



Highlights of [GAO-10-657](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

Since 2001, the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) has been working to develop an electronic records archive (ERA) to preserve and provide access to massive volumes and all types of electronic records. NARA certified initial operating capability of the first two phases of ERA in June 2008 and December 2008 and plans to achieve full operating capability for the system by 2012. As required by the Consolidated Appropriations Act, NARA submitted an expenditure plan to Congress to support its request for fiscal year 2010 ERA funding. The act also requires that this plan meet six conditions, including a review by GAO. GAO's objectives in reviewing the fiscal year 2010 plan were to (1) determine whether the plan satisfies the legislative conditions, (2) determine the extent to which NARA has implemented prior GAO recommendations, and (3) provide any other observations on the plan or the ERA acquisition. To do this, GAO reviewed the expenditure plan and other agency documents and interviewed NARA officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is recommending that the Archivist of the United States ensure that NARA's investment review process includes adequate executive-level oversight and that ERA's requirements are being managed using a disciplined process. In commenting on a draft of this report, the Archivist generally agreed and described steps taken or planned to address GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-10-657](#) or [key components](#). For more information, contact David A. Powner at (202) 512-9286 or pownerd@gao.gov.

ELECTRONIC RECORDS ARCHIVE

Status Update on the National Archives and Records Administration's Fiscal Year 2010 Expenditure Plan

What GAO Found

NARA's fiscal year 2010 expenditure plan satisfies five of the six legislative conditions and partially satisfies one. Specifically, it partially satisfies the condition that NARA develop a process for reviewing the progress of capital investments. Best practices call for such a process to include an oversight entity to review a project's progress, take corrective actions in response to cost or schedule problems, and ensure the corrective actions are implemented. However, while NARA has conducted regular meetings with senior-level agency management to review ERA progress, there is little evidence that officials identified corrective actions or ensured the actions were implemented. As a result, it is uncertain whether ERA is receiving the necessary level of executive oversight.

NARA has fully implemented three of GAO's five prior recommendations and partially implemented two. The agency implemented recommendations to provide additional information on its plans for the remainder of fiscal year 2009, add an analysis of costs and benefits associated with the ERA component dedicated to presidential records, and develop a contingency plan for ERA in case of system failure. NARA partially implemented a recommendation to provide additional information in the fiscal year 2010 expenditure plan by adding information on ERA's cost, schedule, and performance. However, the plan lacks key information, including the total cost of one of the increments to be funded. NARA has also developed but not yet implemented a plan to implement best practices in its process for measuring program progress, as GAO recommended.

GAO has three observations on the expenditure plan and ERA acquisition:

- The estimated life-cycle cost of the ERA system has increased, and the development is behind schedule. Over the last 3 fiscal years, the estimated cost has increased by about 7 percent, from about \$531 million to about \$567 million. In addition, the planned completion dates for the two increments currently under development are about 1 year later than dates established in program planning documents.
- NARA has not detailed what system capabilities will be delivered in the final two ERA increments. While the expenditure plan identifies some high-level functions, it does not identify specific capabilities to be delivered or dates for completion.
- NARA has not effectively defined or managed ERA's requirements to ensure that the functionality delivered satisfies the objectives of the system. Although NARA established an initial set of high-level requirements, it lacks firm plans to implement about 43 percent of them. In addition, NARA has not updated its requirements document to reflect reinterpreted requirements and did not provide evidence that it always conducted reviews required by its internal policies.

Without ensuring adequate oversight and establishing specific plans to complete ERA, it is increasingly unlikely that NARA will deliver the completed ERA system by 2012 with the originally envisioned capabilities.