

GAO@100 Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-21-273](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

Any of the 1.8 million airport workers with unescorted access to security-restricted areas of the nation's airports could pose an "insider threat." The TSA Modernization Act (Act) required TSA to submit a study examining the cost and feasibility of enhanced worker screening measures. In its September 2020 study, TSA determined that implementing these measures is feasible and estimated implementation costs of \$2.9-\$3.6 billion, with ongoing annual costs of \$2.5-\$3.1 billion.

The Act also included a provision for GAO to review the study's quality and reliability. This report addresses the extent to which TSA, in its 2020 study, (1) followed best practices to comprehensively estimate the costs of implementing enhanced airport worker screening measures and (2) assessed the feasibility of implementing such measures.

GAO reviewed TSA's study and documents of the underlying methods, data, and assumptions; compared the study to best practices of a comprehensive cost estimate—a foundational characteristic of reliability; and interviewed officials from TSA, an industry advisory committee, and airports with worker screening programs.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that TSA (1) issue guidance that staff consider following best practices from GAO's cost estimating guide for future estimates, and (2) issue guidance on feasibility assessments. TSA agreed with our recommendations.

View [GAO-21-273](#). For more information, contact Triana McNeil at (202) 512-8777 or mcnelt@gao.gov

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AIRPORT WORKER SCREENING

TSA Could Further Strengthen Its Approach to Estimating Costs and Feasibility of Security Measures

What GAO Found

The Transportation Security Administration (TSA), in its 2020 study estimating the cost of implementing enhanced airport worker screening measures, followed most of the best practices for a comprehensive cost estimate—one of four characteristics of a high-quality, reliable estimate, according to GAO's *Cost Estimating and Assessment Guide*. For example, while TSA documented its assumptions, it did not include a standard work breakdown structure or dictionary. Without these, TSA cannot ensure its estimates do not omit or double count any elements. TSA officials responsible for developing the estimate said they were unaware of GAO's cost estimating guide. Instead, they followed guidance from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) on regulatory impact analysis, because enhanced worker screening is a conceptual rather than established program. However, OMB has separate guidance on cost estimates, which recommends following GAO's cost estimating guide in order to meet most cost estimating requirements. TSA officials said that our cost estimating guide could be helpful to consider when developing future cost estimates. Issuing guidance to ensure staff consider following best practices will better position TSA to develop future estimates that are comprehensive to inform policy decisions.

Examples of Airport Worker Screening and Supplemental Measures in the Transportation Security Administration's (TSA) September 2020 Cost Estimate and Feasibility Assessment



Source: GAO presentation of TSA information. | [GAO-21-273](#)

In its 2020 study, TSA also used incomplete information to assess the feasibility of implementing enhanced airport worker screening. First, TSA did not include local airport constraints—such as availability of space for screening operations—that it stated could influence feasibility. Second, TSA's assessment relied on the perspectives of and experiences at large airports, which may not be applicable to smaller airports. TSA officials said they believed the feasibility assessment was sufficient and there was no other formal agency guidance for how to conduct feasibility studies. However, officials said that such guidance could be useful for future assessments. Issuing guidance on assessing feasibility will help TSA ensure its future feasibility assessments are consistent and based upon complete information.