



Highlights of [GAO-07-278](#), a report to congressional committees

## Why GAO Did This Study

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has established a program—the U.S. Visitor and Immigrant Status Indicator Technology (US-VISIT)—to collect, maintain, and share information, including biometric identifiers, on selected foreign nationals who travel to the United States. By congressional mandate, DHS is to develop and submit for approval an expenditure plan for US-VISIT that satisfies certain conditions, including being reviewed by GAO. GAO was required to determine if the plan satisfied these conditions, follow up on recommendations related to the expenditure plan, and provide any other observations. To address the mandate, GAO assessed plans against federal guidelines and industry standards and interviewed the appropriate DHS officials.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is recommending that the Secretary of DHS direct the US-VISIT program director to increase program transparency and accountability by defining and justifying planned investments and effectively measuring and reporting on their progress and to determine and mitigate risks associated with not fully satisfying legislative conditions and report these risks to DHS senior leadership and to the appropriate congressional committees. DHS agreed with GAO's findings and recommendations.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-278](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-278).

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Randolph C. Hite at (202) 512-3439 or [hiter@gao.gov](mailto:hiter@gao.gov).

## HOMELAND SECURITY

# Planned Expenditures for U.S. Visitor and Immigrant Status Program Need to Be Adequately Defined and Justified

## What GAO Found

The US-VISIT expenditure plan, related program documentation, and program officials' statements *satisfied* or *partially satisfied* each of the legislative conditions required by the Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act, 2006. For example, they satisfied the condition that the agency provide certification that an independent verification and validation agent is currently under contract for the program and partially satisfied the condition that US-VISIT comply with DHS's enterprise architecture.

DHS also *completed* or *partially completed* each of GAO's prior expenditure plan-related recommendations. For example, the department completed recommendations that it provide an expenditure plan to the Senate and House Appropriations Subcommittees on Homeland Security before obligating restricted fiscal year funds and that it identify and disclose management reserve funding in those plans. However, DHS only partially completed recommendations that the plan fully disclose how the US-VISIT acquisition is being managed and that it fully disclose US-VISIT's cost, schedule, capabilities, and benefits.

GAO identified several additional areas of concern. First, DHS has not adequately defined and justified its proposed fiscal year 2006 expenditures for pilot and demonstration projects aimed at collecting information on persons exiting the country at air, sea, and land borders. Second, DHS has continued to invest in US-VISIT without a clearly defined operational context that includes explicit relationships with related border security and immigration enforcement initiatives. Third, US-VISIT program management costs have risen sharply, while costs for development have decreased, without any accompanying explanation of the reasons.

Overall, the US-VISIT fiscal year 2006 expenditure plan and other available program documentation do not provide a sufficient basis for Congress to exercise effective oversight of the program and to hold the department accountable for results. For proper oversight and accountability to occur, it is essential that DHS increase US-VISIT program transparency and accountability by justifying planned investments on the basis of adequate definition and disclosure of planned expenditures, timelines, capabilities, and benefits, and by effectively measuring and reporting progress against each. It is also essential for DHS to fully satisfy each of the conditions legislated by Congress, because doing so will minimize the program's exposure to risk.