



Highlights of GAO-11-775, a report to the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

September 2011

ELECTRONIC GOVERNMENT

Performance Measures for Projects Aimed at Promoting Innovation and Transparency Can Be Improved

Why GAO Did This Study

Congress enacted the Electronic Government (E-Gov) Act in 2002 to promote better use of the Internet and other information technologies (IT), thereby improving government services for citizens, internal government operations, and opportunities for citizen participation in government. Among other things, the act established the E-Gov Fund to support projects that expand the government's ability to carry out its activities electronically. The act also created the Office of Electronic Government within the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). The Administrator of this office is to assist the OMB Director in approving projects to be supported by the E-Gov Fund. The General Services Administration (GSA) is responsible for administering the fund and notifying Congress of how the funds are to be allocated to projects approved by OMB. GAO was asked to (1) identify and describe the projects supported by the E-Gov Fund, including the distribution of fiscal year 2010 funds among the projects and their expected benefits; and (2) for selected projects, identify their progress against goals. To do this, GAO reviewed project and funding documentation, analyzed project goals, and interviewed agency officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is recommending that GSA ensure that performance metrics that align with all project goals be developed for ongoing E-Gov projects. In written comments on a draft of this report, GSA concurred with GAO's recommendation.

What GAO Found

The \$34 million appropriated by Congress in fiscal year 2010 for the E-Gov fund was distributed among 16 projects in six investment areas, as defined by GSA (see table).

Distribution of Fiscal Year 2010 E-Gov Fund Appropriation

Investment area	E-Gov fund resources
Improving Innovation, Efficiency, and Effectiveness and Federal IT	\$10 million
Citizens Engagement and Access	5 million
Federal Funding and Accountability Act Initiative	9.5 million
Efficient Federal Workforce	5 million
Accessible and Transparent Government Information/Data.gov	3 million
E-Gov Project Management Best Practices	1.5 million
Total	\$34 million

Source: GSA, OMB, and Treasury data.

One investment area—Improving Innovation, Efficiency, and Effectiveness and Federal IT—accounted for \$10 million of the fiscal year 2010 appropriation. This area included an initiative on federal cloud computing—the use of Internet-based computing services. The remaining investment areas supported projects promoting government transparency, collaboration, and public participation and a project for developing best practices for IT management. Among other benefits, the 16 projects are expected to improve data quality and foster cross-agency knowledge sharing and communication as well as increase public access and use of federal datasets.

As of May 2011, the four E-Gov projects GAO selected for more detailed review had made varying progress toward their goals. For example, a cloud computing security initiative was still being developed; a dashboard for displaying target and actual customer service metrics had been developed in a pilot with four agencies, but had not been publicly released; a platform for government employees and contractors to use web-based networking and collaboration tools was in limited deployment; and a website (Data.gov) that allows the public to find, download, and use government-generated data had been fully launched. In addition, the four projects had defined performance metrics that aligned with many, though not all, of their major goals and intended benefits. Although the E-Gov Administrator (who serves as the Federal Chief Information Officer) announced the termination of two of the four reviewed projects in May 2011, the two ongoing projects do not yet have fully defined metrics that align with all of their major goals and intended benefits. Thus, managers and stakeholders cannot effectively assess project results and provide credible evidence of progress, which is particularly important in a resource-constrained environment.

View GAO-11-775. For more information, contact Valerie C. Melvin at (202) 512-6304 or melvinv@gao.gov.