

Agency Strategic Plan

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Overview

Requirements

When developing or updating its strategic plan, the agency is to follow certain requirements for the planning process and must ensure that its strategic plan contains specific elements:

- mission statement;
- general (also known as strategic or long-term) goals and objectives;
- a description of how any goals and objectives contribute to federal government priority goals;
- a description of interagency collaboration to achieve the agency's goals and objectives;
- a description of the strategies and resources required to achieve the agency's goals and objectives;
- a description of how the agency's goals and objectives incorporate input from congressional consultations;
- a description of how the agency's performance goals and priority goals relate to the general goals and objectives;
- an identification of external factors that could significantly affect the achievement of the agency's goals and objectives;
- and
- program evaluations used to establish or review the agency's general goals and objectives.

5 U.S.C. § 306.

Select Legislative History

Strategic plans are the starting point and basic underpinning for a system of program goal setting and performance measurement throughout the federal government. A multi-year strategic plan articulates the fundamental mission (or missions) of an organization, and lays out its long-term general goals for implementing that mission, including the resources needed to reach these goals. S. Rep. No. 111-372, at 3 (2010).

Related GAO Work

GAO has elaborated on and suggested several practices that support this requirement, including:

- how annual performance plans can help address strategic planning challenges ([GAO/GGD-98-44](#));
- building on strategic plans to improve federal management ([GAO/T-GGD/AIMD-98-29](#));
- critical issues for improving strategic plans ([GAO/GGD-97-180](#)); and
- key questions for reviewing strategic plans ([GAO/GGD-10.1.16](#)).

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Strategic Planning Process

Requirements

At least every 4 years, each agency is required to issue a strategic plan concurrent with the President's Budget in the second year of a presidential term beginning in 2014. The agency is to make the plan available on its website and notify the President and Congress of its availability. 5 U.S.C. § 306(a).

The strategic plan is to cover at least a 4-year period. As needed, the agency may make adjustments to the strategic plan to reflect significant changes in its operating environment, with appropriate notification of Congress. 5 U.S.C. § 306(b).

At least every 2 years, including when developing or making adjustments to a strategic plan, the agency is to consult with Congress, including obtaining majority and minority views from the appropriate authorizing, appropriations, and oversight committees. 5 U.S.C. § 306(d).

The agency is also to solicit and consider the views and suggestions of its stakeholders when developing or making adjustments to a strategic plan. 5 U.S.C. § 306(d).

The functions and activities related to agency strategic planning are considered inherently governmental functions, only to be performed by federal employees. 5 U.S.C. § 306(e).

Select Legislative History

The Act requires strategic plans cover a period of no less than four years and allows the agency to make adjustments to the plan to reflect significant changes in its operating environment, with appropriate notification to Congress. This is not to mean that an agency should frequently modify its existing strategic plans; rather the intent is to provide agencies the flexibility to respond to an event that significantly changes the operating environment. S. Rep. No. 111-372, at 3-4 (2010).

If agencies wait to consult with relevant congressional stakeholders until a strategic plan has been substantially drafted and vetted within the executive branch, agencies forego important opportunities to learn early on about specific concerns that will be critical to successful implementation. Therefore, the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs again strongly emphasized that Congressional consultations are to take place during the development of the plan—not after. S. Rep. No. 111-372, at 5 (2010).

This legislation clarifies that the agency shall periodically consult with and obtain majority and minority views from its authorizing, appropriations, and oversight committees when developing or making adjustments to its strategic plan. It also requires Congressional consultations occur at least once every two years; this is to ensure that each Congress has input on the goals, objectives, strategies, and performance measures of the agency. Moreover, it allows the agency to have an opportunity to provide a progress report on its performance and ensures that various committees are getting the types of performance information they need. S. Rep. No. 111-372, at 5 (2010).

Related GAO Work

GAO has elaborated on and suggested several practices that support this requirement, including:

- involving stakeholders ([GAO/GGD-96-118](#), pp. 14-16);
- assessing the environment ([GAO/GGD-96-118](#), pp. 16-18); and
- enhancing the usefulness of consultations between Congress and the Executive Branch ([GAO-12-215R](#), pp. 6-13 and [GAO/T-GGD-97-56](#), pp. 4-11).

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Mission Statement

Requirements

The agency strategic plan is to contain a comprehensive mission statement covering the major functions and operations of the agency. 5 U.S.C. § 306(a)(1).

Select Legislative History

The agency mission statement should concisely summarize what the agency does, as required by law, presenting the main purposes for all its major functions and operations. S. Rep. No. 103-58, at 24 (1993).

Related GAO Work

GAO has elaborated on and suggested several practices that support this requirement, including:

- addressing overlap and fragmentation ([GAO/GGD-10.1.16](#), p. 10);
- consulting with Congress on agency missions ([GAO/GGD-10.1.16](#), p. 10); and
- reviewing agency mission statements ([GAO/GGD-10.1.16](#), p. 11).

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General Goals and Objectives (also known as Strategic Goals)

Requirements

The agency strategic plan is to contain general (also known as strategic or long-term) goals and objectives, including outcome-oriented goals, for the major functions and operations of the agency. 5 U.S.C. § 306(a)(2).

Select Legislative History

The general goals should elaborate on the mission statement. These goals constitute a specific set of policy, programmatic, management objectives for the programs and operations covered in the strategic plan, and serve as a framework from which the annual performance goals are derived. The general goals should correspond to the purposes set forth in the mission statement, and develop with greater specificity how an agency will carry out its mission. The general goals do not need to be in a quantitative or measurable form, but they must be expressed in a manner that allows a future assessment of whether a goal is being achieved. S. Rep. No. 103-58, at 24 (1993).

Related GAO Work

GAO has elaborated on and suggested several practices that support this requirement, including:

- aligning strategic goals and strategies ([GAO/GGD-97-180](#), pp. 8-9);
- aligning strategic goals and performance goals ([GAO/GGD-97-180](#), p. 9); and
- reviewing agency strategic goals ([GAO/GGD-10.1.16](#), pp. 12-13).

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Contribution to Federal Government Priority Goals

Requirements

The agency strategic plan is to contain a description of how any goals and objectives contribute to the Federal Government priority goals, also known as crosscutting goals. 5 U.S.C. § 306(a)(3).

Select Legislative History

The Act requires agencies to describe how any goals and objectives in its strategic plan contribute to the crosscutting federal government priority goals required by this legislation. This mandate seeks to ensure that agency goals align with broader federal efforts on that mission, and to provide greater clarity regarding the impact of employee efforts on overarching goals. S. Rep. No. 111-372, at 4 (2010).

Related GAO Work

GAO has elaborated on this requirement:

- aligning federal efforts vertically ([GAO-04-38](#), p. 105).

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Strategies and Resources

Requirements

The agency strategic plan is to contain a description of how the general goals and objectives are to be achieved, including a description of the operational processes, skills and technology, and the human capital, information, and other resources required to achieve those goals and objectives. 5 U.S.C. § 306(a)(4)(A).

Select Legislative History

The strategic plan is also to contain a description of how the agency intends to achieve the general goals. This description should cover the overall approach that will be taken over the time period covered by the plan, including a schedule for significant actions and the needed resources. S. Rep. No. 103-58, at 24-25 (1993).

Related GAO Work

GAO has elaborated on and suggested several practices that support this requirement, including:

- fully developing strategies, including those to address management challenges ([GAO/GGD-97-180](#), pp. 12-15);
- aligning strategic goals and strategies ([GAO/GGD-97-180](#), pp. 8-9);
- aligning activities, core processes, and resources ([GAO/GGD-96-118](#), pp. 18-21); and
- reviewing agency strategies ([GAO/GGD-10.1.16](#), pp. 14-15).

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Interagency Collaboration

Requirements

The agency strategic plan is to contain a description of how the agency is working with other agencies to achieve its general goals and objectives as well as relevant federal government priority goals. 5 U.S.C. § 306(a)(4)(B).

Select Legislative History

Across the federal government, various agencies operate similar or related programs. GAO has found that mission fragmentation and program overlap are widespread across the government and that addressing this challenge is essential to the success of national strategies in areas such as homeland security, drug control, and the environment. Without appropriate coordination, such programs may be implemented in a fragmented manner which wastes scarce resources, confuses citizens, and limits the overall effectiveness of the federal effort. The Act requires an agency to describe how it is working with other agencies to achieve its own goals and objectives, as well as the crosscutting priority goals of the federal government. S. Rep. No. 111-372, at 4 (2010).

Related GAO Work

GAO has elaborated on and suggested several practices that support this requirement, including:

- implementing mechanisms for interagency collaboration ([GAO-12-1022](#));
- addressing duplication, overlap, and fragmentation ([GAO-13-279SP](#), pp. 21-27; [GAO-12-342SP](#), pp. 4-5; [GAO-11-617T](#), pp. 3-7; [GAO-11-318SP](#), pp. 3-4; [GAO/AIMD-97-146](#));
- practices to enhance and sustain collaboration ([GAO-06-15](#)); and
- barriers to interagency collaboration and approaches for improving the management of crosscutting programs ([GAO/GGD-00-106](#)).

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Input from Congressional Consultations

Requirements

The agency strategic plan is to contain a description of how the goals and objectives incorporate views and suggestions obtained through congressional consultations. 5 U.S.C. § 306(a)(5).

Select Legislative History

The Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 established a consultation process so that agencies could take Congressional views into account as appropriate. The GPRA Modernization Act of 2010 strengthens the Congressional consultation process by encouraging agencies to describe how agency goals and objectives incorporate the views and suggestions obtained through consultations with Congress. S. Rep. No. 111-372, at 5 (2010).

If agencies wait to consult with relevant congressional stakeholders until a strategic plan has been substantially drafted and vetted within the executive branch, agencies forego important opportunities to learn early on about specific concerns that will be critical to successful implementation. Therefore, this Committee again strongly emphasizes that Congressional consultations are to take place during the development of the plan—not after. S. Rep. No. 111-372, at 5 (2010).

Related GAO Work

GAO has elaborated on and suggested several practices that support this requirement, including:

- enhancing the usefulness of consultations between Congress and the Executive Branch ([GAO-13-174](#), pp. 31-35; [GAO-12-621SP](#), pp. 9-13; [GAO-12-215R](#), pp. 6-13; [GAO/T-GGD-97-56](#), pp. 4-11).

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Relationship to Performance Goals

Requirements

The agency strategic plan is to contain a description of how the performance goals provided in the agency performance plan—including any agency priority goals if applicable—contribute to the general goals and objectives. 5 U.S.C. § 306(a)(6).

Select Legislative History

The strategic plan should indicate how the goals of the annual performance plans will be used to measure progress in achieving the general goals of the strategic plan, and the underlying basis for any assumptions or projections. S. Rep. No. 103-58, at 25 (1993).

Related GAO Work

GAO has elaborated on and suggested several practices that support this requirement, including:

- linking strategic goals and performance goals ([GAO/GGD-97-180](#), p. 9); and
- reviewing the relationship between agency strategic goals and performance goals ([GAO/GGD-10.1.16](#), pp. 16-17).

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External Factors

Requirements

The agency strategic plan is to contain an identification of those key factors external to the agency and beyond its control that could significantly affect the achievement of the general goals and objectives. 5 U.S.C. § 306(a)(7).

Select Legislative History

The key external factors that could significantly affect the achievement of the general goals and objectives, and which should be explained in the strategic plan, can include both governmental and non-governmental factors. S. Rep. No. 103-58, at 25 (1993).

Related GAO Work

GAO has elaborated on and suggested several practices that support this requirement, including:

- conducting risk assessments ([GAO/AIMD-00-21.3.1](#), pp. 10-11); and
- reviewing external factors ([GAO/GGD-10.1.16](#), pp. 18-19).

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Program Evaluations

Requirements

The agency strategic plan is to contain a description of the program evaluations used in establishing or revising general goals and objectives, with a schedule for future program evaluations to be conducted. 5 U.S.C. § 306(a)(8).

Select Legislative History

Program evaluation is an objective and formal assessment of the results, impact, or effects of a program or policy. While most often aimed at assessing the degree to which a program's stated objectives are being or have been realized, program evaluations are also frequently used for measurement of "unintended" results, good or bad, that were not explicitly included in the original statement of objectives or foreseen in the implementation design. Thus, they can serve to validate or find error in the basic purposes and premises that underlay a program or policy. Finally, this definition should be read as including evaluations of program implementation process and operating policies and practices when the primary concern is about these issues rather than program outcome. However, the definition is not intended to include program monitoring activities that are (or should be) a routine component of good program management. S. Rep. No. 103-58, at 32-33 (1993).

Because measurement of outcomes often relies on an analytic process known as program evaluation, the strategic plan is to contain a section explaining how completed evaluations were used to establish or revise general (long-term or strategic) goals, and set out a schedule for periodic future program evaluations. S. Rep. No. 103-58, at 25 (1993).

Related GAO Work

GAO has elaborated on and suggested several practices that support this requirement, including:

- criteria and procedures for deciding which programs to review ([GAO-11-176](#));
- conducting special studies to provide data on results that are otherwise unavailable, explain the reasons for observed performance, or identify ways to improve performance ([GAO/GGD-00-204](#), pp.6-13);
- the importance of discussions between congressional staff and agency officials concerning information needs when planning new studies ([GAO-GGD-00-35](#), pp.20-21);
- the complementary roles of program evaluation and performance measurement ([GAO-11-646SP](#));
- supplementing performance data with impact evaluations to provide a more complete picture of effectiveness ([GAO/GGD-97-180](#), pp. 20-21); and
- reviewing the program evaluation information contained in strategic plans ([GAO/GGD-10.1.16](#), pp. 20-21).

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