



Highlights of [GAO-05-300](#), a report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on National Security, Emerging Threats and International Relations, Committee on Government Reform, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The creation of the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) was the largest government reorganization in over 50 years, involving 170,000 employees and a \$40 billion budget. Given the magnitude of this effort, strategic planning is critical for DHS to ensure that it meets the nation's homeland security challenges. GAO was asked to assess the extent to which DHS's planning process and documents (1) address required elements of the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (GPRA) and other good strategic planning practices and (2) reflect its homeland and non-homeland security mission responsibilities.

What GAO Recommends

To make DHS a more results-oriented agency and allow for public oversight and accountability, GAO recommends that the Secretary ensure that (1) DHS consult directly with external stakeholders, including Congress, federal agencies, state and local governments, and the private sector, in its next strategic planning process and (2) DHS's next strategic plan includes a description of the relationship between annual performance goals and long-term goals, as required by GPRA, and adopt a number of good strategic planning practices. In commenting on a draft of this report, DHS generally agreed with GAO's recommendations and provided additional information that was incorporated, as appropriate.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-300.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Bernice Steinhardt at (202) 512-6543 or steinhardt@gao.gov.

RESULTS-ORIENTED GOVERNMENT

Improvements to DHS's Planning Process Would Enhance Usefulness and Accountability

What GAO Found

DHS has made considerable progress in its planning efforts, releasing its first strategic plan in 2004 that details its mission and strategic goals. Nevertheless, opportunities for improvement exist. The creation of DHS brought together 22 agencies to coordinate the nation's homeland security efforts and to work with Congress and numerous other organizations, including federal agencies, state and local governments, and the private sector, to further this mission. Although DHS planning documents describe programs requiring stakeholder coordination to implement, stakeholder involvement in the planning process itself was limited. Involving stakeholders in strategic planning efforts can help create an understanding of the competing demands and limited resources, and how those demands and resources require careful and continuous balancing. As DHS updates its strategic plan, earlier and more comprehensive stakeholder consultation will help ensure that DHS's efforts and resources are targeted at the highest priorities and that the planning documents are as useful as possible to DHS and its stakeholders.

While DHS's strategic plan addresses five of the six GPRA-required elements, it does not describe the relationship between annual and long-term goals. This linkage is crucial for determining whether an agency has a clear sense of how it will assess progress toward achieving the intended results for its long-term goals. While DHS's strategic planning documents address most of the required elements of GPRA, not including them in the strategic plan makes it difficult for DHS and its stakeholders to identify how their roles and responsibilities contribute to DHS's mission and potentially hinders Congress's and other key stakeholders' ability to assess the feasibility of DHS's long-term goals. Additionally, several of the GPRA-required elements addressed in the strategic plan could be further developed through the adoption of additional good strategic planning practices. For example, identifying the specific budgetary, human capital, and other resources needed to achieve its goals could demonstrate the viability of the strategies and approaches presented for achieving its long-term goals.

Finally, although DHS's priority is its homeland security mission—which emphasizes deterring terrorism in the United States—DHS's planning documents clearly address its responsibility for non-homeland security mission programs as well, such as its response to natural disasters. In addition, DHS planning officials said that non-homeland security responsibilities were represented in the planning process and documents due, in part, to the commitment of top leadership.