

A report to congressional committees

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What GAO Found

Each year, the federal government spends trillions of dollars on federal programs that support the American people and address policy goals. Statutory provisions first enacted in 2011 require the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) to develop and annually update an inventory of all federal programs.

OMB’s January 2025 update to the federal program inventory website demonstrates continued progress in fulfilling statutory requirements. However, OMB has not yet fully addressed 13 of the 20 requirements. For example, the inventory does not yet include all federal programs, such as foreign assistance or defense programs. It also does not provide all required program, spending, and performance information for the more than 2,600 programs currently included in it. Without a complete inventory, decision-makers lack a critical tool to help them better identify and manage fragmentation, overlap, and duplication across the federal government.

GAO identified opportunities for OMB to improve the transparency and usefulness of the inventory. GAO found that the inventory was not fully consistent with four out of five related key practices GAO’s work previously identified, which can help ensure federal websites address relevant requirements.

Inventory Consistency with Key Practices for Transparent and Useful Websites

Key Practices	GAO Assessment
Provide free and unrestricted data	●
Engage with users	◐
Provide data in useful formats	◐
Fully describe the data	◐
Facilitate data discovery for all users	◐

● Fully consistent with key practice ◐ Partially consistent with key practice ○ Not consistent

Source: GAO analysis of the Federal Program Inventory. | GAO-26-107551

For example, the practice to fully describe the data involves an action to disclose known data quality issues and limitations. GAO found that OMB had disclosed some inventory data quality issues, such as potential discrepancies between two different sources of program spending data. GAO’s assessment identified additional quality issues, such as inactive programs being included in the inventory and missing spending data.

GAO also sought perspectives from 10 organizations that represented actual and potential inventory users. Their feedback at times aligned with GAO’s assessment. For example, five stated that the inventory would be more useful if it more clearly stated its limitations, such as identifying the types of programs not yet included and the proportion of federal spending those programs represent.

Without fully incorporating the key practices into its activities for managing the website, OMB cannot ensure that the inventory addresses relevant federal requirements or provides transparent and useful information that meets the needs of various users, such as Congress, agency leaders, and the public.

Why GAO Did This Study

A comprehensive listing of programs, along with related funding and performance information, would help federal decision-makers and the public better understand what the government does, spends, and achieves each year.

The William M. (Mac) Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021 includes provisions for GAO to review program inventory implementation. This is the second report in a series of products responding to those provisions and assesses the extent to which (1) the inventory provides information consistent with statutory requirements, and (2) opportunities exist to improve the transparency and usefulness of the inventory.

To address these objectives, GAO compared the information on the January 2025 inventory website to statutory requirements and key practices for transparent and useful websites. GAO also obtained perspectives from 10 selected organizations that represented a range of actual and potential users, such as recipients of federal awards and federal agency management.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making 17 recommendations to OMB: 13 recommendations relate to fully addressing statutory requirements to implement a complete inventory, and 4 recommendations relate to taking actions consistent with key practices for enhancing the inventory’s transparency and usefulness.

OMB did not provide comments.