

## RECOVERY ACT

### GSA's Courthouse Projects Illustrate Opportunities to Improve Management Practices and Analyze Environmental Outcomes

#### Why GAO Did This Study

The Recovery Act provided GSA with \$5.55 billion—over three times the agency's 2009 funding for new construction and renovations—to invest in federal buildings and U.S. courthouses. This amount included \$4.5 billion to convert federal buildings and U.S. courthouses into green buildings that would reduce energy and water use, among other goals.

GAO was asked to review GSA's use of Recovery Act funds as they related to courthouses. This report examines (1) how GSA determined which courthouse projects to fund under the Recovery Act, (2) how GSA's management of selected Recovery Act projects aligned with successful practices and whether these projects disrupted judiciary operations, and (3) how GSA set environmental goals for courthouses and whether selected projects met those goals. GAO reviewed relevant laws and agency documents, collected cost and schedule data on courthouse projects, and analyzed environmental outcomes for 10 projects. GAO selected these 10 Recovery Act courthouse projects, based on project size, type, and location, and interviewed GSA officials and judiciary tenants about GSA's management and coordination.

#### What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that GSA (1) examine incorporating successful management practices into its capital investment process and (2) analyze and apply environmental outcomes for green Recovery Act projects. GSA agreed with GAO's recommendations.

#### What GAO Found

The General Services Administration (GSA) developed eight selection criteria for utilizing its \$4.5 billion in high-performing green (green) building funds—or more than 80 percent of its total \$5.5-billion budget—under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (Recovery Act). GSA used almost \$800 million of its \$4.5-billion green building funds on 15 full or partial modernization projects and the remaining funds were used on federal buildings or limited scope projects. For example, at the Hipolito F. Garcia Federal Building and U.S. Courthouse in San Antonio, Texas, GSA installed solar panels and a solar water heater on the roof, installed a green roof on the interior courtyard, and replaced the building's lighting. In addition, as of May 2014, GSA used \$257 million of the \$750 million in Recovery Act funds dedicated to federal buildings and U.S. courthouses to construct or acquire seven courthouses.

GSA management of selected Recovery Act courthouse projects did not always align with seven successful practices that GAO developed for managing large-scale investments. GAO's more in-depth review of 10 courthouses showed that while GSA generally provided top leadership support and sufficient funding, its management of these Recovery Act projects did not always align with the remaining five practices. For example, judiciary tenants at 3 of the 10 courthouses said that GSA management did not actively engage with judiciary stakeholders during construction. In one case, judiciary officials at the Federico Degetau Federal Building and Clemente Ruiz Nazario Courthouse in Puerto Rico said they were not consulted on the project's phased schedule approach that required the closure of all public restrooms in the operating courthouse for a year, except for one restroom on the seventh floor of the adjoining federal building. For the projects GAO reviewed, when GSA did not incorporate the successful practices, GAO found that projects were more likely to experience schedule delays, cost increases, or lack of tenant support. GAO found that most judiciary tenants were satisfied with the completed projects, although tenants at 4 courthouses said the projects disrupted court operations.

GSA set environmental goals by establishing minimum performance criteria (MPC) to guide how it designed green courthouse Recovery Act projects; however, environmental outcomes are not yet known. The MPC included dozens of environmental requirements for projects in areas such as energy, water, and material use. While some Recovery Act projects have been completed for several years and GSA has the necessary data to evaluate projects, GSA officials have not developed a schedule for analyzing building performance against the MPC. GAO evaluated the extent to which the selected courthouses with a year or more of operational data contributed toward the energy and water-reduction goals that GSA used to develop the MPC. GAO found that as of fiscal year 2014, 2 of the 5 courthouses with available data are contributing toward energy reduction goals, and all 4 courthouses with available data are contributing toward water reduction goals. Without evaluating the performance of courthouse projects against the MPC, GSA lacks important information that could guide the agency's future investments in green infrastructure.