

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-13-524](#), a report to congressional requesters

## Why GAO Did This Study

While IT investments have the potential to make organizations more efficient, many federal IT projects experience cost overruns, schedule delays, and performance shortfalls. To help address these shortfalls, OMB established TechStats—face-to-face meetings to terminate or turnaround IT investments that are failing or are not producing results.

GAO was asked to evaluate the implementation of TechStats. GAO's objectives were to (1) identify key characteristics of TechStats held to date; (2) evaluate whether selected agencies are conducting TechStats in accordance with OMB guidance, and (3) analyze the extent to which reported TechStat results are tracked and validated. To do so, GAO selected four agencies—Agriculture, Commerce, HHS, and DHS—because these were the agencies with the highest number of at-risk investments. GAO analyzed OMB and agency documentation, compared agency processes to TechStat guidance, compared efforts to validate reported outcomes to leading practices, and interviewed OMB and agency officials.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is making recommendations to OMB to require agencies to address high-risk investments and to report on how they validated the outcomes. GAO is also making recommendations to selected agencies to address weaknesses in following OMB's TechStat guidance. OMB and Commerce officials generally agreed with GAO's recommendations. Agriculture partially agreed with GAO's assessment; neither it nor HHS commented on the recommendations.

View [GAO-13-524](#). For more information, contact David A. Powner at (202) 512-9286 or [pownerd@gao.gov](mailto:pownerd@gao.gov).

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## INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

### Additional Executive Review Sessions Needed to Address Troubled Projects

## What GAO Found

Since January 2010, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and selected agencies have held multiple TechStat Accountability Sessions (TechStats) on information technology (IT) investments that varied in terms of function, significance, and risk. As of April 2013, OMB reported conducting 79 TechStats, which focused on 55 investments at 23 federal agencies. The four agencies conducted 37 TechStats covering 28 investments. About 70 percent of the OMB- and 76 percent of agency-led TechStats on major investments were considered medium- to high-risk at the time of the TechStat. However, the number of at-risk TechStats held to date is relatively small compared to the current number of medium- and high-risk IT investments. Until OMB and agencies develop plans to address these investments, the investments will likely remain at risk.

**Number of TechStats as a Percentage of Medium- and High-Risk Investments, as of May 2013**

	Number of at-risk IT investments that have undergone a TechStat	Number of at-risk IT investments	Percentage
<b>OMB-led</b>			
Governmentwide	30	162	18.5%
<b>OMB- or Agency-led</b>			
Department of Agriculture (Agriculture)	6	15	40.0%
Department of Commerce (Commerce)	7	12	58.3%
Department of Homeland Security (DHS)	8	26	30.8%
Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)	2	16	12.5%
<b>Agency average</b>			<b>33.3%</b>

Source: GAO analysis of IT Dashboard data as of August 2012.

The selected agencies are generally conducting TechStats in accordance with OMB guidance. OMB's TechStat guidance includes 15 key requirements, such as when TechStats should be implemented, what participants should be included, and how outcomes should be tracked and reported. DHS implemented all of the TechStat requirements. Commerce, HHS, and Agriculture implemented a majority of the requirements, but each had shortcomings. For example, these agencies did not consistently create memorandums with responsible parties and due dates for action items. Fully implementing OMB's guidance could better position agencies to effectively manage and resolve problems on IT investments.

OMB and selected agencies have tracked and reported positive results from TechStats, with most resulting in improved governance. OMB also reported in 2011 that federal agencies achieved almost \$4 billion in life-cycle cost savings as a result of TechStat sessions. However, GAO was unable to validate OMB's reported results because OMB did not provide artifacts showing that it ensured the results were valid. From GAO's selected agencies, three investments had cost implications. Agencies provided supporting documentation for about \$22.2 million in cost savings and avoidances. Until OMB obtains and shares information on the methods used to validate reported results, it will be difficult for the results to be independently validated and for OMB to provide assurance to Congress and the public that TechStats are achieving their intended impact.