

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-17-156](#), a report to congressional addressees

## Why GAO Did This Study

Effective implementation of the DATA Act will allow federal funds to be better tracked and greatly increase the types of data made publicly available. OMB and Treasury have taken significant steps to implement the act, but challenges remain as the critical deadline of May 2017 approaches. Consistent with GAO's mandate under the act, this report is one in a series of products GAO will provide to Congress providing oversight of DATA Act implementation. This report examines (1) steps taken to establish a clear data governance structure which is important during the upcoming transition to a new administration, (2) challenges reported by major agencies in their implementation plan updates, (3) the operationalization of government-wide data standards and technical specifications for data reporting, and (4) updated designs for the Section 5 pilot for reducing recipient reporting burden and progress made in its implementation. GAO reviewed key implementation documents, compared the Section 5 Pilot to leading practices, and interviewed staff at OMB, Treasury, and other selected agencies.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is making one new recommendation: that for the Section 5 Pilot, OMB clearly document in its design of the procurement portion how data collected through the centralized certified payroll reporting portal will be applied to other required procurement reporting. Moving forward, additional progress needs to be made to address GAO's 11 previous DATA Act recommendations that remain open. OMB neither agreed nor disagreed with GAO's recommendation.

View [GAO-17-156](#). For more information, contact J. Christopher Mihm (202) 512-6806 or [Mihmj@gao.gov](mailto:Mihmj@gao.gov) or Paula Rascona at (202) 512-9816 or [Rasconap@gao.gov](mailto:Rasconap@gao.gov)

December 2016

## DATA ACT

### OMB and Treasury Have Issued Additional Guidance and Have Improved Pilot Design but Implementation Challenges Remain

## What GAO Found

**Data governance and the transition to the new administration.** Consistent with a July 2015 GAO recommendation to establish clear policies and processes that follow leading practices for data governance under the Digital Accountability and Transparency Act of 2014 (DATA Act), the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the Department of the Treasury (Treasury) have taken the initial step of convening a committee to maintain established standards and identify new standards. Although this represents progress, more needs to be done to establish a data governance structure that is consistent with key practices to ensure the integrity of standards over time. The upcoming transition to a new administration presents risks to implementing the DATA Act, potentially including shifted priorities or lost momentum. The lack of a data governance structure for managing efforts going forward jeopardizes the ability to sustain progress as priorities shift over time.

**Implementation plan updates.** The 24 Chief Financial Officers Act agencies continue to face challenges implementing the DATA Act, according to information in their implementation plan updates. GAO identified four categories of challenges reported by agencies that may impede their ability to implement the act: systems integration issues, lack of resources, evolving and complex reporting requirements, and inadequate guidance. To address these challenges, agencies reported changing internal policies and procedures; leveraging existing resources; and using external resources, and manual and temporary workarounds, among other actions.

**Operationalizing data standards and technical specifications for data reporting.** OMB issued additional guidance on how agencies should report data involving specific transactions, such as intragovernmental transfers, and how agencies should provide quality assurances for submitted data. However, this guidance does not provide sufficient detail in areas such as the process for providing assurance on data submissions and it does not address others, such as how agencies should operationalize the definitions for data elements (e.g., primary place of performance and award description). Treasury released a new version of the DATA Act Broker—a system that collects and validates agency data—in October 2016 and is making minor adjustments to its functionality. Agencies have reported making progress creating and testing their data submissions, but some report needing to rely on interim solutions for initial reporting while they wait for automated processes to be developed.

**Pilot to reduce recipient reporting burden.** GAO reviewed the revised design for both the grants and procurement portions of the pilot and found that they partly met each of the leading practices for effective pilot design. Although this represented significant progress since April 2016, GAO identified an area where further improvement is still needed. Specifically, the plan for the procurement portion of the pilot does not clearly document how findings related to the centralized certified payroll reporting portal will be applicable to other types of required procurement reporting. This is a particular concern given the diversity of federal procurement reporting requirements. To date, all six components of the grant portion are underway. Data collection for the procurement portion is delayed and is not expected to begin until January or February 28, 2017.