

## Why GAO Did This Study

Research and development helps catalyze breakthroughs that improve the overall health and wellbeing of our society. Federal research and development expenditures averaged about \$135 billion annually for fiscal years 2015 to 2017. According to OSTP, providing free public access to federally funded research results can improve both the impact and accountability of this important federal investment. In February 2013, OSTP directed federal agencies with more than \$100 million in annual research and development expenditures to develop a plan to support increased public access to the results of federally funded research.

GAO was asked to examine public access to federally funded research results. This report examines the extent of agencies' (1) progress implementing plans to increase public access to federally funded research results and (2) coordination on public access plan implementation. GAO administered a questionnaire to 19 federal agencies selected based on annual research and development expenditure amounts, among other criteria; reviewed agency documents; and interviewed officials from 11 agencies, OSTP, and 21 stakeholder organizations.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is making 37 recommendations to 16 agencies to promote full and effective implementation of agency public access plans. For example, GAO recommends that OSTP and 5 agencies leading a public access interagency group take steps to fully implement selected leading collaboration practices. Of the 16 agencies, 15 agreed with GAO's recommendations while 1 (OSTP) disagreed. GAO continues to believe the recommendation to OSTP is warranted.

View [GAO-20-81](#). For more information, contact John Neumann at (202) 512-6888 or [neumannj@gao.gov](mailto:neumannj@gao.gov).

## FEDERAL RESEARCH

### Additional Actions Needed to Improve Public Access to Research Results

#### What GAO Found

The 19 agencies that GAO reviewed have made progress implementing their plans to increase public access to federally funded research results (publications and data), as called for in a 2013 Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) memorandum. However, some agencies have not fully implemented some aspects of their plans, in particular those related to data access and mechanisms to ensure researchers comply with public access requirements.

#### Examples of Agencies' Progress Implementing Plans to Increase Public Access to Federally Funded Research Results

Public access plan topic	Extent of agency progress
Repositories	All 19 agencies have identified federally owned or managed locations, known as repositories, for preservation and public access to publications. For data, agencies rely on an array of federal and nonfederal repositories. However, seven agencies have not taken steps, such as establishing a single web-based point of access, or have not fully implemented plans to help the public find data stored across repositories. Taking such steps could better support public access to federally funded data.
Data management plans (DMPs)	Sixteen of 19 agencies reported requiring researchers to submit a DMP, which is supposed to describe how researchers will provide for long-term preservation and access to data they generate, or a justification for why that cannot be done. However, four agencies reported they have not established such requirements or have done so on a limited basis. Without requiring DMPs from agency-funded researchers, agencies may not be able to ensure that agency-funded data are being made publicly available.
Compliance	Eleven agencies reported that they have not fully developed or implemented mechanisms to ensure researchers comply with applicable public access requirements. Officials cited several reasons for this, including resource constraints and difficulty with tracking and measuring compliance. Without fully implementing compliance mechanisms—as called for in the OSTP memorandum—agencies may not have assurance that all appropriate federally funded research results are being made publicly available.

Source: GAO analysis of agency public access plan implementation efforts. | [GAO-20-81](#)

Agencies are coordinating with each other and with nonfederal stakeholders to implement public access plans, including through an interagency group led by OSTP and five other agencies. However, the group has not fully implemented selected leading practices identified by GAO that can enhance and sustain interagency collaboration, such as defining and articulating common outcomes. For example, according to OSTP staff, key outcomes have not yet been decided upon. Agency officials and stakeholders identified several challenges to implementing public access plans that interagency coordination might help them address, such as

- Absence of common standards in several areas;
- Measuring effectiveness of public access plan implementation; and
- Balancing providing public access with safeguarding sensitive information.

By taking steps to fully implement relevant leading collaboration practices, the interagency group could help agencies better marshal their collective efforts to address common challenges to public access plan implementation.