

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-18-550](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

GAO has previously found that DHS's components had acquisition programs that did not meet requirements and that those requirements were, in some cases, poorly defined. Poorly defined requirements increase the risk that acquisitions will not meet the needs of users in the field—for example, border patrol agents or emergency responders.

GAO was asked to examine DHS components' practices for developing requirements. This report addresses the policies, organizations, and workforce that selected DHS components use to develop requirements for their acquisition programs.

GAO selected seven DHS components with significant acquisition programs and a non-generalizable sample of programs—based on cost, component, and acquisition phase—as case studies. GAO analyzed policies and program documentation; and interviewed DHS and component officials, as well as end users of DHS programs. GAO compared components' practices to industry best practices and federal internal control standards.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making 25 recommendations, including to individual components to establish policies and independent organizations for requirements development, assess workforce needs, and establish training and certifications. DHS concurred with all the recommendations.

View [GAO-18-550](#). For more information, contact Marie A. Mak at (202) 512-4841 or makm@gao.gov.

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DHS ACQUISITIONS

Additional Practices Could Help Components Better Develop Operational Requirements

What GAO Found

GAO has identified several best practices to ensure that operational requirements for acquisitions are well-defined and found some Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) components met them while others did not. These practices include a formal policy for developing requirements, an independent requirements organization, and an understanding of workforce needs and training. The table below shows GAO's assessment of seven of DHS's components against these practices.

| GAO Assessment of Selected DHS Components Requirements Infrastructure | | | | |
|---|--------|--------------------------|----------------------|----------|
| | Policy | Independent organization | Workforce assessment | Training |
| Customs and Border Protection | ◐ | ● | ◐ | ◐ |
| Federal Emergency Management Agency | ○ | ○ | ◐ | ○ |
| Immigration and Customs Enforcement | ○ | ◐ | ○ | ○ |
| National Protection and Programs Directorate | ◐ | ◐ | ○ | ○ |
| Transportation Security Administration | ◐ | ● | ○ | ○ |
| U.S. Coast Guard | ● | ● | ○ | ● |
| U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services | ◐ | ◐ | ○ | ○ |

Key: ● Practice is present ◐ Practice is in development or needs updating ○ Practice is not present

Source: GAO assessment of Department of Homeland Security (DHS) data. | GAO-18-550

Establishing a formal policy to guide the process is critical to developing well-defined requirements. However, only the Coast Guard has an approved policy for requirements development among the seven components reviewed. Without well-defined requirements, components are at risk of acquiring capabilities that will not meet mission needs. DHS officials told GAO that components have generally prioritized obtaining funding and starting programs over developing requirements.

Three components have a requirements development organization, separating requirements from acquisition in addressing capability gaps. Officials from components without such organizations told GAO that they have fewer major acquisitions and rely on DHS to assist in requirements development. DHS policy and best practices, however, maintain the importance of this separation regardless of the number of major acquisitions to guard against possible bias by acquisition officials toward a specific materiel solution.

Two components have assessed requirements development workforce needs, but both need to be updated; and one component has provided requirements development training and certification. Other component officials told GAO that they lack the resources necessary to take these steps. Best practices indicate that without an appropriately sized and trained workforce, components remain at risk of acquiring capabilities that fail to meet end user needs.