

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-17-486T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Oversight and Management Efficiency, Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Each year, USCIS processes millions of applications from foreign nationals seeking to study, work, visit, or live in the United States, and for persons seeking to become U.S. citizens. In 2006, USCIS began the Transformation Program to enable electronic adjudication and case management tools that would allow users to apply and track their applications online.

It is essential that USCIS deploy a seamless electronic system to help ensure the integrity of the immigration process. Such a system should allow the agency to more accurately process immigration and citizenship benefits in a timely manner and identify fraudulent and criminal activity.

This statement summarizes GAO's most recent reports on USCIS's Transformation Program. These reports focus on cost increases and schedule delays and program management challenges that have contributed to increasing risks to the new system. GAO identified the program as one of ten federal high-risk investments in need of attention in 2015.

What GAO Recommends

In its prior reports, GAO made 30 recommendations to address weaknesses in the management and acquisition of the Transformation Program. USCIS concurred and has fully addressed 17 of the 30 recommendations to date.

View [GAO-17-486T](#). For more information, contact Carol C. Harris at (202) 512-4456 or harriscc@gao.gov.

Thursday, March 16, 2017

IMMIGRATION BENEFITS SYSTEM

Significant Risks in USCIS's Efforts to Develop its Adjudication and Case Management System

What GAO Found

The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services' (USCIS) most recent cost and schedule baseline, approved in April 2015, indicates that its Transformation Program will cost up to \$3.1 billion and be fully deployed no later than March 2019. This is an increase of approximately \$1 billion with a delay of more than 4 years from its initial July 2011 acquisition program baseline. In addition, the program is currently working to develop a new cost and schedule baseline to reflect further delays. Due to the program's recurring schedule delays, USCIS will continue to incur costs for maintaining its existing systems while the program awaits full implementation. Moreover, USCIS's ability to achieve program goals, including enhanced national security, better customer service, and operational efficiency improvements, will be delayed.

Recurring delays are partly the result of challenges in program management. In July 2016, GAO reported that the USCIS Transformation Program had fully addressed some, and partially addressed many other key practices for implementing software development, conducting systems integration and testing, and monitoring the largest program contractors. Nevertheless, GAO reported that the program inconsistently adhered to these practices. For example,

- The program had established an environment and procedures for continuously integrating functionality and was conducting various tests and inspections of new software code. However, the program was not consistently adhering to its policies and guidance or meeting stated benchmarks for testing and inspections.
- The program had reported experiencing issues such as production defects and bugs in the system as a result of deploying software that had not been fully tested.
- The program had mixed success in monitoring its contractors for six contracts that GAO reviewed. For example, a development services contract contained appropriate performance criteria that linked to the program goals, but the program did not clearly define measures against which to analyze differences between services expected and those delivered.
- Its software development approach deviated from key practices in part because USCIS policy and guidance were not being updated.

Given the history of development for the Transformation Program and the subsequent commitment of additional resources for a new system, it is more important than ever that USCIS consistently follow key practices in its system development efforts. For example, the program has already reported realizing risks associated with deploying software that has not been fully tested, such as system bugs, defects, and unplanned network outages. If the agency does not address the issues GAO has identified in prior work, then it will continue to experience significant risk for increased costs, further schedule delays, and performance shortfalls.