Although the original goal was for the e-Authentication gateway to be operational by September 2003, GSA has achieved few of its project objectives and recently extended the milestone for completing a fully operational system to March 2004. GSA has completed several important tasks, such as issuing a request for information and fielding a demonstration prototype of the gateway. However, other essential activities, such as developing authentication profiles—requirements summaries that address the needs of the other 24 OMB e-government initiatives—have not yet been fully addressed. Further, to meet the new milestone, GSA plans to compress the acquisition process for the operational gateway by awarding a contract by December 2003 for delivery of an operational gateway by March 2004. This accelerated schedule may be difficult to achieve. The modest progress achieved to date calls into question the likelihood that the project can successfully field an operational gateway, even within the revised schedule.

The challenges facing the e-Authentication gateway project make it difficult for GSA to achieve the kind of rapid results envisioned for the initiative. For example, procedures and guidance have not yet been completed defining the specific technologies to support different authentication requirements. In addition, technical standards have not yet been agreed upon to provide a basis for ensuring interoperability among different authentication products and systems. Further, GSA has not taken full measures to ensure that the gateway system is adequately secured and that privacy information is adequately protected. Addressing these and other challenges is essential to the successful deployment of a gateway that can effectively support the authentication requirements of OMB’s e-government initiatives.

What GAO Found

Overview of e-Authentication Gateway Process

User
Private individual
Government employee
Business

Point of entry
FirstGov
Agency applications

e-Authentication gateway
Gateway requests verification from appropriate ECP

Electronic credential provider (ECP)
ECP verifies user credential

User obtains access to agency application
Agency applications
Gateway receives verification
Gateway shares verification with agency application

Source: GAO analysis of e-Authentication Gateway process.