

Why GAO Did This Study

DOD has long sought to improve the efficiency of its weapon system acquisition process, including the time and effort needed to complete the milestone decision process.

The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2014 mandated GAO to review DOD's weapon system acquisition process. This report examines (1) the effort and value involved in the preparation for a milestone decision; (2) factors that influence the time needed to complete the milestone decision process; and (3) alternative processes used by some DOD programs and leading commercial firms.

To perform this work, GAO examined the levels of review and information requirements that are part of DOD's process. GAO surveyed 24 program managers and 40 other DOD officials on the value and the time to complete milestone documentation. For 15 program offices, we gathered data on the time to complete the entire milestone decision process. GAO discussed with DOD officials the factors that lead to inefficiencies. GAO also examined practices used by some classified DOD programs and five commercial firms generally recognized as leaders in product development.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOD identify and potentially eliminate reviews and information requirements that are no longer needed and select programs to pilot more streamlined approaches to provide only the most essential information to decision makers. DOD concurred with both recommendations.

View [GAO-15-192](#). For more information, contact Michael J. Sullivan, (202) 512-4841 or sullivanm@gao.gov.

ACQUISITION REFORM

DOD Should Streamline Its Decision-Making Process for Weapon Systems to Reduce Inefficiencies

What GAO Found

The acquisition programs GAO surveyed spent, on average, over 2 years completing numerous information requirements for their most recent milestone decision, yet acquisition officials considered only about half of the requirements as high value. The requirements, in total, averaged 5,600 staff days to document.



Source: GAO analysis of DOD data. | GAO-15-192

The Department of Defense's (DOD) review process is a key factor that influences the time needed to complete information requirements. The process in some instances can include up to 56 organizations at 8 levels and accounts for about half of the time needed to complete information requirements. Most program managers felt that these reviews added high value to only 10 percent of the documents.

Comparison of Review Levels for DOD Traditional and Classified Programs



Source: GAO presentation of DOD data. | GAO-15-192

DOD's F-16 aircraft program, some classified programs, and five commercial firms GAO visited use streamlined processes with fewer documents and reviews and offer alternatives to the traditional DOD process. Establishing an efficient process for documentation and oversight is a key internal control to avoid wasteful spending. The challenge is to find the right balance between effective oversight and the competing demands on programs. DOD, however, has not yet identified ways to achieve the right balance by minimizing the time spent on information requirements and reviews that contribute to its inefficient milestone decision process.