

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-16-110](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

IQA, passed in fiscal year 2001, required OMB to issue government-wide guidelines by the end of that fiscal year to ensure the quality of information disseminated by federal agencies. OMB issued guidance to agencies to clarify how agencies were to satisfy the law and otherwise implement IQA. The guidance required agencies to develop and post IQA guidelines and related information on their websites. GAO reported in 2006 that expanded oversight and clearer guidance by OMB could improve agencies' implementation of IQA. GAO was asked to conduct an updated study on IQA. This report (1) identifies the number, source, and final disposition of IQA correction requests received by the 24 Chief Financial Officers (CFO) Act and other agencies for fiscal years 2010 through 2014 and (2) assesses the extent to which the 24 CFO Act and other agencies that received correction requests made IQA information publicly available, among other objectives. GAO obtained data on IQA guidelines and other IQA-related information from the 24 CFO Act agencies and 6 additional agencies that reported receiving IQA correction requests for fiscal years 2010 through 2014. GAO also reviewed agency websites and interviewed OMB and agency officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that OMB (1) consolidate and centralize on its website a summary of IQA correction requests, (2) work with DOD and FHFA to help ensure they post required IQA administrative mechanisms and guidance online, and (3) provide additional guidance to help improve the transparency and usability of IQA websites to ensure the public can easily find and access online information. OMB agreed with these recommendations.

View [GAO-16-110](#). For more information, contact Robert Goldenkoff at (202) 512-2757 or goldenkoffr@gao.gov

December 2015

INFORMATION QUALITY ACT

Actions Needed to Improve Transparency and Reporting of Correction Requests

What GAO Found

Of the 30 agencies in GAO's review, 16 reported on their respective websites receiving a total of 87 Information Quality Act (IQA) correction requests from fiscal years 2010 through 2014, while 14 agencies did not post any requests during this time. Three agencies—the Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Health and Human Services, and Department of Interior—reported receiving 61 of the 87 requests. Agencies are required to post all IQA correspondence, including a copy of each correction request and the agencies' formal response on their websites. However, 8 agencies who reported receiving IQA correction requests did not post on their website the same number of IQA correction requests that they reported to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). In most cases, agencies indicated that the discrepancies were due to the time frames for posting information to their respective websites. OMB officials said they are communicating with agencies to address these discrepancies. GAO found that trade associations and advocacy organizations (50 of 87) submitted the most IQA correction requests, followed by private citizens (16), and businesses (13). GAO also found that IQA correction requests either (1) questioned agencies' use of or agencies' interpretation of data used or (2) cited administrative errors. For example, a trade association questioned the accuracy of data used in public service advertising on childhood lead poisoning prevention. Agencies did not make the requested corrections in 59 of the 87 IQA correction requests. IQA is one of several processes available to the public for requesting corrections of agency information. In one-fourth (15 of 59) of the requests where agencies determined that no change should be made, agencies addressed those requests through an administrative mechanism other than the dedicated IQA request for correction process.

OMB posts IQA information online, including links to agency-specific IQA guidelines; however, there is no central location on OMB's website where a user could access all IQA data, making specific IQA data more difficult to find and hindering transparency of the process. Twenty-eight of the 30 agencies in GAO's review posted the required IQA information online as of November 2015. The Department of Defense's (DOD) posted IQA information did not include the administrative mechanisms needed to submit a correction request to the agency as required. The Federal Housing Finance Agency's (FHFA) online information did not include its required IQA guidance. Without this information, the public may be unaware of the steps the agencies would take upon receiving a correction request, or even how to submit a correction request. OMB staff stated they would work with the agencies to improve the information on their websites, but as of December 2015, they had not completed that process. Ensuring that online content is accurate is one of the guidelines for federal digital services. These guidelines are aimed at helping federal agencies improve their communications and interactions with customers through websites. GAO found at least five agencies did not include any information regarding correction requests and other agencies' posts included outdated information or contained broken hyperlinks. The Department of Energy's web page includes a link to its IQA processes but as of November 2015 the page to submit correction requests online was under construction. OMB requires agencies to post information quality correspondence on agency websites to increase the transparency of the process but has not provided specific guidance to agencies for posting accessible, user-oriented information, including specific time frames for posting information, explanations of and links to other available correction processes, and other suggestions for improving website usability. Providing such guidance will help increase transparency and allow the public to view all IQA related information including correction requests, appeal requests, and agency responses to those requests.