



Highlights of [GAO-09-1011T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Federal Financial Management, Government Information, Federal Services, and International Security, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

Since 1997, periodic GAO surveys indicate that overall, federal managers have more performance information available, but have not made greater use of this information for decision making. To understand the barriers and opportunities for more widespread use, GAO was asked to (1) examine key management practices in an agency in which managers' reported use of performance information has improved; (2) look at agencies with relatively low use of performance information and the factors that contribute to this condition; and (3) review the role the President and Congress can play in promoting a results-oriented and collaborative culture in the federal government. This testimony is primarily based on GAO's report, *Results-Oriented Management: Strengthening Key Practices at FEMA and Interior Could Promote Greater Use of Performance Information*, which is being released today. In this report, GAO made recommendations to the Departments of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Interior for improvements to key management practices to promote greater use of performance information at FEMA, the National Park Service, Bureau of Reclamation, as well as at Interior. Both DHS and Interior generally agreed with these recommendations.

The testimony also draws from GAO's extensive prior work on the use of performance information and results-oriented management.

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GOVERNMENT PERFORMANCE

Strategies for Building a Results-Oriented and Collaborative Culture in the Federal Government

What GAO Found

GAO's prior work identified key management practices that can promote the use of performance information for decision making to improve results, including: demonstrating leadership commitment; aligning agency, program, and individual performance goals; improving the usefulness of performance information; building analytic capacity; and communicating performance information frequently and effectively. The experience of the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) illustrates how strengthening these practices can help an agency increase its use of performance information. According to GAO's most recent 2007 survey of federal managers, the percentage of CMS managers reporting use of performance information for various management decisions increased by nearly 21 percentage points since 2000—one of the largest improvements among the agencies surveyed. CMS officials attributed this positive change to a number of the key practices, such as the agency's leaders communicating their commitment to using performance information to drive decision making.

Conversely, the experiences of the Department of the Interior (Interior) and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) within the Department of Homeland Security indicated that the absence of such commitment can discourage managers and their staff from using performance information. According to GAO's 2007 survey, Interior and FEMA ranked 27 and 28, respectively, out of 29 agencies in their reported use of performance information for various management functions. Based on further survey data analysis, reviews of planning, policy, and performance documents, and management interviews, GAO found that inconsistent application of key practices at FEMA and Interior—such as routine communication of how performance information influences decision making—contributed to their relatively low survey scores. While both FEMA and Interior have taken some promising steps to make their performance information both useful and used, these initiatives have thus far been limited.

The President and Congress also have unique and critical roles to play by driving improved federal agency performance. By focusing attention on certain high-level goals and tracking agency performance, the President and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) can send a message that using performance information is critical for achieving results and maximizing the return on federal funds invested. Through its oversight, Congress can also signal to agencies that results matter by articulating performance expectations for areas of concern and following up to ensure that performance goals are achieved. The President and Congress can also play a role in improving government performance in areas that require the concerted efforts of multiple agencies and programs to address, such as preparing for and responding to a pandemic influenza. A governmentwide strategic plan could support collaborative efforts by identifying long-term goals and the strategies needed to address crosscutting issues.