

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-16-602](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

In an effort to improve IT across the federal government, in March 2014 GSA established 18F, which provides IT services (e.g., develop websites) to agencies. In addition, in August 2014 the Administration established USDS, which aims to improve public-facing federal IT services. The President's Budget for fiscal year 2016 also proposed funding for agencies to establish their own digital service teams.

GAO was asked to review 18F and USDS. GAO's objectives were to (1) describe 18F and USDS efforts to address problems with IT projects and agencies' views of services provided, (2) assess these programs' efforts against practices for performance measurement and project prioritization, and (3) assess agency plans to establish their own digital service teams. To do so, GAO reviewed 32 18F projects and 13 USDS projects that were underway or completed as of August 2015 and surveyed agencies about these projects; reviewed 18F and USDS in key performance measurement and project prioritization practices; reviewed 25 agencies' efforts to establish digital service teams; and reviewed documentation from four agencies, which were chosen based on their progress made in establishing digital service teams.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making two recommendations to GSA and two recommendations to OMB to improve goals and performance measurement. GAO is also recommending that OMB update policy regarding CIOs and digital services teams. GSA and OMB concurred with the recommendations.

View [GAO-16-602](#). For more information, contact David A. Powner at (202) 512-9286 or pownerd@gao.gov.

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DIGITAL SERVICE PROGRAMS

Assessing Results and Coordinating with Chief Information Officers Can Improve Delivery of Federal Projects

What GAO Found

The General Service Administration's (GSA) 18F and Office of Management and Budget's (OMB) U.S. Digital Service (USDS) have provided a variety of services to agencies supporting their information technology (IT) efforts. Specifically, 18F staff helped 18 agencies with 32 projects and generally provided development and consulting services, including software development solutions and acquisition consulting. In addition, USDS provided assistance on 13 projects across 11 agencies and generally provided consulting services, including quality assurance, problem identification and recommendations, and software engineering. Further, according to GAO's survey, managers were generally satisfied with the services they received from 18F and USDS on these projects (see table).

Results of GAO Survey on Satisfaction with Digital Services Projects

Program	Very satisfied	Moderately satisfied	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied	Moderately dissatisfied	No response
18F	16	7	0	3	5
U.S. Digital Service	6	3	0	0	4

Source: GAO survey of agency project managers that engaged with 18F and U.S. Digital Service. | GAO-16-602

Both 18F and USDS have partially implemented practices to identify and help agencies address problems with IT projects. Specifically, 18F has developed several outcome-oriented goals and related performance measures, as well as procedures for prioritizing projects; however, not all of its goals are outcome-oriented and it has not yet fully measured program performance. Similarly, USDS has developed goals, but they are not all outcome-oriented and it has established performance measures for only one of its goals. USDS has also measured progress for just one goal. Until 18F and USDS fully implement these practices, it will be difficult to hold the programs accountable for results.

Agencies are beginning to establish digital service teams. Of the 25 agencies included in the President's proposed funding for agency digital service teams, OMB has established charters with 6 agencies for their digital service teams. In addition, according to the Deputy USDS Administrator, USDS expects to establish charters with an additional 2 agencies by the end of the fiscal year—the Department of Education and the Small Business Administration. For the remaining 16 agencies, as of April 2016, 8 agencies reported that they plan to establish digital service teams but have yet to establish charters with USDS. The other 9 agencies reported that they do not plan to establish digital service teams by September 2016 and most noted that it was because they did not receive requested funding to do so. Further, of the 4 agencies GAO selected to review, only 1 has defined the relationship between its digital service team and the agency Chief Information Officer (CIO). This is due, in part, to the fact that USDS policy does not describe the expected relationship between CIOs and these teams. Until OMB updates its policy and ensures that the responsibilities between the CIOs and digital services teams are clearly defined, it is unclear whether CIOs will be able to fulfill their statutory responsibilities with respect to IT management of the projects undertaken by the digital service teams.