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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-04-586](#), a report to the Subcommittees on Homeland Security, Senate and House Committees on Appropriations

Why GAO Did This Study

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has established a program—the United States Visitor and Immigrant Status Indicator Technology (US-VISIT)—to collect, maintain, and share information, including biometric identifiers, on selected foreign nationals who travel to the United States. By congressional mandate, DHS is to develop and submit for approval an expenditure plan for US-VISIT that satisfies certain conditions, including being reviewed by GAO. Among other things, GAO was asked to determine whether the plan satisfied these conditions, and to provide observations on the plan and DHS's program management.

What GAO Recommends

To better ensure that the US-VISIT program is worthy of investment, GAO is reiterating its previous recommendations aimed at establishing effective program management capabilities. Additionally, GAO is making several new recommendations designed to encourage stronger management of the initial phases of the US-VISIT program, including implementing effective test management practices and assessing the full impact of future US-VISIT deployment on land port of entry workforce levels and facilities. DHS agreed with all of GAO's recommendations and most of its observations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-586.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Randolph C. Hite at (202) 512-3439 or hiter@gao.gov.

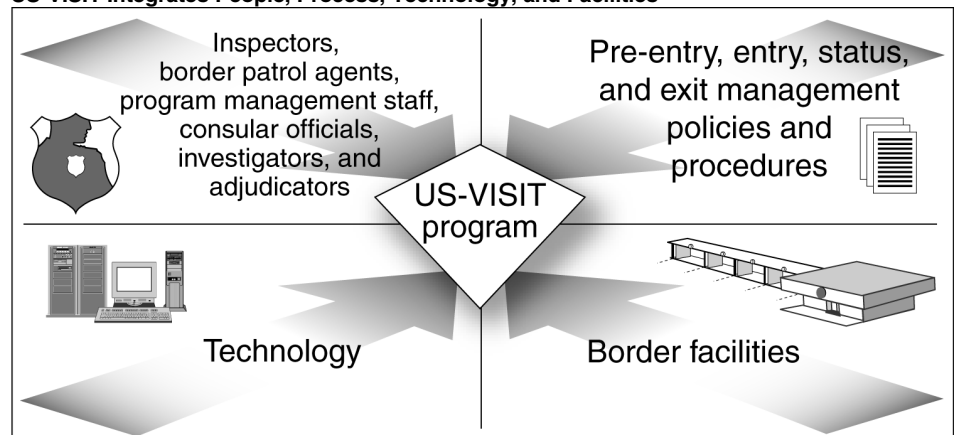
HOMELAND SECURITY

First Phase of Visitor and Immigration Status Program Operating, but Improvements Needed

What GAO Found

DHS's fiscal year 2004 US-VISIT expenditure plan and related documentation at least partially satisfies all conditions imposed by the Congress, including meeting the capital planning and investment control review requirements of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). For example, DHS developed a draft risk management plan and a process to implement and manage risks. However, DHS does not have a current life cycle cost estimate or a cost/benefit analysis for US-VISIT. The US-VISIT program merges four components into one integrated whole to carry out its mission (see figure).

US-VISIT Integrates People, Process, Technology, and Facilities



Sources: GAO (analysis), Nova Development Corp. (images).

GAO also developed a number of observations about the expenditure plan and DHS's management of the program. These generally recognize accomplishments to date and address the need for rigorous and disciplined program practices. For example, US-VISIT largely met its commitments for implementing an initial operating capability, known as Increment 1, in early January 2004, including the deployment of entry capability to 115 air and 14 sea ports of entry. However, DHS has not employed rigorous, disciplined management controls typically associated with successful programs, such as test management, and its plans for implementing other controls, such as independent verification and validation, may not prove effective. More specifically, testing of the initial phase of the implemented system was not well managed and was completed after the system became operational. In addition, multiple test plans were developed during testing, and only the final test plan, completed after testing, included all required content, such as describing tests to be performed. Such controls, while significant for the initial phases of US-VISIT, are even more critical for the later phases, as the size and complexity of the program will only increase. Finally, DHS's plans for future US-VISIT resource needs at the land ports of entry, such as staff and facilities, are based on questionable assumptions, making future resource needs uncertain.