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# HOMELAND SECURITY

## Actions Needed to Address Longstanding Gaps in Human Resources IT

## Why GAO Did This Study

Since DHS was created in 2002 and merged 22 agencies into one department, its human resources environment has included duplicative systems and paper-based processes. DHS initiated its human resources IT portfolio initiative in 2003 to consolidate and modernize the department's human resources systems.

GAO was asked to provide an update on DHS's progress in implementing the portfolio initiative. GAO's objectives were to, among other things, (1) identify progress in achieving goals, (2) evaluate the extent to which DHS implemented portfolio management practices, and (3) identify any challenges in overseeing shared service providers.

GAO reviewed project documentation to determine actions taken relative to goals; evaluated HRIT portfolio documentation against best practices for portfolio management; compared DHS actions to address their identified challenges to federal requirements; reviewed documents from a key shared service provider (Agriculture) and compared them to federal requirements; and conducted interviews.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is making 10 recommendations, including nine to DHS to identify a strategy and goals for HRIT; address remaining portfolio management gaps; and reevaluate options to replace and secure aging systems; and one to Agriculture to renegotiate agreements to enable DHS access to cybersecurity documents. DHS and Agriculture generally concurred with the recommendations.

View GAO-25-107233. For more information, contact Kevin Walsh at WalshK@gao.gov.

## What GAO Found

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) started a human resources IT (HRIT) portfolio (a collection of related IT projects) initiative in 2003 to modernize systems. According to the Department's Inspector General, by 2010 DHS had made limited progress on the initiative. In 2010, the DHS Deputy Secretary announced that the department could no longer sustain a component-based approach for human resource IT. Accordingly, in 2011 DHS announced 15 program goals; most goals were aimed at delivering enterprise-wide solutions.

After nine years of effort from 2011 to 2020 that resulted in not meeting 12 of the 15 goals, DHS refined and replaced the goals with five different goals. However, it discontinued use of those goals in 2022 and further refined and replaced HRIT's goals with two new draft goals. As of April 2025, these goals remain in draft status. Between 2005 and 2023, GAO estimates that, based on available data, DHS has spent at least $262 million on this initiative.

The lack of progress in achieving its goals is due in part to gaps in DHS's implementation of six key portfolio management practice areas (see table below). For example, DHS does not have an approved strategy and goals, and lacks cost data for 28 of 49 projects, which prevents fully measuring portfolio performance.

### DHS's Human Resources IT Implementation of Portfolio Management Practices

| Portfolio management practice area | GAO rating |
| --- | --- |
| Strategic management (e.g. developing a strategic plan) | ◑ |
| Governance (e.g. developing a portfolio governance board) | ◑ |
| Capacity and capability management (e.g. allocating resources) | ◑ |
| Stakeholder engagement (e.g. implementing a stakeholder engagement plan) | ◑ |
| Performance management (e.g. measuring performance against metrics) | ○ |
| Risk management (e.g. utilizing a risk register to track portfolio risks) | ◑ |

Legend: ●=Fully implemented ◑=Partially implemented ○=Not implemented

Source: GAO analysis of the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) human resources IT portfolio documentation against practices defined in Project Management Institute, Inc., *The Standard for Portfolio Management – Fourth Edition* (Newton Square, PA: 2017). | GAO-25-107233

According to DHS officials, they are experiencing two challenges in overseeing federal shared service providers, such as the U.S. Department of Agriculture—a provider of payroll, personnel actions, and time and attendance services to DHS.

- DHS has had difficulties in ensuring Agriculture is adhering to federal cybersecurity requirements. Although DHS and others have reported significant cybersecurity concerns with Agriculture systems, they have not been successful in obtaining requested documents from Agriculture. According to DHS officials, they need these documents to comply with their cybersecurity responsibilities under federal requirements and guidance.

- In November 2024, Agriculture finalized a plan to modernize two critical aging mainframe systems that are essential to DHS. However, according to officials, that plan is now on hold as new leadership assesses whether the effort will continue.

_____ **United States Government Accountability Office**