

**Census Bureau Needs to Better Manage Schedule for Modernization Program**

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A report to congressional requesters

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**What GAO Found**

The Census Bureau fully implemented leading practices for risk management for its enterprise-wide data storage and processing modernization program (known as the Enterprise Data Lake). It also substantially implemented leading practices for managing requirements and cost estimating. However, the Bureau partially implemented leading practices for developing and maintaining the schedule for the program, as shown in the table.

**Extent to Which the Census Bureau Implemented Leading Practices for Managing the Enterprise Data Lake Program**

Management Area	Overall Assessment	Assessment by Leading Practice
Risk Management	● Fully implemented	● ● ● ● ●
Requirements Management	● Substantially implemented	● ● ● ○
Cost Estimation	● Substantially implemented	● ● ● ●
Schedule	○ Partially implemented	○ ○ ○ ○

Source: GAO analysis of Census Bureau data. | GAO-26-107629

The program’s management of risk and requirements improves its ability to mitigate risks and deliver on the program. However, the program’s requirements management plan was not in alignment with its process for managing low-level requirements. Thus, the program may have difficulty ensuring that low-level requirements are documented consistently. Documenting requirements can ensure that there is consistency between the requirements and the solution, which increases the likelihood that the solution will meet user needs.

Additionally, the program fully met two of the four characteristics of a high-quality, reliable cost estimate (well documented and accurate), and substantially met the remaining two characteristics (comprehensive and credible). As a result, GAO found that the program’s cost estimate was reliable. However, the program’s schedule estimate was unreliable. The program did not substantially meet any of the four characteristics of a reliable schedule: comprehensive, well-constructed, credible, and controlled. Without fully implementing leading practices for a reliable schedule, the Bureau faces schedule uncertainty that may result in unreliable completion dates, time extension requests, and delays in the program.

The Bureau partially implemented leading practices for managing selected interdependencies among its four IT modernization programs. For example, to manage stakeholder interdependencies among the programs, it is holding regular meetings with stakeholders to discuss program status, risks, and issues. However, the Bureau does not have a process to ensure that changes to survey onboarding dates are incorporated, if applicable, into the schedules for the related IT modernization programs. Without a documented process for managing interdependent schedule changes, the Bureau may not identify schedule disconnects early enough to allow program management sufficient time to make decisions. Potential schedule disconnects may also hinder the ability to predict the consequences of managerial action or inaction on events and increase the risk that the Bureau is unable to deliver a set of integrated systems for future surveys, such as the 2030 Census.

**Why GAO Did This Study**

The U.S. Census Bureau’s IT systems are essential to collecting and providing data about the nation’s people and economy. Prior to the 2020 Census, the Bureau, a component of the Department of Commerce, faced challenges in modernizing and consolidating its IT systems. For future surveys, including the 2030 Census, the Bureau has embarked on four modernization programs to collect, store, process, and disseminate data.

GAO was asked to review the Bureau’s implementation of key modernization programs. This report (1) evaluates the extent to which the Bureau is implementing leading practices in managing risks, requirements, cost estimates, and schedule for a selected enterprise-wide IT program; and (2) determines the extent to which the Bureau is managing selected interdependencies among the enterprise-wide IT programs.

GAO selected the data storage and processing program due to its critical role to the agency’s mission, and the maturity of its cost and schedule documentation. GAO assessed the program’s management of risks, requirements, cost, and schedule against leading practices. In addition, GAO reviewed prior GAO reports and Bureau documentation related to interdependencies among the four IT modernization programs and interviewed Bureau officials.

**What GAO Recommends**

GAO is making three recommendations to the Department of Commerce related to the Bureau managing requirements, developing a reliable schedule, and managing schedule interdependencies between the enterprise-wide IT programs. Commerce concurred with the recommendations and stated it would prepare a formal action plan.