

Highlights of [GAO-13-435](#), a report to the Chairman, Committee on Finance, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

U.S. taxpayers visited the IRS's website over 375 million times during 2012. IRS officials noted there are over 110,000 web pages and downloadable documents plus some basic interactive tools, such as calculators, on IRS.gov. In December 2011, GAO reported that taxpayers benefit from the increased web services, and IRS could realize substantial savings by transferring taxpayers away from costly telephone interactions. GAO was asked to review IRS's efforts to offer more interactive services. Among other things, this report describes the interactivity of IRS's online services and assesses its strategy for expanding the interactivity of its website. To address these objectives, GAO reviewed IRS's website to determine the services it provided as of March 2013, compared the *IRS Online Strategy* to federal guidance such as [Howto.gov](#), and interviewed IRS officials in the Offices of Online Services and Information Technology.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that IRS develop a long-term strategic plan for its web services that includes, among other things, studies of leading practices at a strategic level; a measurable goal for taxpayer satisfaction; business cases for new online services that describe the potential benefits and costs and prioritized projects; and links to investments in security. IRS agreed with two of these recommendations, did not state whether it agreed or disagreed on two others, and partially agreed with developing business cases because it believes other criteria should be considered. GAO believes this recommendation remains valid as discussed in this report.

View [GAO-13-435](#). For more information, contact James R. White at (202) 512-9110 or whitej@gao.gov.

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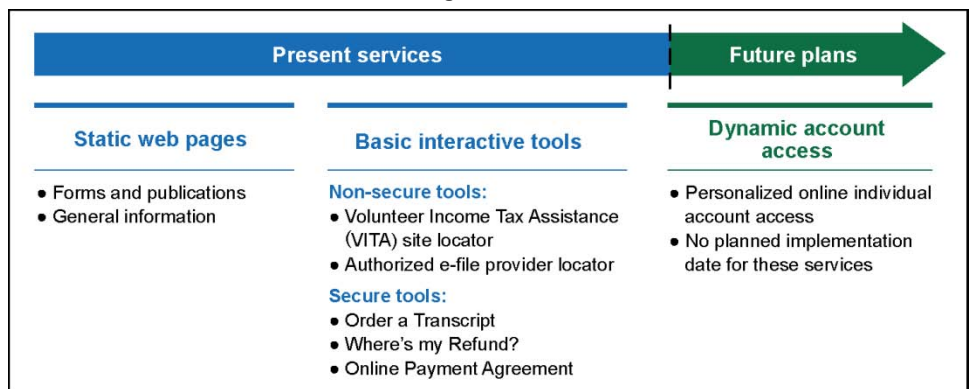
IRS WEBSITE

Long-Term Strategy Needed to Improve Interactive Services

What GAO Found

The Internal Revenue Service's (IRS) existing online services are limited when compared to many other government and private sector organizations. Static web pages make up the majority of [www.IRS.gov](#); however, IRS highlights 18 basic interactive tools from its homepage. IRS does not offer dynamic account access to taxpayers. Other federal and state taxing authorities provide a broader range of online services to their customers, including interactive account access.

Current and Future Online Services on IRS.gov



Source: GAO analysis of IRS information.

To improve its website, IRS has been simultaneously (1) focusing on multiple short term projects to deliver new basic interactive tools and (2) longer term efforts to invest in foundational infrastructure, such as security.

IRS does not, however, have a long term strategy for enhancing its website that explains how its ongoing and new efforts fit together. No overall cost estimate exists and there are not enough details on goals, deliverables, future online services, and timeframes to be able to assess progress. Several fundamental elements for a website strategy, as described on [www.Howto.gov](#) and in other guidance, are missing. Among others actions, IRS is not:

- using leading practices learned to help formulate a long-term strategy;
- setting a measureable taxpayer satisfaction goal to help ensure taxpayers' needs are being met;
- prioritizing the development of new online services based on business cases that outline the benefits and costs; and
- linking investments in security to a long term plan.

While IRS's efforts to date have already benefited taxpayers and hold the promise of additional benefits in the future, a long term strategy could help managers have a common understanding of IRS's plans, and better assist Congress in understanding what it is being asked to fund and holding IRS accountable for progress.