

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-20-249SP](#), a report to congressional requesters

## Why GAO Did This Study

The acquisition of IT systems has presented challenges to federal agencies. Accordingly, in 2015 GAO identified the management of IT acquisitions and operations as a high-risk area, a designation it retains today.

GAO was asked to report on federal IT acquisitions. GAO's specific objective was to identify essential mission-critical IT acquisitions across the federal government and determine their key attributes.

To identify acquisitions for the review, GAO administered a questionnaire to the 24 agencies covered by the *Chief Financial Officers Act of 1990* asking them to identify their five most important mission-critical IT acquisitions. From a total of 101 acquisitions that were identified, GAO selected 16 mission-critical IT acquisitions to profile in this report. The selection was based on various factors, including the acquisition's criticality to providing service to the nation, its total life cycle costs, and its applicability to the President's Management Agenda.

For each of the 16 selected acquisitions, GAO obtained and analyzed documents on cost, schedule, risks, governance, and related information; and interviewed cognizant agency officials.

GAO requested comments from the 12 agencies with acquisitions profiled in its draft report and the Office of Management and Budget. In response, one agency (the Social Security Administration) provided comments that discussed the planned use of its system.

View [GAO-20-249SP](#). For more information, contact Carol C. Harris at (202) 512-4456 or [harriscc@gao.gov](mailto:harriscc@gao.gov).

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## INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

### Key Attributes of Essential Federal Mission-Critical Acquisitions

#### What GAO Found

Federal agencies are undertaking information technology (IT) acquisitions that are essential to their missions. GAO identified 16 of these acquisitions as particularly critical to missions ranging from national security, to public health, to the economy (see table). GAO has previously reported on these acquisitions and the programs they support, and has made numerous recommendations to agencies for improvement.

The amount agencies expect to spend on the selected acquisitions vary greatly depending on their scope and complexity, as well as the extent of transformation and modernization that agencies envision once the acquisitions are fully deployed. For example, the Department of Defense plans to spend \$10.21 billion over 21 years on its health care modernization initiative, while the Department of Homeland Security intends to spend \$3.19 billion over 30 years on its system supporting immigration benefits processing. Agencies reported potential cost savings associated with 13 of the 16 mission-critical acquisitions after deployment due to factors such as shutting down legacy systems, eliminating physical paper processing, and improving security, monitoring, and management.

Eleven of the 16 selected acquisitions were rebaselined during their development, meaning that the project's cost, schedule, or performance goals were modified to reflect new circumstances. Agencies reported a number of reasons as to why their acquisitions were rebaselined, including delays in defining the cost, schedule, and scope; budget cuts and hiring freezes; technical challenges; and changes in development approach.

As shown below, ten of the acquisitions relate to an additional programmatic area that GAO has designated high risk.

#### Federal Agency Mission-Critical Information Technology Acquisitions

Department of Agriculture	Modernize and Innovate the Delivery of Agricultural Systems
Department of Commerce	2020 Decennial Census*
Department of Defense	Defense Healthcare Management System Modernization* Global Combat Support System-Army*
Department of Homeland Security	Student and Exchange Visitor Information System Modernization* U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Transformation*
Department of the Interior	Automated Fluid Minerals Support System II*
Department of Justice	Next Generation Identification System Terrorist Screening System
Department of State	Consular System Modernization
Department of Transportation	Automatic Dependent Surveillance-Broadcast
Department of the Treasury	Customer Account Data Engine 2* Integrated Enterprise Portal*
Department of Veterans Affairs	Electronic Health Record Modernization*
Small Business Administration	Application Standard Investment
Social Security Administration	Disability Case Processing System 2*

Legend: \*= Acquisition relates to a programmatic area that GAO has previously designated as being high risk.

Source: GAO analysis of agency data. | GAO-20-249SP