

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-14-63](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

GSA is responsible for ensuring that federal agencies have access to the telecommunications services and solutions needed to meet their mission requirements. As agencies' telecommunications needs have evolved, so too have GSA's contracts to help support them. Its latest contracts, signed in 2007 and collectively called Networx, provide transport; Internet protocol; wireless; and management and application services, among others. In fiscal year 2012, agencies spent over \$1.4 billion on Networx services. However, the transition from the previous telecommunications contracts, known as FTS2001, has not been easy, taking almost 3 years longer than planned.

GAO's objectives were to determine (1) what factors contributed to the delay in transitioning services to Networx and the consequences due to the delay, and (2) to what extent GSA is documenting and applying lessons learned as it prepares for the next telecommunications contract transition. GAO examined lessons learned activities and supporting documents, cost and missed savings estimates, performed case studies at two agencies with large delays, and interviewed agency and service provider officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that, in preparing for the next transition, GSA, in coordination with OPM, examine potential government-wide expertise shortfalls, and that it provide agencies guidance on project planning and fully archive, share, and prioritize lessons learned. GSA and OPM agreed with GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-14-63](#). For more information, contact Carol R. Cha at (202) 512-4456 or chac@gao.gov.

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TELECOMMUNICATIONS

GSA Needs to Share and Prioritize Lessons Learned to Avoid Future Transition Delays

What GAO Found

Complex acquisition processes and weaknesses in project planning contributed to the delays experienced on the Networx transition, resulting in cost increases and missed savings. In particular, the complexity of the acquisition process was related to duplicative contract vehicles, the large number of service options, and changes related to the process for ensuring fair competition among service providers, among others. These issues were reported by the General Services Administration (GSA) to have been compounded by a decline in contracting and technical expertise within the agencies. GAO has identified skills gaps in the federal workforce as a government-wide high-risk area and highlighted the need for agencies to work with the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to close them. Weaknesses in agencies' project planning also contributed to the delays. For example, agencies tended to transition easier items first, to demonstrate progress, before they transitioned items that needed a long lead time such as data networks and international services. As a result of the delays, GSA's estimated cost to complete the transition increased by \$66.4 million, 44 percent over the baseline estimate. In addition to the extra transition costs, agencies may have paid more for similar services by staying on the FTS2001 contracts longer than planned. Specifically, in April 2010, GSA estimated that agencies could have saved 28.4 percent of their spending on FTS2001 by using Networx contracts instead. Based on this rate of savings, GAO estimates that agencies could have saved about \$329 million if they had transitioned to Networx on time.

The extent to which GSA is documenting and applying lessons learned in preparation for the next telecommunications transition varies. GSA has fully or partially satisfied five of six key practices necessary for a robust lessons learned process (see table). To its credit, GSA has collected, analyzed, and validated lessons learned from the Networx transition. However, it has not fully shared these lessons with its customer agencies or prioritized them to ensure that resources are applied to areas with the greatest return on investment. GSA plans to finalize its next telecommunications acquisition strategy in December 2013 and begin the next transition when it awards new contracts in February 2017. Fully addressing key lessons learned practices should help GSA and agencies better plan for and execute the next telecommunications transition.

Extent to which GSA Satisfied Lessons Learned Key Practices

Practice	Satisfied?
Collecting information	●
Analyzing the information collected to identify lessons that lead to recommendations	●
Validating the accuracy and applicability of lessons to other projects	●
Archiving the lessons	◐
Sharing and disseminating lessons	◐
Prioritizing and applying lessons learned	○

Key: ● GSA satisfied the criteria. ◐ GSA has partially satisfied the criteria. ○ GSA has not satisfied the criteria.

Source: GAO analysis of GSA data.