U.S. GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE

441 G St. NW
Washington, DC 20548

Accessible Version

February 12, 2026

Mr. Clyde Richards, Jr.
Chief Information Officer
National Science Foundation
2415 Eisenhower Avenue
Alexandria, VA 22314

Chief Information Officer Open Recommendations: National Science Foundation

Dear Mr. Richards, Jr.:

I am writing to you with respect to your role as the Chief Information Officer (CIO) for the National Science Foundation (NSF). As an independent, non-partisan agency that works for Congress, GAO's mission is to support Congress in meeting its constitutional responsibilities and help improve the performance and ensure the accountability of the federal government. Our work includes investigating matters related to the use of public funds and evaluating programs and activities of the U.S. Government at the request of congressional committees and subcommittees, on the initiative of the Comptroller General, and as required by public laws or committee reports. Our duties include reporting our findings and recommending ways to increase economy and efficiency in government spending. The purpose of this letter is to provide an overview of the open, publicly available GAO recommendations to NSF that call for the attention of the CIO.

We identified recommendations that relate to the CIO's roles and responsibilities in effectively managing IT. They include strategic planning, investment management, and information security. We have previously reported on the significance of the CIO's role in improving the government's performance in IT and related information management functions.[1] Your attention to these recommendations will help ensure the effective use of IT at the agency.

Currently, NSF has five open recommendations that call for the attention of the CIO. Each of these recommendations relate to the Improving IT Acquisitions and Management GAO High-Risk area.[2] Fully implementing these open recommendations could significantly improve NSF's ability to manage its critical systems, operations, and information. I have summarized the five recommendations here. See the enclosure for additional details on the GAO recommendations.

[1]See for example, GAO, *Federal Chief Information Officers: Critical Actions Needed to Address Shortcomings and Challenges in Implementing Responsibilities*, GAO-18-93 (Washington, D.C.: Aug. 2, 2018).

[2]GAO, *High-Risk Series: Heightened Attention Could Save Billions More and Improve Government Efficiency and Effectiveness*, GAO-25-107743 (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 25, 2025).

Improving IT Acquisitions and Management. NSF needs to improve its acquisition of cloud services and its reviews of the agency's IT portfolio. In particular, four recommendations address key OMB cloud procurement requirements. For example, we recommended that the CIO develop guidance regarding standardizing cloud service-level agreements. Implementing this recommendation would help ensure that NSF is consistently holding its cloud service providers accountable for their service performance.

We also recommended that the agency complete annual reviews of its IT portfolio consistent with federal requirements. Until NSF implements this recommendation, it may miss opportunities to identify areas of duplication within its IT portfolio and to develop strategies to streamline operations and optimize resource allocation.

In addition to GAO's recommendations, the NSF Inspector General also has multiple open recommendations in the area of cybersecurity. These include cybersecurity recommendations that relate to the agency's requirements under the Federal Information Security Modernization Act of 2014.[3] It will be important to address both GAO and Inspector General recommendations.

Copies of this letter are being sent to the appropriate congressional committees and the Federal CIO. The letter will also be available at no charge on the GAO website at https://www.gao.gov.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss any of the recommendations outlined in this letter, please do not hesitate to contact me at marinosn@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this letter. Our teams will continue to coordinate with your staff on addressing these five open recommendations that call for the attention of the CIO. I appreciate NSF's continued commitment and thank you for your personal attention to these important recommendations.

Sincerely,

//SIGNED//

Nick Marinos
|Managing Director
Information Technology and Cybersecurity

Enclosure

cc: Mr. Gregory Barbaccia, Federal CIO, Office of Management and Budget

[3]The Federal Information Security Modernization Act of 2014, Pub. L. No. 113-283, 128 Stat. 3073 (Dec. 18, 2014) largely superseded the Federal Information Security Management Act of 2002, enacted as Title III, E-Government Act of 2002, Pub. L. No. 107-347, 116 Stat. 2899, 2946 (Dec. 17, 2002).

Enclosure

Chief Information Officer Open Recommendations to the National Science Foundation

This enclosure includes the open, publicly available GAO recommendations to the National Science Foundation (NSF) that call for the attention of its Chief Information Officer (CIO). All five of these recommendations relate to improving IT acquisitions and management.

Improving IT Acquisitions and Management

Federal IT investments too frequently fail to deliver capabilities in a timely, cost-effective manner. Key management challenges—such as a lack of disciplined project planning and program oversight—continue to hamper effective acquisition and management of the government's IT assets. Table 1 provides information on the open IT acquisition and management-related recommendations relevant to the NSF CIO.

Table 1: Open Chief Information Officer (CIO)-related IT Acquisition and Management Recommendations for the National Science Foundation (NSF)

GAO report number	GAO report title	Recommendation
GAO-24-106137	Cloud Computing: Agencies Need to Address Key OMB Procurement Requirements	The Director of the NSF should ensure that the CIO of NSF updates guidance to put a cloud service-level agreement (SLA) in place with every vendor when a cloud solution is deployed. The guidance should include language that addresses the Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) required elements for SLAs, including: clear performance metrics and remediation plans for non-compliance. (Recommendation 33) The Director of the NSF should ensure that the CIO of NSF develops guidance regarding standardizing cloud SLAs. (Recommendation 34) The Director of the NSF should ensure that the CIO of NSF updates its guidance to require that contracts affecting the agency's high value assets that are managed and operated in the cloud include language that provides the agency with continuous visibility of the asset. (Recommendation 35) The Director of the NSF should ensure that the CIO of NSF updates its existing contracts for high value assets that are managed and operated in the cloud to meet OMB's requirement once guidance from the CIO Council is available on language that provides the agency with continuous visibility of the asset. If modifying the existing contract is not practical, the agency should incorporate language into the contract that will meet OMB's requirement upon option exercise or issuance of a new award. (Recommendation 36)
GAO-25-107041	IT Portfolio Management: OMB and Agencies Are Not Fully Addressing Selected Statutory Requirements	The Director of the NSF should direct its agency CIO to work with OMB to ensure that annual reviews of their IT portfolio are conducted in conjunction with the Federal CIO and the Chief Operating Officer or Deputy Secretary (or equivalent), as prescribed by the Federal Information Technology Acquisition Reform Act of 2014. (Recommendation 38)

Source: GAO summary based on previously issued reports. | GAO-26-108707