HOMELAND SECURITY

U.S. Visitor and Immigrant Status Program’s Long-standing Lack of Strategic Direction and Management Controls Needs to Be Addressed

What GAO Found

The US-VISIT expenditure plan, including related program documentation and program officials’ statements, satisfies or partially satisfies some but not all of the legislative conditions required by the Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act, 2007. For example, the department satisfied the condition that it 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. However, the department did not satisfy the conditions that the plan include a comprehensive US-VISIT strategic plan and a complete schedule for biometric exit implementation.

DHS partially implemented GAO’s oldest open recommendations pertaining to US-VISIT. For example, while the department partially completed the recommendation that it develop and begin implementing a US-VISIT system security plan, the scope of the plan does not extend to all the systems that comprise US-VISIT. In addition, while the expenditure plan provides some information on US-VISIT’s cost, schedule, and benefits associated with planned capabilities, the information provided is not sufficiently defined and detailed to address GAO’s recommendation and provide a reasonable basis for measuring progress and holding the department accountable for results.

GAO identified several additional observations. On the positive side, DHS data show that the US-VISIT prime contract is being executed according to cost and schedule expectations. However, DHS continues to propose disproportionately heavy investment in US-VISIT program management-related activities without adequate justification or full disclosure. Further, DHS continues to propose spending tens of millions of dollars on US-VISIT exit projects that are not well-defined, planned, or justified on the basis of costs, benefits, and risks.

Overall, the US-VISIT fiscal year 2007 expenditure plan and other available program documentation do not provide a sufficient basis for effective program oversight and accountability. Both the legislative conditions and GAO’s open recommendations are aimed at accomplishing both, and thus they need to be addressed quickly and completely. However, despite ample opportunity to do so, DHS has not done so and the reasons why are unclear. Until these recommendations are addressed, GAO does not believe that the program’s disproportionate investment in management-related activities represents a prudent and warranted course of action or to expect that the newly launched exit endeavor will produce results different from past results—namely, no operational exit solution despite expenditure plans allocating about a quarter of a billion dollars to various exit activities.