

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-20-312](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

DOD has had longstanding organizational and management challenges that hinder collaboration. Section 911 of the NDAA for Fiscal Year 2017 directed the Secretary of Defense to, among other things, issue an organizational strategy that identifies critical objectives that span multiple functional boundaries, establish cross-functional teams to support this strategy, and provide related guidance and training.

The NDAA for Fiscal Year 2017 also included a provision for GAO periodically to assess DOD's actions in response to section 911. GAO has issued a series of reports since June 2017 and made a number of recommendations to DOD. This report assesses the extent to which DOD has made progress in (1) implementing the requirements of section 911 and (2) establishing cross-functional teams.

GAO reviewed documentation, interviewed cross-functional team members and other DOD officials, and compared DOD's actions to section 911 requirements and leading practices for cross-functional teams.

What GAO Recommends

In this report, GAO recommends that DOD identify and document specific implementation steps to advance a collaborative culture, consistent with GAO's leading practices. GAO also reiterates the importance of addressing its prior recommendations. DOD concurred with GAO's recommendation.

View [GAO-20-312](#). For more information, contact Elizabeth Field at (202) 512-2775 or fielde1@gao.gov

January 2020

DEFENSE MANAGEMENT

More Progress Needed for DOD to Meet Outstanding Statutory Requirements to Improve Collaboration

What GAO Found

Since GAO's August 2019 report, the Department of Defense (DOD) has taken actions to complete three additional statutory requirements of section 911 of the National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) for Fiscal Year 2017, but has not completed three remaining requirements. These requirements are intended to support cross-functional teams and to promote department-wide collaboration (see table). Cross-functional teams rely on individuals with different types of expertise to work toward a common, well-defined goal, and are thought to deliver better and faster solutions to complex and fast-moving problems.

Recently Addressed and Remaining Statutory Requirements from Section 911 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017

Requirement	Due date	Status
Issue organizational strategy	September 1, 2017	Complete
Streamline the Office of the Secretary of Defense	June 23, 2018	Complete
Issue guidance on cross-functional teams	September 30, 2017	Complete
Provide training for cross-functional team members and their supervisors	Not specified	Not complete
Provide training for presidential appointees	Within 3 months of appointment	Not complete
Report on the successes and failures of cross-functional teams	February 25, 2019	Not complete

Source: GAO analysis of legislation and Department of Defense information. | GAO-20-312

DOD's approved organizational strategy addresses key requirements of section 911, including identifying critical objectives that would benefit from the use of cross-functional teams and providing for the appropriate use of these teams. However, the strategy did not include practical, specific implementation steps to guide DOD's efforts to advance a collaborative culture, which had been included in earlier draft versions of the strategy. These steps had aligned with GAO's leading practices for mergers and organizational transformations. Specific implementation steps like those included in earlier drafts of the organizational strategy offered DOD a clear path forward for pursuing the goals of section 911 and for promoting a collaborative culture. Absent identifying and documenting specific implementation steps, it is less clear how DOD intends to implement the organizational strategy and assess progress toward its goals.

DOD's existing cross-functional team charged with improving electromagnetic spectrum operations and defending its communication systems from attacks is continuing its work by issuing a statutorily mandated report, among other efforts, but DOD has not clarified responsibility for funding the team. GAO will continue to monitor DOD's progress toward providing such support to the team as GAO recommended in August 2019. In addition, DOD has designated the Close Combat Lethality Task Force and the Protecting Critical Technology Task Force as new cross-functional teams, although they meet only some of the section 911 requirements. DOD officials said they will ensure that the newly designated teams meet these requirements, including providing required training.