

Why GAO Did This Study

The federal government plans to spend almost \$96 billion on IT investments in fiscal year 2018; however, as GAO has previously found, too often these investments have cost overruns and schedule delays. To enhance oversight of IT programs, for 2015, Congress directed OMB to identify the 10 highest priority IT programs that are under development across federal agencies and report on their status each quarter. Further, for 2016, Congress directed USDS to provide a quarterly report of current USDS projects, including the top 10 high priority programs.

GAO was asked to review OMB's oversight of high priority programs. This review evaluated (1) OMB's process for identifying, overseeing, and reporting on the high priority IT investment programs and (2) USDS's process for identifying and prioritizing its projects, including its consideration of the high priority programs, and its reporting on the projects. GAO analyzed OMB memorandums and reports to Congress and interviewed OMB staff, including from USDS. In addition, GAO compared USDS's processes with IT management best practices.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making three recommendations to OMB for enhancing the oversight of high priority programs and continuing to report on both these programs and USDS projects. OMB neither agreed nor disagreed with the recommendations but disagreed with several of GAO's conclusions, which GAO continues to believe are valid as discussed in the report.

View [GAO-18-51](#). For more information, contact David A. Powner at (202) 512-9286 or pownerd@gao.gov.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

OMB Needs to Report On and Improve Its Oversight of the Highest Priority Programs

What GAO Found

The Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) Office of E-Government and Information Technology (E-Gov) reported that it undertook a structured approach to identify the top 10 high priority IT programs in reports to Congress in June 2015 and June 2016. Specifically, OMB staff stated that they chose the top 10 programs from a longer list of agency programs requiring additional oversight (referred to as high impact programs). E-Gov staff reported that the high priority programs were already receiving greater oversight than what was provided to the other major programs due to their high impact designation. This additional oversight included frequent meetings with agency Chief Information Officer (CIO) leadership and quarterly meetings with OMB staff. However, the Federal CIO was not directly involved in this oversight. According to E-Gov staff, the Federal CIO does not typically get involved in individual programs due to the large number of programs. However, past experience has shown that Federal CIO involvement has had a significant impact. For example, Federal CIO-led reviews of troubled projects, known as TechStat reviews, resulted in \$3 billion in savings in 2010. Until OMB ensures that the Federal CIO is more directly involved in the oversight of these high priority programs, it may be missing a key opportunity to improve accountability and achieve positive results.

OMB's 2015 and 2016 reports to Congress on the top 10 high priority programs identified the status of the programs and major milestones. However, the reports were not issued on a quarterly basis, as directed. E-Gov staff stated that they were unable to do so because of other competing reporting requirements and the limited resources available to draft and fully review the report on a quarterly basis. In addition, OMB stopped issuing the reports on the top 10 high priority IT programs after June 2016. OMB stated that Congress' 2016 direction to the U.S. Digital Service (USDS)—an OMB component—to provide a quarterly report that described the status of USDS teams and projects, including the top 10 high priority programs, meant that OMB should only report on USDS projects considered to be high priority. However, continued identification and reporting on the top 10 high priority programs, and not just USDS projects, would further enhance congressional oversight by providing congressional stakeholders information that is not readily available on those programs in the greatest need of attention.

USDS issued reports to Congress on the status of its key projects in December 2016 and July 2017; however, the reports did not address the top 10 high priority programs as directed by Congress, according to OMB staff, because of OMB's interpretation of Congress's direction. In addition, the reports were not issued quarterly, as directed. USDS staff attributed this to the time and effort needed to review and prepare the report. However, continuing to identify and report on the top 10 high priority programs while also reporting on USDS's projects would help to enhance congressional oversight and current administration IT governance entities' efforts by providing stakeholders with information that is not readily available.