



Highlights of [GAO-09-96](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has established a program known as U.S. Visitor and Immigrant Status Indicator Technology (US-VISIT) to collect, maintain, and share information, including biometric identifiers, on certain foreign nationals who travel to and from the United States. By congressional mandate, DHS is to develop and submit an expenditure plan for US-VISIT that satisfies certain conditions, including being reviewed by GAO. GAO's objectives were to (1) determine if the plan satisfies the twelve legislative conditions and (2) provide observations about the plan and management of the program. To accomplish this, GAO assessed the plan and related DHS certification letters against each aspect of each legislative condition and assessed program documentation against federal guidelines and industry standards.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is recommending that the Secretary direct the department's Investment Review Board to immediately review the program relative to the findings and observations in this report and report the results to Congress. In written comments on a draft of this letter, DHS officials said that they agreed with GAO's recommendations.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-09-96](#). For more information, contact Randolph C. Hite at (202) 512-3439 or hiter@gao.gov.

HOMELAND SECURITY

U.S. Visitor and Immigrant Status Indicator Technology Program Planning and Execution Improvements Needed

What GAO Found

The fiscal year 2008 US-VISIT expenditure plan does not fully satisfy any of the eleven conditions required of DHS by the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2008, either because the plan does not address key aspects of the condition or because what it does address is not adequately supported or is otherwise not reflective of known program weaknesses. More specifically, of the eleven conditions, the plan partially satisfies eight. For example, while the plan includes a listing of GAO recommendations, it does not provide milestones for addressing these recommendations, as required by the act. Further, although the plan includes a certification by the DHS Chief Procurement Officer that the program has been reviewed and approved in accordance with the department's investment management process, and that this process fulfills all capital planning and investment control requirements and reviews established by the Office of Management and Budget, the certification is based on information that pertains to the fiscal year 2007 expenditure plan and fiscal year 2009 budget submission, rather than to the fiscal year 2008 expenditure plan. Moreover, even though the plan provides an accounting of operations and maintenance and program management costs, the plan does not separately identify the program's contractor services costs, as required by the act. With regard to the remaining three legislative conditions, the plan does not satisfy any of them. For example, the plan does not include a certification by the DHS Chief Human Capital Officer that the program's human capital needs are being strategically and proactively managed and that the program has sufficient human capital capacity to execute the expenditure plan. Further, the plan does not include a detailed schedule for implementing an exit capability or a certification that a biometric exit capability is not possible within 5 years. The twelfth legislative condition was satisfied by our review of the expenditure plan.

Beyond the expenditure plan, GAO observed that other program planning and execution limitations and weaknesses also confront DHS in its quest to deliver US-VISIT capabilities and value in a timely and cost-effective manner. Concerning DHS's proposed biometric air and sea exit solution, for example, the reliability of the cost estimates used to justify the proposed solution is not clear, the proposed solution would provide less security and privacy than other alternatives, and public comments on the proposed solution raise additional concerns, including the impact the solution would have on the industry's efforts to improve passenger processing and travel. Moreover, the program's risk management database shows that key risks are not being managed. Finally, frequent rebaselining of one of the program's task orders has minimized the significance of schedule variances. Collectively, this means that additional management improvements are needed to effectively define, justify, and deliver a US-VISIT system solution that meets program goals, reflects stakeholder input, minimizes exposure to risk, and provides Congress with the means by which to oversee program execution. Until these steps are taken, US-VISIT program performance, transparency, and accountability will suffer.