

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Information technology can be a key element of management reform, dramatically reshaping government to make it more responsive and efficient. Today's rapid technological change and innovation, including the growth of the Internet, offer unprecedented opportunities to use information technology to enhance government service to citizens by improving performance and reducing costs. These opportunities, however, create great challenges: ensuring that new electronic technologies are effectively applied and used, that government information is properly managed, and that the privacy and security of government data in computerized systems and networks are fully protected. The Information Technology team leads GAO's efforts to help the government address these and other important challenges by working to build the government's capacity to manage information technology and to manage the collection, use, and dissemination of information in an era of rapidly changing technology. We also seek to strengthen information security and to protect the computer and telecommunications systems that support the nation's vital infrastructures.

Our Work

We assist Congress in assessing and improving the government's substantial information technology investments—including high-risk modernization efforts—and we continue to develop and expand best practice methodologies that are used today across government to help guide information technology investment decision making. We also seek to improve how the government collects and manages its information in a world of instant Internet connectivity and to better protect the security and privacy of government data in light of the nation's growing dependence on complex interconnected computer and telecommunications systems.

Our specialists perform work at federal agencies across the country. For the most part, our staff are located in Washington, D.C., with some additional field staff in Atlanta, Dallas, and Denver.

Specifically, we are focused on

- strengthening information security and critical computer-support infrastructure protection;
- enhancing the collection, use, and dissemination of government information;
- assessing opportunities for electronic (e-) government;
- promoting sound enterprise architectures/infrastructures;
- fostering mature systems acquisition, development, and operational practices;
- developing and building upon best practices methodologies to better ensure use of sound information technology investment practices; and
- developing information technology human capital strategies.

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Accomplishments and Key Projects

Examples of our recent accomplishments include

- helping Congress, in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks, determine the effectiveness of the government's use of information technology to combat terrorism;
- identifying computer security and network vulnerabilities to mitigate risks at federal agencies and improve the government's ability to respond to cyber attacks and intrusions;
- assisting the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) strengthen its management of strategic plans and efforts to consolidate and integrate approximately 700 IT systems and supporting IT organizations of the 22 component agencies merged within the department in 2003;
- promoting effective governmentwide development and use of Enterprise Architectures-blueprints for engineering business processes and implementing and evolving supporting IT systems to optimize performance;
- helping Congress reach a balanced view of the complex management and technical challenges involved in the transition to e-government and development of key tools;
- working with the Internal Revenue Service, Federal Aviation Administration, DHS, and others to help strengthen the management of complex multibillion-dollar information technology modernization programs to improve operations, promote better customer service, and reduce costs;
- identifying impediments to the government's transition to new, more cost-effective long-distance telecommunications contracts-valued at over \$1 billion-and recommending ways to overcome them;
- developing tools that assist agencies bring about improvements in the way billions of IT dollars are invested and managed annually in support of federal agencies business operations; and
- identifying the challenges associated with managing and preserving electronic records to help the government improve development of an advanced electronic records archive.

Currently, we are also working to

- assess the challenges associated with implementing new technologies, such as wireless networks, and new tools available for securing these systems;
- evaluate government efforts to address emerging cybersecurity threats, strengthen homeland defense, and ensure the continuity of government computer and telecommunications systems that support the nation's critical infrastructures;
- review the government's progress planning and implementing the transition to Internet Protocol version 6 for defining how and where Internet data and voice traffic flow across networks.
- promote the Department of Defense's (DOD) implementation of a departmentwide enterprise architecture for modernizing its 4,000+ business systems;
- assess security and reliability concerns for electronic voting systems and the federal and state actions underway to address them;
- determine whether the billions of dollars that DOD invests in modernizing its systems are managed to minimize risk and maximize benefits;
- examine the technical challenges faced by the Patent Trademark Office in fully automating its business process and developing electronic file storage capabilities; and
- assess ways to ensure security for Federal Aviation Administration systems.