INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

OMB and Agencies Need to Improve Planning, Management, and Oversight of Projects Totaling Billions of Dollars

What GAO Found

OMB and federal agencies have identified approximately 413 IT projects—totaling at least $25.2 billion in expenditures for fiscal year 2008—as being poorly planned, poorly performing, or both. Specifically, through the Management Watch List process, OMB determined that 352 projects (totaling about $23.4 billion) are poorly planned. In addition, agencies reported that 87 of their high risk projects (totaling about $4.8 billion) were poorly performing. Twenty-six projects (totaling about $3 billion) are considered both poorly planned and poorly performing.

OMB has taken steps to improve the identification of the Management Watch List and high-risk projects since GAO testified last September, including publicly disclosing reasons for placement on the Management Watch List and clarifying high-risk project criteria. However, more needs to be done by both OMB and the agencies to address recommendations GAO has previously made to improve the planning, management, and oversight of poorly planned and performing projects so that potentially billions in taxpayer dollars are not wasted.

In its rebaselining review, GAO reports that 48 percent of the federal government’s major IT projects have been rebaselined for several reasons, including changes in project goals and changes in funding. Of those rebaselined projects, 51 percent were rebaselined at least twice and about 11 percent were rebaselined 4 times or more. In addition, while the major agencies have all established rebaselining policies, these policies are not comprehensive. Specifically, none of the policies were fully consistent with best practices, including describing a process for developing a new baseline and requiring the validation of the new baseline. Agencies’ policies varied in part because OMB has not issued guidance specifying what elements these policies are to include. In its report, GAO makes recommendations to OMB to issue guidance for rebaselining policies and to the major agencies to develop comprehensive rebaselining policies that address identified weaknesses.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on GAO-08-1051T. For more information, contact David A. Powner at (202) 512-9286 or pownerd@gao.gov.