

Highlights of [GAO-21-452T](#), a testimony before the Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

DHS OIG has a critical role in providing independent and objective oversight of DHS, which encompasses multiple operational and support components. OIGs are expected to maintain high standards of professionalism and integrity in light of their mission, according to quality standards developed by the community of federal Inspectors General. However, DHS OIG has faced a number of challenges that have affected its ability to carry out its oversight mission effectively.

This statement is based on GAO's draft report on DHS OIG's management and operations, which is currently at the agency for comment. It provides preliminary observations on DHS OIG's strategic planning processes; quality assurance processes; and reporting time frames for work from DHS OIG's offices of Audits and Special Reviews and Evaluations.

To develop these preliminary observations, GAO reviewed relevant federal laws and quality standards for federal OIGs as well as DHS OIG documentation, including organizational policies; internal communications such as emails and memoranda; and DHS OIG's semiannual reports to Congress and published reports. GAO also analyzed DHS OIG project data from fiscal years 2015 through 2020, and interviewed DHS OIG leaders and other staff.

What GAO Recommends

GAO will complete its review and make recommendations, as appropriate, in the final report.

View [GAO-21-452T](#). For more information, contact Chris Currie at (404) 679-1875 or curriec@gao.gov.

April 21, 2021

DHS OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Preliminary Observations on Long-Standing Management and Operational Challenges

What GAO Found

GAO's preliminary work has identified a number of management and operational challenges, including frequent leadership turnover, since fiscal year 2015 that have impeded the overall effectiveness of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Office of Inspector General (OIG). DHS OIG senior leaders have acknowledged that these challenges have contributed to organizational weaknesses, and have taken steps to begin addressing some of them. GAO's preliminary work has identified issues in the following areas, among others:

- **Strategic planning:** DHS OIG has not consistently developed strategic plans, which are a necessary input for developing the organization's other guiding documents and governance framework. Specifically, DHS OIG has operated for 4 of the past 6 years without a strategic plan, and the plan it adopted for fiscal years 2018–2019 included some, but not all, of the elements considered standard for federal entities. In 2020, DHS OIG contracted with a nonprofit academy of government experts to develop a strategic plan for fiscal years 2021–2025, with expected delivery in June 2021.
- **Quality assurance:** Internal and external reviews have reported on concerns about quality assurance in some of DHS OIG's work. In 2017 and 2018, after an internal review found that some reports issued by DHS OIG may not have adhered to the professional standards cited, DHS OIG retracted 13 audit reports that had been issued over a 5-year period. In 2018, an external review determined that DHS OIG needed to improve its system of quality control. Though DHS OIG concurred with all of the recommendations from that external review, it did not fully implement them. In addition, DHS OIG has not established roles and responsibilities for an organization-wide quality assurance program. Moreover, GAO's preliminary work indicates that current staff allocations may limit DHS OIG's quality assurance reviews to focusing on audit work and not on the other types of work it produces, including inspections, evaluations, special reviews, and management alerts.
- **Timeliness:** DHS OIG project time frames for work from its offices of Audits and Special Reviews and Evaluations have increased over the 4 fiscal years GAO assessed. For example, in fiscal year 2017, 79 of 102 Office of Audits projects were completed in 1 year or less and eight of 102 took more than 18 months. In fiscal year 2020, seven of 67 reports were completed in 1 year or less and more than half (35 of 67) took more than 18 months. In addition, DHS OIG has not assessed time frames for work completed by these offices, though timeliness in reporting is a key element of effective oversight and DHS OIG staff considered it an organizational weakness.

GAO will complete its evaluation of these and other management and operational areas, and will issue a final report in the coming months.