



March 1997

Administration of Justice Issue Area Plan Fiscal Years 1997-98

Foreword

As the investigative arm of Congress and the nation's auditor, the General Accounting Office is charged with following the federal dollar wherever it goes. Reflecting stringent standards of objectivity and independence, GAO's audits, evaluations, and investigations promote a more efficient and cost-effective government; expose waste, fraud, abuse, and mismanagement in federal programs; help Congress target budget reductions; assess financial information management; and alert Congress to developing trends that may have significant fiscal or budgetary consequences. In fulfilling its responsibilities, GAO performs original research and uses hundreds of databases or creates its own when information is unavailable elsewhere.

To ensure that GAO's resources are directed toward the most important issues facing Congress, each of GAO's 32 issue areas develops a strategic plan that describes the significance of the issues it addresses, its objectives, and the focus of its work. Each issue area relies heavily on input from congressional committees, agency officials, and subject-matter experts in developing its strategic plan.

The Administration of Justice issue area covers the Department of Justice, the Department of the Treasury's investigative agencies, the judicial branch of the federal government, and several independent agencies. GAO's work in the justice area generally seeks to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the justice system. The principal issues in the justice area are

- federal law enforcement's response, in partnership with state and local governments, to violent crime, drugs, and other major threats facing society;
- the efficiency and effectiveness of the federal courts and corrections systems, given the increasing demands placed on them and current budgetary constraints;
- the Immigration and Naturalization Service's ability to effectively and efficiently enforce immigration laws and enhance service delivery; and
- the U.S. Customs Service's effectiveness in implementing its drug interdiction and investigative missions and fulfilling its trade enforcement mission.

In the pages that follow, we describe our planned work for fiscal years 1997 and 1998 relating to these issues.

Events in the justice area tend to move swiftly. Therefore, we designed a flexible planning process that will allow us to respond quickly to emerging issues. If you have any questions or suggestions about this plan, please call me at (202) 512-3610.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Norman Rabkin". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Norman" and last name "Rabkin" clearly distinguishable.

Norman J. Rabkin
Director, Administration of
Justice Issues

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Table I: Key Issues

Issue	Significance
Law enforcement: How can federal law enforcement, working with state and local governments, better respond to crime?	Crime is one of the foremost concerns of the American public. To address this concern, Congress has made many crimes involving drugs and firearms federal offenses and increased the budgets of the Department of Justice (DOJ) and the Department of the Treasury to investigate and prosecute them. Congress also has made billions of dollars available to states and localities to help them combat violent crime, drugs, terrorism, and juvenile delinquency in their communities. In addition, the President has called for a federal, state, and local partnership to address the crime problem. In the aftermath of the World Trade Center and Oklahoma City Federal Building bombings, Congress has further enhanced the authority of federal agencies to address the increasing threat of domestic and international terrorism and has increased funding to support counterterrorism activities.
Adjudication and corrections: How can the efficiency of federal courts be improved and correctional costs be better contained?	The increased scope of federal crimes and DOJ's resources to investigate and prosecute them has created tremendous demands on the federal judiciary and corrections systems. For example, criminal trials in district courts have increased about 25 percent since 1989, federal death penalty prosecutions have grown from 1 to 116, and prisoner appeals have grown 50 percent. The Federal Bureau of Prisons' inmate population now exceeds 106,000 and includes more women, more inmates over age 50, and more inmates with drug or mental health problems. Probation officers supervise another 85,000 offenders. On the civil side, 1996 bankruptcy filings are expected to exceed 1 million for the first time. Questions are being raised about how efficiently the courts and prisons are operating in light of these challenges.
Immigration: What actions can strengthen enforcement of immigration laws and INS' system of internal controls?	The effects on this country of legal and illegal immigration continue to be of major public and congressional concern. INS' fiscal year 1997 budget is \$3.1 billion, an increase of 16 percent over fiscal year 1996. Major legislation to curb the influx of illegal aliens was enacted at the end of fiscal year 1996. The Illegal Immigration Reform and Responsibility Act of 1996 contains numerous provisions aimed at strengthening the enforcement capabilities of INS. INS is under increasing scrutiny from Congress for its alleged instances of deception and wrongdoing, its ability to effectively use the additional resources, and its ability to carry out its new legislative mandates.
Customs: Is the Customs Service effectively performing its drug interdiction and trade enforcement missions?	The U.S. Customs Service is charged with enforcing the nation's trade laws by ensuring that illegal goods do not enter the United States while legal trade flows unimpeded. Customs faces increased demands from recent trade agreements (NAFTA and GATT), its involvement in drug interdiction activities, and pressure from domestic and foreign businesses to facilitate the movement of goods and people across U.S. borders. In addition, Customs has committed to enhance its export control activities. The traditional focus of Customs has been directed toward movement of goods coming into the United States. However, indications are that the attractiveness of the international black market makes enforcement efforts for outgoing goods increasingly important.

Table I: Key Issues

Objectives	Focus of work
• Assess federal progress in implementing certain major crime control initiatives and enforcement programs. • Review federal implementation and states' use of selected categorical grants for crime control to provide information on their outcomes and impacts.	• Assess progress of federal drug and firearms control efforts. • Assess FBI's role in carrying out the President's counterterrorism strategy. • Evaluate efforts to stem laundering of money derived from illegal drug activity. • For specific programs and activities, such as community policing and drug courts, assess federal law enforcement agencies' progress in implementing legislatively required plans and in establishing goals and performance measures.
• Report periodically to Congress on judiciary initiatives and other changes that could increase efficiency. • Identify strategies for containing cost growth in the corrections system.	• Assess status of selected Judicial Conference recommendations for efficiency. • Assess bankruptcy workload and judiciary's efforts to match resource distribution to workload. • Assess state practices that may be applicable to federal prison operations. • Evaluate BOP's effort to cost-effectively meet the needs of a changing inmate population.
• Identify ways to improve immigration enforcement efforts against illegal and criminal aliens. • Identify ways INS can improve internal controls over its management information system.	• Assess the implementation of the border strategy and its effects on illegal entry. • Assess the implementation and results of expedited procedures to remove aliens who attempt to enter the country without proper documents. • Evaluate the process for identifying and removing criminal aliens. • Assess the strengths and weaknesses of INS' management information system for budgetary and management decisionmaking. • Review aspects of INS' Citizenship USA program.
• Determine the effectiveness of Customs' drug interdiction and investigative efforts. • Determine the effectiveness of Customs' cargo and trade enforcement efforts.	• Evaluate Customs' drug interdiction and investigative efforts. • Assess Customs' cargo compliance measurement program, in-bond transfers, and other trade enforcement efforts. • Assess Customs' export control efforts.

Table II: Planned Major Work

Issue	Planned major job starts
Law enforcement	• Assess the operations of High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area task forces. • Assess the use of money laundering data in enforcement efforts. • Review the status of the “instant check” system required by the Brady Act. • Review the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms’ efforts to detect criminal sources of firearms. • Review FBI’s use of funds provided for counterterrorism activities.
Adjudication and corrections	• Assess implementation of judiciary initiatives with the most promise for reducing costs. • Assess judiciary’s management of its rising bankruptcy workload. • Provide options for managing cost effectively special needs populations in prisons. • Assess cost containment strategies of selected state prison systems.
Immigration	• Review border enforcement efforts along Southwest border. • Review expedited removal procedures at ports of entry. • Assess the quality of INS’ data used for its management information system. • Assess internal controls over criminal background checks of naturalization applicants.
Customs	• Analyze Customs’ efforts to interdict drug smugglers traveling via air and land transportation. • Assess Customs’ efforts to detect export of such contraband items as currency, firearms, and stolen cars at major land ports.

Table III: GAO Contacts

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