on achieving their APGs or identify alternative ways of measuring progress, such as milestones for completing major deliverables for the APG (for more information on the measures and milestones the selected agencies identified, see appendix I).<sup>16</sup>

**Performance Information Quality Transparency Requirements:** GPRAMA requires agencies to describe how they are ensuring the accuracy and reliability of the data used to measure progress towards APGs and performance goals, including an identification of the following five areas:<sup>17</sup>

- the means used to verify and validate [performance data];<sup>18</sup>
- the sources for the data;

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<sup>14</sup>31 U.S.C. §§ 1115(b)(8), 1116(c)(6), 1122(b)(5). We define performance information as data collected to measure progress toward achieving an agency's established mission or program-related goals or objectives. For more information, see [GAO-14-747](#). In a few instances, this report uses the term "performance data" because we are quoting from a statute or an agency document that uses that term.

<sup>15</sup>31 U.S.C. § 1120(b).

<sup>16</sup>31 U.S.C. § 1115(b)(6), (c) and OMB Circular No. A-11, sections 240.10 and 250.13 (2015). OMB refers to performance measures as performance indicators in A-11 and on Performance.gov. For consistency with our prior work, we will use this term—performance measures—throughout this report.

<sup>17</sup>31 U.S.C. §§ 1115(b)(8), 1116(c)(6), 1122(b)(5).

<sup>18</sup>GPRAMA uses the term "measured values" instead of performance data. We define verification as the assessment of completeness, accuracy, consistency, timeliness, and related quality control practices for performance information. We define validation as the assessment of whether performance information is appropriate for the performance measure. For more information, see, GAO, *Performance Plans: Selected Approaches for Verification and Validation of Agency Performance Information*, [GAO/GGD-99-139](#) (Washington, D.C.: July 30, 1999).

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- the level of accuracy required for the intended use of the data;<sup>19</sup>
  - any limitations to the data at the required level of accuracy; and
  - how the agency will compensate for such limitations (if needed) to reach the required level of accuracy.

GPRAMA requires agencies to provide information to OMB that addresses all five requirements for each of their APGs for publication on a website (Performance.gov).<sup>20</sup> Agencies also must address all five requirements for performance goals in their performance plans and reports.<sup>21</sup>

GPRAMA states that Performance.gov shall consolidate information about each APG, thereby making this information readily accessible to the public, members of Congress, and congressional committees.<sup>22</sup> GPRAMA makes OMB responsible for Performance.gov and requires agencies to provide OMB with quarterly updates on their APGs, including how they are ensuring the quality of performance information, for publication on Performance.gov.<sup>23</sup>

Further, GPRAMA continues transparency requirements set in GPRA that require agencies to publish annual performance plans and reports (see text box).<sup>24</sup> While GPRAMA requires certain information to be reported in performance plans and certain other information to be reported in performance reports, the Reports Consolidation Act of 2000 authorizes agencies—with the concurrence of OMB—to consolidate performance

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<sup>19</sup>OMB explains the concept of intended use refers to expectations agencies have set for the accuracy levels that are needed for how the performance information will be used. For example, an agency's drug testing trial may require a high level of credibility and precision to protect lives, while decisions about how to improve outreach for a program may not require the same level of precision. See OMB Circular No. A-11, section 200.21 (2015).

<sup>20</sup>31 U.S.C. § 1122(b)(5).

<sup>21</sup>31 U.S.C. §§ 1115(b)(8), 1116(c)(6).

<sup>22</sup>31 U.S.C. § 1122(b), (d).

<sup>23</sup>31 U.S.C. § 1122(b)(5).

<sup>24</sup>For more information on requirements for performance plans and reports and to access our previous work in this area, see our Key Issues page on Managing for Results in Government, [http://www.gao.gov/key\\_issues/managing\\_for\\_results\\_in\\_government/issue\\_summary](http://www.gao.gov/key_issues/managing_for_results_in_government/issue_summary).

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plans and reports into a single publication that covers past actual and future planned performance.<sup>25</sup>

**GPRAMA's Requirements for Agencies' Annual Performance Plans and Reports**

Performance **plans** should

- identify the *planned level of performance* for the current fiscal year and the next fiscal year,
- explain how the agency will ensure the *accuracy and reliability* of its performance information,
- identify the agency's priority goals (APGs), and
- be published every February, concurrent with the President's Budget.<sup>a</sup>

Performance **reports** should

- summarize the actual level of performance agencies achieved during the previous five fiscal years,
- explain how the agency ensures the accuracy and reliability of its performance information, and
- be published every February.<sup>b</sup>

Source: GPRAMA, 31 U.S.C. §§ 1115(b) and 1116(b)(c). |GAO-15-788

<sup>a</sup>The specific deadline is the first Monday in February. 31 U.S.C. §§ 1105(a), 1115(b).

<sup>b</sup>GPRAMA states that performance reports should be published no less than 150 days after the end of the fiscal year, which is February 27. See, 31 U.S.C. § 1116(b)(1).

**Guidance and Information Sharing on Implementing GPRAMA:** OMB provides guidance to agencies in Circular A-11 on how to implement GPRAMA. OMB updates A-11 annually, and the most recent update was published in June 2015.<sup>26</sup> GPRAMA also established in law an interagency council—the PIC—chaired by OMB and composed of agency PIOs to facilitate the exchange of useful practices to strengthen agency performance management, such as through cross-agency working groups.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>31 U.S.C. § 3516(a). OMB encourages agencies to consolidate performance plans and reports, and four of the agencies we reviewed—DHS, Interior, Labor, and NASA—did this.

<sup>26</sup>OMB, Circular No. A-11, *Preparation, Submission, and Execution of the Budget*, pt 6 (June 2015). This can be accessed at [https://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/circulars\\_a11\\_current\\_year\\_a11\\_toc/](https://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/circulars_a11_current_year_a11_toc/).

<sup>27</sup>31 U.S.C. § 1124(b). PIOs are senior executives who advise their agencies on goal-setting and measurement and reviewing progress toward APGs. For more information on the PIC and PIOs, see GAO, *Managing for Results: Agencies Have Elevated Performance Management Leadership Roles, but Additional Training Is Needed*, GAO-13-356 (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 16, 2013).

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## Public Reporting of Performance Information Quality for Selected Agencies' Priority Goals Was Not Transparent

The selected 23 APGs we reviewed are intended to drive progress in important and complex areas, such as assisting veterans, addressing climate change, and protecting workers. Given the significance and complexity of many APGs, congressional and public understanding regarding how federal agencies are measuring and assessing progress toward these goals is important. GPRAMA requires agencies to publicly report on how they are ensuring the accuracy and reliability of the performance information they use to measure progress towards these APGs.<sup>28</sup> However, our review found that overall, it would be challenging for Congress and the public to understand how the selected agencies are ensuring that the performance information they report for their 23 APGs is accurate and reliable—that is, suitable for making judgments about agency progress or decisions for different courses of action.

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## Performance.gov Provided Limited Information on the Quality of Performance Information Used to Measure Progress on Selected Agency Priority Goals

We found limited information on Performance.gov on the quality of performance information used to assess progress on the six selected agencies' 23 APGs. While each agency has a section dedicated to its priority goals on Performance.gov, there is no place on the website that is set aside to discuss the quality of performance information for each APG. The six agencies we reviewed used various sections of Performance.gov to discuss some of the performance information quality requirements for APGs. But, none of the agencies addressed all five GPRAMA requirements for their individual APGs. Moreover, while we found hyperlinks from Performance.gov to the selected agencies' performance plans and reports, there was no explanation on Performance.gov of where to find performance information quality discussions in these plans and reports.

We discussed our preliminary findings with OMB staff in January 2015. In response, OMB updated its A-11 guidance in June 2015 to direct agencies to either provide information for publication on Performance.gov of how they are ensuring the quality of performance information for their APGs, or provide a hyperlink from Performance.gov to an appendix in their performance report that discusses the quality of their performance

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<sup>28</sup>31 U.S.C. §§ 1115(b)(8), 1116(c)(6), 1122(b)(5).

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information.<sup>29</sup> OMB staff stated that this information will likely not be available until agencies start reporting on the next set of APGs (for fiscal years 2016 and 2017).<sup>30</sup> This is because OMB will need to update a template that agencies complete for their Performance.gov updates. OMB staff confirmed in July 2015 that they are still using a version of this template that they provided to us in January 2015 that has not yet been updated to reflect this change.

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**Selected Agencies' Annual Performance Plans and Reports Provided Incomplete Information on the Quality of Performance Information Used to Measure Progress on Priority Goals**

Five of the six agencies' performance plans and reports we reviewed did not describe how they ensured the quality of performance information for their individual APGs. On the other hand, all six agencies did describe how they ensured the quality of their performance information overall. Of the 23 APGs in our sample, we could only find performance information quality discussions that addressed all five of the GPRAMA requirements for 3 APGs, which belonged to the Department of Homeland Security.


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<sup>29</sup>Specifically, A-11 states in parentheses that agencies, "may hyperlink to [annual performance report] appendix." OMB has encouraged agencies in both the 2015 update and earlier versions of A-11 to prepare an appendix to their performance plans and reports that assesses the reliability and completeness of their performance information. See, point 8.5 in the table in section 210.11 of OMB Circular No. A-11 (2015).

<sup>30</sup>Agencies are expected to publish APGs for fiscal years 2016 and 2017 in October 2015. However, public reporting on Performance.gov concerning these APGs is not expected until February 2016 when agencies are expected to publish updates on APG targets. For more information on time frames, see OMB Circular No. A-11, section 200.23 (2015).

*The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Provided Some Information for How Performance Information Quality Is Ensured For One of Three APGs, but Did Not Address All Requirements*

**Table 1: Assessment of USDA’s FY14 Performance Report and FY15-FY16 Performance Plans**

| Agency  | Agency Priority Goals (APGs) for FY14 and FY15   | Description of how each APG met GPRAMA performance information quality requirements |
|---|--|---|
|  | <i>Reduce the number of foodborne Salmonella illnesses that are associated with USDA’s Food Safety and Inspection Service regulated products—meat, poultry, and processed egg products</i> | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>No</b></p>  |
| <p>Description of how agency ensured performance information quality overall</p>  | <i>Create new economic opportunities through farming and the creation of new markets for agricultural products</i>   | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>No</b></p>  |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Yes</b></p>                                     | <i>Improve the health of our nation’s soils to make our food, fiber, and energy production systems resilient and sustainable</i>   | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>No</b></p>  |

Sources: Performance.gov for list of APGs as of December 2014 and January 2015. GAO analysis of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, *FY2014: Annual Performance Report, FY2015 Budget Summary and Annual Performance Plan*, and *FY2016 Budget Summary and Annual Performance Plan*. [GAO-15-788]

USDA identified its APGs and briefly summarized the results achieved for each APG in its performance report for fiscal year 2014. Further, USDA’s performance report provided data quality discussion for each of the performance measures presented in the 2014 report, which included the two performance measures USDA used to measure progress on its *Reduce the Number of Foodborne Salmonella Illnesses* APG.<sup>31</sup> However, USDA did not address all of the GPRAMA requirements for this APG or its two other APGs, as shown by table 1. For the *Reduce the Number of Foodborne Salmonella Illnesses* APG, USDA addressed two of the five GPRAMA requirements. For example, USDA identified the Centers for

<sup>31</sup>For more information on USDA’s performance measures for its APGs, see appendix I.

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Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) as the source of the data measuring the number of illnesses from products USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service regulates. USDA also noted that CDC receives information from state and local health agencies concerning outbreaks of illnesses.<sup>32</sup> USDA acknowledges that the quality of the data can vary by reporting agency, which is an example of identifying a potential limitation. While the fiscal year 2014 performance report did not explain how USDA and CDC are compensating for this limitation, USDA did provide a hyperlink in its performance report to a CDC web page that provided more detailed information about tracking and reporting of foodborne illnesses.<sup>33</sup> Further, while USDA described a number of steps it is taking to reduce illnesses and detect contamination in food products, USDA did not explain to external audiences what level of accuracy it requires to make decisions related to this APG. Our prior work has identified improving oversight of food safety as a high-risk area, emphasizing the need to improve planning and collaboration among USDA and other federal food safety agencies. This makes it important for USDA to expand its performance information quality discussion and address all requirements for this APG.<sup>34</sup>

USDA's performance plans and report did not address any of the five GPRAMA requirements regarding the quality of the performance information for its two other APGs: *Create New Economic Opportunities* and *Improve the Health of Our Nation's Soils*. The lack of information related to the two other APGs makes it more challenging for Congress and the public to understand how USDA is ensuring the quality of performance information, including potential limitations. For example, USDA's Inspector General identified the need to develop effective performance measures as a management challenge facing the agency and raised concerns about the accuracy of some performance information. But, USDA's performance plans and report do not address

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<sup>32</sup>In our discussions with USDA officials, they reported receiving additional data from the U.S. Census Bureau, although USDA does not identify the Census Bureau as a data source in its performance report. For more information on this performance measure, see appendix I.

<sup>33</sup>The web page USDA refers readers to is <http://www.cdc.gov/foodsafety/fdoss/faq/faq-food-tool.html>.

<sup>34</sup>For more information, see pp. 262-267 of GAO, *High-Risk Series: An Update*, GAO-15-290 (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 11, 2015).



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this issue with regard to two of its APGs.<sup>35</sup> We shared our analysis with officials in USDA's Office of Budget and Program Analysis, and they acknowledged their agency could improve its public reporting on the quality of its performance information for APGs.

USDA's performance report for fiscal year 2014 contained an explanation on how the agency ensures the quality of its performance information overall, which is reproduced below (see text box). This helps external audiences understand that USDA's methodology for collecting performance information has been vetted by scientists and policymakers.<sup>36</sup>

**U.S. Department of Agriculture's Statement on Performance Information Quality—2014 Annual Performance Report**

*The data used by the Department to measure performance are collected using a standardized methodology. This methodology has been vetted by federally employed scientists and policymakers, and, ultimately, the Under Secretaries of the respective mission areas. All attest to the completeness, reliability, and quality of the data.*

Source: U.S. Department of Agriculture, *FY2014: Annual Performance Report*. | GAO-15-788


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<sup>35</sup>Specifically, USDA's Inspector General's (IG) review of the agency's Recovery Act funds found, among other things, that the data being reported are of questionable accuracy. The IG noted that as the office's audits have extended to non-Recovery Act programs, the IG has found similar issues. For more information, see pp. 24-25 of Office of Inspector General, *USDA Management Challenges* (Washington, D.C.: Aug. 15, 2014).

<sup>36</sup>This statement did not appear in the 2013 performance report.

*The Department of Defense (DOD) Highlighted Progress for All APGs, but Did Not Explain How Performance Information Quality Is Ensured*

**Table 2: Assessment of DOD’s FY13-FY14 Performance Reports, FY14 Performance Plan Update, and Agency Strategic Plan FY15-FY18**

| Agency  | Agency Priority Goals (APGs) for FY14 and FY15 | Description of how each APG met GPRAMA performance information quality requirements |
|---|--|---|
|  | <i>Transition to Veterans</i>                  | <b>No</b>   |
|   | <i>Reform the DOD Acquisition Process</i>      | <b>No</b>   |
| Description of how agency ensured performance information quality overall         | <i>Improve Energy Performance</i>              | <b>No</b>   |
| <b>Yes</b>  | <i>DOD Financial Statement Audit Readiness</i> | <b>No</b>   |

Sources: Performance.gov for list of APGs as of December 2014 and January 2015. GAO analysis of the Department of Defense, “2014 Performance Plan Update,” *Fiscal Year 2015 Budget Request Overview*, *Fiscal Year 2016 Budget Request Overview*, and *Agency Strategic Plan, Fiscal Years 2015-2018 Version 1.0*. | GAO-15-788

DOD included performance discussions for all of its APGs and stated whether the agency had met its interim or final APG targets in its performance reports for fiscal years 2013 and 2014; however, it did not address the performance information quality requirements for each APG, as shown in table 2.<sup>37</sup> While DOD’s fiscal year 2013 and 2014 performance reports do not describe agency-wide guidance for ensuring performance information quality, we found an explanation of DOD’s guidance regarding performance information quality in DOD’s “2014 Performance Plan Update.” DOD officials said this document was intended to serve as the agency’s performance plan for fiscal year 2015. As reflected in table 2, the document provided a description of DOD’s APGs for fiscal years 2014 and 2015 and contained a brief statement addressing agency-wide data verification and validation practices. It states that, “at the beginning of the fiscal year, goal leaders provide action

<sup>37</sup>For more information on DOD’s performance measures for its APGs, see appendix I.

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plans and verification and validation forms on each performance goal listed in the [annual performance plan].”

Officials in the Office of the Deputy Chief Management Officer said that DOD’s fiscal year 2014 performance plan update constituted their agency’s fiscal year 2015 performance plan, although this purpose is not clearly explained in the document.<sup>38</sup> DOD officials told us their agency would publish its 2016 performance plan as part of its agency strategic plan, which was intended for publication by the end of summer 2015. The Secretary of Defense signed this plan covering fiscal years 2015-2018, which is dated July 31, 2015.<sup>39</sup> Our review of the plan indicated that it described DOD’s performance management process. However, it did not explain how DOD will address all of the performance information quality requirements for each of the agency’s APGs. In addition, the plan did not make clear which sections of the plan were intended to address the requirement to publish a performance plan establishing performance goals for 2016.

When we shared our analysis with DOD officials, they acknowledged that the agency could make improvements in how it addresses GPRAMA requirements. However, DOD officials stated that information related to their APGs is published in other reports. For example, DOD publishes an annual energy management report that provides more detailed information related to its *Improve Energy Performance* APG.<sup>40</sup> We reviewed this report for fiscal year 2014 and found that it contained detailed information related to this APG, including some explanation of how DOD is measuring its energy consumption. However, GPRAMA and OMB require agencies to report on the quality of performance information in their annual performance plans and reports. DOD does not refer the reader to this more detailed report in its performance plans and reports. DOD officials also noted they collect internally more detailed information

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<sup>38</sup>This document is identified as *Performance Improvements* on the website of the Office of the Undersecretary of Defense (Controller) at <http://comptroller.defense.gov/BUDGETMATERIALS/BUDGET2015.ASPX>.

<sup>39</sup>Department of Defense, *Agency Strategic Plan, Fiscal Years 2015-2018 Version 1.0* (July 31, 2015).

<sup>40</sup>Department of Defense, *Annual Energy Management Report: Fiscal Year 2014* (May 2015).

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related to the GPRAMA requirements, such as on their verification and validation processes.

Improving the public reporting of performance information quality is important because DOD's *Reform the DOD Acquisition Process* and *DOD Financial Statement Audit Readiness* APGs address areas that we have identified as high risk.<sup>41</sup> For the acquisition APG, we reported in 2014 that DOD expects to invest \$1.5 trillion in its portfolio of major defense acquisition programs, making it particularly important that DOD explains how it is ensuring the quality of performance information for this APG.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, given that DOD is responsible for more than half of the federal government's discretionary spending, we reported that it is particularly important DOD has accurate, timely, and useful financial information. The reliability of DOD's financial information and ability to maintain effective accountability for its resources will be increasingly important to the federal government's ability to make sound resource-allocation decisions.


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<sup>41</sup>For more information on DOD weapon systems acquisition, see pp. 197-202 of [GAO-15-290](#). For DOD financial management, see pp. 172-183.

<sup>42</sup>In fiscal year 2014 dollars.

*The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Addressed GPRAMA Requirements in Explaining How Performance Information Quality Is Ensured for All APGs*

**Table 3: Assessment of DHS’s Performance Plans and Reports Covering FY13-FY16**

| Agency  | Agency Priority Goals (APGs) for FY14 and FY15  | Description of how each APG met GPRAMA performance information quality requirements |
|---|---|---|
|  | <i>Strengthen aviation security counterterrorism capabilities by using intelligence driven information and risk-based decisions</i> | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Yes</b></p>                                       |
| Description of how agency ensured performance information quality overall         | <i>Enforce and administer our immigration laws through prioritized detention and removal of criminal aliens</i>                     | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Yes</b></p>                                       |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Yes</b></p>                                     | <i>Ensure resilience to disasters by strengthening disaster preparedness and response capabilities</i>                              | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Yes</b></p>                                       |

Sources: Performance.gov for list of APGs as of December 2014 and January 2015. GAO analysis of Department of Homeland Security, *Annual Performance Report, Fiscal Years 2013-2015 and Appendix A: Measure Descriptions, Data Collection Methodologies, and Verification and Validation Information (2013-2015)*; and *Annual Performance Report, Fiscal Years 2014-2016 and Appendix A: Measure Descriptions, Data Collection Methodologies, and Verification and Validation Information (2014-2016)*. | GAO-15-788

DHS presented information about performance information quality for all three of its APGs in its performance plans and reports, which included detailed discussion for 10 of the 14 performance measures used to measure progress on these APGs.<sup>43</sup> Specifically, DHS published an appendix to its performance plans and reports with detailed performance information quality discussion for these measures.<sup>44</sup> For each measure,

<sup>43</sup>For more information about the performance measures DHS uses, see appendix I. DHS did not provide detailed performance information quality discussion in its performance plans and reports for every performance measure associated with its APGs identified on Performance.gov. GPRAMA requires this information to be provided for each APG, so therefore we consider DHS as having addressed the requirements.

<sup>44</sup>The most recent is *U.S. Department of Homeland Security Annual Performance Report, Fiscal Years 2014-2016, Appendix A: Measure Descriptions, Data Collection Methodologies, and Verification and Validation Information*, (Washington, D.C.: February 2015).

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DHS's appendix describes the related program, the scope of the data, the source and collection methodology for the data, and an assessment of data reliability. For example, for the number of convicted criminal aliens that Immigration and Customs Enforcement removes from the country for the *Enforce and Administer Our Immigration Laws* APG, DHS addresses the requirements for explaining verification and validation. It explains how headquarters staff looks for unusual patterns in data field offices have entered into a database tracking removals. DHS also states it conducts additional checks by cross-referencing data on removals reported by detention facilities and field offices, and says a statistical tracking unit does further checks. Related to the intended use of performance information, DHS explains for each performance measure discussed in this appendix how it uses the measure for decision making. For example, DHS explains that its measure of the number of convicted criminal aliens removed from the country reflects the "full impact" of its program activities in this area. This helps a reader understand that DHS will need a high level of accuracy to ensure that its programs are achieving its goals for this area.


We found examples of DHS acknowledging potential limitations for some APG performance measures. For example, DHS acknowledged that the average number of days to process inquiries from individuals experiencing difficulties with travel screening for its *Aviation Security* APG does not include the time DHS is waiting for the traveler to submit all required documents. This helps a reader understand that the performance measure may not reflect the total number of days it takes to resolve issues impeding an individual from traveling. DHS addresses the final requirement—how the agency will compensate for limitations to reach the required level of accuracy, if needed—by stating that each APG performance measure discussed in the appendix is reliable. Further, DHS also provided more specific explanation of corrective actions for some performance measures. For the *Ensure Resilience to Disasters* APG, DHS acknowledges that there is some variation in how states and territories assess their capabilities for dealing with disasters. But, it also explains that federal officials provide technical assistance and review the submissions from state and territorial officials to ensure that they align with guidance the Federal Emergency Management Administration provides to states and territories for how to assess their capabilities.

In addition, DHS's performance plans and reports explained how the agency ensures the quality of its performance information overall. DHS states it has an agency-wide performance management framework, which includes a process for verifying and validating its performance

information. For example, DHS explains that one of the steps it takes is to have an independent review team assess the completeness and reliability of its performance measurement data. By addressing the five GPRAMA requirements for its APGs, DHS's performance plans and reports helped external audiences better understand how it ensures the accuracy and reliability of performance information for the agency's highest priority performance goals.

*The Department of the Interior (Interior) Described How Performance Information Quality is Ensured Overall, but Did Not Address GPRAMA Requirements for its APGs*

**Table 4: Assessment of Interior's Performance Plans and Reports Covering FY13-FY16**

| Agency  | Agency Priority Goals (APGs) for FY14 and FY15                            | Description of how each APG met GPRAMA performance information quality requirements |
|---|---|---|
|  | <i>Climate Change Adaptation</i>  | <b>No</b>   |
|   | <i>Renewable Energy Resource Development</i>                              | <b>No</b>   |
|   | <i>Water conservation</i>   | <b>No</b>   |
|   | <i>Safer and More Resilient Communities in Indian Country</i>             | <b>No</b>   |
|   | Description of how agency ensured performance information quality overall | <i>Youth stewardship of natural and cultural resources<sup>a</sup></i>              |
| Yes   | <i>Oil and gas resource management</i>                                    | <b>No</b>   |

Sources: Performance.gov for list of APGs as of December 2014 and January 2015. GAO analysis of the Department of the Interior, 2014/2015 Annual Performance Plan & 2013 Report, 2015/2016 Annual Performance Plan & 2014 Report, and "Data Verification and Validation Standards." | GAO-15-788

<sup>a</sup>As of June 2015, Interior had changed the name of this APG on Performance.gov to be *Engaging the Next Generation*.

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Interior's performance plan and report covering fiscal years 2014 through 2016 provided an overall explanation of how it verified and validated its performance information, which is reproduced in figure 1.<sup>45</sup> Interior's plan and report states that it requires component agencies to have verification and validation processes, and referred to a more detailed document on the website of Interior's Office of Policy, Management, and Budget "Data Verification and Validation Standards." These standards provide direction to component agencies on how to verify and validate performance information and other aspects of performance information quality.<sup>46</sup> For example, the standards explain that component agencies should document data sources, describe the accuracy limits of data, and identify data limitations. Interior shared these standards in June 2015 with other agencies participating in a Performance Improvement Council cross-agency working group on data quality.

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<sup>45</sup>This explanation did not appear in the other performance plan and report we reviewed covering fiscal years 2013 through 2015. An Interior official explained that the agency added this statement to the most recent performance plan and report due to our audit. The official noted that while this statement was added to the performance plan and report, the standards discussed have been in place since 2003.

<sup>46</sup>The standards can be accessed at <http://www.doi.gov/pmb/ppp/upload/DOI-Performance-Data-V-V-Standards-Matrix.pdf>.



**Figure 1: Interior's Verification and Validation Statement from its FY 2015/2016 Performance Plan and 2014 Report**

The Department must ensure that its performance information is **sufficiently accurate, reliable, and sound**. GPRA requires agencies to describe the means used to verify and validate measured performance as part of the annual performance plan or budget. **Verification includes assessing data completeness, accuracy, and consistency and related quality control practices. Validation is the assessment of whether the data are appropriate for the performance measure.**

The Department requires the full implementation of data validation and verification criteria consistent with guidance posted in OMB Circular A-11 Part 6 (July 2014) to ensure that information is properly collected, recorded, processed, and aggregated for reporting and use by decision makers. In January 2003 (and reiterated in 2007), the Department issued a memorandum requiring a data verification and validation (V&V) process be put into place and used effectively by all bureaus and offices collecting and reporting performance data. **A data V&V assessment matrix, developed in cooperation with bureaus and departmental offices, including the Office of the Inspector General, was issued with the memorandum.** The matrix has been used successfully as a tool to elevate data V&V procedures to an acceptable functional level within the organization and to detect potential problem areas in well-established office data V&V systems.

Each bureau and office annually certifies their performance data complies with data verification and validation (Data V&V) criteria found in OMB Circular A-11 Part 6 (July 2014) and in accordance with DOI's data V&V assessment matrix.

Source: Department of the Interior, 2015/2016 Annual Performance Plan & 2014 Report. | GAO-15-788

Interior's performance plans and reports did not explain how performance information quality was ensured for its individual APGs. As shown above, Interior's statement on verification and validation is written at a high level and does not explain the specific steps component agencies took to ensure that performance information for each APG was accurate and reliable. Interior's Deputy Performance Improvement Officer noted that the performance plans and reports discussed the agency's performance in mission areas that relate to the APGs, and thereby provided contextual information that would allow the public to understand the quality of performance information for these APGs. Thus, they provided information on performance targets and past performance for some of the performance measures related to APGs. The available contextual information in the performance plans and reports did not address all of the GPRAMA performance information quality requirements for each APG. For example, related to its *Water Conservation* APG, which aims to increase the available water supply in the western states, Interior identifies the number of people and farmers the Bureau of Reclamation delivers water to, and reports on the acre feet of water conservation capability enabled through Reclamation's programs. While this helps

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external audiences understand the importance of this APG and the related mission area, Interior does not explain how it is ensuring that it is accurately measuring the water conservation capability enabled through Reclamation's programs.<sup>47</sup>

Our recent work has identified challenges related to the performance information Interior uses to measure progress on its *Oil and Gas Resource Management* APG. Interior states the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) will increase the completion of inspections of federal and Indian high-risk oil and gas cases.<sup>48</sup> However, we reported that it is difficult to compare Interior's performance over time in conducting inspections of onshore oil and gas production because BLM has revised its strategy several times during the period we examined.<sup>49</sup> This is an example of a limitation that makes it more difficult for external audiences to compare Interior's performance over time. We recommended in April 2015 that BLM take further steps to improve its production verification efforts. Interior concurred with these recommendations. As of July 2015, Interior stated that it has taken action to implement these recommendations, such as planning to publish updated regulations for oil and gas measurement in the third quarter of fiscal year 2016. More broadly, we have identified this area as high risk because our many prior reports have raised questions about whether the government was collecting all the revenue it was due from oil and gas produced from

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<sup>47</sup>For more information, see pp. 111-112, Department of the Interior, *2014/2015 Annual Performance Plan & 2013 Report*, (Washington, D.C.: February 2014) and pp. 118-119 of Department of the Interior, *2015/2016 Annual Performance Plan & 2014 Report* (Washington, D.C.: February 2015).


<sup>48</sup>Interior explains that operating regulations require inspection of leases which produce high volumes of oil or natural gas and those leases that have a history of noncompliance at least once a year. These inspections help ensure that hydrocarbon production on federally managed lands are properly accounted for and results in accurate royalty payments to the public and Indian owners of such minerals.

<sup>49</sup>We had reported in 2010 that BLM had been unable to consistently meet its goals for completing production inspections and recommended an alternative inspection strategy. In response, BLM developed a risk-based inspection strategy, which was first employed in fiscal year 2011, but BLM subsequently modified this strategy in fiscal years 2013 and 2014. For more information, see GAO, *Oil and Gas Resources: Interior's Production Verification Efforts and Royalty Data Have Improved, but Further Actions Needed*, [GAO-15-39](#) (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 7, 2015).

federal leases. Also, this revenue is one of the federal government's largest nontax source of revenue.<sup>50</sup>

*The Department of Labor (Labor) Described the Overall Quality of its Performance Information, but Not on How Quality Is Ensured for its Individual APGs*

**Table 5: Assessment of Labor's Performance Plans and Reports Covering FY13-FY16**

| Agency   | Agency Priority Goals (APGs) for FY14 and FY15  | Description of how each APG met GPRAMA performance information quality requirements |
|--|---|---|
|  | <i>Secure safe and healthy workplaces, particularly in high-risk industries</i>   | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>No</b></p>  |
| <p>Description of how agency ensured performance information quality overall</p>   | <i>Improve opportunities for America's workers through attainment of industry-recognized credentials that employers demand by 10 percent</i>  | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>No</b></p>  |
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b>Yes</b></p>                                      | <i>Increase the percent of participants who receive intensive services provided by Disabled Veterans Outreach Program specialists, with a focus on improving employment outcomes for veterans</i> | <p style="text-align: center;"><b>No</b></p>  |

Sources: Performance.gov for list of APGs as of December 2014 and January 2015. GAO analysis of Department of Labor's FY 2013 Annual Performance Report and FY 2014 Annual Performance Report. | GAO-15-788

Labor's performance reports contained limited discussion of performance information quality for its APGs, as table 5 shows.<sup>51</sup> The reports referred

<sup>50</sup>For more information on management of federal oil and gas resources, see pp. 94-100 of [GAO-15-290](#).

<sup>51</sup>While Labor refers to these as performance reports, the performance reports state that they also serve as the agency's performance plans for the relevant years.

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readers to its *Summary of Performance and Financial Information*, which includes an attestation statement from the Secretary of Labor as to the reliability and completeness of the agency's performance information (we reproduce these statements in the text boxes below). These statements provide the reader with the Secretary's assurance of the quality of Labor's performance information. However, these statements do not describe what practices are in place to ensure that the agency is using accurate and reliable performance information to measure and report on progress for its individual APGs.<sup>52</sup>

**Department of Labor's Data Completeness and Reliability Statement—Fiscal Year 2014 Annual Performance Report**

*The Fiscal Year 2014 Summary of Performance and Financial Information includes an assessment by the Secretary of the reliability and completeness of DOL (Labor's) performance data reported under the GPRAMA. The Department satisfies this requirement with Agency Head-level attestations that the data do not contain significant limitations that can lead to inaccurate assessments of results.*

Source: Department of Labor, *Fiscal Year 2014 Annual Performance Report*. | GAO-15-788

**The Secretary of Labor's Data Quality Attestation Statement—Fiscal Year 2014 Summary of Performance and Financial Information**

Secretary's Attestation Statement

*I attest that the summarized financial and performance data included in this document as well as the data in the Agency Financial Report and the Annual Performance Report are complete and reliable in accordance with Federal requirements.*

Source: Department of Labor, *Fiscal Year 2014 Summary of Performance and Financial Information*. | GAO-15-788

When we shared our analysis with Labor officials, they said that they were not fully aware of the performance information quality requirements for APGs. However, they emphasized that their agency places considerable emphasis on ensuring the quality of its performance information, and on conducting program evaluations to assess the effectiveness of its programs.<sup>53</sup> Labor officials referred us to other agency publications—*The Department of Labor FY 2014-2018 Strategic Plan* and *The Department of Labor FY 2016 Congressional Budget Justification*—for

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<sup>52</sup>While the Secretary's statements are not published in the performance reports, we decided to include these statements in our review because the performance reports clearly refer readers to these statements and make clear that they are intended to address performance information quality.

<sup>53</sup>Our 2014 report on agencies' trends in the use of performance information found that Labor was only one of two agencies that showed a statistically significant increase in the use of performance information by federal managers in the 24 Chief Financial Officers Act agencies between 2007 and 2013. For more information, see [GAO-14-747](#).

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explanation to the public of the activities they said their agency was taking to ensure the quality of its performance information. We confirmed that these publications do describe the agency's research and evaluation agenda. For example, Labor states in its strategic plan that it is committed to improving the quality of performance information by conducting future evaluations to ensure the outcome data it reports are accurate. While Labor's strategic plan does not explain the extent to which these data quality studies will focus on issues related to its APGs, Labor does provide valuable information and important context on how it plans to ensure the quality of its performance information. Nevertheless, GPRAMA's performance information quality requirements are important because our previous work on fragmentation, overlap, and duplication shows that Labor needs to report more transparently on program performance for its veterans' employment and training programs. This relates to one of Labor's APGs on improving employment outcomes for veterans. Specifically, we reported in 2012 that Labor provided Congress with an annual veterans' program report that provided certain performance information, such as the number of disabled and recently separated veterans who received intensive services. But, we found that Labor was not reporting these results relative to the performance goals it had set.<sup>54</sup> We recommended in our prior work that Labor report both performance goals and associated performance outcomes for its veterans' employment and training programs. Labor agreed with our recommendation and has made some progress in addressing it.<sup>55</sup> For example, Labor has reported on how the results achieved for the performance measure it uses to measure progress on one of its APGs (percent of veterans receiving intensive services served by Disabled Veterans Outreach Program specialists) compare to the targets it set. Labor provided this information for this performance measure in both its performance report and on Performance.gov.


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<sup>54</sup>We noted that Labor was not required to report program outcomes in relation to performance goals. For more information, see, GAO, *2015 Annual Report: Additional Opportunities to Reduce Fragmentation, Overlap, and Duplication and Achieve Other Financial Benefits*, [GAO-15-404SP](#) (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 14, 2015), and *Veterans' Employment and Training: Better Targeting, Coordinating, and Reporting Needed to Enhance Program Effectiveness*, [GAO-13-29](#) (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 13, 2012).

<sup>55</sup>For example, Labor in its fiscal year 2013 annual report to Congress reported on some of its performance goals and associated outcomes for its Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program. However, Labor did not report performance goals or associated outcomes for its Veterans' Workforce Investment Program and Local Veterans' Employment Representative Program in this annual report to Congress.

*The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Described Its Overall Approach for Ensuring Performance Information Quality, but Does Not Explain How Performance Information Quality for its APGs Is Ensured*

**Table 6: Assessment of NASA’s Performance Plans and Reports Covering FY13-FY16**

| Agency  | Agency Priority Goals (APGs) for FY14 and FY15   | Description of how each APG met GPRAMA performance information quality requirements |
|---|--|---|
|  | <i>Achieve critical milestones in development of new systems for the human exploration of deep space</i>                       | <b>No</b>   |
| <b>Description of how agency ensured performance information quality overall</b>  | <i>Increase utilization of the International Space Station’s internal and external research facilities</i>                     | <b>No</b>   |
| <b>Yes</b>  | <i>Facilitate the development of and certify U.S. industry-based crew transportation systems while maintaining competition</i> | <b>No</b>   |
|   | <i>Launch the James Webb Space Telescope</i>   | <b>No</b>   |

Sources: Performance.gov for list of APGs as of December 2014 and January 2015. GAO analysis of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, *FY 2015 Management and Performance* and *FY 2014 Annual Performance Report and FY 2016 Annual Performance Plan*. | GAO-15-788

NASA’s performance plans and reports characterize the agency as a performance-based organization committed to managing toward specific, measurable goals, and to using performance information to continually improve operations. As shown in table 6, these performance plans and reports explain how the agency ensures the quality of its performance information overall. For example, NASA stated in its performance plans and reports that it held internal reviews for its projects, determined technology readiness levels, and required mission directorates and mission support offices to submit evidence supporting all performance

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measure ratings.<sup>56</sup> Further, NASA stated that it used external entities, such as scientific review committees and aeronautics technical evaluation bodies, to help it validate program performance. These statements provide valuable insight into how NASA measures its performance and uses evidence.

However, NASA's performance plans and reports did not explain how the agency ensured the quality of performance information for individual APGs. NASA presented concise summaries of each APG, progress updates, and next steps. However, there was little explanation provided for external audiences which described how NASA took the approach it has outlined for ensuring the overall quality of its performance information, and applied this approach to individual APGs.

In our discussions with NASA officials, they emphasized that they do collect information related to all of the GPRAMA requirements. To illustrate this, NASA officials demonstrated their internal Performance Measure Manager system to us in April 2015.<sup>57</sup> NASA officials told us that the system functions as a warehouse for agency performance information and they upload information from the system to Performance.gov for quarterly APG updates and to help develop their performance plans and reports. They showed us that this system collects information on the quality of performance information for a range of performance measures, including for APGs. For example, the internal database has a field for verification and validation materials for the *James Webb Space Telescope* APG, and identifies a data limitation for it.<sup>58</sup> However, NASA does not publicly report all of the information the system collects on how it ensures the quality of performance information for its APGs.

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<sup>56</sup>Technology readiness levels, which were originally developed by NASA, are measured on a scale of one to nine, beginning with paper studies of a technology's feasibility and culminating with a technology fully integrated into a completed product. For more information, see appendix IV of GAO, *NASA: Assessments of Selected Large-Scale Projects*, [GAO-15-320SP](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 24, 2015).

<sup>57</sup>While NASA officials noted that this system is not unique to NASA—they reported that it is maintained by the Department of the Treasury's Bureau of the Fiscal Service and is available to other federal agencies—we refer to it as an internal system because the information in the system is not available to the public.

<sup>58</sup>At the time of our visit, the system stated that verification and validation materials will be provided by the Science Mission Directorate for this APG. According to NASA officials, the milestone activity identified in the performance plan and report had not yet been achieved.



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NASA officials expressed concern about how well the GPRAMA performance information quality requirements can be applied to their agency's performance reporting. NASA officials said that they use what GPRAMA and Office of Management and Budget Circular A-11 refer to as an alternative form of performance measurement that, among other things, allows an agency to use milestones for completing major deliverables for the APG instead of performance measures.<sup>59</sup> They further explained that they use numerous milestones to measure progress on their APGs. They added that NASA only reports on key quarterly milestones in its performance plans and reports and on Performance.gov.<sup>60</sup> Unlike other agencies, they noted they often do not have quantitative data sets for their performance information. However, the GPRAMA performance information quality requirements apply to all APGs, even if the agency is using milestones.

As we noted in our 2015 High Risk update, NASA plans to invest billions of dollars in the coming years to explore space, understand Earth's environment, and conduct aeronautics research. We designated NASA's acquisition management as high risk in 1990 in view of NASA's history of persistent cost growth and schedule slippage in the majority of its major projects.<sup>61</sup> Going forward, we noted in our February 2015 high risk update that it will be critical for NASA to ensure adequate and ongoing assessments of risks related to two of its APGs for developing new systems for exploring deep space and the James Webb Space Telescope. However, as our review shows, NASA has not explained to external audiences how it is ensuring the quality of performance information for these APGs related to these high-risk areas. Without such information, it will be more difficult for Congress and the public to understand whether NASA is effectively measuring progress toward these APGs, and whether the billions of dollars being spent to accomplish these important efforts are being used effectively.

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<sup>59</sup>GPRAMA provides for goals to be expressed in an "alternative form" when it is not feasible to express them in an objective, quantifiable, and measurable form. In addition to the reporting requirements we have addressed, the goal description must satisfy one of two standards allowing assessment of program results, or state why it is infeasible or impractical to express a performance goal in any form for the program activity. 31 U.S.C. § 1115(c) and OMB Circular No. A-11, sections 240.10 and 250.13 (2015).

<sup>60</sup>For more information about NASA's milestones, see appendix I.

<sup>61</sup>See pp. 307-313 of [GAO-15-290](#).



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## Cross-Agency Working Group Could Help Agencies and OMB Improve Public Reporting on the Quality of Performance Information Used to Measure Progress on Priority Goals

In 2015, OMB and the Performance Improvement Council (PIC) established the Data Quality Cross-Agency Working Group. This group met for the first time in February 2015; and four other meetings were held in April, May, June, and July 2015. As of June 2015, PIC staff reported that a total of 12 agencies were participating, which is more than half of the agencies with APGs. Three of the six agencies we selected for review—the Departments of Defense and Homeland Security (DHS) and NASA—are participating. DHS and NASA officials told us that they have made or plan to make presentations at these meetings on their agencies' performance information quality processes. In addition, Interior's Deputy Performance Improvement Officer shared his agency's verification and validation standards with the group. An additional nine agencies—the Departments of Commerce, Education, Health and Human Services, Justice, Treasury, and Veterans Affairs, and the Environmental Protection Agency, Small Business Administration, and Social Security Administration—are also participating in the group.<sup>62</sup> According to meeting notes for the May 2015 meeting provided by OMB and PIC staff, the group had identified several goals:

- improve the reliability and quality of performance information and of the reporting process;
- set standards and develop consistency across agencies; and
- highlight good performance measures and accurate and appropriate performance information.

The May 2015 meeting notes state the group's end product will be to identify solutions agencies have used to solve a data quality problem. In June 2015, the PIC's Executive Director explained that while the group is still working on defining this end product, it wants to develop a collection of useful and leading practices that can be shared with agency officials. The PIC's Executive Director and her staff also noted that this end product could include providing recommendations to OMB on changes that could be made to the A-11 guidance on how to address GPRAMA's performance information quality requirements. OMB staff also indicated to us that they would like to get input from the group on additional changes that could be made to A-11. PIC staff told us that the participating

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<sup>62</sup>Environmental Protection Agency officials presented at the June 2015 meeting on their agency's program for ensuring the quality of its performance information.

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agencies met with OMB staff in July 2015 to discuss additional changes that should be made to A-11.

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## Conclusions

For more than two decades, agencies have been required to publicly report on the quality of their performance information in annual performance plans. More recently, agencies have also been required to report on Performance.gov on how they will ensure the accuracy and reliability of the performance information used to measure progress on each of their highest priority performance goals, the APGs. However, insufficient progress has been made. While OMB for several years has directed agencies to discuss the quality of APG performance information in their annual performance plans and reports, the selected agencies' plans and reports often did not. OMB recently changed its guidance to require agencies to provide this information for publication on Performance.gov. The next key step is to build upon this recent guidance to implement the change and make this important information readily accessible to the public and Congress.

This overall lack of transparency means that members of Congress, citizens, journalists, and researchers seeking information about agency performance related to priority goals have to search in multiple places, and often end up finding no explanation of the quality of performance information for APGs. For agencies to maintain the confidence of Congress and the public that they are indeed achieving their priority goals for the challenging and complex results they seek to achieve, agencies will need to provide more transparent explanations of how they are ensuring the accuracy and reliability of performance information for their APGs.

More broadly, our review shows that five agencies continue to provide limited information in their annual performance plans and reports concerning the quality of performance information for their APGs. The same is true for all six agencies on Performance.gov. In some cases, the needed context and information may be available within the agency for the agency's use. However, this information is not consistently provided to external audiences. The Performance Improvement Council's (PIC) Data Quality Cross-Agency Working Group provides a potential forum for agencies to collaborate and share information on this topic, and the group is defining its intended end product. Given the shortcomings our review identified at the majority of the six agencies reviewed, the working group could help agencies identify practices that will help them more clearly explain to Congress and the public how they are ensuring that the performance information for their highest priority performance goals is

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accurate and reliable. OMB could also work with this PIC working group to continue updating its guidance to agencies to ensure that this information is readily accessible on Performance.gov.

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## Recommendations for Executive Action

To improve the public reporting about how agencies are ensuring the quality of performance information used to measure progress towards their priority goals, we recommend the following actions:

- The Secretaries of Agriculture, Defense, Homeland Security, Interior, and Labor, and the Administrator of NASA should more fully address GPRAMA requirements and OMB guidance by working with OMB to describe on Performance.gov how they are ensuring the quality of performance information used to measure progress towards their APGs.
- The Secretaries of Agriculture, Defense, Interior, and Labor, and the Administrator of NASA should more fully address GPRAMA requirements and OMB guidance by describing in their agencies' annual performance plans and reports how they are ensuring the quality of performance information used to measure progress towards their APGs.

To help participating agencies improve their public reporting, we recommend that the Director of OMB, working with the PIC Executive Director, should:

- Identify additional changes that need to be made in OMB's guidance to agencies related to ensuring the quality of performance information for APGs on Performance.gov.
- Identify practices participating agencies can use to improve their public reporting in their performance plans and reports of how they are ensuring the quality of performance information used to measure progress towards APGs.

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## Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

We provided a draft of this report to the Director of OMB and the Secretaries of Agriculture, Defense, Homeland Security, Interior, and Labor, and the Administrator of NASA.

The Department of the Interior and NASA concurred with the recommendations directed to them, and discussed specific actions they plan to take to address these recommendations. Interior and NASA's written responses are reproduced in appendixes II and III.

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In its response, NASA also shared a concern about how we portrayed its high-risk reporting in the draft report. It stated that our draft report suggested that the select milestones identified as part of its performance reporting are the sole mechanisms NASA uses to assess risks and measure progress towards launching the James Webb Space Telescope, and developing new systems for human exploration of deep space. NASA further stated that to comply with reporting requirements related to APGs, it has opted to provide information on key quarterly milestones that the public can easily understand. To address NASA's concern, we revised the report to recognize that NASA officials told us they use numerous milestones to measure progress on their APGs. NASA also said that it only reports on key quarterly milestones in its performance plans and reports, and on Performance.gov. NASA also provided technical clarifications, which we incorporated as appropriate.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) also concurred with the recommendation directed to it. However, DHS stated that it has already taken action to implement our recommendation to work with OMB to describe on Performance.gov how DHS is ensuring the quality of performance information used to measure progress towards its APGs. Thus, DHS regards the recommendation as resolved and closed. DHS stated that on July 1, 2015, agency officials in its Office of Program Analysis and Evaluation provided OMB with several specific suggestions to consider as possible enhancements to the internal system that OMB uses to gather agency data for public posting on Performance.gov. This will allow agencies to include more comprehensive data quality information on this public website. DHS's efforts are an important step toward addressing our recommendation. However, as our review found, and DHS recognizes in its response letter, more will need to be done to make DHS's explanations of performance information quality for its APGs accessible to external audiences on Performance.gov. For example, in our report we noted that OMB's updated A-11 guidance in June 2015 gives agencies the option of providing a hyperlink from Performance.gov to an appendix in their performance reports containing their performance information quality discussion, which DHS could do. We will continue to monitor DHS's efforts to work with OMB to fully implement the recommendation. DHS's written comments are reproduced in appendix IV.

The Department of Defense (DOD) partially concurred with the recommendations directed to it. DOD stated that it has ongoing actions to improve the quality of performance information, and to make better use of that information in management. However, DOD stated that it did not agree that making discussion of the process of managing the quality of

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performance information a part of either the agency strategic plan or annual reporting has any major management value. We disagree. First, GPRAMA does not require, nor did we recommend, that DOD provide information on the quality of performance information for its agency priority goals in its agency strategic plan. Second, GPRAMA does require that this information be provided in agency performance plans and reports and on Performance.gov. We continue to believe it is important for DOD to fully address these GPRAMA requirements because, as described in our report, two of DOD's APGs address areas we have identified as high risk. Also, DOD is responsible for more than half of the federal government's discretionary spending. DOD's written comments are reproduced in appendix V.

The Departments of Agriculture (USDA) and Labor did not comment on the recommendations directed to them. However, they both discussed specific actions they plan to take to improve the quality of their publicly-reported performance information for their agency priority goals. In comments relayed to us in an August 14, 2015, e-mail from the Associate Director of USDA's Office of Budget and Program Analysis, who is also the agency's Performance Improvement Officer (PIO), he stated the agency would ensure that a description of the quality of performance information be added for each performance measure included in its APGs for fiscal years 2016 and 2017. He also stated that USDA will work with OMB to put this information on Performance.gov or in its annual performance plan and report with a reference to that information on Performance.gov. He also stated a reference to this information would be provided in USDA's annual performance plan. He also provided us with a technical clarification, which we incorporated.

In its response, Labor raised a concern about statements in our draft report regarding information on several of its programs that serve veterans, which were drawn from our prior work. Labor stated that the report incorrectly asserts that it does not report on the number of veterans receiving intensive services relative to performance goals. Rather, Labor stated that it has used the Veterans' Employment and Training Services measure for the percent of veterans being served by the Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program as an APG for 4 years, and has included how results relate to performance goals. Additionally, Labor asserted that outcomes for the Veterans Workforce Investment Program have been included in the annual report to Congress in fiscal years 2013 and 2014. We revised the report to reflect Labor's updated actions as appropriate. Labor's written comments are reproduced in appendix VI.

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In an August 26, 2015, e-mail from OMB's liaison to GAO, OMB did not comment on the recommendations, but provided technical clarifications, which we incorporated as appropriate.

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We are sending copies of this report to the Director of OMB and the heads of the agencies we reviewed as well as appropriate congressional committees and other interested parties. In addition, this report is available at no charge on the GAO website at <http://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff members have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-6806 or [mihmj@gao.gov](mailto:mihmj@gao.gov). Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made key contributions to this report are listed in appendix VII.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J. Christopher Mihm". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

J. Christopher Mihm  
Managing Director, Strategic Issues

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*List of Committees*

The Honorable Ron Johnson  
Chairman  
The Honorable Thomas R. Carper  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs  
United States Senate

The Honorable Jason Chaffetz  
Chairman  
The Honorable Elijah E. Cummings  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Oversight and Governmental Reform  
House of Representatives

The Honorable Mark Meadows  
Chairman  
The Honorable Gerald E. Connolly  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Government Operations  
Committee on Oversight and Governmental Reform  
House of Representatives

# Appendix I: Selected Agencies' Priority Goals and Performance Measures and Milestones

**Table 7: U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Priority Goals and Measures**

| Agency Priority Goal   | Performance measures identified on Performance.gov   |
|--|--|
| Reduce the number of foodborne <i>Salmonella</i> illnesses that are associated with USDA's Food Safety and Inspection Service regulated products—meat, poultry, and processed egg products | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All-illness measure</li> <li>• <i>Salmonella</i> performance standard</li> </ul>  |
| Create new economic opportunities through farming and the creation of new markets for agricultural products  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New markets for local and regional food</li> <li>• New bio-based companies</li> <li>• Microloans</li> <li>• Farmers markets and food hubs</li> <li>• Consumer demand</li> <li>• Investments in local and regional food systems</li> </ul> |
| Improve the health of our nation's soils to make our food, fiber, and energy production systems resilient and sustainable  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Scientific studies</li> <li>• Soil health management systems</li> <li>• Soil carbon retained</li> <li>• Corn and soybean production</li> <li>• Literature review</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Total for USDA: 3 goals</b>   | <b>13 performance measures</b>   |

Source: Performance.gov as of December 2014 and January 2015. | GAO 15-788

Note: Performance measures (which OMB refers to as indicators) are defined as measurable values that indicate the state or level of something. See, OMB Circular No. A-11, section 200.21 (2015).



**Appendix I: Selected Agencies' Priority Goals  
and Performance Measures and Milestones**

**Table 8: Department of Defense (DOD) Priority Goals and Measures**

| Agency Priority Goal                                 | Performance measures identified on Performance.gov  |
|--|---|
| Transition to veterans                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Verified percent of Service members who have separated and attended (a) pre-separation counseling, (b) a Department of Labor employment workshop, and (c) Veterans Affairs Benefits briefings prior to their separation</li> <li>• Percent of Service members who meet DOD's Integrated Disability Evaluation System process time and satisfaction goals<sup>a</sup></li> <li>• Verified percent of eligible Service members who separated and met Career Readiness Standards prior to their separation<sup>b</sup></li> <li>• Percent of wounded, ill and injured Service Members enrolled in a Service recovery coordination program and have an established and active recovery plan administered by a DOD trained recovery care coordinator<sup>c</sup></li> </ul> |
| Reform the DOD acquisition process                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Median cycle time deviation from the previous year for active Major Defense Acquisition Programs (MDAPs) starting in fiscal year 2002 and after</li> <li>• Average rate of acquisition cost growth from the previous year for MDAPs starting in fiscal year 2002 and after</li> <li>• Number of MDAP breaches equal to or greater than 15 percent of current Acquisition Program Baseline unit cost or equal to or greater than 30 percent of original Acquisition Program Baseline unit cost for reasons other than approved changes in quantity</li> <li>• Percentage of contract obligations that are competitively awarded</li> </ul>  |
| Improve energy performance                           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cumulative average percent reduction in building energy intensity</li> <li>• Percentage of renewable energy produced or procured based on DOD's annual electric energy usage</li> </ul>  |
| DOD financial statement audit readiness <sup>f</sup> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mission Critical Asset Audit Readiness<sup>d</sup></li> <li>• Funds Balance with Treasury</li> <li>• Statement of Budgetary Resources/Statement of Budgetary Activity<sup>e</sup></li> </ul>   |
| <b>Total for DOD: 4 goals</b>                        | <b>13 performance measures<sup>g</sup></b>  |

Source: Performance.gov as of December 2014 and January 2015. | GAO 15-788

Note: Performance measures (which OMB refers to as indicators) are defined as measurable values that indicate the state or level of something. See, OMB Circular No. A-11, section 200.21 (2015).

<sup>a</sup>As of June 2015, DOD had changed this performance measure on Performance.gov to be, "percent of Service members who meet the DOD [Integrated Disability Evaluation System] performance goal."

<sup>b</sup>As of June 2015, DOD had changed this measure on Performance.gov to be, "percent of eligible active duty Service members who separated and met Career Readiness Standards prior to their separation."

<sup>c</sup>As of June 2015, DOD had changed this measure on Performance.gov to be, "percentage of recovering Service Members enrolled in Wounded Warrior Programs with Active Recovery Plans that are shared with [the Department of Veterans Affairs] to aid in successful transition."

<sup>d</sup>As of June 2015, DOD had changed this measure on Performance.gov to be, "existence and completeness of Mission Critical Assets."

<sup>e</sup>As of June 2015, DOD had changed this measure on Performance.gov to be "Statement of Budgetary Resources."

<sup>f</sup>As of June 2015, DOD had added an additional measure, "Valuation of Mission Critical Assets," to this APG on Performance.gov.

<sup>g</sup>Our review focused on 13 performance measures. As noted above, DOD subsequently added an additional performance measure.

**Appendix I: Selected Agencies' Priority Goals  
and Performance Measures and Milestones**

**Table 9: Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Priority Goals and Measures**

| Agency Priority Goal   | Performance measures identified on Performance.gov  |
|--|---|
| Strengthen aviation security counterterrorism capabilities by using intelligence driven information and risk-based decisions | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of daily travelers eligible to receive expedited physical screening based on assessed low risk</li> <li>• Percent of domestic air enplanements vetted against the terrorist watch list through Secure Flight</li> <li>• Percent of international air enplanements vetted against the terrorist watch list through Secure Flight</li> <li>• Percent of passengers satisfied with the Transportation Security Administration's PreCheck security screening</li> <li>• Percent of nationwide airport operational hours with wait times of less than 20 minutes</li> <li>• Average number of days for DHS Traveler Redress Inquiry Program redress requests to be closed</li> </ul> |
| Enforce and administer our immigration laws through prioritized detention and removal of criminal aliens                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percent of total aliens removed categorized as criminal aliens</li> <li>• Number of convicted criminal aliens removed per fiscal year</li> <li>• Number of aliens removed convicted of the most serious crimes (level 1 offenders)</li> <li>• Average length of stay in detention of all convicted criminal aliens prior to removal from the U.S.</li> <li>• Percent of removal orders secured by Immigration and Customs Enforcement attorneys that support the agency's civil enforcement priorities</li> </ul>  |
| Ensure resilience to disasters by strengthening disaster preparedness and response capabilities                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percent of states and territories with a Threat and Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment that meets current DHS guidance</li> <li>• Percent of high priority planning core capabilities rated as proficient by states and territories</li> <li>• Number of states and territories that have demonstrated improvement towards achieving their core capability targets established through their Threat and Hazard Identification and Risk Assessment</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Total for DHS: 3 goals</b>  | <b>14 performance measures</b>  |

Source: Performance.gov as of December 2014 and January 2015. | GAO 15-788

Note: Performance measures (which OMB refers to as indicators) are defined as measurable values that indicate the state or level of something. See, OMB Circular No. A-11, section 200.21 (2015).

**Appendix I: Selected Agencies' Priority Goals  
and Performance Measures and Milestones**

**Table 10: Department of the Interior (Interior) Priority Goals and Measures**

| <b>Agency Priority Goal</b>                                      | <b>Performance measures identified on Performance.gov</b>  |
|--|--|
| Climate change adaptation  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Climate change maturity rating</li> </ul>   |
| Renewable energy resource development                            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of megawatts of approved capacity authorized on public land and the Outer Continental Shelf for renewable energy development while ensuring full environmental review (cumulative since fiscal year 2010)</li> </ul> |
| Water conservation   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Acre feet of water conservation capacity enabled through the Bureau of Reclamation's priority goal conservation programs</li> </ul>   |
| Safer and more resilient communities in Indian Country           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reduction in recidivism of adult offenders incarcerated</li> </ul>  |
| Youth stewardship of natural and cultural resources <sup>a</sup> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of work opportunities for individuals age 15 to 25 in work supporting the mission of the Department<sup>a</sup></li> </ul>   |
| Oil and gas resource management                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Percent of high risk oil and gas cases inspected</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Total for Interior: 6 goals</b>                               | <b>6 performance measures</b>  |

Source: Performance.gov as of December 2014 and January 2015. | GAO 15-788

Note: Performance measures (which OMB refers to as indicators) are defined as measurable values that indicate the state or level of something. See, OMB Circular No. A-11, section 200.21 (2015).

<sup>a</sup>As of June 2015, Interior changed the name of this goal and associated measure on Performance.gov to be "Engaging the Next Generation."

**Appendix I: Selected Agencies' Priority Goals  
and Performance Measures and Milestones**

**Table 11: Department of Labor (Labor) Priority Goals and Measures**

| Agency Priority Goals  | Performance measures identified on Performance.gov  |
|--|---|
| Secure safe and healthy workplaces, particularly in high-risk industries   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Five-year rolling average of fatal injuries per 200,000 hours worked (All Mine Safety and Health Administration rate) / Five-year total of hours worked</li> <li>• Number of hazards abated associated with falls in construction</li> <li>• Number of hazards abated associated with falls in general industry</li> </ul> |
| Improve opportunities for America's workers through attainment of industry-recognized credentials that employers demand by 10 percent  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percent of Employment and Training Administration workforce system program completers who received training services and attained a credential</li> </ul>  |
| Increase the percent of participants who receive intensive services provided by Disabled Veterans Outreach Program specialists, with a focus on improving employment outcomes for veterans | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Percent of veterans receiving intensive services served by Disabled Veterans Outreach Program specialists</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Total for Labor: 3 goals</b>  | <b>5 performance measures</b>   |

Source: Performance.gov as of December 2014 and January 2015. | GAO 15-788

Note: Performance measures (which OMB refers to as indicators) are defined as measurable values that indicate the state or level of something. See, OMB Circular No. A-11, section 200.21 (2015).

**Appendix I: Selected Agencies' Priority Goals  
and Performance Measures and Milestones**

**Table 12: National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) Priority Goals and Milestones**

| Agency Priority Goal  | Milestones identified on Performance.gov   |
|---|--|
| Achieve critical milestones in development of new systems for the human exploration of deep space                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Q1: Launch and recover the Exploration Flight Test (EFT-1) vehicle.</li> <li>• Q1: Complete the Qualification Motor-1 booster test firing.</li> <li>• Q2: Complete the mobile launcher structural modifications.</li> <li>• Q3: Complete the Critical Design Reviews for the Space Launch System elements (i.e., Upper stage).</li> <li>• Q3: Complete the Ground Systems Development &amp; Operations Critical Design Review.</li> <li>• Q4: Complete the Orion Critical Design Review.</li> <li>• Q4: Complete the Space Launch System Critical Design Review.</li> </ul> |
| Increase utilization of the International Space Station's internal and external research facilities                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Q1: Launch advanced rodent research hardware and payload resupply on SpaceX-4.</li> <li>• Q2: Launch one new external science payload and payload resupply on SpaceX-5.</li> <li>• Q3: Launch one or more new external science payloads and payload resupply on SpaceX-6.</li> <li>• Q3: Support the 4th International Space Station Research and Development Conference in Boston.</li> <li>• Q4: Launch payload hardware and resupply on H-II transfer vehicle (HTV5).</li> </ul>   |
| Facilitate the development of and certify U.S. industry-based crew transportation systems while maintaining competition | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Q1: Begin Commercial Crew Transportation Capability contract milestone activities and support protest activities.</li> <li>• Q2: Execute contract elements in alignment with negotiated contract milestones.</li> <li>• Q3: Execute contract elements in alignment with negotiated contract milestones.</li> <li>• Q4: Execute contract elements in alignment with negotiated contract milestones.</li> </ul>   |
| Launch the James Webb Space Telescope   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Q1: Complete mirror placements on the pathfinder primary mirror backplane support structure.</li> <li>• Q2: Initiate flight Optical Telescope Element structure assembly integration.</li> <li>• Q3: Provide completed secondary mirror support structure to Optical Telescope Element structure integration and testing.</li> <li>• Q4: Deliver flight backplane to Goddard Space Flight Center.</li> </ul>  |
| <b>Total for NASA: 4 goals</b>  | <b>20 milestones for 2015</b>  |

Source: Performance.gov as of December 2014 and January 2015. | GAO 15-788

Note: Milestones are scheduled events signifying the completion of a major deliverable. NASA officials told us that only the most significant milestones on these goals appear on Performance.gov. All NASA milestones are for fiscal year 2015. See, OMB Circular No. A-11, section 200.21 (2015).

# Appendix II: Comments from the Department of the Interior



United States Department of the Interior

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY  
Washington, DC 20240

AUG 26 2015

J. Christopher Mihm  
Managing Director, Strategic Issues  
U.S. Government Accountability Office  
441 G Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Mihm:

Thank you for providing the Department of the Interior (Department) the opportunity to review and comment on the draft Government Accountability Office Report entitled *Managing for Results: Greater Transparency Needed in Public Reporting on the Quality of Performance Information for Selected Agencies' Priority Goals* (GAO-15-788).

We appreciate GAO's review of federal agencies' efforts to publicly report on the quality of performance information being used to measure progress of their agency priority goals (APGs) as reported on Performance.gov and in their Annual Performance Plan and Reports (APP&R). The GAO issued two recommendations to the Department in response to its overall findings. We generally agree with the findings and concur with the recommendations and offer the following responses.

GAO made two recommendations to the Secretary of the Interior on how to improve the public reporting to ensure the quality of performance information used to measure progress towards the agency's goals. First, the Secretary of the Interior should more fully address Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) Modernization Act of 2010 (GPRAMA) requirements and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) guidance by working with OMB to describe on Performance.gov how it is ensuring the quality of performance information used to measure progress towards their APGs. Second, the Department should describe in its APP&R how it is ensuring the quality of performance information used to measure progress towards its APGs.

#### **Response to Recommendations**

In follow up to preliminary report discussions with GAO this spring and to address Recommendation 1 above, the Department will add new information to the "Indicators" tab on [www.performance.gov](http://www.performance.gov) for each of the APGs, starting with the launch of the FY 2016/2017 APGs. This additional information will more fully describe the data sources and validation/verification processes, data requirements and limitations, and compensatory actions related to data accuracy. To address Recommendation 2, the Department will update the Data Quality section of the FY 2015 APP&R with the same information added to [www.performance.gov](http://www.performance.gov) and described above to address Recommendation 1. Finally, in

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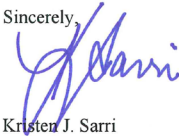
**Appendix II: Comments from the Department  
of the Interior**

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response to both recommendations 1 and 2, the Department joined the OMB's Performance Improvement Council (PIC) Data Quality Working Group to ensure APG performance information's adherence to both GPRAMA and current and future OMB guidance.

If you have any questions, or need additional information, please contact me.

Sincerely,



Kristen J. Sarri  
Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary  
Policy, Management and Budget

# Appendix III: Comments from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration

National Aeronautics and Space Administration  
Headquarters  
Washington, DC 20546-0001



August 25, 2015

Reply to Attn of: Office of the Chief Financial Officer

J. Christopher Mihm  
Managing Director  
Strategic Issues  
United States Government Accountability Office  
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Mihm:

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) appreciates the opportunity to review and comment on the Government Accountability Office (GAO) draft report entitled, "Managing for Results: Greater Transparency Needed in Public Reporting on the Quality of Performance Information for Selected Agencies' Priority Goals" (GAO-15-788).

I want to thank GAO for acknowledging that NASA internally collects data on the quality of its performance information, even though we may be field-limited in terms of our ability to report this information on Performance.gov. However, I am concerned by the portrayal of NASA's High Risk reporting in the draft report, which suggests that the select milestones identified as part of our performance planning efforts are the sole mechanisms NASA uses to assess risks and measure progress toward launching the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) and developing new systems for human exploration of deep space. To comply with the reporting requirements associated with Agency Performance Goals (APGs), NASA has opted to provide information on key quarterly milestones that the public can easily understand. As we have discussed with GAO in the context of the ongoing assessments of JWST, Orion, the Space Launch System (SLS), and Ground Systems Development & Operations (GSDO), NASA uses numerous indicators to assess the status of these programs. We believe this information, which is routinely provided to key stakeholders, provides a more comprehensive view of progress.

In the draft report, GAO makes the following two recommendations to the NASA Administrator, intended to improve the public reporting about how NASA is ensuring the quality of performance information used to measure progress toward its APGs:

**Recommendation 1:** The NASA Administrator should more fully address Government Performance and Results Act Modernization Act (GPRAMA) requirements and Office of Management and Budget (OMB) guidance by working



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with OMB to describe on Performance.gov how NASA is ensuring the quality of performance information used to measure progress towards its APGs.

**Management's Response:** Concur. NASA currently is developing its APGs for the FY 2016-17 reporting cycle. OMB will determine the schedule for publishing the new APGs on Performance.gov. As noted in the draft report, OMB is revising its data collection template to include fields on the quality of Agency performance information. NASA will continue to work with OMB to understand how the template will apply to agencies using the alternate format, including any future data limitations. Until these new fields are available to agencies using the alternate format, NASA will describe how it ensures the quality of its performance information for each of its FY 2016-17 APGs in the existing Strategies field.

**Estimated Completion Date:** Upon publication of the FY 2016-17 APGs on Performance.gov.

**Recommendation 2:** The NASA Administrator should more fully address GPRAMA requirements and OMB guidance by describing in NASA's annual performance plans and reports how NASA is ensuring the quality of performance information used to measure progress towards its APGs.

**Management's Response:** Concur. NASA will include information on how it ensures the quality of performance information used to measure progress toward each of its APGs when it publishes the *FY 2015 Annual Performance Report and FY 2017 Annual Performance Plan*, scheduled for public release on the same date as the FY 2017 President's Budget.

**Estimated Completion Date:** Upon publication of the *FY 2015 Annual Performance Report and FY 2017 Annual Performance Plan*, which is tied to the release of the FY 2017 President's Budget.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this draft report. If you have any questions or require additional information, please contact David Walters at (202) 358-1364.

Sincerely,



David P. Radzanowski  
Chief Financial Officer

# Appendix IV: Comments from the Department of Homeland Security

U.S. Department of Homeland Security  
Washington, DC 20528



**Homeland  
Security**

August 19, 2015

J. Christopher Mihm  
Managing Director, Strategic Issues  
U.S. Government Accountability Office  
441 G Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20548

Re: Draft Report GAO-15-788, "MANAGING FOR RESULTS: Greater Transparency Needed in Public Reporting on the Quality of Performance Information for Selected Agencies' Priority Goals"

Dear Mr. Mihm:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this draft report. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) appreciates the U.S. Government Accountability Office's (GAO's) work in planning and conducting its review and issuing this report.

DHS senior leadership and Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO) program officials were pleased to note GAO's positive recognition that, of the six agencies reviewed, only DHS publicly reported on how it ensured the accuracy and reliability of performance information used to measure progress on agency priority goals (APGs), in accordance with Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 Modernization Act of 2010 (GPRAMA) requirements. It is also important to note that the Association of Government Accountants (AGA) recently recognized the DHS OCFO for its outstanding accountability and performance information reporting.

Specifically, during May 2015, the AGA awarded DHS with its Certificate of Excellence in Accountability Reporting (CEAR) for the Fiscal Year 2014 Annual Financial Report (AFR). This award recognizes outstanding accountability reporting and is the highest form of recognition in federal government management reporting. In addition, the AGA honored DHS with an award for having the "Best-in-Class" Summary of Performance information, which is presented in the Management Discussion and Analysis section of the AFR, which can be found on the DHS public webpage. The Best-in-Class award recognizes that DHS was the best in reporting performance information of all the AFRs submitted for CEAR Award consideration. DHS takes its GPRAMA reporting

responsibilities seriously and will continue to strive to set the best possible example of excellence in this regard for others to follow.

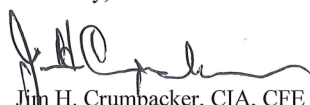
The draft report contained one recommendation with which the Department concurs. Specifically, GAO recommended that:

**Recommendation:** The Secretaries of Agriculture, Defense, Homeland Security, Interior, Labor, and the Administrator of NASA should more fully address GPRAMA requirements and OMB guidance by working with OMB to describe on Performance.gov how they are ensuring the quality of performance information used to measure progress towards their APGs.

**Response:** Concur. The DHS OCFO's Program Analysis and Evaluation Division (PA&E) recognizes the value of making accurate and reliable performance information available to the public. PA&E's internal information system currently maintains data quality information describing how data is collected and verified to ensure data quality. PA&E uploads this data quality information to the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB's) Performance Reporting Entry Portal (PREP) system—the system used to populate Performance.gov—to the extent the system is designed to accept the information. On July 1, 2015, PA&E provided OMB several specific suggestions to consider as possible enhancements to the PREP system so that agencies could include more comprehensive data quality information on this public website. DHS will comply with any future OMB guidance related to ensuring the quality of performance information and public reporting concerning APGs on Performance.gov. Given the aforementioned actions already taken and the fact that there are no additional actions which the Department can take at this time, DHS requests that GAO consider this recommendation resolved and closed.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to comment on this draft report. Technical comments were previously submitted under separate cover. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions. We look forward to working with you in the future.

Sincerely,



Jim H. Crumpacker, CIA, CFE  
Director  
Departmental GAO-OIG Liaison Office

# Appendix V: Comments from the Department of Defense



DEPUTY CHIEF MANAGEMENT OFFICER  
9010 DEFENSE PENTAGON  
WASHINGTON, DC 20301-9010

AUG 26 2015

Mr. J. Christopher Mihm  
Managing Director, Strategic Issues  
U.S. Government Accountability Office  
441 G Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20548-0001

Dear Mr. Mihm:

This is the Department of Defense response to the Government Accountability Office (GAO) draft report GAO-15-788, "Managing for Results: Greater Transparency Needed in Public Reporting on the Quality of Performance Information for Selected Agencies' Priority Goals," dated August 7, 2015 (GAO Code 451119).

The Department partially concurs with the recommendations. We have ongoing actions to improve the quality of performance information and to make better use of that information in management of the Department. However, we do not agree that making discussion of the process of managing the quality of information a part of either the agency strategic plan or annual reporting has any major management value. We will continue to work on improved performance management and look forward to subsequent reviews of our process validating the work the Department is doing.

The Department appreciates the opportunity to respond to your draft report. We look forward to your continued cooperation and dialog toward our common goal of improving performance management throughout the Department of Defense.

Should you have any questions, please contact Ms. Anita Robertson, 571-372-3034, Anita.G.Robertson.civ@mail.mil.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Peter Levine", written over a horizontal line.

Peter Levine



# Appendix VI: Comments from the Department of Labor

U.S. Department of Labor

Office of the Assistant Secretary  
for Administration and Management  
Washington, D.C. 20210



AUG 26 2015

Mr. J. Christopher Mihm  
Managing Director, Strategic Issues  
Government Accountability Office  
441 G St, NW  
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Mihm:

I appreciate the opportunity to comment on your draft report, *Managing for Results: Greater Transparency Needed in Public Reporting on the Quality of Performance Information for Selected Agencies' Priority Goals* (GAO-15-788), which included recommendations for the Department of Labor (DOL).

We are continuously working to improve the quality of our publically-reported performance information. To that end, we created a data quality assessment tool that will be piloted in FY 2016 and includes agencies with measures that support our Agency Priority Goals (APGs) for FY 2016-17. The tool is tentatively scheduled for Department-wide implementation in FY 2017. We will include a description of the process and summary findings in our FY 2016 Annual Performance Report and annually thereafter. We will also work with the Office of Management and Budget to make APG data quality information available on Performance.gov.

DOL has concerns about the statements on page 21 of the draft report regarding information on several of our programs that serve veterans. The report incorrectly asserts that DOL does not report on the number of veterans receiving intensive services relative to performance goals. Rather, DOL has used the Veterans' Employment and Training Services (VETS) measure for the percent of veterans being served by the Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program as an APG for four years and has included how results relate to performance goals. Additionally, outcomes for the Veterans Workforce Investment Program have been included in the annual report to Congress in FY 2013 and FY 2014.

If you have any questions you can contact Holly Donnelly, Deputy Performance Improvement Officer at [Donnelly.holly.a@dol.gov](mailto:Donnelly.holly.a@dol.gov).

Sincerely,

  
T. Michael Kerr  
Performance Improvement Officer

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# Appendix VII: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

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## GAO Contact

J. Christopher Mihm, (202) 512-6806 or [mihmj@gao.gov](mailto:mihmj@gao.gov).

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## Staff Acknowledgements

In addition to the contact named above, Sarah E. Veale, Assistant Director, and Michael O'Neill, Analyst-in-Charge, supervised the development of this report. Virginia Chanley, Emily Christoff, Erik Kjeldgaard, and A.J. Stephens made significant contributions to all aspects of this report. Deirdre Duffy and Robert Robinson provided additional assistance.

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