

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-13-755](#), a report to Congressional Requesters

## FEDERAL EMPLOYEES

### Opportunities Exist to Strengthen Performance Management Pilot

#### Why GAO Did This Study

A longstanding challenge for federal agencies has been developing credible and effective performance management systems that can serve as a strategic tool to drive internal change and achieve results. In 2011, various federal agencies, labor unions, and other organizations developed the Goals-Engagement-Accountability-Results (GEAR) framework to help improve performance management.

GAO was asked to evaluate GEAR. This report (1) analyzes how the GEAR framework addresses key practices for effective performance management and identifies opportunities to improve GEAR implementation government-wide; (2) describes the status of GEAR implementation at pilot agencies and lessons learned to date; and (3) assesses the extent to which each pilot agency's GEAR implementation plan includes selected best practices for project planning. The report is based on GAO's analysis of GEAR documents, agency project plans, and interviews with agency officials.

#### What GAO Recommends

As GEAR is adopted government-wide, GAO recommends that the Director of OPM, in collaboration with the CHCO Council, define roles and responsibilities for OPM, the CHCO Council, and individual agencies, in such areas as updating the toolkit (as needed) and disseminating information on GEAR more broadly. GAO also recommends that OPM, Coast Guard, HUD, and NCA update their GEAR project plans to be consistent with best practices for project planning.

OPM, DHS, HUD, and VA agreed with the recommendations.

View [GAO-13-755](#). For more information, contact Robert Goldenkoff, (202) 512-6806, or [goldenkoff@gao.gov](mailto:goldenkoff@gao.gov)

#### What GAO Found

GAO found that the GEAR framework generally addresses previously identified key practices for effective performance management, such as aligning individual performance expectations with organizational goals, but refinements could improve future government-wide implementation. Five federal agencies are piloting GEAR—the Departments of Energy (DOE), Homeland Security/Coast Guard (DHS/Coast Guard), Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Veterans Affairs/National Cemetery Administration (VA/NCA), and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM)—with the intention to expand GEAR government-wide. The Chief Human Capital Officers Council (CHCO Council) is developing a toolkit based, among other things, on the experience of the pilot agencies. The toolkit is intended to help additional agencies implement the GEAR framework; CHCO Council representatives expect the toolkit to be complete by the end of September 2013. However, beyond the toolkit, neither the CHCO Council nor OPM have identified next steps to implement GEAR government-wide, such as identifying roles and responsibilities. Further, neither OPM nor the CHCO Council has plans to regularly update the GEAR framework or toolkit to include additional lessons learned, or to make such information available more broadly to key stakeholders, such as human resource professionals who may be responsible for future implementation. Without taking these steps, agencies that have already begun implementing GEAR risk losing their momentum; in addition, it may be challenging to implement GEAR government-wide.

The five pilot agencies adopted various approaches to implementing GEAR – DOE, HUD, and OPM implemented GEAR agency-wide, while Coast Guard and NCA adopted GEAR in single units – based on agency needs, available resources, and GAO's lessons learned to date. For example, early stakeholder involvement, including engagement between those representing labor and management, resulted in greater transparency and fewer obstacles. In addition, administering employee surveys to identify the greatest needs before implementing GEAR helped establish a baseline to better track results.

Each of the pilot agencies developed a GEAR project plan that outlined specific actions. DOE's GEAR plan was the most thoroughly documented. The other four agency plans did not include all project planning best practices, as shown in the table below. Without these elements, agencies may be limited in their ability to determine what needs to be done, when it should be done, who should do it, and how to measure progress towards achieving objectives.

Some Agencies' GEAR Project Plans Were More Complete Than Others

Agency	Extent to which plans included project planning good practices				
	Objectives	Specific actions	Roles and responsibilities	Schedules	Performance measures
Coast Guard	Yes	Yes	Yes	Partially <sup>a</sup>	No
DOE	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
HUD	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
NCA	Yes	Yes	Partially <sup>a</sup>	Partially <sup>a</sup>	No
OPM	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes

Source: GAO analysis.

<sup>a</sup>GAO assessed an agency's plan as partially including a best practice if it included limited information on a specific best practice but did not do so consistently throughout the plan.