

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-16-469](#), a report to congressional requesters

## Why GAO Did This Study

Federal agencies plan to spend more than \$89 billion on IT in fiscal year 2017. Historically, long-term system development projects have often produced disappointing results. To help address these issues, OMB now requires agencies to deliver useable functionality every 6 months to reduce risk and deliver capabilities more quickly. GAO's objectives were to (1) describe the number of major IT investments primarily in development identified on the IT Dashboard as reporting the delivery of functionality every 6 months; (2) assess selected departments' and investments' delivery of incremental functionality and determine the factors affecting delivery rates; and (3) assess the quality and completeness of selected departments' plans to employ incremental development practices. GAO analyzed information on the IT Dashboard, analyzed reported project data and policies of 7 selected departments with the most investments primarily in development, and interviewed OMB and department officials.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is making 12 recommendations to 8 agencies to improve reporting of incremental data on the IT Dashboard and policies for CIO certification of adequate incremental development. Five departments agreed with our recommendations, the Department of Defense partially agreed with one and disagreed with another, OMB did not agree or disagree, and the Department of the Treasury did not comment on the recommendations. GAO continues to believe its recommendations are appropriate.

View [GAO-16-469](#). For more information, contact David A. Powner at (202) 512-9286 or [pownerd@gao.gov](mailto:pownerd@gao.gov).

August 2016

# INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY REFORM

## Agencies Need to Increase Their Use of Incremental Development Practices

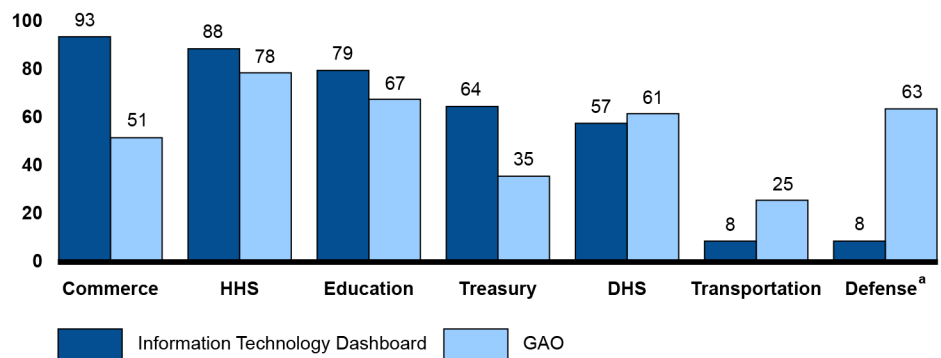
### What GAO Found

For fiscal year 2016, 22 agencies reported 64 percent of their software development projects would deliver useable functionality every 6 months on the Information Technology (IT) Dashboard, as required by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). However, shortcomings with OMB's guidance—the lack of clarity regarding the types of projects where incremental development would not apply and how the status of these non-software projects should be reported—have affected the accuracy of the data on the IT Dashboard.

GAO reviewed 7 departments' software projects and found approximately half of these projects reported delivery of functionality every 6 months. However, there are significant differences in the data reported to GAO and on the IT Dashboard (see figure below) due to inconsistencies in reporting non-software projects, the timing of reporting, and a lack of support for reported delivery, which affects the accuracy of reported rates. Department officials also reported that management and organizational challenges and project complexity and uniqueness impact their ability to deliver incrementally. It is critical that departments continue to improve their use of incremental development to deliver functionality and reduce the risk that these projects will not meet cost, schedule, and performance goals.

**Comparison of Software Development Projects' Percentage of Planned Delivery Every Six Months Reported on IT Dashboard and to GAO for Fiscal Year 2016**

Percentage of software development projects planning to deliver a release every 6 months in fiscal year 2016



Commerce (Department of Commerce), HHS (Department of Health and Human Services), Education (Department of Education), Treasury (Department of the Treasury), DHS (Department of Homeland Security), Transportation (Department of Transportation), Defense (Department of Defense)

Source: GAO analysis of department data. | GAO-16-469

<sup>a</sup>Defense did not provide the requested information in time to verify the information reported to GAO.

Although OMB's requirement has been in place since June 2015, only three departments (Department of Commerce, Department of Homeland Security, and the Department of Transportation) had policies and processes to ensure that the chief information officer would certify IT investments are adequately implementing incremental development. Officials from three departments reported they were updating their existing policies to address certification, but had not yet finalized these efforts, and one department stated its current processes were sufficient.