RESULTS-ORIENTED GOVERNMENT

Practices That Can Help Enhance and Sustain Collaboration among Federal Agencies

What GAO Found

Collaboration can be broadly defined as any joint activity that is intended to produce more public value than could be produced when the organizations act alone. Agencies can enhance and sustain their collaborative efforts by engaging in the eight practices identified below. Running throughout these practices are a number of factors such as leadership, trust, and organizational culture that are necessary elements for a collaborative working relationship:

- define and articulate a common outcome;
- establish mutually reinforcing or joint strategies;
- identify and address needs by leveraging resources;
- agree on roles and responsibilities;
- establish compatible policies, procedures, and other means to operate across agency boundaries;
- develop mechanisms to monitor, evaluate, and report on results;
- reinforce agency accountability for collaborative efforts through agency plans and reports; and
- reinforce individual accountability for collaborative efforts through performance management systems.

GAO has previously reported that GPRA, with its focus on strategic planning, the development of long-term goals, and accountability for results, provides a framework Congress, OMB, and executive branch agencies can use to consider the appropriate mix of long-term strategic goals and strategies needed to identify and address issues that cut across agency boundaries. In addition, to provide a broader perspective on the federal government’s goals and strategies to address issues that cut across agencies, we previously recommended that (1) OMB develop a governmentwide performance plan as required by GPRA and (2) Congress consider amending GPRA to require a governmentwide strategic plan.

OMB, through the PMA, has emphasized improving government performance through governmentwide and agency-specific initiatives. One of these focuses specifically on improving coordination, but only between the Departments of Veterans Affairs and Defense’s health resource sharing collaborations.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Director of OMB focus on additional programs in need of collaboration and promote the practices in this report. Options include expanding the focus on collaboration in the President’s Management Agenda (PMA) and supplementing the Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) guidance with information about these practices. OMB agreed with this recommendation.

Agencies involved in the collaborations provided technical comments, which we incorporated as appropriate.


To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Bernice Steinhardt at (202) 512-6543 or steinhardtb@gao.gov.