

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-13-518](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

The federal government faces significant and long-standing fiscal, management, and performance challenges. The act's implementation offers opportunities for Congress and the executive branch to help address these challenges. This report is the latest in a series in which GAO, as required by the act, reviewed the act's initial implementation. GAO assessed the executive branch's (1) progress in implementing the act and (2) effectiveness in using tools provided by the act to address key governance challenges. To address these objectives, GAO reviewed the act, related OMB guidance, and past and recent GAO work related to federal performance management and the act; and interviewed OMB staff. In addition, to determine the extent to which agencies are using performance information and several of the act's requirements to improve agency results, GAO surveyed a stratified random sample of 4,391 federal managers from 24 agencies, with a 69 percent response rate which allows GAO to generalize these results.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends OMB improve implementation of the act and help address challenges by ensuring that the contributions of tax expenditures to crosscutting and agency goals are identified and assessed, and developing a detailed approach for addressing long-standing performance measurement issues. OMB staff agreed with these recommendations. GAO also reports on the status of existing recommendations related to CAP goals, APGs, QPRs, the PIC, agency performance management training, and Performance.gov.

View [GAO-13-518](#). For more information, contact J. Christopher Mihm at (202) 512-6806 or mihmj@gao.gov

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MANAGING FOR RESULTS

Executive Branch Should More Fully Implement the GPRA Modernization Act to Address Pressing Governance Challenges

What GAO Found

The executive branch has taken a number of steps to implement key provisions of the GPRA Modernization Act (the act). The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) developed interim cross-agency priority (CAP) goals, and agencies developed agency priority goals (APG). Agency officials reported that their agencies have assigned performance management leadership roles and responsibilities to officials who generally participate in performance management activities, including quarterly performance reviews (QPR) for APGs. Further, OMB developed Performance.gov, a government-wide website, which provides quarterly updates on the CAP goals and APGs.

However, the executive branch needs to do more to fully implement and leverage the act's provisions to address governance challenges.

OMB and agencies have identified many programs and activities that contribute to goals, as required, but are missing additional opportunities to address crosscutting issues. For example, few have identified tax expenditures, which represented about \$1 trillion in forgone revenue in fiscal year 2012, due to a lack of OMB guidance and oversight. Therefore, the contributions made by tax expenditures towards broader federal outcomes are unknown.

Ensuring performance information is useful and used by federal managers to improve results remains a weakness. GAO found little improvement in managers' reported use of performance information or practices that could help promote this use. There was a decline in the percentage of managers that agreed that their agencies' top leadership demonstrates a strong commitment to achieving results. However, agencies' QPRs show promise as a leadership strategy for improving the use of performance information in agencies.

Agencies have taken steps to align daily operations with agency results, but continue to face difficulties measuring performance. Agencies have established performance management systems to align individual performance with agency results. However, agencies continue to face long-standing issues with measuring performance across various programs and activities. The Performance Improvement Council (PIC) could do more to examine and address these issues, given its responsibilities for addressing crosscutting performance issues and sharing best practices. Without a comprehensive examination of these issues and an approach to address them, agencies will likely continue to experience difficulties in measuring program performance.

Communication of performance information could better meet users' needs. Federal managers and potential users of Performance.gov reported concerns about the accessibility, availability, understandability, and relevance of performance information to the public. Further outreach to key stakeholders could help improve how this information is communicated.

Agency performance information is not always useful for congressional decision making. Consultations with Congress are intended, in part, to ensure this information is useful for congressional decision making. However, GAO found little evidence that meaningful consultations occurred related to agency strategic plans and APGs. GAO also found that the performance information provided on Performance.gov may not fully be meeting congressional needs.