April 2023

GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Actions Needed to Improve Transparency of Cross-Agency Priority Goals

Accessible Version

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Why GAO Did This Study

The federal government faces critical challenges that require effective management and collaboration among federal agencies. The performance planning and reporting framework under GPRAMA provides important tools, such as CAP goals, that can help decision makers address these challenges. The PMA identifies an administration's key management priorities. It also provides a framework for implementing the CAP goals.

GPRAMA includes a provision for GAO to periodically report on the act's implementation. This report (1) describes how OMB has begun to implement the PMA and CAP goals; and (2) assesses the extent to which the CAP goals addressed relevant GPRAMA requirements, and guidance and practices related to timeliness, completeness, and transparency.

To address these objectives, GAO analyzed information on the PMA and CAP goals. GAO also interviewed OMB staff and General Services Administration officials.
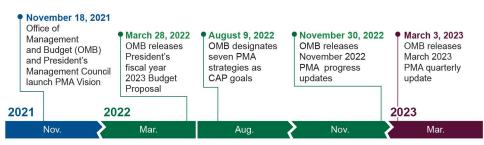
What GAO Recommends

GAO is making five recommendations for OMB to improve the transparency of the CAP goals, including designating a goal related to information technology, developing procedures to improve the timeliness of the goals, ensuring consistent quarterly reporting of goal progress, and reporting on final progress at the end of the 4-year goal period. OMB generally agreed with GAO's findings, but disagreed with the recommendations. GAO continues to believe the recommendations are important to improve CAP goal transparency, as discussed in this report.

View GAO-23-106354. For more information, contact Alissa H. Czyz at (202) 512-6806 or czyza@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

The President's Management Agenda (PMA), which is typically released by each administration, serves to communicate and organize cross-agency priority (CAP) goals required under the GPRA Modernization Act of 2010 (GPRAMA). CAP goals are 4-year outcome-oriented goals covering a number of mission and management areas across the federal government. This administration's PMA, which was released in November 2021, consists of three priority areas: (1) strengthening the federal workforce, (2) improving the federal customer experience, and (3) managing federal financial management and procurement. Under these three priority areas, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) designated seven related strategies as CAP goals in August 2022.

Timeline of the President's Management Agenda and Cross-Agency Priority Goal Activities, 2021-2023

Source: GAO analysis of Performance.gov. | GAO-23-106354

Text of Timeline of the President's Management Agenda and Cross-Agency Priority Goal Activities, 2021-2023

Key Event

- Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and President's Management Council launch PMA Vision

- OMB releases President's fiscal year 2023 Budget Proposal

- OMB designates seven PMA strategies as Cross-Agency Priority goals

- OMB releases November 2022 PMA progress updates

- OMB releases March 2023 PMA quarterly update

Source: GAO analysis of Performance.gov. | GAO-23-106354

GAO found that the administration's designated CAP goals do not address all relevant GPRAMA requirements, and related guidance and practices. OMB designated CAP goals for three of the five management areas required by GPRAMA: financial management, human capital management, and procurement and acquisition management. However, as of March 2023, OMB had not designated CAP goals addressing the other two areas: information technology management and federal real property management. These areas are long-standing management challenges facing the federal government.

————————— **United States Government Accountability Office**

OMB designated the current CAP goals in August 2022. This designation came several months after the statutory deadline of submitting CAP goals concurrent with the submission of the President's budget in March 2022. Timely release of the CAP goals can help improve congressional oversight and provide important information on program performance.

GAO also found that OMB did not consistently report quarterly progress toward achieving CAP goals as required by GPRAMA. More consistent public reporting could provide greater transparency and allow for reporting on final progress achieved at the end of a goal period. Such final reporting would help ensure continuity between CAP goal cycles. This reporting would also provide information on progress toward addressing long-standing federal management challenges and high-risk areas.

Contents

April 4, 2023

Congressional Committees

The federal government faces a range of critical challenges that require effective management and collaboration among federal agencies. These include improving food safety oversight, ensuring the nation's cybersecurity, and addressing drug misuse, strategic human capital, and IT management. Several of these challenges are included in our High-Risk List.[1] The performance planning and reporting framework originally put into place by the Government Performance Results Act of 1993 (GPRA), and significantly enhanced by the GPRA Modernization Act of 2010 (GPRAMA), provides important tools that can help decision makers address challenges facing the federal government.[2]

These tools include the federal government priority goals, also known as cross-agency priority (CAP) goals. GPRAMA requires the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to coordinate with agencies to develop the CAP goals.[3] Under GPRAMA, CAP goals are to be 4-year outcome-oriented goals covering a number of crosscutting mission areas—as well as goals to improve management across the federal government.[4] The President's Management Agenda (PMA), which is typically released by each administration, serves to communicate and organize CAP goals, objectives, and implementation strategies.

GPRAMA includes a provision for us to periodically evaluate and report on its implementation, including implementation of the CAP goals.[5] This report 1) describes how OMB has begun to implement the PMA and CAP goals, and 2) assesses the extent to which the CAP goals addressed

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[1]GAO, *High-Risk Series: Dedicated Leadership Needed to Address Limited Progress in Most High-Risk Areas*, GAO-21-119SP (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 2, 2021).

[2]Pub. L. No. 103-62, 107 Stat. 285 (1993); Pub. L. No. 111-352, 124 Stat. 3866 (2011).

[3]31 U.S.C. § 1120(a)(1).

[4]31 U.S.C. § 1120(a)(1), (2).

[5]Pub. L. No. 111-352, § 15(b)(2), 124 Stat. at 3883–3884. For more information related to our prior work on GPRAMA, see https://www.gao.gov/leading-practices-managing-results-government and the list of our related products at the end of this report.

relevant GPRAMA requirements and related guidance and practices related to timeliness, completeness, and transparency.

To address both of our reporting objectives, we interviewed OMB staff and General Services Administration (GSA) officials about activities underway from November 2021 through April 2023 to develop and implement the PMA and CAP goals. In addition, we reviewed information available on Performance.gov. This federal website provides program and performance information to the public, and other relevant documentation related to the PMA and CAP goals.[6] We examined the strategies, performance goals, performance measures, and milestones associated with the PMA and CAP goals. We also examined the leadership structure for implementing the PMA and CAP goals. In addition, we also assessed the CAP goals against relevant statutory requirements in GPRAMA, related OMB guidance, and Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government.[7] Finally, we reviewed our prior work on the CAP goals.[8]

We conducted this performance audit from November 2021 to April 2023 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Background

PMA

The PMA identifies an administration's key management reform priorities and initiatives across the federal government. It also communicates and organizes goals, objectives and implementation strategies. In addition,

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[6]Performance.gov serves as the federal performance website required under GPRAMA. It is the source for available information on the performance goals, measures, leaders, and progress updates associated with each of the PMA priority areas and related CAP goals. See 31 U.S.C. § 1122.

[7]GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government,* GAO-14-704G (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 2014).

[8]See Related GAO Products at the end of this report.

the PMA provides a management framework for identifying and implementing the CAP goals required under GPRAMA.[9] Each of the prior three administrations released PMAs. PMAs began to incorporate CAP goals following GPRAMA's passage in January 2011.

CAP Goals

GPRAMA requires OMB to develop two types of CAP goals: (1) outcome-oriented goals covering a limited number of crosscutting policy areas, and (2) goals for management improvements needed across the federal government in the areas of financial, human capital, IT, procurement and acquisition, and federal real property management.[10]

GPRAMA established a number of requirements for developing and implementing CAP goals. These requirements are expanded upon in OMB guidance to agencies for preparing the budget and instructions for budget execution, referred to as Circular A-11.[11] For example, according to GPRAMA, the goals are to be long term in nature and updated or revised at least every 4 years.[12] When developing or adjusting the goals, OMB is required to consult periodically or at least once every 2 years with congressional oversight and budgetary committees.[13] Additionally, GPRAMA requires OMB to review with the appropriate lead government official, the progress toward achieving the CAP goal during the most recent quarter, overall trend data, and the likelihood of meeting the planned level of performance.[14]

The PMA and CAP goals are presented on Performance.gov, which GPRAMA required OMB to establish by October 1, 2012.[15] The information found on Performance.gov includes progress toward achieving the priorities and initiatives established in the PMA and CAP

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[9]31 U.S.C. § 1120(a).

[10]31 U.S.C. § 1120(a)(1)(A), (B).

[11]Office of Management and Budget, *Preparation, Submission, and Execution of the Budget*, Circular No. A-11, part 6 (August 2022).

[12]31 U.S.C. § 1120(a)(2).

[13]31 U.S.C. § 1120(a)(3), (4).

[14]31 U.S.C. § 1121(a)(1).

[15]31 U.S.C. § 1122.

goals through consolidating reporting on performance and strategic planning efforts and updates on key areas of focus.[16] For example, GPRAMA requires OMB to report publicly on results achieved during the most recent quarter and overall trend data compared to the planned level of performance.[17]

We have previously noted that the longer-term nature and complex outcomes of CAP goals can make implementation challenging.[18] In September 2021, we reported on key considerations for implementing CAP goals based on perspectives from subject matter specialists and White House Leadership Development Fellows who worked on them. As shown in figure 1, 10 key considerations are grouped into five broad actions for CAP goal implementation, drawn from GPRAMA requirements and our prior work.

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[16]See our prior work on Peformance.gov: GAO, *Managing for Results: Further Progress Made in Implementing the GPRA Modernization Act, but Additional Actions Needed to Address Pressing Governance Challenges,* GAO-17-775 (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 29, 2017); *Performance.gov: Long-Term Strategy Needed to Improve Website Usability*, GAO-16-693 (Washington, D.C.: Aug. 30, 2016); and *Managing for Results, Leading Practices Should Guide the Continued Development of Performance*.gov, GAO-13-517 (Washington, D.C.: June 6, 2013).

[17]31 U.S.C. § 1122(c)(5).

[18]GAO, *Government Performance Management: Key Considerations for Implementing Cross-Agency Priority Goals and Progress Addressing GAO Recommendations,* GAO-21-104704 (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 28, 2021).

Figure 1: Key Considerations to Facilitate the Implementation of Cross-Agency Priority Goals

Actions to implement cross-agency priority (CAP) goals	Key considerations
Establish the goal	• Establish a balanced set of outcome-oriented mission and management-focused goals that reflect the government's highest policy priorities. • Engage goal teams and key stakeholders in early development of outcome-oriented goals and performance measures.
Identify goal leaders and contributors	• Identify co-leaders and subgoal leaders to facilitate leadership, continuity, and agency buy-in. • Clarify and agree on roles, responsibilities, and decision-making processes for goal teams.
Identify resources to support implementation	• Dedicate resources to goal implementation, including funding, staffing, and technology. • Create a repository of lessons learned to share across goal teams.
Use performance information	• Focus on improving the quality and use of data to routinely assess goal progress and a shared commitment to continuous improvement.
Report results	• Report on actions taken to develop performance measures and other progress measures. • Assess and report progress on goal achievement at the end of the goal periods. • Develop communications strategies.

Source: GAO analysis of focus group results, agency documents, Performance.gov, GAO reports, and GAO (icons). | GAO-23-106354

Text of Figure 1: Key Considerations to Facilitate the Implementation of Cross-Agency Priority Goals

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Identify resources to support implementation	• Dedicate resources to goal implementation, including funding, staffing, and technology. • Create a repository of lessons learned to share across goal teams.

Actions to implement cross-agency priority (CAP) goals	Key considerations
Use performance information	• Focus on improving the quality and use of data to routinely assess goal progress and a shared commitment to continuous improvement.
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Source: GAO analysis of focus group results, agency documents, Performance.gov, GAO reports, and GAO (icons). | GAO-23-106354

Entities Involved in PMA and CAP Goals' Implementation

Five entities develop and lead the implementation of the PMA and CAP goals, as described below:

OMB. GPRAMA directs OMB to coordinate with agencies to develop CAP goals and develop a federal government performance plan on how those goals will be achieved.[19] Additionally, the law requires OMB to review progress achieved toward implementing CAP goals with the appropriate officials and report progress on a public website, Performance.gov, quarterly. OMB provides guidance to agencies for implementing GPRAMA and related laws in its annual budget guidance, Circular No. A-11.[20]

GSA. GSA supports the implementation of the PMA and CAP goals in partnership with OMB. GSA's Office of Shared Solutions and Performance Improvement supports interagency collaboration and provides expertise to accomplish the priorities of the PMA. More specifically, this office coordinates and manages progress reviews, provides feedback to goal leaders, drafts briefing materials, publishes updates to Performance.gov, and supports goal teams. This office also supports the Performance Improvement Council and other executive councils. Finally, GSA publishes quarterly updates and other communications on Performance.gov.

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[19]31 U.S.C. §§ 1115(a), 1120(a).

[20]See Office of Management and Budget, *Preparation, Submission and Execution of the Budget*, Circular No. A-11, part 6 (August 2022).

President's Management Council. The President's Management Council advises the President and OMB on government reform initiatives, provides performance and management leadership throughout the Executive Branch, and oversees implementation of government-wide management policies. OMB's Deputy Director for Management chairs the President's Management Council. It includes the Director of the Office of Personnel Management, the Administrator of GSA, the White House Cabinet Secretary, and Chief Operating Officers from major federal agencies. These deputy heads of agencies, in their role as agency chief operating officers, are generally responsible for overall organizational management to improve agency performance and achieve the mission and goals of the agency.[21]

Performance Improvement Council. The Performance Improvement Council assists OMB with improving the performance of the federal government and achieving CAP goals. This assistance may include facilitating the exchange of useful practices and developing recommendations to streamline and improve agency performance management. The OMB Deputy Director for Management chairs the Performance Improvement Council. Performance Improvement Officers from 24 major federal agencies make up the Performance Improvement Council.[22] GSA's Office of Shared Solutions and Performance Improvement staff also support Performance Improvement Council activities.[23]

CAP Goal Leaders. Goal leaders develop strategies to achieve goals, manage execution, and regularly review performance toward goal achievement. OMB Circular A-11 guidance requires OMB to designate goal leaders for CAP goals.[24]

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[21]31 U.S.C. § 1123(b)(1).

[22]31 U.S.C. § 1124(b)(1). Several provisions of GPRAMA apply specifically to the 24 agencies covered by the Chief Financial Officers Act of 1990. 31 U.S.C. § 1120(b)(1). The Performance Improvement Council includes the Performance Improvement Officers of the 24 Chief Financial Officers Act agencies as members.

[23]31 U.S.C. § 1124(b)(3).

[24]31 U.S.C. §§ 1115(a)(3), (b)(5)(E), 1120(b)(1)(C); Office of Management and Budget, *Preparation, Submission, and Execution of the Budget*, Circular No. A-11, part 6, section 220.12 (August 2022).

OMB Has Identified Elements of PMA and CAP Goals, and Established Implementation Processes

PMA Development and Rollout

OMB released the content and governance structure of the PMA and CAP goals over time from November 2021 through March 2023, as described in figure 2. OMB released the high-level Biden-Harris Management Agenda Vision (PMA Vision) in November 2021.[25] The PMA Vision includes a description of the administration's management priorities, its guiding values, and the leaders involved in its implementation. The three PMA priority areas are: *Strengthening and Empowering the Federal Workforce; Delivering Excellent, Equitable, and Secure Federal Services and Customer Experience; and Managing the Business of Government*.[26] The PMA Vision states that it will advance each of the three priorities through nine specific strategies, and OMB designated seven of these nine strategies as CAP goals in August 2022.

Figure 2: President's Management Agenda (PMA) and Cross-Agency Priority (CAP) Goals' Implementation Timeline, 2021-2023

Source: GAO analysis of Performance.gov. | GAO-23-106354

[25]Office of Management and Budget, *The Biden-Harris Management Agenda Vision* (Washington, D.C.: November 2021).

[26]For more information about activities under this priority, see GAO, *Federal Workforce: OPM Advances Efforts to Close Government-wide Skills Gaps but Needs a Plan to Improve Its Own Capacity*, GAO-23-105528 (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 27, 2023).

Text of Figure 2: President's Management Agenda (PMA) and Cross-Agency Priority (CAP) Goals' Implementation Timeline, 2021-2023

Key Event	Date
President signs Executive Order on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in the Federal Workforce	June 25, 2021
Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and President's Management Council launch PMA Vision	November 18, 2021
Administration issues Presidential Memo on Increasing Equity and Levelling the Playing Field for Underserved Small Business Owners in federal contracting.	December 2, 2021
President signs Executive Order on Transforming Federal Customer Experience and Service Delivery to Rebuild Trust in Government	December 13, 2021
OMB announces PMA Priority Area Leaders	March 15, 2022
OMB releases President's FY2023 Budget Proposal	March 28, 2022
Agencies begin to release 2022-2026 strategic plans on performance.gov	March 31, 2022
OMB releases some additional information on PMA priority areas, including goals, metrics, and strategy leads	April 7, 2022
OMB releases progress updates on the three PMA priority areas	July 8, 2022
OMB designates seven PMA strategies as Cross-Agency Priority goals	August 9, 2022
OMB Associate Director of Performance and Personnel Management and Priority Area 2 Goal Leader Pam Coleman resigns	August 19, 2022
GSA Deputy Commissioner of the Federal Acquisition Service and Priority Area 2 Goal Leader Dave Zvenyach resigns.	September 9, 2022
OMB releases PMA Learning Agenda	September 15, 2022
OMB releases some additional information on the three PMA priority areas	November 2, 2022, November 8, 2022
OMB releases November 2022 PMA progress updates	November 30, 2022
OMB releases March 2023 PMA quarterly update	March 3, 2023

Source: GAO analysis of Performance.gov. | GAO-23-106354

Note: The PMA Learning Agenda refers to the plan for identifying and addressing relevant policy questions intended to support the implementation of the full PMA developed by OMB.

Figure 3 shows all seven CAP goals designated in the PMA that fall under the three priority areas.

Figure 3: 2022-2026 Cross-Agency Priority Goals in the President's Management Agenda

Priority Area 1: Strengthening and Empowering the Federal Workforce

Cross-Agency Priority (CAP) Goals

Attract and hire the most qualified employees, who reflect the diversity of our country, in the right roles across the federal government.

Make every Federal job a good job, where all employees are engaged, supported, heard, and empowered, with opportunities to learn, grow, join a union, and have an effective voice in their workplaces through their union, and thrive throughout their careers.

Reimagine and build a roadmap to the future of Federal work informed by the lessons from the pandemic and nationwide workforce and workplace trends.

Priority Area 2: Delivering Excellent, Equitable, and Secure Federal Services and Customer Experience

Cross-Agency Priority (CAP) Goals

Improve the service design, digital products, and customer experience management of Federal High-Impact Service Providers by reducing customer burden, addressing inequities, and streamlining processes.

Design, build, and manage Government service delivery for key life experiences that cut across Federal Agencies.

Priority Area 3: Managing the Business of Government

Cross-Agency Priority (CAP) Goals

Foster lasting improvements in the Federal acquisition system to strengthen the U.S. domestic manufacturing base, support American workers, lead by example toward sustainable climate solutions, and create opportunities for underserved communities.

Build capacity in Federal financial management, including through Federal financial assistance, to catalyze American industrial strategy, address climate-related risks, and deliver equitable results.

Source: Performance.gov and GAO (icons). | GAO-23-106354

Text of Figure 3: 2022-2026 Cross-Agency Priority Goals in the President's Management Agenda

Priority Area 1: Strengthening and Empowering the Federal Workforce

- Attract and hire the most qualified employees, who reflect the diversity of our country, in the right roles across the federal government.

- Make every Federal job a good job, where all employees are engaged, supported, heard, and empowered, with opportunities to learn, grow, join a union, and have an effective voice in their workplaces through their union, and thrive throughout their careers.

- Reimagine and build a roadmap to the future of Federal work informed by the lessons from the pandemic and nationwide workforce and workplace trends.

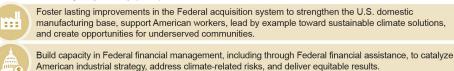**Priority Area 2: Delivering Excellent, Equitable, and Secure Federal Services and Customer Experience**

- Improve the service design, digital products, and customer experience management of Federal High-Impact Service Providers by reducing customer burden, addressing inequities, and streamlining processes.

- Design, build, and manage Government service delivery for key life experiences that cut across Federal Agencies.

Priority Area 3: Managing the Business of Government

- Foster lasting improvements in the Federal acquisition system to strengthen the U.S. domestic manufacturing base, support American workers, lead by example toward sustainable climate solutions, and create opportunities for underserved communities.

- Build capacity in Federal financial management, including through Federal financial assistance, to catalyze American industrial strategy, address climate-related risks, and deliver equitable results.

Source: Performance.gov and GAO (icons). | GAO-23-106354

According to OMB staff, the current PMA is distinguished from prior ones in several ways. For example, OMB staff reported that this administration set fewer high-level priority areas than in prior PMAs.[27] Additionally, the PMA includes a set of values that guide its development and implementation, such as advancing equity as a core part of government management and decision-making processes. OMB also developed a learning agenda for the first time to inform the PMA and seven CAP goals.[28] Finally, the President's Management Council has been more directly involved with implementation than in the past, according to OMB staff.

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[27]The Obama Administration established 16 CAP goals in its PMA. The Trump Administration established 14 CAP goals in its PMA. The current PMA designates seven CAP goals.

[28]The PMA Learning Agenda was released in September 2022, and was informed by input from multiple stakeholders. The PMA Learning Agenda is intended to support the PMA priorities. Learning agendas, also referred to as evidence-building plans, are required by the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018. They are systematic plans for identifying and addressing policy questions relevant to the programs, policies, and regulations of the agency. *See* Pub. L. No. 115-435, § 101, 132 Stat. 5529, 5530–5531 (2019), *codified at* 5 U.S.C. § 312. The learning agenda can be found at https://www.performance.gov/pma/learning-agenda/.

PMA and CAP Goal Leadership

OMB has led the development and implementation of the PMA and CAP goals, with support from GSA. OMB staff stated that the President's Management Council has also played a key role in developing and supporting the Biden-Harris PMA. For example, all members of the President's Management Council signed the November 2021 PMA Vision, which also includes a letter from the President.

Members of the President's Management Council also serve as priority area leaders for the three PMA priority areas. For example, the Director of the Office of Personnel Management and Deputy Secretaries of the Departments of Defense and Labor serve as priority area leaders for strengthening and empowering the federal workforce. We have previously reported that top leadership involvement is important to successful management, including in the context of GPRAMA.[29]

Priority Area Leads are responsible for approving multi-year action plans for strategies and related CAP goals, monitoring progress, and providing updates to the President's Management Council. OMB staff stated that the involvement of the council has led to a very collaborative environment for PMA implementation. This collaboration includes engaging directly with agency subject matter experts, Chief Human Capital Officers, and Chief Financial Officers.

Strategy Leads facilitate implementation of the specific strategies within each priority area. They also oversee the development and execution of the strategies, coordinate strategy teams responsible for day-to-day functions, and participate in PMA engagement and communications activities. Strategy Leads consist of senior agency officials such as Chief Human Capital officers and senior career leaders at OMB and GSA. Implementation Leads are to coordinate with Priority Area Leads to monitor progress, provide updates to key stakeholders, and prepare progress reports in coordination with cross-agency teams.

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[29]GAO, *Managing for Results: OMB Should Strengthen Reviews of Cross-Agency Goals*, GAO-14-526 (Washington, D.C.: June 10, 2014) and *Managing for Results: Key Considerations for Implementing Interagency Collaborative Mechanisms,* GAO-12-1022 (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 27, 2012).

Governance Structure for Implementing PMA and CAP Goals and Assessing Progress

OMB, GSA, and relevant lead officials planned to implement the PMA through a number of different methods, including an action planning process, regular progress updates, and public reporting on Performance.gov. CAP goal action plans are intended to be a tool for strategic planning and to guide implementation activities.[30] Some elements of CAP goal action plans are published on Performance.gov. The action planning process includes setting specific, outcome-focused goals, choosing performance measures (which OMB refers to in the PMA as "success metrics"), mapping milestones, identifying stakeholders, and developing engagement strategies. Progress updates and public reporting are intended to provide the necessary information to gauge progress toward the CAP goals and to allow for public outreach. These quarterly updates are to be made available on Performance.gov.

Figure 4 shows an example of the performance management structure used for the PMA as reported on Performance.gov. Each of the PMA's three priority areas are divided into separate strategies. Each strategy includes a number of goals, leaders, performance measures, and milestones.[31] Performance.gov also includes milestones and goals to help illustrate progress. The most recent update, published in March 2023, discusses progress within the priority areas. The strategy shown below is also one of the seven designated CAP goals.

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[30]According to OMB, action plans include the following elements: leadership and team, goal statements, performance measures, challenges and opportunities, strategy or goal structure, milestones, contributing programs, environment, governance structure and process, key stakeholders, and an engagement and communications plan.

[31]OMB Circular A-11 states that each CAP Goal has at least two goal leaders from both the Executive Office of the President and key agencies that will manage the processes by which goals are executed, and that will share accountability for progress. In our prior work we define "strategy" as a description of how the CAP goal team intends to achieve its strategic goals and objectives through its processes and activities, human capital, information, and other resources. According to GPRAMA, a "performance measure" (also called a "performance indicator") is a particular value or characteristic used to measure an output or outcome. GPRAMA defines a "milestone" as a scheduled event signifying the completion of a major deliverable or a set of related deliverables or phase of work. 31 U.S.C. §1115(h)(6), (10); see also GAO, *Managing for Results: OMB Improved Implementation of Cross-Agency Priority Goals, But Could Be More Transparent About Measuring Progress,* GAO-16-509 (Washington, D.C.: May 20, 2016).

Figure 4: Example of the President's Management Agenda's and Cross-Agency Priority Goal Performance Structure

⚠	**Priority Area**	Strengthening and Empowering the Federal Workforce
👥	**Priority Area Leads**	Director, Office of Personnel Management Deputy Secretary, Department of Defense Deputy Secretary, Department of Labor
📋	**Strategy**	Attract and hire the most qualified employees, who reflect the diversity of our country, in the right roles across the Federal Government.
🎯	**Goals**	**1.1:** Agencies will efficiently and inclusively attract and hire quality candidates and reduce any systemic barriers by improving the hiring process for all applicants, hiring managers, and human resources specialists. **1.2:** Agencies will build equitable pathways into the Federal Government for early career positions, particularly from underrepresented and underserved communities.
🔍	**Success Metrics**	• All agencies will review applicant flow data -- identifying barriers to diversity in the hiring process and exploring possible connections to policies, procedures, and practices -- and develop plans to address identified barriers promoting equitable and consistent representation throughout the hiring process. • Increase the number of positions that are enrolled in full, continuous vetting to reduce the burden associated with initial employee background investigations. • Increase the percentage of hiring actions using alternative assessments to replace or augment a self-reported occupational questionnaire. • Increase the percentage of job announcements for which applicants receive notification of their status in the hiring process. • Increase the number of positions agencies make available for early career hires. • Increase the number of eligible interns that are converted into full-time employees. • Increase the number of paid internships.
👥	**Strategy Leads**	Director, Office of Human Resources and Acting Chief Human Capital Officer, Department of the Treasury Chief Human Capital Officer, Department of Veterans Affairs

Source: Performance.gov. and GAO (icons). | GAO-23-106354

Text of Figure 4: Example of the President's Management Agenda's and Cross-Agency Priority Goal Performance Structure

Priority Area	Strengthening and Empowering the Federal Workforce
Priority Area Leads	Director, Office of Personnel Management Deputy Secretary, Department of Defense Deputy Secretary, Department of Labor
Strategy	Attract and hire the most qualified employees, who reflect the diversity of our country, in the right roles across the Federal Government.

Goals	1.1: Agencies will efficiently and inclusively attract and hire quality candidates and reduce any systemic barriers by improving the hiring process for all applicants, hiring managers, and human resources specialists.	1.2: Agencies will build equitable pathways into the Federal Government for early career positions, particularly from underrepresented and underserved communities.
Success Metrics	-All agencies will review applicant flow data -- identifying barriers to diversity in the hiring process and exploring possible connections to policies, procedures, and practices -- and develop plans to address identified barriers promoting equitable and consistent representation throughout the hiring process.	-Increase the number of positions agencies make available for early career hires.
	-Increase the number of positions that are enrolled in full, continuous vetting to reduce the burden associated with initial employee background investigations.	-Increase the number of eligible interns that are converted into full-time employees.
	-Increase the percentage of hiring actions using alternative assessments to replace or augment a self-reported occupational questionnaire.	-Increase the number of paid internships.
	-Increase the percentage of job announcements for which applicants receive notification of their status in the hiring process.	
Strategy Leads	Director, Office of Human Resources and Acting Chief Human Capital Officer, Department of the Treasury	
	Chief Human Capital Officer, Department of Veterans Affairs	

Source: Performance.gov. and GAO (icons). | GAO-23-106354

Note: The term "Priority Area" refers to the three priorities that make up the President's Management Agenda (PMA). The three PMA priority areas are: 1) Strengthening and Empowering the Federal Workforce; 2) Delivering Excellent, Equitable, and Secure Federal Services and Customer Experience; and 3) Managing the Business of Government. Priority Area Leads are members of the President's Management Council responsible for facilitating implementation of the specific strategies within each priority area. The term "strategy" refers to the means by which the PMA will advance government-wide priorities. Under the current PMA, seven of nine total strategies have been designated as Cross-Agency Priority (CAP) goals. For the purposes of the strategy, the term "goals" refers to actions agencies will take to achieve it. "Success metrics" represent the performance measures associated with the strategy. "Strategy Leads" refers to the officials responsible for facilitating implementation of CAP goal strategies within each priority area.

Performance.gov also indicates that the strategies designated as CAP goals in the PMA benefit from additional governance and funding. White House Leadership Development Fellows and Office of Shared Services and Performance Improvement staff within GSA support the implementation of the CAP goals. Since 2016, CAP goals have been supported by additional funding through a transfer authority available to

OMB.[32] For fiscal year 2023, Congress made up to $15 million in funding available for activities related to the CAP goals.[33]

OMB has issued two progress updates on the CAP goals' implementation, as well as one update issued prior to the designation of the CAP goals, as of March 2023.[34] The first update was posted on Performance.gov in July 2022, before the CAP goals were designated. The second update was issued in November 2022 as discussed below. OMB released a second update on CAP goal implementation in March 2023. These updates generally reported progress toward milestones, discussed efforts to identify goals and performance measures, and highlighted accomplishments.

OMB staff stated in December 2022 that they planned to release more information in the future. Specifically, OMB staff stated that they expected to report on CAP goal progress quarterly, as required under GPRAMA, starting in early 2023.[35] As previously stated, OMB issued a quarterly update on progress implementing the PMA in March 2023. OMB staff said in June 2022 that they plan to establish reliable baselines, and will add more specificity to performance measures over time.

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[32]The head of each executive agency is authorized by law to transfer funds made available for the current fiscal year to the Administrator of GSA, with the approval of the Director of OMB. However, the funds transferred or reimbursed shall not exceed $15 million and shall be administered to support government-wide and other innovations, initiatives, and activities, including activities related to federal government Priority Goals, otherwise known as CAP goals. Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2016, Pub. L. No. 114-113, div. E, § 721, 129 Stat. 2242, 2477 (2015); Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2017, Pub. L. No. 115-31, div. E, § 721, 131 Stat. 135, 381 (2017); Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2018, Pub. L. No. 115-141, div. E, § 721, 132 Stat 348, 592 (2018); Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2019, Pub. L. No. 116-6, div. D, § 721, 133 Stat. 13, 191 (2019); Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2020, Pub. L. No. 116-63, div. C, § 721, 133 Stat. 2317, 2489 (2019); Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, Pub. L. No. 116-260, div. E, § 721, 134 Stat 1182, 1434 (2020); Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2022, Pub. L. No. 117-103, div. E, § 721, 136 Stat. 49, 297–298 (2022); Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023, Pub. L. No. 117-328, div. E, § 721, 136 Stat. 4459, 4708–4709 (2022).

[33]Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023, Pub. L. No. 117-328, div. E, § 721, 136 Stat. at 4709.

[34]The July 2022 update to Performance.gov discussed activities in two of the three priority areas. The November 2022 update discussed activities under all three areas. The March 2023 update also discussed activities under all three areas.

[35]31 U.S.C. §§ 1121(a)(1), 1122(c)(5).

GPRAMA also requires OMB, with the support of the Performance Improvement Council, to review progress toward CAP goal implementation at least quarterly with appropriate government officials.[36] Reviews should discuss quarterly progress, overall trends, and the likelihood of meeting the planned level of performance.[37] In January 2023, OMB staff said that reviews for PMA strategies and CAP goals by OMB and the President's Management Council occurred in April, July, and November 2022, ahead of the release of publicly reported updates on Performance.gov.

CAP Goals Have Not Been Timely, Complete, or Fully Transparent

Timing of CAP Goal Designations Did Not Follow Statutory Requirements

OMB designated the 2022-2026 CAP goals within the PMA on August 9, 2022, several months after the submission of the President's fiscal year 2023 budget. GPRAMA requires that CAP goals be made publicly available concurrent with the submission of the President's budget in the first full year following the year in which a new President takes office.[38] This requirement is reiterated in OMB Circular A-11.[39] The administration released its fiscal year 2023 budget on March 28, 2022. Therefore, to remain consistent with statutory requirements, the 2022-2026 CAP goals were required to be publicly released at that time.

OMB staff attributed the delay in designating the CAP goals to increased engagement among the President's Management Council, various cross-agency councils, and other stakeholders. The engagement required greater effort to release information publicly. However, OMB staff told us that they agreed that GPRAMA requires them to designate and publicly announce CAP goals concurrent with the President's budget. As a result, there was a significant gap between the release of the PMA Vision in

[36]31 U.S.C. § 1121(a).

[37]31 U.S.C. § 1121(a)(1). We have previously reported that such reviews can have positive effects on performance and collaboration. See GAO-14-526.

[38]31 U.S.C. § 1120(a)(2).

[39]Office of Management and Budget, *Preparation, Submission, and Execution of the Budget*, Circular No. A-11, part 6, § 220.7 (August 2022).

November 2021 and August 2022. OMB and GSA staff explained in December 2022 that while the CAP goals had not been designated until August 2022, CAP goal teams had begun implementing them as part of the PMA prior to their designation.

OMB's Circular A-11 states that publishing information on CAP goals on Performance.gov supports coordination and decision-making to advance goal implementation. By developing additional guidance and procedures to ensure that future CAP goals are updated or revised consistent with GPRAMA requirements, OMB can ensure their timely release. The timely and consistent release of the CAP goals can help improve congressional oversight and provide important information on program performance. These results are among the stated purposes of GPRAMA as identified in Circular A-11.

OMB Designated CAP Goals for Some, but Not All, Required Government-wide Management Areas

GPRAMA requires that OMB develop goals in a limited number of management areas for which improvements are needed across the federal government. These areas are: 1) financial management; 2) human capital management; 3) IT management; 4) procurement and acquisition management; and 5) real property management.[40] As of March 2023, OMB had designated CAP goals for three of the five required management areas: financial management, human capital management, and procurement and acquisition management. OMB had yet to designated CAP goals addressing the other two required management areas for IT management and federal real property management, as of March 2023. Figure 5 below shows our assessment of the required government-wide management areas that were designated in 2022-2026 CAP goals.

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[40]31 U.S.C. § 1120(a)(1)(B).

Figure 5: GAO Assessment of Required Government-wide Management Areas Designated in 2022-2026 Cross-Agency Priority (CAP) Goals

Management Area	Designated CAP Goal
Financial Management	✓
Human Capital Management	✓
Information Technology Management	X
Procurement and Acquisition Management	✓
Federal Real Property Management	X

Source: GAO analysis of Performance.gov. and GAO (icons). | GAO-23-106354

Data table of Figure 5: GAO Assessment of Required Government-wide Management Areas Designated in 2022-2026 Cross-Agency Priority (CAP) Goals

Management Area	Designated CAP Goal
Financial Management	Yes
Human Capital Management	Yes
Information Technology Management	No
Procurement and Acquisition Management	Yes
Federal Real Property Management	No

Source: GAO analysis of Performance.gov. and GAO (icons). | GAO-23-106354

IT management. As of March 2023, OMB had not designated a CAP goal for IT management. The November 2021 PMA Vision states that IT modernization and cybersecurity are critical tools. It added that the administration planned to bolster cybersecurity and identify and address IT and cybersecurity workforce skills gaps.[41] In December 2022, OMB released a federal cybersecurity progress report for fiscal year 2022 on Performance.gov.

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[41]Office of Management and Budget, *The Biden-Harris Management Agenda Vision* (Washington, D.C.: November 2021).

OMB staff told us that they focused on IT capabilities, such as cybersecurity and systems for service delivery, in the context of customer experience. OMB staff are also planning for the future of federal work, part of the third CAP goal under the first priority area.[42] Specifically, OMB staff told us that IT was integral to the PMA priority area to improve federal customer experience. Further, OMB staff stated that it was their understanding that the CAP goal management areas required in GPRAMA were intended to facilitate improvements, rather than serve as standalone goals. OMB's Deputy Director for Management stated that the administration intentionally focused on fewer priority areas, to help ensure progress on areas in need of transformation.[43]

However, OMB did not designate a specific CAP goal for IT management, as required by GPRAMA. We have previously identified improving the management of IT acquisitions and operations as a high-risk area for the federal government.[44] This is because federal IT investments too frequently fail or incur cost overruns and schedule slippages while contributing little to mission-related outcomes. Also, these investments often suffer from a lack of effective management. In addition, risks to IT systems supporting the federal government and the nation's critical infrastructure are increasing as highlighted by the series of high-profile cyber incidents (e.g., SolarWinds and the Colonial Pipeline hacks).[45] As of December 2022, there were nearly 300 open recommendations related to

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[42]The CAP goal is as follows: "Reimagine and build a roadmap to the future of Federal work informed by lessons from the pandemic and nationwide workforce and workplace trends."

[43]Office of Management and Budget, "Biden-Harris PMA: A Recording of Our Conversation on One Year of Progress" (Washington D.C.: December 13, 2022), accessed December 23, 2022, https://www.performance.gov/blog/pma-one-year-of-progress/?utm_medium=email&utm_source=govDelivery.

[44]GAO, *High-Risk Series: Dedicated Leadership Needed to Address Limited Progress in Most High-Risk Areas*, GAO-21-119SP (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 2, 2021). We have also identified ensuring the cybersecurity of the nation as a high-risk area for the federal government, though cybersecurity is not a management area required to have a CAP goal under GPRAMA.

[45]GAO, *Cybersecurity: Federal Response to SolarWinds and Microsoft Exchange Incidents*, GAO-22-104746 (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 13, 2022).

IT management and more than 700 related to cybersecurity across the federal government.[46]

While the PMA and some of the designated CAP goals contain strategies that touch on aspects of IT and identify it as an enabler, these strategies do not establish goals to address IT management challenges across the government. IT is an important tool to facilitate improvements in areas such as customer experience. IT does play an enabling role but it is crucial to have cross-agency goals specifically aimed at improving IT management government-wide. By designating a CAP goal specific to IT management, as required by GPRAMA, OMB can more effectively address the critical high-risk challenges we have previously reported on and further identify opportunities to improve IT management across the federal government.

Federal real property management. As of March 2023, OMB had also not specifically identified a CAP goal related to federal real property management, as required by GPRAMA. We previously identified improving aspects of federal real property management as a high-risk area for the federal government.[47] Specifically, we found continuing challenges in the areas of reducing excess and underutilized property, collecting more reliable real property data, and improving facility security. In our 2021 High Risk update, we reported that there were 68 open recommendations related to federal real property management.

Priority Area 1 of the PMA includes a discussion of an aspect of federal real property management under the CAP goal related to planning the future of federal work to "reimagine and build a roadmap to the future of Federal work informed by lessons from the pandemic and nationwide workforce and workplace trends." Other OMB guidance reinforces this

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[46]GAO, *Information Technology and Cybersecurity: Evolving the Scorecard Remains Important for Monitoring Agencies' Progress*, GAO-23-106414 (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 15, 2022).

[47]GAO-21-119SP.

priority.[48] Additionally, in November 2022, additional milestones related to capital planning for the future of work CAP goal were reported on Performance.gov.[49] Similar to the IT management area, OMB staff stated in December 2022 that federal real property was an important tool to facilitate the implementation of the CAP goals in all three priority areas, which includes the CAP goal related to the future of work.

However, the Priority Area 1 goals and milestones generally do not address important ongoing challenges, such as those we have previously identified in our High Risk updates. These ongoing challenges include areas such as improving data reliability and increasing facility security. To the extent these and other related issues are not included in the Priority Area 1 goals and milestones, agencies may miss opportunities to make further progress addressing this long-standing high-risk area.

GPRAMA ensures that there is an emphasis on long-standing crosscutting policy and management issues in the development of CAP goals. The CAP goals offer an opportunity for the federal government to prioritize goals addressing these long-standing management challenges, including long-standing challenges that appear on our High-Risk List. By designating a CAP goal specifically addressing federal real property management, as required by GPRAMA, the administration can identify opportunities to address these high-risk issues. As a result, OMB can take advantage of opportunities to use the CAP goals to improve federal real property management across the federal government.

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[48]In July 2022, OMB issued a memorandum to agencies to help address their real property resource needs and help them to define the amount and types of real property required to fully implement their respective future of work. The memorandum required agencies to restart the annual capital planning process that had been suspended as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. It also required agencies to define real property resources required for the immediate post re-entry workplace environment and in the future of work context. See Office of Management and Budget, *FY2024 Agency-wide Capital Planning to Support the Future of Work,* OMB Memorandum M-22-14 (Washington, D.C.: July 20, 2022).

[49]The milestones related to capital planning for the future of work are: "GSA to work with 24 Chief Financial Officers Act agencies to complete national portfolio plans;" "Submit agency FY 2024 – FY 2028 capital plans to OMB and the Federal Real Property Council;" and "Issue guidance to agencies on agency-wide capital planning to support the future of work." The milestone to issue guidance on agency-wide capital planning was completed in the fourth quarter of fiscal year 2022. The other two milestones are due to be completed in fiscal year 2023.

OMB Can Provide More Transparency on Efforts to Achieve CAP Goals Through Consistent Reporting on Progress and Results

Consistent quarterly reporting on progress and trends would allow OMB to assess CAP goal achievement at the end of the 4-year goal period better. Prior administrations generally provided some regular quarterly updates on CAP goal implementation. As show in figure 2 above, as of March 2023, OMB provided two progress updates on Performance.gov related to CAP goal implementation. Additionally, OMB continued limited reporting on issues that were formerly CAP goals, such as in the areas of personnel vetting and cybersecurity.[50] OMB staff explained that Performance.gov provided flexibility to report on these and other initiatives associated with prior CAP goals.[51]

However, quarterly reporting on CAP goals has been inconsistent across administrations over the full goal period, except in the limited instances identified above. In other areas where overlap between the current and prior CAP goals occurred, such as improving customer service, reporting stopped in January 2021, prior to the end of the 4-year CAP goal period in February 2022. Similarly, public quarterly reporting on Performance.gov of the 2014-2018 CAP goals did not continue beyond 2016.

GPRAMA requires quarterly performance reporting on CAP goals, including the results achieved during the most recent quarter and overall trend data compared to the planned level of performance.[52] Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government also states that management should externally communicate the necessary quality information to achieve the entity's objectives.[53] This standard includes communicating

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[50]Performance.gov reports data on results of the "Reduce the Footprint" initiative covering fiscal year 2015 through fiscal year 2020. It also includes information on the Trusted Workforce personnel vetting initiative.

[51]The "Communities" page on Performance.gov includes pages related to several initiatives, including customer experience, equity, cybersecurity, real property metrics, and the Trusted Workforce 2.0 personnel vetting initiative. Some of these initiatives relate to elements of the current PMA, while others relate to prior PMAs and CAP goals.

[52]31 U.S.C. § 1122(c)(5).

[53]GAO-14-704G, p. 15.01.

quality information so that external parties and oversight bodies, such as Congress, can help the entity achieve its objectives and address related risks. Additionally, our prior work has found that reporting progress on goal achievement at the end of the goal period, including baseline and trend data required by GPRAMA, would help facilitate future CAP goal implementation.[54]

OMB staff stated in September 2022 that they were planning to assess progress through future quarterly performance updates posted on Performance.gov. However, as noted above, quarterly progress updates have occurred inconsistently. In December 2022, OMB staff told us that they anticipated moving to a regular rhythm of quarterly progress updates beginning in 2023. As stated above, OMB had released a quarterly update on CAP goal implementation in March 2023. OMB staff could not confirm whether there would be a final update at the end of the goal period to assess overall progress.

Because quarterly reporting of CAP goal progress has been inconsistent, it is difficult to determine what results were achieved for a goal compared to planned levels of performance at the end of the 4-year CAP goal period. By reporting more complete and consistent information on CAP goal implementation through quarterly updates and reporting on goal achievement at the end of the 4-year goal period, OMB can provide greater transparency on CAP goal implementation. Such reporting could help OMB better assess implementation progress and offer lessons learned for developing and implementing future CAP goals. Additional transparency could be particularly helpful in understanding progress toward addressing long-standing federal management challenges and high-risk programs and operations vulnerable to waste, fraud, abuse, or mismanagement, or in need of transformation.

Conclusions

The PMA and its CAP goals address a number of critical challenges facing the federal government, including strengthening the federal workforce, improving service delivery, and building capacity in federal financial management and the acquisition systems. Much of the

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[54]GAO-21-104704.

information related to how federal agencies will achieve the PMA and related CAP goals is included on Performance.gov.

The 2022-2026 CAP goals were not designated until several months after the release of the President's budget proposal. The goals did not address all of the required government-wide management areas, including high-risk areas. Additionally, inconsistencies in quarterly reporting of CAP goal progress across administrations have made it more challenging to determine progress toward achieving goals at the end of the goal period. Such reporting is critical to providing a view of progress over time, especially for goals intended to address long-term management challenges. By putting processes in place to ensure consistent quarterly reporting during the current 2022-2026 CAP goal period, OMB can help ensure that both current and future CAP goals provide clear, consistent information to Congress and the public about progress toward the federal government's management priorities.

Additionally, public reporting on final progress achieved toward implementing the CAP goals at the end of the 4-year goal period can help inform future CAP goal implementation. The timely, complete, and transparent implementation of GPRAMA, including the CAP goals, could improve federal performance and address critical challenges facing the federal government.

Recommendations for Executive Action

We are making five recommendations to the Director of the Office of Management and Budget to help improve the transparency of the CAP goals:

- The Director of OMB should develop guidance and procedures to ensure that CAP goals are updated or revised and made publicly available concurrently with the submission of the budget of the United States Government, made in the first full fiscal year following any year in which the term of the President commences. (Recommendation 1)

- The Director of OMB should designate a CAP goal addressing IT management, which is responsive to ongoing government-wide challenges. (Recommendation 2)

- The Director of OMB should designate a CAP goal addressing federal real property management, which is responsive to ongoing government-wide challenges. (Recommendation 3)

- The Director of OMB should ensure consistent quarterly public reporting of progress achieved toward implementing the current set of CAP goals throughout the 2022-2026 goal period. (Recommendation 4)

- The Director of OMB should develop guidance to ensure that the progress toward implementing the most recent CAP goals is publicly reported at the end of each 4-year goal period. (Recommendation 5)

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

We provided a draft of this report to GSA and OMB for review and comment. GSA responded that it had no comments on this report. In written comments provided by OMB (reproduced in appendix I), OMB generally agreed with our findings, but disagreed with our recommendations. OMB also responded that GAO's efforts to assess the implementation of GPRAMA have helped increase the use of performance information and led to more effective implementation of the law. However, OMB also stated that it had some concerns with the implications of our recommendations for using GPRAMA as a tool to drive meaningful results for the public. We continue to believe that our recommendations are warranted, for the reasons we discuss below.

OMB disagreed with our first recommendation that it develop guidance and procedures to ensure that CAP goals are updated or revised and made publicly available concurrently with the submission of the federal budget. In its comments, OMB acknowledged that the current set of CAP goals was not announced and made publicly available concurrently with the submission of the federal budget, as required by GPRAMA.[55] As we stated in our report, OMB staff attributed the delay in designating the current CAP goals to increased engagement among the President's Management Council and other stakeholders. According to OMB, current law and OMB's A-11 guidance accurately and sufficiently address the timing considerations that we identify in this report. However, OMB's current guidance did not result in publication of the CAP goals in compliance with the statutory deadline. Therefore, we maintain that developing additional guidance and procedures is warranted to ensure the timely and consistent designation of CAP goals, and to improve transparency and congressional oversight.

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[55]31 U.S.C. § 1120(a)(2).

OMB disagreed with our second and third recommendations that it should designate CAP goals addressing IT and federal real property management. OMB stated that the PMA currently addresses cross-agency efforts in these areas under the PMA's strategies to improve customer experiences and plan for the future of federal work. Further, OMB said that the outcomes of the PMA will be better realized by orienting the PMA around goals where these areas are already embedded. Our report recognizes that the PMA contains strategies that incorporate aspects of IT and federal real property management, but we disagree that OMB has designated specific CAP goals for these areas as required by GPRAMA.[56] GPRAMA requires that OMB develop goals for specific management areas for which improvements are needed across the federal government, including IT and federal real property management. In addition, we have previously identified both IT and federal real property management as high-risk areas for the federal government. Thus, we maintain these recommendations are warranted to ensure that OMB uses the CAP goals to address these long-standing government-wide management challenges.

OMB disagreed with our fourth recommendation that it should ensure consistent quarterly public reporting of progress achieved toward implementing the current set of CAP goals throughout the 2022-2026 goal period. OMB stated that it has provided regular updates on the progress of the implementation of the PMA, and cited 18 updates posted to Performance.gov during the period from November 2021 through March 2023. We agree that OMB has publicly communicated about the implementation of the PMA. However, GPRAMA specifically requires quarterly progress updates on the CAP goals that include results achieved during the most recent quarter and overall trend data compared to the planned level of performance.[57] As we mentioned in our report, the CAP goals were designated in the PMA in August 2022. Since that time, our report also noted that there have been two quarterly progress updates of the PMA after the CAP goals were designated, in November 2022, and in March 2023. Providing consistent quarterly updates, as GPRAMA requires and OMB has committed to, can provide greater transparency on CAP goal implementation. Thus, we maintain this recommendation is warranted to ensure transparency on CAP goal implementation.

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[56]31 U.S.C. § 1120(a)(1)(B)(iii), (v).

[57]31 U.S.C. § 1122(c)(5).

OMB disagreed with our fifth recommendation that it should develop guidance to ensure that progress toward implementing the most recent CAP goals is publicly reported at the end of each 4-year goal period. OMB maintained that the statutory requirement to update or revise the CAP goals every 4 years at a minimum creates a situation in which implementation of CAP goals will span presidential transitions, and that a new administration will only report against the CAP goals of a prior administration where those goals and priorities are aligned with the policies of the new administration's leadership.[58] OMB also explained, to the extent possible, it seeks to ensure that progress toward implementing the most recent CAP goals is publicly reported at the end of the 4-year goal period. However, as we reported, because quarterly reporting of CAP goal progress has been inconsistent across administrations, it is difficult to determine what results were achieved for a goal compared to planned levels of performance at the end of the 4-year CAP goal period. Thus, we maintain this recommendation is warranted to provide greater transparency on progress toward addressing long-standing government-wide management challenges.

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees, the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, the Administrator of the General Services Administration, and other interested parties. In addition, the report is available at no charge on the GAO website at https://www.gao.gov.

If you or your staffs have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-6806 or czyza@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last

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[58]31 U.S.C. § 1120(a)(2).

page of this report. GAO staff members who made key contributions to this report are listed in appendix II.

Alissa H. Czyz
Director, Strategic Issues

List of Committees

The Honorable Gary C. Peters
Chairman
The Honorable Rand Paul, M.D.
Ranking Member
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
United States Senate

The Honorable Richard Blumenthal
Chairman
The Honorable Ron Johnson
Ranking Member
Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
United States Senate

The Honorable Kyrsten Sinema
Chair
The Honorable James Lankford
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Government Operations and Border Management
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
United States Senate

The Honorable James Comer
Chairman
The Honorable Jamie Raskin
Ranking Member
Committee on Oversight and Accountability
House of Representatives

The Honorable Nancy Mace
Chairwoman
The Honorable Gerald E. Connolly
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Cybersecurity, Information Technology, and
  Government Innovation
Committee on Oversight and Accountability
House of Representatives

The Honorable Pete Sessions
Chairman

The Honorable Kweisi Mfume
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Government Operations and the Federal Workforce
Committee on Oversight and Accountability
House of Representatives

Appendix I: Comments from the Office of Management and Budget

EXECUTIVE OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT
OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT AND BUDGET
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20503

March 15, 2023

Ms. Alissa H. Czyz
Director, Strategic Issues
United States Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Ms. Czyz,

Thank you for the opportunity to review a copy of GAO's draft report, "Actions Needed
to Improve Transparency of Cross-Agency Priority (CAP) Goals" (GAO-23-106354), as well as
facilitating the collaboration between our organizations that led to its production. With more than
two dozen reports issued since 2012 that audit implementation of the GPRA Modernization Act
(GPRAMA), GAO's efforts have helped increase the use of performance information and led to
more effective implementation by Executive Branch agencies. While OMB agrees with the
findings in the draft report generally, we do have some concerns with the implications these
Recommendations would have on using GPRAMA as a tool to drive meaningful management
results for the American people. This letter responds to each of GAO's Recommendations.

- (GAO Recommendation 1). "The Director of OMB should develop guidance and procedures
  to ensure that CAP goals are updated or revised and made publicly available concurrently
  with the submission of the budget of the U.S. Government, made in the first full fiscal year
  following any year in which the term of the President commences."

OMB acknowledges that CAP Goals were not announced and made publicly available in
early 2022 "concurrently with the submission of the budget of the U.S. Government, made in the
first full fiscal year following any year in which the term of the President commences." The
budget was submitted on March 28, 2022, and OMB announced the CAP Goals and made them
publicly available on August 9, 2022. While we agree with the recommendation for OMB to
execute on timing, OMB disagrees with GAO's recommendation that OMB develop additional
guidance or procedures concerning this timing. Current law accurately and sufficiently addresses
the timing considerations that GAO identifies in the draft report. As GAO notes on page 16 of its
draft report, OMB already has in place such guidance. OMB's commitment to transparency and
timeliness is reinforced by the guidance that GAO cites, along with OMB's coordination with
agencies throughout the annual budget formulation process. OMB remains committed to aligning
its policymaking concerning the CAP goals with the submission of the budget.

- (GAO Recommendation 2). "The Director of OMB should designate a CAP Goal addressing IT management which is responsive to ongoing governmentwide challenges."

- (GAO Recommendation 3). "The Director of OMB should designate a CAP Goal addressing federal real property management, which is responsive to ongoing governmentwide challenges."

While the President's Management Agenda (PMA) and OMB recognize the importance of information technology (IT) management and federal real property management, as discussed in GAO's draft report and reflected in GPRAMA, OMB disagrees with the GAO's Recommendations 2 and 3 that these areas are not already incorporated into this Administration's PMA strategies and CAP goals.

CAP Goals are used to effectuate cross-agency coordination in order to achieve the Administration's management priorities. These management priorities are articulated in the Administration's PMA. The Biden-Harris PMA was launched and released in November 2021. The identification of CAP Goals occurred in August 2022, reflecting the detailed goal-setting and action-planning needed to implement and deliver on the broader outcomes and priorities in the Biden-Harris PMA. Cross-agency efforts in the area of IT management are currently being advanced across all of the areas of the Biden-Harris PMA, as well as specifically in the PMA's Priority Area 1, Strategy 3, and Priority Area 2, Strategy 3, which aim to improve customer experience with government services through better delivery, greater equity, and more security. Cross-agency efforts to address Federal real property management are being advanced as part of the PMA's Priority Area 1, Strategy 3, which seeks to reimagine the future of the Federal workforce, informed by lessons from the pandemic and nationwide workforce and workplace trends.

OMB believes that the outcomes of the PMA will be better realized by orienting leadership, coordination, and implementation of the PMA around goals where IT management and real property management are already embedded, rather than by separately identifying those strategies. Setting separate CAP Goals in these specific areas that are disconnected from the performance outcomes that these inputs impact, as GAO recommends, risks orienting PMA Priority Area and PMA Strategy leadership away from the outcome-driven focus of the current PMA and CAP Goals.

- (GAO Recommendation 4). "The Director of OMB should ensure consistent quarterly public reporting of progress toward implementing the current set of CAP Goals throughout the 2022-2026 goal period.

OMB disagrees with GAO's finding on page 20 of the draft report about the number of progress updates on Performance.gov "related to implementation of the President's Management Agenda (PMA)." Below is a chronological listing of the PMA-related updates posted to

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Performance.gov providing information and updates on the progress of PMA implementation, as of the date of this letter.

1. March 3, 2023: "March 2023 Quarterly PMA Updates"[1]
2. February 9, 2023: "Applying Change to Federal Hiring: A Case Study at Interior"[2]
3. February 1, 2023: "New Data Visualizations Bring Transparency to the President's Management Agenda"[3]
4. January 11, 2023: "Spotlight: USAID Improves Customer Experience for its Partners"[4]
5. December 20, 2022: "Biden-Harris PMA: A Recording of Our Conversation on One Year of Progress"[5]
6. November 30, 2022: "November 2022 Quarterly PMA Updates"[6]
7. September 15, 2022: "Public Informs Final Government-Wide PMA Learning Agenda"[7]
8. August 30, 2022: "U.S. Digital Corps in Action: Building a Federal Tech Workforce"[8]
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16. February 17, 2022: "Updates on the President's Management Agenda"[16]
17. December 13, 2021: "Putting the Public First: Improving Customer Experience and Service Delivery for the American People"[17]

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[1] https://www.performance.gov/blog/2023-q1-presidents-management-agenda-updates/.
[2] https://www.performance.gov/blog/2023-federal-hiring-interior/.
[3] https://www.performance.gov/blog/2023-data-presidents-management-agenda/.
[4] https://www.performance.gov/blog/2023-usaid-customer-experience-cx/.
[5] https://www.performance.gov/blog/pma-one-year-of-progress/.
[6] https://www.performance.gov/blog/november-2022-updates/.
[7] https://www.performance.gov/blog/final-pma-learning-agenda-released/.
[8] https://www.performance.gov/blog/digital-corps-update/.
[9] https://www.performance.gov/blog/july-2022-updates/.
[10] https://www.performance.gov/blog/life-experiences/.
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[13] https://www.performance.gov/blog/budget-delivers-for-federal-workforce/.
[14] https://www.performance.gov/blog/meet-the-priority-area-leads/.
[15] https://www.performance.gov/blog/priority-area-leads/.
[16] https://www.performance.gov/blog/pma-february-update/.
[17] https://www.performance.gov/blog/cx-eo/.

3

18. November 18, 2021: "Office of Management and Budget Launches Biden-Harris Management Agenda Vision"[18]

Through the above 18 updates, OMB provided transparency on both the PMA and the CAP Goals while also building public trust through frequent, publicly available, and engaging public updates. OMB will continue to provide public transparency into the progress being made in implementing the PMA through frequent public reporting and additional updates.

- (GAO Recommendation 5). "The Director of OMB should develop guidance to ensure that progress toward implementing the most recent CAP Goals is publicly reported at the end of each 4-year goal period."

OMB reiterates our previous position that the four-year statutory requirement governing the update of CAP Goals creates a situation in which implementation of CAP Goals will necessarily span Presidential transitions. Consistent with the intent of GPRAMA and in accordance with previous OMB guidance to the agencies, a new Administration will only report against the CAP Goals of a prior Administration where those goals and priorities are aligned with the policies of the new Administration's leadership.[19] To the extent possible within this framework, OMB seeks to ensure that progress toward implementing the most recent CAP Goals is publicly reported at the end of each four-year goal period.

We appreciate GAO's work on this important audit and look forward to further collaboration on achieving a shared vision for an effective and efficiently managed Federal Government.

Sincerely,

Jason Miller
Deputy Director for Management

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[18] https://www.performance.gov/blog/pma-launch/.
[19] Reference OMB Memorandum M-17-26, Reducing Burden for Federal Agencies by Rescinding and Modifying OMB Memoranda, issued June 15, 2017, at page 8.

4

Text of Appendix I: Comments from the Office of Management and Budget

March 15, 2023

Ms. Alissa H. Czyz Director, Strategic Issues

United States Government Accountability Office 441 G Street, NW

Washington, DC 20548 Dear Ms. Czyz,

Thank you for the opportunity to review a copy of GAO's draft report, "Actions Needed to Improve Transparency of Cross-Agency Priority (CAP) Goals" (GAO-23-106354), as well as facilitating the collaboration between our organizations that led to its production. With more than two dozen reports issued since 2012 that audit implementation of the GPRA Modernization Act (GPRAMA), GAO's efforts have helped increase the use of performance information and led to more effective implementation by Executive Branch agencies. While OMB agrees with the findings in the draft report generally, we do have some concerns with the implications these Recommendations would have on using GPRAMA as a tool to drive meaningful management results for the American people. This letter responds to each of GAO's Recommendations.

- (GAO Recommendation 1). "The Director of OMB should develop guidance and procedures to ensure that CAP goals are updated or revised and made publicly available concurrently with the submission of the budget of the U.S. Government, made in the first full fiscal year following any year in which the term of the President commences."

OMB acknowledges that CAP Goals were not announced and made publicly available in early 2022 "concurrently with the submission of the budget of the U.S. Government, made in the first full fiscal year following any year in which the term of the President commences." The budget was submitted on March 28, 2022, and OMB announced the CAP Goals and made them publicly available on August 9, 2022. While we agree with the recommendation for OMB to execute on timing, OMB disagrees with GAO's recommendation that OMB develop additional guidance or procedures concerning this timing. Current law accurately and sufficiently addresses the timing considerations that GAO identifies in the draft report. As GAO notes on page 16 of its draft report, OMB already has in place such guidance. OMB's commitment to transparency and

timeliness is reinforced by the guidance that GAO cites, along with OMB's coordination with agencies throughout the annual budget formulation process. OMB remains committed to aligning its policymaking concerning the CAP goals with the submission of the budget.

- (GAO Recommendation 2). "The Director of OMB should designate a CAP Goal addressing IT management which is responsive to ongoing governmentwide challenges."

- (GAO Recommendation 3). "The Director of OMB should designate a CAP Goal addressing federal real property management, which is responsive to ongoing governmentwide challenges."

While the President's Management Agenda (PMA) and OMB recognize the importance of information technology (IT) management and federal real property management, as discussed in GAO's draft report and reflected in GPRAMA, OMB disagrees with the GAO's Recommendations 2 and 3 that these areas are not already incorporated into this Administration's PMA strategies and CAP goals.

CAP Goals are used to effectuate cross-agency coordination in order to achieve the Administration's management priorities. These management priorities are articulated in the Administration's PMA. The Biden-Harris PMA was launched and released in November 2021.

The identification of CAP Goals occurred in August 2022, reflecting the detailed goal-setting and action-planning needed to implement and deliver on the broader outcomes and priorities in the Biden-Harris PMA. Cross-agency efforts in the area of IT management are currently being advanced across all of the areas of the Biden-Harris PMA, as well as specifically in the PMA's Priority Area 1, Strategy 3, and Priority Area 2, Strategy 3, which aim to improve customer experience with government services through better delivery, greater equity, and more security.

Cross-agency efforts to address Federal real property management are being advanced as part of the PMA's Priority Area 1, Strategy 3, which seeks to reimagine the future of the Federal workforce, informed by lessons from the pandemic and nationwide workforce and workplace trends.

OMB believes that the outcomes of the PMA will be better realized by orienting leadership, coordination, and implementation of the PMA around goals where IT management and real property management are already embedded, rather than by separately identifying those strategies. Setting separate CAP Goals in these specific areas that are disconnected from the performance outcomes that these inputs impact, as GAO recommends, risks orienting PMA Priority Area and PMA Strategy leadership away from the outcome-driven focus of the current PMA and CAP Goals.

- (GAO Recommendation 4). "The Director of OMB should ensure consistent quarterly public reporting of progress toward implementing the current set of CAP Goals throughout the 2022- 2026 goal period.

OMB disagrees with GAO's finding on page 20 of the draft report about the number of progress updates on Performance.gov "related to implementation of the President's Management Agenda (PMA)." Below is a chronological listing of the PMA-related updates posted to Performance.gov providing information and updates on the progress of PMA implementation, as of the date of this letter.

1. March 3, 2023: "March 2023 Quarterly PMA Updates"[1]

2. February 9, 2023: "Applying Change to Federal Hiring: A Case Study at Interior"[2]

3. February 1, 2023: "New Data Visualizations Bring Transparency to the President's Management Agenda"[3]

4. January 11, 2023: "Spotlight: USAID Improves Customer Experience for its Partners"[4]

5. December 20, 2022: "Biden-Harris PMA: A Recording of Our Conversation on One Year of Progress"[5]

6. November 30, 2022: "November 2022 Quarterly PMA Updates"[6]

7. September 15, 2022: "Public Informs Final Government-Wide PMA Learning Agenda"[7]

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[8] https://www.performance.gov/blog/digital-corps-update/.

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[9] https://www.performance.gov/blog/july-2022-updates/.

[10] https://www.performance.gov/blog/life-experiences/.

[11] https://www.performance.gov/blog/reducing-administrative-burden/.

[12] https://www.performance.gov/blog/new-pma-priority-updates/.

[13] https://www.performance.gov/blog/budget-delivers-for-federal-workforce/.

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Jason Miller

Deputy Director for Management

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[19] Reference OMB Memorandum M-17-26, Reducing Burden for Federal Agencies by Rescinding and Modifying OMB Memoranda, issued June 15, 2017, at page 8.

Appendix II: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

Alissa H. Czyz, (202) 512-6806, czyza@gao.gov

Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, Sarah E. Veale (Assistant Director), Peter Beck (Analyst-in-Charge), Michael Bechetti, Amalia Konstas, Andrew Lobel, Connor Mason, Steven Putansu, and Andrew J. Stephens made key contributions to this report.

Related GAO Products

GAO, *Government Performance Management: Key Considerations for Implementing Cross-Agency Priority Goals and Progress Addressing GAO Recommendations*, GAO-21-104704 (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 28, 2021).

GAO, *Child Well-Being: Key Considerations for Policymakers, Including the Need for a Federal Cross-Agency Priority Goal*, GAO-18-41SP (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 9, 2017).

GAO, *Managing for Results: OMB Improved Implementation of Cross-Agency Priority Goals, But Could Be More Transparent About Measuring Progress*, GAO-16-509 (Washington, D.C.: May 20, 2016).

GAO, *Managing for Results: OMB Should Strengthen Reviews of Cross-Agency Goals*, GAO-14-526 (Washington, D.C.: June 10, 2014).

GAO, *Managing for Results: GAO's Work Related to the Interim Crosscutting Priority Goals under the GPRA Modernization Act*, GAO-12-620R (Washington, D.C.: May 31, 2012).

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