What GAO Did This Study
In fiscal year 2018, Congress directed GSA and the Office of Management and Budget to establish and implement a program for agencies to buy products through online marketplaces. This report examines GSA’s ability to monitor providers’ compliance with data protection requirements. This report reviews GSA’s implementation of the commercial platforms program, the extent to which GSA is measuring program progress, and GSA’s oversight of platform providers’ efforts to protect data from unauthorized disclosure and use.

A House report accompanying the William M. (Mac) Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021 included a provision for GAO to review GSA’s ability to monitor providers’ compliance with data protection requirements. This report examines GSA’s implementation of the commercial platforms program, the extent to which GSA is measuring program progress, and GSA’s oversight of platform providers’ efforts to protect data from unauthorized disclosure and use.

What GAO Recommends
GAO recommends that GSA establish a comprehensive plan with goals and time frames for measuring program implementation and further develop its monitoring plan with specific actions to ensure that platform providers are complying with data protection requirements. GSA agreed with the recommendations.

Source: GAO analysis of platform providers’ information. | GAO-21-104572

* Suspended or debarred contractors are examples of prohibited suppliers. Preferred products or suppliers include environmentally sustainable products or small businesses.

GSA has established initial metrics for measuring program implementation, but it has not yet created a comprehensive plan with goals or clear time frames for assessing program progress. For example, GSA stated that it will track how sales are distributed across the three platforms, but it has not identified a goal of what percentage of sales across them is appropriate or the time frame to achieve that goal. As the program progresses, GSA can begin to change its focus from testing the commercial platforms program concept to measuring progress. Establishing a comprehensive plan that outlines goals and time frames for each metric will better position GSA to measure if the program is being implemented successfully or if the program needs changes before it is ultimately expanded government-wide, as is the current plan.

GSA developed a plan to oversee each platform provider’s compliance with requirements to protect government and supplier data. But it did not address some areas of compliance, and some actions within the plan may not effectively prevent unauthorized activity. For example, the data protection requirement prohibits providers from using third-party supplier data for pricing, marketing, or other activities. GSA’s monitoring plan states that it will track sales of products supplied by the providers and compare them to products from third-party suppliers. However, this approach does not clearly demonstrate whether a provider violated the data protection requirement. By including specific actions, such as regular reviews of providers’ policies in its monitoring plan, GSA will be better positioned to ensure that providers comply with the requirements to protect supplier or government data from unauthorized use.