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April 16, 2024

The Honorable Bennie G. Thompson
Ranking Member
Committee on Homeland Security
House of Representatives

The Honorable Seth Magaziner
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Counterterrorism, Law Enforcement, and Intelligence
Committee on Homeland Security
House of Representatives

Homeland Security: DHS Internal Entities Facilitate Information Sharing in Key Areas and Collaborate as Needed

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is responsible for responding to new and emerging threats against the nation. To help accomplish this broad mission—encompassing counterterrorism, cyber protection, border security, and disaster response, among others—departmental offices and components must effectively share information. DHS’s Strategic Plan for 2020–2024 made information and intelligence sharing, as well as close coordination and collaboration across the department, a top priority.¹

DHS’s headquarters offices and its components play a key role in intradepartmental information sharing. For example, the Office of Intelligence and Analysis (I&A) has a leading role in providing intelligence, analysis, and related information to support DHS operations.² A variety of established internal information sharing entities (i.e., groups) exist to assist I&A, other DHS components, and headquarters offices to routinely share such information and intelligence.³

¹Department of Homeland Security, *DHS Strategic Plan Fiscal Years 2020–2024*.

²The Implementing Recommendations of the 9/11 Commission Act of 2007 amended the Homeland Security Act of 2002, reorganizing DHS and creating the Office of Intelligence and Analysis. See Pub. L. No. 107-296, title II, subtitle A, § 201, 116 Stat. 2135, 2145–49, as amended by Pub. L. No. 110-53, title V, subtitle D, § 531, 121 Stat. 266, 332–35 (classified as amended at 6 U.S.C. § 121).

³Intelligence is information gathered within or outside the U.S. that involves threats to our nation, its people, property, or interests; the development, proliferation, or use of weapons of mass destruction; and any other matter bearing on U.S. national or homeland security. Intelligence information includes classified information, which is information that, for reasons of national security, is specifically designated by a U.S. government agency for limited or restricted dissemination or distribution.

In our prior work we found that clear communication is essential to effectively counter the rising threat of domestic terrorist events and violent extremism.⁴ However, the DHS Office of Inspector General and members of Congress have raised concerns about the number and effectiveness of various information sharing groups.⁵ You asked us to review issues related to these groups, including the number and purpose of such groups. This report (1) describes the various groups DHS uses to promote internal information sharing and their purpose and operating status and (2) identifies the extent to which any similar groups collaborate to avoid duplicating efforts.

To address both objectives, we first identified internal information sharing groups led by select DHS headquarters offices and component members of the DHS Intelligence Enterprise.⁶ More specifically we sought information (such as membership and key activities) on groups—including task forces, working groups, committees, councils, centers, forums, or other coordination groups—with the following characteristics:

- (1) Promoted the sharing of information within DHS—to include intelligence (both finished and unevaluated), data, written products, and discussions—as a primary responsibility;⁷
- (2) Were focused on issues or topics related to DHS’s mission, and not administrative issues (e.g., payroll, office space); and
- (3) Were operational any time from January 1, 2020, through September 30, 2023.⁸ We selected these dates because these were the three most recent calendar years at the time that we distributed our data collection instrument.

⁴See the list of related GAO products at the end of this report.

⁵Department of Homeland Security, Office of Inspector General, *DHS Cannot Determine the Total Cost, Effectiveness, and Value of Its Joint Task Forces*, OIG-20-80 (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 30, 2020).

⁶We included DHS headquarters offices whose purpose is to promote collaboration across the department—specifically the Office of Strategy, Policy, and Plans; the Management Directorate; and the Office of Homeland Security Situational Awareness. In addition, we included I&A because its mission is to promote information and intelligence sharing across the department, as well as the members of the DHS Intelligence Enterprise because of their intelligence and information sharing responsibilities. The DHS Intelligence Enterprise is headed by the Under Secretary for Intelligence and Analysis, who also holds the position of DHS Chief Intelligence Officer. It is composed of I&A and the intelligence components of the following DHS entities: the Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction Office, the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, the Federal Emergency Management Agency, the Federal Protective Service (within the Management Directorate), the Transportation Security Administration, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, U.S. Coast Guard, U.S. Customs and Border Protection, and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

⁷Unevaluated intelligence reports contain unanalyzed content whereas finished intelligence products contain the assessment, judgment, or other analytic input of personnel.

⁸Three intradepartmental joint task forces were operational during this time, but we did not include them in the scope of this review. In 2014, the Secretary of Homeland Security directed the establishment of Joint Task Force-East, Joint Task Force-West, and Joint Task Force-Investigations to address, among other things, the smuggling of illicit drugs over the southern border and approaches to the U.S. In 2020, DHS terminated Joint Task Force-West and Joint Task Force-Investigations, and as of November 2023, Joint Task Force-East continued to operate. We did not include the joint task forces in the scope of our review because a concurrent GAO review addressed DHS’s use and oversight of joint task forces, including the extent to which DHS has developed and documented criteria for determining whether to establish or terminate a joint task force. The review found, among other things, that DHS had not developed and documented such criteria as of November 2023. The review made recommendations to address this issue and DHS

In addition, to confirm we collected data on formally established information sharing groups, we ensured the identified groups had one or more of the following: a charter or a memorandum of understanding/agreement, dedicated funding, and/or a statutory mandate. For groups that met our criteria for inclusion, we reviewed agency documentation—including charters, memorandums, policies and procedures, agendas, meeting minutes, and annual reports—and categorized them by similarities in their purpose. In addition, we requested available information on groups' costs, such as budgets and resources. We also interviewed relevant DHS headquarters and component officials about the history of the information sharing groups we identified (i.e., why groups were established, and if applicable, discontinued), purpose, activities, and any collaboration practices, among other things.

Using GAO's fragmentation, overlap, and duplication evaluation and management guide, we analyzed the characteristics of the information sharing groups we identified to determine areas of duplication and overlap, if any.⁹ Specifically, we assessed for duplication and overlap between the identified groups by comparing key attributes such as the purpose, membership, users, and activities of the groups. For groups that we identified as similar from this assessment, we compared their efforts to select leading interagency collaboration practices identified in our prior work because such practices could mitigate possible duplication of activities between similar groups. Specifically, we compared their efforts to collaboration practices, including the practice of leveraging resources and information—which includes looking for opportunities to address crosscutting needs through staffing and technology.¹⁰ We also compared DHS's efforts to the control environment component of federal internal control standards, specifically the principle that management should establish an organizational structure, assign responsibility, and delegate authority to achieve organizational goals.¹¹

We conducted this performance audit from July 2023 to April 2024 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

concurrent and identified ongoing and planned steps to address the recommendations. See GAO, *Department of Homeland Security: Additional Actions Needed to Improve Oversight of Joint Task Forces*, [GAO-24-106855](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 7, 2024).

⁹Overlap occurs when multiple agencies or programs have similar goals, engage in similar activities or strategies to achieve them, or target similar beneficiaries. Duplication occurs when two or more agencies or programs are engaged in the same activities or provide the same services to the same beneficiaries. Fragmentation, which we did not assess in this review, is when more than one agency (or organization within an agency) is involved in the same broad area of national need and opportunities exist to improve service delivery. See GAO, *Fragmentation, Overlap, and Duplication: An Evaluation and Management Guide*, [GAO-15-49SP](#) (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 14, 2015).

¹⁰See GAO, *Government Performance Management: Leading Practices to Enhance Interagency Collaboration and Address Crosscutting Challenges*, [GAO-23-105520](#) (Washington, D.C.: May 24, 2023).

¹¹See GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, [GAO-14-704G](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 2014).

Nine DHS Groups Facilitate Internal Information Sharing

We identified nine formal DHS groups that are focused on sharing information internally within the department.¹² The nine groups generally align with one of three purposes (see fig. 1).

Figure 1: Categories of Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Internal Information Sharing Groups and Their Purpose

<i>Group category</i>	<i>Information sharing purpose</i>
Senior Leadership Decision-Making <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Counter Threats Advisory Board 2. Deputy’s Management Action Group 3. Law Enforcement Coordination Council 4. Operations Deputies Board^a 5. Operational Executives Group 	Provide a forum for DHS senior leadership to discuss and respond to ongoing issues and make recommendations.
Policymaking <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. Chief Data Officer Council 7. Continuity Mission Assurance Board 8. Information Sharing and Safeguarding Governance Board 	Set policies and guidelines on information sharing and data governance throughout DHS.
Intelligence and Threat Identification and Analysis <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 9. Homeland Security Intelligence Council 	Coordinate and share threat information and intelligence.

Source: GAO analysis of DHS information. | GAO-24-106896

Note: These groups were operational any time from January 1, 2020, through September 30, 2023.

^aDHS discontinued the Operations Deputies Board in 2022 as part of a departmental reorganization initiative.

DHS established these nine groups based on senior DHS leadership (i.e., Secretary or other senior officials) priorities, or in response to newly enacted statutory requirements.¹³ We provide more information on the specific priorities or requirements leading to the establishment of each group later in the enclosure to this report. DHS discontinued one group—the Operations Deputies Board—during the time frame of our review because of a departmental reorganization initiative.¹⁴ When establishing and discontinuing these groups, DHS demonstrated it had the necessary internal controls, including structures and authorities, in place to carry out organizational goals articulated by DHS senior leaders or Congress.¹⁵ For example, DHS

¹²We identified an additional group—the Senior Leaders Council—a forum of senior leaders across the department to provide advice and recommendations to the Secretary of Homeland Security on policy issues, among other things. According to DHS officials, the group may have been discontinued in 2018 and therefore was not in the time frame of our review (January 1, 2020, through September 30, 2023). However, officials were unable to confirm this or provide us with additional information on the activities of the group or a rationale for why it was discontinued.

¹³One group (the Counter Threats Advisory Board) was statutorily authorized after it was established by DHS. Pub. L. No. 116- 260, div. U., tit. VI, § 602(a), 134 Stat. 1182, 2294-5 (2020) (classified at 6 U.S.C. § 124m–1). We discuss this group in more detail in the enclosure to this report.

¹⁴The Secretary of Homeland Security initiated this departmental reorganization initiative in 2021 with the goal of improving DHS operations. We discuss how this reorganization initiative impacted information sharing groups in the enclosure to this report.

¹⁵See [GAO-14-704G](#).

implemented senior leadership requirements that directed the establishment of the Deputy's Management Action Group and the Continuity Mission Assurance Board.

In addition, we found that two groups were not actively meeting during the time frame of our review—January 1, 2020, through September 30, 2023—but there were no costs associated with this inactivity. These were the Deputy's Management Action Group and the Information Sharing and Safeguarding Governance Board, which had periods of inactivity but were not disbanded and remained ready for use. Specifically, the Deputy's Management Action Group was inactive for approximately 2 years between April 2019 and June 2021 due to management's preference not to use the group as a mechanism for information sharing.¹⁶ In addition, according to I&A officials, the Information Sharing and Safeguarding Governance Board has been inactive for approximately 3 years, but select subgroups remained active as of January 2024. According to DHS officials, the main costs associated with all nine groups are support staff's time spent organizing and conducting group activities and group members' time spent on those activities. Therefore, when groups are inactive there generally are few, if any, cost implications.¹⁷

Some DHS Groups Were Similar, but Collaboration Activities Helped Address Potential Duplication

We found no evidence of unnecessary duplication among these groups, however, we found that some of the groups' purposes and activities had the potential for overlap. Specifically, we found the potential for overlap between the Information Sharing and Safeguarding Governance Board and the Chief Data Officer Council. We also found the potential for overlap between the Counter Threats Advisory Board and the Homeland Security Intelligence Council.¹⁸

However, we also found that agency officials associated with these groups described activities to leverage their respective resources and information—a leading interagency collaboration practice—to mitigate possible duplication of activities. For example, officials told us that the Chief Data Officer Council is leading an effort to standardize the format of data sharing agreements across the department and also led an effort to catalogue the data assets of the department. The Information Sharing and Safeguarding Governance Board would have previously addressed these activities as part of its role to set information sharing policy and resolve information sharing disputes. However, officials explained that because the Chief Data Officer Council includes many of the same subject matter experts who would have participated in the board's efforts in these areas, officials utilize the council's meetings. Officials told us that one of the reasons the Information Sharing and Safeguarding Governance Board has not met since March 2021 is because the Chief Data Officer Council has incorporated these types of issues and activities into its regular meetings.

¹⁶The Deputy's Management Action Group meets at the discretion of the Deputy Secretary. See Department of Homeland Security, *DHS Leadership Forums*, Directive 071-01 (June 30, 2015).

¹⁷Officials from all nine groups told us that they did not track members' time devoted to these groups because group activities are a collateral duty.

¹⁸We describe the purpose of these four information sharing groups in the enclosure to this report.

In addition, according to officials associated with the Counter Threats Advisory Board and the Homeland Security Intelligence Council, these groups also leverage resources and information to help manage possible duplication of group activities. Specifically, according to DHS officials, the Homeland Security Intelligence Council, which is composed of less senior staff than the Counter Threats Advisory Board, schedules its meetings to occur a month or so before board's meetings. This allows the more detailed information from the council meetings to inform meetings of more senior staff serving on the board.

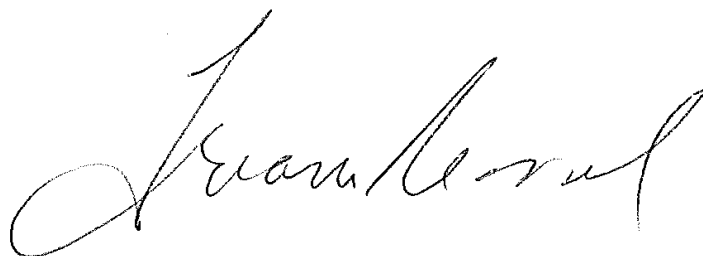
Additional details on each group's characteristics and rationales for why groups were established and discontinued are presented in the enclosure to this report.

Agency Comments

We provided a draft of this report to DHS for review and comment. DHS provided technical comments, which we incorporated as appropriate.

We are sending copies of this report to the relevant congressional committees and the Secretary of Homeland Security. In addition, the report is available at no charge on the GAO website at <http://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-8777 or McNeilT@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made key contributions to this report are Mona Nichols Blake (Assistant Director); Natalie Swabb (Analyst-in-Charge); Michele Fejfar; Megan Johnson; Susan Murphy; Sasan J. "Jon" Najmi; and Sarah Veale.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Triana McNeil". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "T" and "M".

Triana McNeil
Director Homeland Security and Justice

Enclosure – 1

Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Internal Information Sharing Groups

Enclosure I

This enclosure provides information on the purpose, history, membership, and other key details on DHS internal information sharing groups. We identified nine formal DHS groups focused on sharing information internally within the department. These nine groups generally align with one of three purposes.

Categories of Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Internal Information Sharing Groups and their purpose

<i>Group category</i>	<i>Information sharing purpose</i>
Senior Leadership Decision-Making <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Counter Threats Advisory Board2. Deputy's Management Action Group3. Law Enforcement Coordination Council4. Operations Deputies Board^a5. Operational Executives Group	Provide a forum for DHS senior leadership to discuss and respond to ongoing issues and make recommendations.
Policymaking <ol style="list-style-type: none">6. Chief Data Officer Council7. Continuity Mission Assurance Board8. Information Sharing and Safeguarding Governance Board	Set policies and guidelines on information sharing and data governance throughout DHS.
Intelligence and Threat Identification and Analysis <ol style="list-style-type: none">9. Homeland Security Intelligence Council	Coordinate and share threat information and intelligence.

Source: GAO analysis of DHS information. | GAO-24-106896

Note: These groups were operational any time from January 1, 2020, through September 30, 2023.

^aDHS discontinued the Operations Deputies Board in 2022 as part of a departmental reorganization initiative.

Counter Threats Advisory Board (CTAB)

Administering DHS office and Years



Intelligence and Analysis (I&A) and the Office of the Counterterrorism Coordinator
December 2020 – present¹⁹

Purpose, roles, & responsibilities



Coordinates DHS intelligence, policy, and information sharing related to the mission and functions of the departmental components with responsibilities for countering threats. According to officials, CTAB utilizes intelligence to help inform, formulate, and execute counter-threat policy. CTAB is also responsible for coordinating ongoing threat mitigation efforts and activities and makes recommendations and advises the Secretary of Homeland Security on such issues.

History



After the attempted bombing of a U.S. bound commercial aircraft on December 25, 2009, DHS recognized a need to strengthen counterterrorism coordination and information sharing. DHS subsequently established the Counterterrorism Advisory Board in November 2010.²⁰ In 2020, the Counter Threats Advisory Board was statutorily authorized for a period of 2 years by the Counter Threats Advisory Board Act of 2019.²¹ The act, among other things, did not limit the board's mission to terrorism-related threats, and renamed the board to its current iteration, the Counter Threats Advisory Board. According to DHS officials, the act expanded CTAB's mission in recognition of the changing threat environment and the need to be more flexible when addressing new and emerging threats. While CTAB's statutory authorization expired in December 2022, I&A officials stated that CTAB continues to operate under the Secretary's authority.

Key activities



CTAB holds regularly scheduled quarterly meetings to discuss emerging threats, significant planned special events, and overseas events that impact homeland security. In 2021 CTAB convened 14 times. For example, during one meeting members were briefed on potential threats associated with the U.S. evacuation effort from Afghanistan. According to officials, CTAB met numerous times from 2022 through February 2024.

Members



The Under Secretary for Intelligence and Analysis and the Counterterrorism Coordinator serve as cochairs.²² The Under Secretary for Strategy, Policy, and Plans and the Director of the Office of Homeland Security Situational Awareness serve as executive leads. Members are leaders from most operational and support components.

Potential for overlap



Yes, there is the potential for overlap between CTAB and Homeland Security Intelligence Council, but the groups collaborate to avoid duplication.

Source: GAO analysis of DHS information; Icons-Studio/stock.adobe.com. | GAO-24-106896

¹⁹The CTAB previously operated as the Counterterrorism Advisory Board. These dates represent the current iteration of the CTAB, the Counter Threats Advisory Board.

²⁰The attempted attack involved a Nigerian national on flight 253 from Amsterdam to Detroit, Michigan, who attempted to detonate an explosive device located in his underwear. The federal government had threat-related information on the individual but did not place him on the terrorist watchlist that is used to screen all passengers flying to the U.S. The incident led to congressional and White House reviews. See GAO, *Terrorist Watchlist: Routinely Assessing Impacts of Agency Actions since the December 25, 2009, Attempted Attack Could Help Inform Future Efforts* [GAO-12-476](#) (Washington, D.C.: May 31, 2012).

²¹The Counter Threats Advisory Board Act of 2019 was enacted as Title VI of Division U of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, Pub. L. No. 116-260, div. U., tit. VI, § 602(a), 134 Stat. 1182, 2294-5 (2020) (classified at 6 U.S.C. § 124m-1). The act established the Counter Threats Advisory Board in December 2020 and authorized it for a period of 2 years until December 2022.

²²According to I&A officials, the Counterterrorism Coordinator became cochair of CTAB when the Secretary of Homeland Security appointed someone to the position in November 2022. Prior to the appointment of the Counterterrorism Coordinator, the Under Secretary for Intelligence and Analysis was the CTAB's sole chair, and, according to DHS officials, also served as the Counterterrorism Coordinator. I&A officials told us they are revising the CTAB charter to reflect the Counterterrorism Coordinator's role as cochair, in addition to other changes.

Deputy's Management Action Group (DMAG)

Administering DHS office and Years



Office of Strategy, Policy, and Plans

October 2014 – present (inactive between April 2019 and June 2021)

Purpose, roles, & responsibilities



Serves as a forum to discuss and provide recommendations to the Deputy Secretary of Homeland Security regarding emerging issues, including specific initiatives in departmental strategy, program and budget review, acquisition reform, operational planning, and joint operations, among other things.

History



DHS senior leadership established DMAG in 2014 as part of the Secretary of Homeland Security's Unity of Effort memo, which sought to improve planning and communication across DHS offices and components. More specifically, the memo identified a need for a senior leadership group to meet regularly and discuss emerging issues with the Deputy Secretary. According to officials, the DMAG met the needs outlined in the memo by enhancing senior leadership coordination between the Deputy Secretary and component leadership officials.

Key activities



According to DHS officials, the DMAG meets at the discretion of the Deputy Secretary. For example, our prior work noted that the DMAG was inactive between April 2019 and June 2021.²³ However, the DMAG was active in 2022 and 2023. DMAG meetings are opportunities for senior leaders across the Department to share information and collaborate on relevant issues. For example, during a 2022 meeting, members received an overview briefing on the expansion of the Office of Immigration Statistics to the Office of Homeland Security Statistics.

Members



While membership varies at the discretion of the Deputy Secretary—who serves as the chair—members have included the DHS Chief of Staff, DHS Under Secretaries, the Chief Financial Officer, and leaders from most operational and support components. An official within DHS's Office of Strategy, Policy, and Plans performs DMAG administrative activities, such as scheduling meetings and preparing agendas and after-action reports.

Potential for overlap



None identified.

Source: GAO analysis of DHS information; Icons-Studio/stock.adobe.com. | GAO-24-106896

²³See GAO, *Homeland Security: Joint Requirements Council Needs Leadership Attention to Improve Effectiveness*, [GAO-23-106125](#) (Washington, D.C.: Aug. 30, 2023).

Law Enforcement Coordination Council (LECC)

Administering DHS office and Years



Office of Strategy, Policy, and Plans

October 2021 – present²⁴

Purpose, roles, & responsibilities



Serves as a forum to coordinate department-wide law enforcement-related matters, including those related to policies and training. Specifically, LECC seeks to evaluate and improve DHS law enforcement policies and ensure they are consistent with the law; align with best practices; and protect privacy, civil rights, and civil liberties.

History



DHS established the LECC as a forum for the DHS law enforcement community in 2021. According to officials, DHS previously discussed the idea for such a forum, but a 2022 Executive Order on advancing effective, accountable policing practices led to the department's renewed focus on the LECC.²⁵

Key activities



The LECC convenes quarterly to discuss updates and decisions, engage with subject matter experts, and approve priorities for LECC subcommittees, among other things. According to DHS officials, the majority of the LECC's work occurs through its three subcommittees—Training, Use of Force Policy, and Law Enforcement Administration. The Training subcommittee, chaired by the Federal Law Enforcement Training Centers, updates the law enforcement training DHS officers and agents receive. The Use of Force Policy subcommittee—chaired by the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Law Enforcement in the Office of Strategy, Policy, and Plans—reviews issues and discusses best practices related to the use of force, according to officials. In addition, the subcommittee updated the department's use of force policy in February 2023.²⁶ According to officials, the Law Enforcement Administration subcommittee has a rotating chair and covers issues such as the use of body-worn cameras and women in law enforcement.

Members



The Secretary of Homeland Security serves as the chair. Members include senior leadership officials from across the department, such as the General Counsel and Chief Privacy Officer, as well as leaders from the nine offices and components with law enforcement officers and agents.

Potential for overlap



None identified.

Source: GAO analysis of DHS information; Icons-Studio/stock.adobe.com. | GAO-24-106896

²⁴The LECC charter was updated and signed by the Secretary of Homeland Security in October 2022. However, according to DHS officials, the LECC was active beginning in October 2021.

²⁵Exec. Order No. 14074, 87 Fed. Reg. 32,945 (May 31, 2022).

²⁶Department of Homeland Security, Secretary of Homeland Security, *Memorandum for Agency Leaders Update to the Department Policy on the Use of Force Policy Statement 044-05* (Revision 01) (Feb. 6, 2023). According to DHS officials, this was a response to Executive Order 14074.

Operations Deputies Board (OPSDEPS)

Administering DHS office and Years



Office of Operations Coordination (now the Office of Homeland Security Situational Awareness)
February 2019 – February 2022

Purpose, roles, & responsibilities



Discontinued in 2022, it served as a forum to coordinate departmental preparedness operations and was a forum to discuss emerging threats, incidents, events, and crises. According to DHS officials, the group worked to encourage cross-component coordination at the headquarters level, particularly during times of crisis.

History



DHS established OPSDEPS in 2019 to meet the need for a senior-level crisis management structure. According to DHS officials, the Secretary of Homeland Security identified a need for a group of senior personnel to convene in times of emerging threats, incidents, events, and crises after a series of major hurricanes hit the U.S. in 2017. However, DHS discontinued OPSDEPS in 2022 as part of the Secretary's 2021 departmental reorganization initiative. The initiative, among other things, reassigned the duties unrelated to situational awareness from the Office of Operations Coordination to other DHS offices and renamed it the Office of Homeland Security Situational Awareness.

Key activities



OPSDEPS met weekly to discuss ongoing DHS operations, threats, and issues and made decisions and recommendations to support operations coordination and other activities. For example, according to officials, in the lead up to the 2020 general election, OPSDEPS helped coordinate the activities of multiple DHS components, including the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency and the Federal Protective Service. The group also briefed the Secretary and Deputy Secretary as needed.

Members



The Director of the Office of Operations Coordination served as the chair. OPSDEPS board members were component-designated senior officials serving as operations coordination subject matter experts who could represent and make decisions for their respective component or office.

Potential for overlap



None identified.

Source: GAO analysis of DHS information; Icons-Studio/stock.adobe.com. | GAO-24-106896

Operational Executives Group (OEG)

Administering DHS office and Years



Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction Office
May 2023 – present

Purpose, roles, & responsibilities



Serves as the DHS senior-level coordinating group during DHS's response to terrorist threats or incidents in the U.S. and overseas, among other things. The group coordinates DHS offices and components' response activities and provides recommendations to the Secretary of Homeland Security during a terrorist threat or incident.

History



DHS established the OEG in 2023 in response to the requirements of a 2021 National Security Presidential Memorandum and accompanying DHS directive.²⁷ The memo sets guidelines for interagency response to terrorist threats or incidents in the U.S. or overseas, specifically tasking DHS with numerous duties. The DHS directive further specifies the roles and responsibilities for the response of each DHS component, as well as internal DHS coordination procedures.

Key activities



The OEG meets quarterly, or as needed based on world events and intelligence. The group is to lead DHS in preparing for threats or incidents, as related to the National Security Presidential Memorandum.

Members



The Assistant Secretary of the Countering Weapons of Mass Destruction Office and the Counterterrorism Coordinator serve as cochairs. Members include representatives from most operational and support components.

Potential for overlap



None identified.

Source: GAO analysis of DHS information; Icons-Studio/stock.adobe.com. | GAO-24-106896

²⁷National Security Presidential Memorandum-36, *Guidelines for United States Government Interagency Response to Terrorist Threats or Incidents in the United States and Overseas* (Jan. 2021) and Department of Homeland Security, *Implementation of National Security Presidential Memorandum-36, Directive 213-01* (May 4, 2022).

Chief Data Officer Council (CDOC)

Administering DHS office and Years



Office of the Chief Information Officer within the Management Directorate

April 2021 – present

Purpose, roles, & responsibilities



Establishes and supports enterprise-wide data governance, standards, policies, and procedures that support DHS missions. Among other things, CDOC's goals are to advance analytic capabilities, reduce duplicate data, and facilitate data-informed decision-making.

History



DHS established the CDOC in 2021 to meet the data governance standards set by the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 (Evidence Act). The Evidence Act, among other things, created a framework for federal agencies to take a more comprehensive and integrated approach to evidence building and required the head of each federal agency to designate a nonpolitical appointee employee in the agency as its Chief Data Officer.²⁸ In addition, the Office of Management and Budget provided guidance on how to implement the Evidence Act's data governance requirements, specifically requiring agencies to establish their own data governance bodies chaired by their Chief Data Officer.²⁹ The CDOC follows Office of Management and Budget guidance implementing the Evidence Act.³⁰

Key activities



CDOC meets monthly to review emerging data governance, policies, initiatives, and collaboration opportunities. For example, CDOC had an initiative to help standardize how components identified sexual orientation and gender identity in their databases. CDOC has 13 data domains—subgroups that focus on a specific type of data and address issues as needed—including biometrics, infrastructure protection, and intelligence.

Members



The DHS Chief Data Officer serves as the chair and the DHS Evaluation Officer and DHS Statistical Officer serve as the vice chairs. Members are Chief Data Officers or representatives from all DHS operational and support components.

Potential for overlap



Yes, there is the potential for overlap between CDOC and the Information Sharing and Safeguarding Governance Board, but the groups collaborate to avoid duplication.

Source: GAO analysis of DHS information; Icons-Studio/stock.adobe.com. | GAO-24-106896

²⁸Pub. L. No. 115-435, 132 Stat. 5529 (2019). Chief Data Officers serve on an interagency council within the Office of Management and Budget.

²⁹See OMB, *Phase 1 Implementation of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018: Learning Agendas, Personnel, and Planning Guidance*, M-19-23 (Washington, D.C.: July 10, 2019).

³⁰We reported on the CDOC's efforts to incorporate targeted violence and terrorism prevention into its data governance framework in 2021. At that time, the group was referred to as the DHS Data Governance Council. See, GAO, *Countering Violent Extremism: DHS Can Further Enhance Its Strategic Planning and Data Governance Efforts*, [GAO-21-507](#) (Washington, D.C.: July 20, 2021).

Continuity Mission Assurance Board (CMAB)

Administering DHS office and Years



Federal Emergency Management Agency

February 2016 – present

Purpose, roles, & responsibilities



Serves as the senior-level DHS forum to address department-wide continuity issues, strategy, policy, and programs, including continuity of operations, devolution, and reconstitution activities.³¹

History



DHS senior leadership established CMAB in 2016 to help implement continuity policies and programs across the department. DHS transferred responsibility for all departmental continuity programs from DHS headquarters to the Federal Emergency Management Agency in 2023 based on the Secretary's 2021 departmental reorganization initiative. As of December 2023, officials said they are updating the charter to reflect that the Federal Emergency Management Agency is the administering agency for CMAB, based on the reassignment of DHS's continuity-related authorities.

Key activities



According to DHS officials, CMAB meets quarterly to discuss continuity strategy and program requirements. Specifically, CMAB is responsible for facilitating the exchange of continuity program and planning related information among components and coordinating continuity related policies and standards across DHS, among other things. In addition, CMAB has working groups that focus on continuity issues.

Members



The Associate Administrator for the Federal Emergency Management Agency's Office of National Continuity Programs and the Chief Security Officer for DHS serve as cochair of CMAB. Members include representatives from all operational and support components.

Potential for overlap



None identified.

Source: GAO analysis of DHS information; Icons-Studio/stock.adobe.com. | GAO-24-106896

³¹Continuity of operations ensures an organization's ability to continue to perform its essential functions and provide essential services during a disruption to normal operations. Devolution is the ability to transfer statutory authority and responsibility to other designated staff and alternate locations to sustain essential functions. Reconstitution activities focus on returning an organization to normal operations.

Information Sharing and Safeguarding Governance Board (ISSGB)

Administering DHS office and Years



I&A

March 2006 – present (inactive since March 2021)

Purpose, roles, & responsibilities



Serves as the official, senior-level committee and decision-making body on DHS information sharing and related safeguarding issues.³² Among other things, the ISSGB sets policies and guidelines on information sharing and safeguarding, resolves information sharing disputes, and provides guidance on related departmental initiatives.

History



In 2007, the Secretary of Homeland Security issued a memorandum directing the timely sharing of information between DHS offices and components to promote a united, DHS-wide information sharing environment.³³ In addition, the memo directed I&A, along with other headquarters offices, to create the Information Sharing Governance Board to oversee the department's information sharing policy and to work with offices and components on information sharing dispute resolutions. In 2011, the group's mission expanded to include safeguarding in response to an Executive Order requiring all federal agencies to institute a governance mechanism to synchronize information sharing and safeguarding.³⁴ At this time, DHS renamed the group to its current iteration—ISSGB—to reflect these new responsibilities.

Key activities



According to I&A officials, the ISSGB has not convened since March 2021, as there have not been any information sharing matters that have required resolution at a senior level. This is because the ISSGB has two active subgroups composed of working-level staff who address issues as they arise so that the full ISSGB does not need to convene, according to I&A officials. For example, one of the active subgroups—the Data Access Review Council—coordinates the review of information sharing and safeguarding agreements for the external transfer of bulk data containing personally identifiable information to members of the Intelligence Community, among other things.³⁵ Specifically, the council serves as the coordinating body between the Intelligence Community member requesting the data and DHS offices with equities in the data request—such as the component that owns the data; the DHS Privacy Office; the Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties; and the Office of Strategy, Policy, and Plans.³⁶ While the council primarily coordinates and expedites external data requests, according to officials, it also serves as a valuable forum for coordinating internally within DHS to expedite such requests.

Members



The Under Secretary for Intelligence and Analysis serves as the chair and the Assistant Secretary for Policy and the Chief Information Officer serve as the vice chairs. Members are leaders from most operational and support components.

Potential for overlap



Yes, there is the potential for overlap between ISSGB and the Chief Data Officer Council, but the groups collaborate to avoid duplication.

Source: GAO analysis of DHS information; Icons-Studio/stock.adobe.com. | GAO-24-106896

³²To safeguard information, DHS is to protect information and information systems from unauthorized access, modification, disclosure, and use. See Department of Homeland Security, *DHS Information Sharing and Safeguarding Strategy* (Jan. 2013).

³³Department of Homeland Security, Secretary for Homeland Security, *Memorandum to all DHS Components: DHS Policy for Internal Information Exchange and Sharing* (Feb. 1, 2007).

³⁴Exec. Order No. 14074, 76 Fed. Reg. 63,811 (Oct. 13, 2011). The Executive Order was issued after the 2010 unauthorized disclosures of classified military information by Pfc. Chelsea Manning.

³⁵Bulk data are large quantities of data acquired without the use of discriminants (i.e., specific identifiers or search terms). The other active ISSGB subgroup is the Information Safeguarding and Risk Management Council, which identifies information safeguarding policy gaps in DHS and proposes solutions.

³⁶In addition, the Council may coordinate the transfer of bulk data between I&A and other DHS components.

Homeland Security Intelligence Council (HSIC)

Administering DHS office and Years



I&A

November 2009 – present

Purpose, roles, & responsibilities



Serves as the decision-making and oversight body for the DHS Intelligence Enterprise and supports the Under Secretary for Intelligence and Analysis's responsibilities as the DHS Chief Intelligence Officer. Among other things, the HSIC identifies intelligence policy needs for the enterprise, recommends policy proposals, and oversees the development and implementation of policies.

History



DHS established the HSIC in 2009 to advise the Under Secretary for Intelligence and Analysis, who also serves as the DHS Chief Intelligence Officer, on important DHS Intelligence Enterprise issues. Historically, the group has coordinated and shared intelligence between members of the enterprise, among other duties.

Key activities



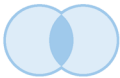
According to I&A officials, the HSIC meets quarterly. Members discuss pertinent enterprise-wide intelligence issues and assist the DHS Chief Intelligence Officer with decision-making. For example, members may discuss how to implement DHS-wide intelligence training. HSIC has six working groups, each of which focuses on a specific topic (e.g., intelligence analysis and production and strategy, planning, and resources) and are cochaired by a representative from I&A and a component. These working groups plan and implement the work relevant to their topic area as assigned by the HSIC.

Members



The Under Secretary for Intelligence and Analysis serves as the chair. Members include Key Intelligence Officials, which are senior intelligence officials designated by the heads of their components to represent their component on the HSIC.³⁷

Potential for overlap



Yes, there is the potential for overlap between HSIC and the Counter Threats Advisory Board, but the groups collaborate to avoid duplication.

Source: GAO analysis of DHS information; Icons-Studio/stock.adobe.com. | GAO-24-106896

³⁷While the U.S. Secret Service is not a member of the DHS Intelligence Enterprise, it is a permanent member of the HSIC.

Related GAO Products

Countering Violent Extremism: FBI and DHS Need Strategies and Goals for Sharing Threat Information with Social Media and Gaming Companies, [GAO-24-106262](#) (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 31, 2024).

Counterterrorism: Action Needed to Further Develop the Information Sharing Environment, [GAO-23-105310](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 26, 2023).

Capitol Attack: Federal Agencies Identified Some Threats, but Did Not Fully Process and Share Information Prior to January 6, 2021, [GAO-23-106625](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb 28, 2023).

Domestic Terrorism: Further Actions Needed to Strengthen FBI and DHS Collaboration to Counter Threats, [GAO-23-104720](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 22, 2023).

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