

Why GAO Did This Study

GAO's work has repeatedly shown that federal agencies must coordinate better to achieve common outcomes. The act established a more crosscutting and integrated approach to achieving results and improving performance, including a requirement that agencies identified by OMB establish APGs. The act directs GAO to review its implementation at several junctures; this report is part of a series doing so. This report (1) examines the extent to which 24 agencies identified by OMB implemented selected requirements related to 102 APGs, and (2) comments on the 21 APGs of five selected agencies, based on prior GAO and IG work, including the status of relevant open recommendations. To address these objectives, GAO reviewed the act's requirements for APGs, OMB guidance, APG information from Performance.gov and related agency documents; and interviewed OMB officials. GAO selected DHS, HUD, DOT, VA, and OPM for their variety of APG program types and linkage to CAP goals. For each agency, GAO reviewed its past work, as well as that of IGs, related to the APGs and updated the status of open recommendations.

What GAO Recommends

GAO makes recommendations to OMB to improve APG implementation by revising its guidance to better reflect interim target, milestone, and CAP goal alignment requirements; and ensure that agencies provide complete information about external contributors to their APGs and describe congressional input on APG development. OMB staff agreed with these recommendations.

View [GAO-13-174](#). For more information, contact J. Christopher Mihm at (202) 512-6806 or mihmj@gao.gov.

MANAGING FOR RESULTS

Agencies Should More Fully Develop Priority Goals under the GPRA Modernization Act

What GAO Found

For 102 agency priority goals (APGs) for 2012 to 2013 that GAO reviewed, agencies implemented three GPRA Modernization Act of 2010 (the act) requirements. Agencies identified (1) a target level of performance within a 2-year time frame; (2) how their APGs contribute to their strategic goals; and (3) an agency official responsible for achieving each APG. These represent important accomplishments, but information about other requirements is incomplete:

Agencies did not fully explain the relationship between APGs and crosscutting efforts. The act directs agencies to identify federal organizations, programs, and activities that contribute to each APG. Agencies identified internal contributors to their APGs, but did not identify external contributors for 34 of 102 APGs. In some cases the APGs appeared to be internally focused; however, in others GAO's work has shown there are external contributors, but none were listed. In addition, the act requires agencies to identify how, if at all, an APG contributes to any cross-agency priority (CAP) goals set by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). Although 29 of 102 APGs appeared to support a CAP goal, only two described the link. When agencies do not identify external contributors or links to crosscutting efforts, it is unclear whether agencies are coordinating to limit overlap and duplication.

Most APGs had performance measures, but many lacked interim targets. The act requires agencies to develop quarterly targets for APGs if they provide data of significant value at a reasonable level of burden. However, OMB's guidance does not fully address this. Without interim targets when appropriate, agencies cannot demonstrate that they are comparing actual results against planned performance on a sufficiently frequent basis to address performance issues as they arise.

Agencies did not identify milestones with completion dates for many APGs. The act requires agencies to develop and publish milestones—scheduled events for completing planned actions—for their APGs. However, OMB's guidance does not direct agencies to provide specific completion dates for their milestones. For 39 of 102 APGs, agencies did not provide milestones with clear completion dates for the next quarter or the remainder of the goal period. Without milestones, agencies are unable to demonstrate that they have properly planned for the actions needed to accomplish their goals and are tracking progress.

Most agencies did not describe how APGs reflect congressional input. The act directs agencies to describe for each APG how input from consultations with Congress was incorporated. However, only one agency provided a description. Without transparency regarding congressional input, there is less assurance that meaningful consultations with Congress are occurring.

GAO commented on all 21 of the APGs from the Departments of Homeland Security (DHS), Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Transportation (DOT), and Veterans Affairs (VA), and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), based on past GAO and inspectors general (IG) work. The most frequent theme in the comments is that agencies continue to face the long-standing challenge of measuring performance and collecting accurate performance data.