

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-19-544T](#), a testimony before the Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

In 2003, GAO designated *Implementing and Transforming DHS* as a high-risk area to the federal government. DHS has made considerable progress in transforming its original component agencies into a single cabinet-level department, and as a result, in 2013, GAO narrowed the scope of the high-risk area to focus on *Strengthening DHS Management Functions*.

In addition, DHS leadership is responsible for implementing numerous recommendations that GAO has made to the department and its component agencies. Current vacancies in top leadership positions could pose a challenge to addressing high-risk areas and priority recommendations that span DHS's diverse missions, which include preventing terrorism and enhancing security, managing our borders, administering immigration laws, securing cyberspace, and responding to disasters.

This testimony discusses the need for DHS leadership commitment to strengthen its management functions and address GAO's priority recommendations. This testimony is based on GAO's 2019 high-risk update and other reports issued from March 2006 through April 2019.

What GAO Recommends

Since the creation of DHS, GAO has made approximately 2,800 recommendations to the department, and DHS has implemented more than 75 percent of them, strengthening program management and performance measurement, among other things. GAO will continue to monitor DHS's progress in strengthening management functions and addressing priority recommendations.

View [GAO-19-544T](#). For more information, contact Christopher P. Currie at (404) 679-1875 or curriec@gao.gov.

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DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

Continued Leadership Is Critical to Addressing a Range of Management Challenges

What GAO Found

With the support and commitment of top leadership, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has made important progress in strengthening its management functions; however, considerable work remains. As of March 2019, DHS had fully addressed 17 of the 30 outcomes related to its management functions (see table). DHS needs to continue to show sustained leadership commitment in implementing its *Integrated Strategy for High-Risk Management* to achieve the remaining outcomes. Leadership commitment is also pivotal in addressing other GAO high-risk areas where DHS has a role, such as ensuring the cybersecurity of the nation, the National Flood Insurance Program, and limiting the federal government's fiscal exposure by better managing climate change risks. Currently, DHS has acting officials serving in eight positions requiring Senate confirmation, including positions with responsibilities for implementing high-risk outcomes, such as the Secretary, Deputy Secretary, and Under Secretary for Management.

Table: GAO Assessment of Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Progress on Key Outcomes Across Management Areas, as of March 2019

Key management function	Fully addressed	Mostly addressed ^a	Partially addressed ^b	Initiated ^c	Total
Acquisition management	2	2	1		5
Information technology management	5	1			6
Financial management			3	3	8
Human capital management	5	1	1		7
Management integration	3		1		4
Total	17	4	6	3	30

Source: GAO analysis of DHS documents, interviews, and prior GAO reports. | [GAO-19-544T](#)

^a"Mostly addressed": Progress is significant and a small amount of work remains.

^b"Partially addressed": Progress is measurable, but significant work remains.

^c"Initiated": Activities have been initiated to address the outcome, but it is too early to report progress.

In April 2019, GAO sent a [letter](#) to the Acting Secretary of Homeland Security detailing 26 open recommendations that GAO believes warrant the highest priority personal attention from the department and its components. These 26 recommendations fall into six major areas—emergency preparedness and response, border security, transportation security, infrastructure and management, cybersecurity, and chemical and nuclear security. For example, GAO has recommended that DHS take steps to strengthen human capital management, such as better managing and assessing its cybersecurity workforce gaps and areas of critical need. Fourteen of the 26 recommendations have been issued to acting officials serving in vacant positions, including 12 to the Secretary of Homeland Security, and two to the Federal Emergency Management Agency which is currently operating under acting leadership.