Progress and Challenges in Implementing the Department’s Acquisition Oversight Plan

What GAO Found

The CPO has taken several actions to implement DHS’s acquisition oversight plan—which generally incorporates basic principles of an effective and accountable acquisition function. The plan monitors acquisition performance through four recurring reviews: self-assessment, operational status, on-site, and acquisition planning. Each component has completed the first self-assessment, which has helped components identify and prioritize acquisition weaknesses. In addition, each component has submitted an initial operational status report to the CPO and on-site reviews are being conducted. Despite this progress, the acquisition planning reviews are not sufficient to determine if components adequately plan their acquisitions—in part because a required review has not been implemented and the CPO lacks visibility into components’ planning activities.

DHS faces two key challenges in implementing its acquisition oversight plan. First, the CPO has had limited oversight resources to implement plan reviews. However, recent increases in staff have begun to address this challenge. Second, the CPO lacks sufficient authority to ensure components comply with the plan—despite being held accountable for departmentwide management and oversight of the acquisition function. GAO has previously recommended that DHS provide the CPO with sufficient enforcement authority to enable effective acquisition oversight.

In addition to these challenges, GAO identified two opportunities to strengthen internal controls for overseeing the plan’s implementation and for increasing knowledge sharing. Specifically, independent evaluations of DHS’s oversight program could help ensure that the plan maintains its effectiveness over time. Sharing knowledge and lessons learned could provide DHS’s acquisition workforce with the information needed to improve their acquisition processes and better achieve DHS’s mission.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is recommending that the CPO reevaluate the approach to the acquisition planning reviews and that DHS enhance internal controls to strengthen the oversight plan through periodic external reviews and knowledge sharing. DHS concurred with GAO’s recommendations.


To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact John Hutton at (202) 512-4841 or huttonj@gao.gov.