

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-15-752T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittees on Information Technology and Government Operations, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The DATA Act directs OMB and Treasury to establish government-wide data standards by May 2015. The act also requires agencies to begin reporting financial spending data using these standards by May 2017 and to post spending data in machine-readable formats by May 2018. This statement is part of a series of products that GAO will provide the Congress as the DATA Act is implemented.

This statement discusses four DATA Act implementation areas to date: (1) establishment of government-wide data standards; (2) OMB and Treasury's effort to establish a governance structure and obtain stakeholder input; (3) the status of the potential transfer of the ROC's assets to Treasury; and (4) the pilot program to reduce reporting burden. GAO reviewed the first 15 data elements finalized under the act; analyzed key documents, technical specifications and applicable guidance; interviewed OMB, Treasury, HHS, and other staff as well as officials from organizations representing non-federal stakeholders; and reviewed literature.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that OMB accelerate efforts to merge DATA Act purposes with the production of a federal program inventory under GPRAMA, and that OMB and Treasury (1) establish policies and processes for a governance structure to maintain the integrity of data standards over time and (2) enhance policies and procedures to provide for ongoing and effective two-way dialogue with stakeholders. OMB staff, Treasury officials, and others provided technical comments which GAO incorporated as appropriate.

View [GAO-15-752T](#). For more information, contact J. Christopher Mihm, 202-512-6806, mihmj@gao.gov.

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DATA ACT

Progress Made in Initial Implementation but Challenges Must be Addressed as Efforts Proceed

What GAO Found

Since the Digital Accountability and Transparency Act (DATA Act) became law in May 2014, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the Department of the Treasury (Treasury) have taken significant steps towards implementing key provisions. These steps include the release of 27 data standards, draft technical documentation, and implementation guidance to help federal agencies meet their responsibilities under the act. However, given the complexity and government-wide scale of activities required by the DATA Act, much more remains to be done.

Data standards. OMB and Treasury have proposed standardizing 57 data elements for reporting under the act. They released 15 elements on May 8, 2015, a year after the passage of the act, and have since released 12 more. Eight of the first 15 were new elements required under the DATA Act; the balance were required under the Federal Funding Accountability and Transparency Act of 2006. GAO identified several issues that may impact the quality and ability to aggregate federal spending data. For example, GAO found: (1) the data standards may not provide a complete picture of spending by program unless OMB accelerates its efforts to produce an inventory of federal programs as required under the GPRAMA Modernization Act of 2010 (GPRAMA); (2) the data standards and elements may not yet represent all that are necessary to fully capture and reliably report on federal spending; and (3) the draft technical specifications GAO reviewed may result in the reporting of inconsistent information. GAO shared its observations with officials who are considering revisions and updating their technical documentation.

Governance and stakeholder engagement. OMB and Treasury have made progress in initial implementation activities by developing structures for project management and data governance as well as for obtaining stakeholder input. However, GAO found that additional effort to address the whole lifecycle of standards development will be needed to ensure that the integrity of data standards is maintained over time. Establishing these policies and procedures now could provide an opportunity for OMB and Treasury to build on existing efforts to reach out to stakeholders by taking steps to foster effective two-way communication to help ensure that the concerns of interested parties are responded to and addressed as appropriate on an ongoing and timely basis.

Recovery Operations Center (ROC). GAO's review of the potential transfer of the ROC's assets found that Treasury does not plan to assume these assets because of a number of impediments. Instead, Treasury has focused on facilitating information sharing between the ROC and Treasury's Do Not Pay initiative, which assists agencies in preventing improper payments. GAO has ongoing work on this issue and plans to issue a report later this year.

Reporting burden pilot. The DATA Act requires OMB to establish a 2-year pilot program to develop recommendations for reducing reporting burden for recipients of federal awards. The pilot was launched this May with the initiation of a national dialogue on reducing reporting burden, building of an online repository of common grants-related data elements, and addition of grants-related resources on Grants.gov. GAO also has ongoing work focusing on this pilot.