

Why GAO Did This Study

Planned federal information technology (IT) spending has now risen to at least \$81 billion for fiscal year 2012. As GAO has previously reported, although a variety of best practices exists to guide their successful acquisition, federal IT projects too frequently incur cost overruns and schedule slippages while contributing little to mission-related outcomes. Recognizing these problems, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) has launched several initiatives to improve the oversight and management of IT investments.

GAO was asked to identify (1) federal IT investments that were or are being successfully acquired and (2) the critical factors that led to the successful acquisition of these investments. To do this, GAO interviewed agency officials from selected federal departments responsible for each investment.

In commenting on a draft of GAO's report, three departments generally agreed with the report. OMB and the other departments either provided minor technical comments, or stated that they had no comments at all.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Critical Factors Underlying Successful Major Acquisitions

What GAO Found

According to federal department officials, the following seven investments were successfully acquired in that they best achieved their respective cost, schedule, scope, and performance goals.

Investments Identified as Successful by Federal Departments

Department	Investment
Commerce	Decennial Response Integration System
Defense	Global Combat Support System-Joint, Increment 7
Energy	Manufacturing Operations Management (MOMentum) Project
Homeland Security	Western Hemisphere Travel Initiative
Transportation	Integrated Terminal Weather System
Treasury	Customer Account Data Engine 2 (CADE 2)
Veterans Affairs	Occupational Health Record-keeping System

Source: Agency data.

Department officials identified nine common factors that were critical to the success of three or more of the seven investments.

Common Critical Success Factors

- 1 Program officials were actively engaged with stakeholders.
- 2 Program staff had the necessary knowledge and skills.
- 3 Senior department and agency executives supported the programs.
- 4 End users and stakeholders were involved in the development of requirements.
- 5 End users participated in testing of system functionality prior to formal end user acceptance testing.
- 6 Government and contractor staff were stable and consistent.
- 7 Program staff prioritized requirements.
- 8 Program officials maintained regular communication with the prime contractor.
- 9 Programs received sufficient funding.

Source: GAO analysis of agency data.

Officials from all seven investments cited active engagement with program stakeholders as a critical factor to the success of those investments. Agency officials stated that stakeholders regularly attended program management office sponsored meetings; were working members of integrated project teams; and were notified of problems and concerns as soon as possible.

Implementation of these critical factors will not necessarily ensure that federal agencies will successfully acquire IT systems because many different factors contribute to successful acquisitions. Nonetheless, these critical factors support OMB's objective of improving the management of large-scale IT acquisitions across the federal government, and wide dissemination of these factors could complement OMB's efforts.