

Highlights of [GAO-13-94](#), a report to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

## Why GAO Did This Study

The federal government collects, maintains, and uses geospatial information—information linked to specific geographic locations—to support many functions, including national security and disaster response. In 2012, the Department of the Interior (Interior) estimated that the federal government invests billions of dollars on geospatial data annually, and that duplication is common. GAO was asked to determine the extent to which the federal government has established and effectively implemented policies and procedures for coordinating its geospatial investments and avoiding duplication.

To do so, GAO focused on FGDC coordination activities; efforts within the departments of Commerce, the Interior, and Transportation; and OMB oversight. GAO reviewed FGDC and department documentation, such as policies, procedures, and strategic plans; OMB guidance and an executive order; and reports concerning duplicative investments.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is making recommendations aimed at improving coordination and reducing duplication, to include FGDC developing a national strategy for coordinating geospatial investments; federal agencies following federal guidance for managing geospatial investments; and OMB developing a mechanism to identify and report on geospatial investments. Two agencies and OMB generally agreed with GAO's recommendations and one agency neither agreed nor disagreed.

View [GAO-13-94](#). For more information, contact David A. Powner at (202) 512-9286 or [pownerd@gao.gov](mailto:pownerd@gao.gov).

## GEOSPATIAL INFORMATION

### OMB and Agencies Need to Make Coordination a Priority to Reduce Duplication

#### What GAO Found

While the President and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) have established policies and procedures for coordinating investments in geospatial data, governmentwide committees and federal departments and agencies have not effectively implemented them. The committee that was established to promote the coordination of geospatial data nationwide—the Federal Geographic Data Committee (FGDC)—has developed and endorsed key standards—including a metadata standard that includes descriptive information about a particular set of geospatial data—and established a clearinghouse of metadata; however, the clearinghouse is not being used by agencies to identify planned geospatial investments to promote coordination and reduce duplication. The FGDC has not yet planned or implemented an approach to manage geospatial data as related groups of investments to allow agencies to more effectively plan geospatial data collection efforts and minimize duplicative investments; and its strategic plan is missing key elements, such as performance measures for many of its defined objectives. Further, none of the three federal departments in GAO's review have fully implemented important activities for coordinating geospatial data, such as preparing and implementing a strategy for advancing geospatial activities within their respective departments (see table).

**Status of Federal Departments' Implementation of Geospatial Activities**

Activity	Commerce	Interior	Transportation
Designate a senior official	◐	●	◐
Prepare and implement a strategy	○	○	○
Develop a policy for metadata	◐	○	○
Make metadata available on clearinghouse	●	●	●
Adopt procedures for accessing clearinghouse	○	○	○

● = Fully met ◐ = Partially met ○ = Not met

Source: GAO analysis of department documentation.

Further, the three agencies in GAO's review responsible for governmentwide management of specific geospatial data have implemented some but not all important activities for coordinating the national coverage of specific geospatial data. For example, only one agency has developed a plan for the nationwide population of the datasets under its responsibility, and none of the agencies have developed a plan to develop standards that facilitate the collection and sharing of geospatial data. Finally, while OMB has oversight responsibilities for geospatial data, OMB staff members acknowledged that OMB does not have complete and reliable information to identify potentially duplicative geospatial investments.

FGDC, federal departments and agencies, and OMB have not yet fully implemented policies and procedures for coordinating geospatial investments because these efforts have not been a priority. As a result, efforts to acquire data are uncoordinated and the federal government is acquiring duplicative geospatial data. For example, three agencies are independently acquiring road data, which is reported to have resulted in millions of wasted taxpayers' dollars. Unless OMB, the FGDC, and federal departments and agencies decide that coordinating geospatial investments is a priority, this situation will likely continue.