

Highlights of [GAO-11-583](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

Declining U.S. manufacturing has been an issue of continuing concern for policymakers; this was reflected in the Obama Administration's (Administration) 2010 announcement of the National Export Initiative. The Administration has also shown interest in improving the efficiency of the federal support of trade operations. In 2004, the Office of Manufacturing and Services (MAS) was established within the Department of Commerce's (Commerce) International Trade Administration (ITA) to enhance the global competitiveness of U.S. industry.

GAO was asked to examine (1) MAS's goals and activities and how they compare with those of other government entities; (2) how MAS prioritizes its activities and targets its resources; and (3) the extent to which MAS tracks and reports its efforts. GAO reviewed agency documents and interviewed officials from MAS, other parts of ITA and Commerce, and other agencies.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of Commerce take actions, in concert with MAS, to finalize MAS's focusing of mission and priorities, systematically monitor workload, and more systematically obtain and communicate information on the value MAS adds to the trade policy process. In its comments, Commerce concurred with the findings and recommendations and expects to make progress by October 2011.

View [GAO-11-583](#) or key components. For more information, contact Loren Yager at (202) 512-4347 or yagerl@gao.gov.

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DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

Office of Manufacturing and Services Could Better Measure and Communicate Its Contributions to Trade Policy

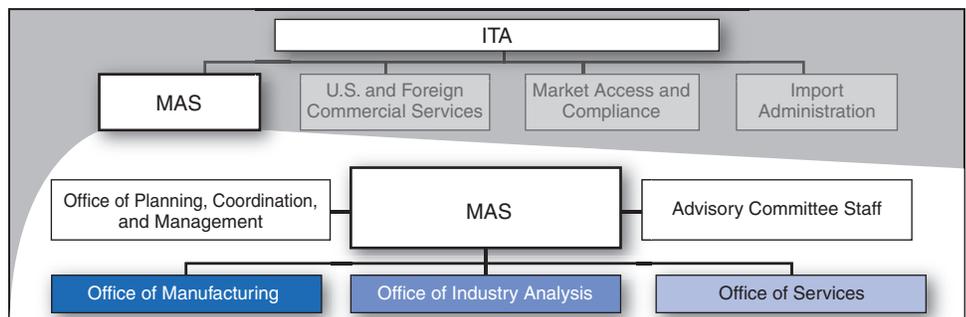
What GAO Found

MAS's primary goal is to support the competitiveness of U.S. industry, which it does largely through combining its industry and trade expertise to support other parts of Commerce, including other parts of the ITA (see figure below) and external U.S. government clients, such as the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR). The major activities of MAS's offices include: collection and dissemination of data on U.S. industry and trade, production of analyses on policies that can affect competitiveness, and identification and resolution of overseas trade barriers. While some activities may seem similar to those of other agencies, such as USTR, officials from MAS's client agencies stated that MAS's combination of industry and trade expertise is not readily available to them elsewhere in the government.

MAS has undertaken an internal review to update its mission and priorities regarding activities and clients and has proposed changes currently under departmental review. MAS does not have a mechanism to systematically monitor analysts' workload or the amount of time spent on requests for different clients. The absence of workload data may hinder its ability to effectively allocate its resources to address the needs of the trade policy process. Further, MAS's role has not been clearly communicated, and ITA's Web site provides limited information about MAS. Consequently, the public and Congress have limited information about MAS's activities and contributions to policy making.

MAS's ability to meet its performance targets largely depends on actions from other government agencies and other parties, making isolating its contributions difficult. MAS developed a series of steps, or milestones, to help isolate its contributions to trade policy outcomes, although officials acknowledged continuing challenges. Further, MAS does not systematically obtain feedback on its performance from the agencies to which it provides analysis, nor does it track its contributions to major policy decisions that fall outside its externally reported performance targets. This makes it difficult to assess the extent to which MAS's work adds value to the trade policy process.

Office of Manufacturing and Services in the ITA



Source: GAO analysis of ITA data.