

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-21-77](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

DHS invests billions of dollars each year in its major acquisition programs—such as systems to help secure the border, increase marine safety, and screen travelers—to help execute its many critical missions. In fiscal year 2020 alone, DHS planned to spend more than \$10 billion on major acquisition programs, and ultimately the department plans to invest more than \$200 billion over the life cycle of these programs. A critical aspect of DHS’s acquisition process is oversight of this portfolio by the CAEs. Most CAEs are senior acquisition officials below the department level, within the components. The CAEs have oversight responsibilities over the components’ major and non-major acquisition programs, among other duties.

GAO was asked to review DHS’s CAE functions. This report assesses the extent to which selected CAEs are nominated and designated to execute oversight responsibilities, among other objectives. GAO selected five DHS components, including the department-level Management Directorate, based, in part, on their number and type of acquisitions. GAO reviewed DHS’s acquisition policy, guidance and documentation from the selected DHS components and interviewed CAEs, CAE support staff, and other DHS officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making four recommendations, including that DHS execute the CAE nomination and designation process consistently as defined in its guidance. DHS concurred with all four recommendations.

View [GAO-21-77](#). For more information, contact Marie A. Mak at (202) 512-4841 or makm@gao.gov.

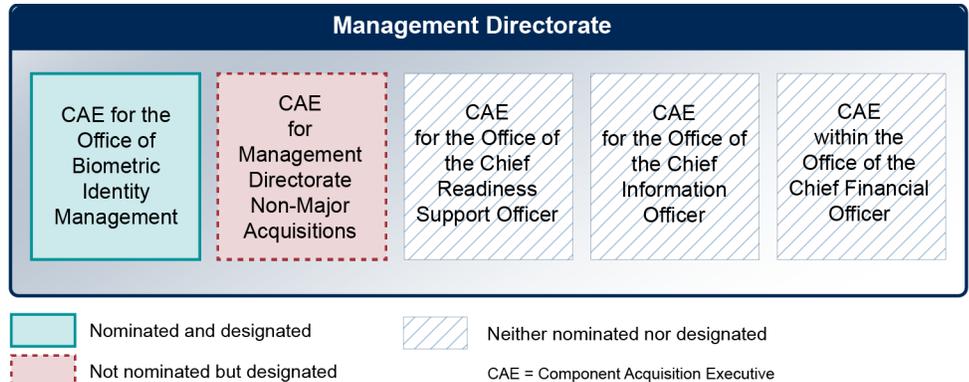
HOMELAND SECURITY ACQUISITIONS

DHS Has Opportunities to Improve Its Component Acquisition Oversight

What GAO Found

Four components—Transportation Security Administration, Coast Guard, Customs and Border Protection, and the Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction Office—within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) implemented the process to formally nominate and designate Component Acquisition Executives (CAE). However, four of the five individuals filling the CAE role—three as acting CAE—in the Management Directorate have not been subjected to this process (see figure). The process, described in guidance, entails preparing a nomination package for DHS to vet candidates’ qualifications against criteria, and designating the selected individual in writing.

Nomination and Designation Status of Department of Homeland Security’s Management Directorate Component Acquisition Executives as of April 2020



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Homeland Security information. | [GAO-21-77](#)

Note: Non-major acquisitions are those with an expected life-cycle cost of less than \$300 million.

DHS indicated that the direct reporting relationship of acting CAEs to the DHS Chief Acquisition Officer makes designating CAEs in the Management Directorate through this process unnecessary. Without using the nomination and designation process, DHS officials lack a standard way to gain insight into the background of the acting CAEs and whether any gaps in experience need to be mitigated. For example, the CAE for the Coast Guard was nominated and designated, but the CAE did not have the acquisition experience that guidance suggests for the position. In the nomination documentation, the Coast Guard identified this issue and described the experienced staff that will support the nominated CAE. However, DHS cannot be confident that the acting CAEs in the Management Directorate are taking mitigation steps, because they have not been subject to this process. Until DHS consistently executes the nomination and designation process described in its guidance, the Chief Acquisition Officer cannot be assured that all acquisition programs are receiving oversight by individuals qualified for the CAE position.