

GAO@100 Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-21-316](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

DHS OIG plays a critical role in overseeing DHS, which encompasses multiple components and programs and has tens of billions of dollars in annual budgetary resources. However, DHS OIG has faced a number of long-standing management and operational challenges that have affected its ability to carry out its oversight mission effectively.

GAO was asked to review DHS OIG's management and operations. This report addresses the extent to which DHS OIG adheres to professional standards and key practices in its management and operations, among other objectives.

GAO reviewed DHS OIG management and operations from fiscal year 2015 through fiscal year 2020. GAO evaluated DHS OIG's processes against quality standards for federal OIGs, relevant federal standards for internal control, and human capital and organizational change leading practices. To do so, GAO reviewed DHS OIG documents, interviewed officials, and analyzed DHS OIG data and published reports.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making 21 recommendations to DHS OIG to address management and operational weaknesses related to performance management, quality assurance, reporting timeliness, and coordination with DHS, among others.

DHS OIG concurred with each of GAO's 21 recommendations.

View [GAO-21-316](#). For more information, contact Chris Currie at (404) 679-1875 or curriec@gao.gov.

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DHS OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

Actions Needed to Address Long-Standing Management Weaknesses

What GAO Found

Since fiscal year 2015, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Office of Inspector General (OIG) has not adhered to a number of professional standards for federal OIGs and key practices for effective management. Frequent leadership turnover and associated shifts in leadership priorities have contributed to DHS OIG's long-standing management and operational weaknesses and impeded efforts to address them. DHS OIG senior leaders acknowledge that various challenges have contributed to these weaknesses, and have taken steps to begin to address some of them, as follows:

- **Organizational performance management:** DHS OIG has operated for 4 of the past 6 years without a strategic plan. This limits its ability to implement other organizational performance management activities, such as annual planning and performance assessment. In the absence of a strategic plan, GAO found that DHS OIG staff may not understand its oversight priorities and goals, which can negatively affect operations and staff performance. In 2020, DHS OIG contracted with a nonprofit academy of government experts to develop a strategic plan for fiscal years 2021–2025, with expected completion in June 2021.
- **Quality assurance:** DHS OIG has not developed or implemented organization-wide roles and responsibilities for quality assurance. DHS OIG retracted some reports in recent years because they did not adhere to professional standards. Because there is no overarching system of internal quality assurance for audit, inspection, evaluation, and other work, DHS OIG cannot know if its internal processes ensure that its work (1) adheres to its policies and (2) meets established standards of performance.
- **Report timeliness:** Project time frames have increased in recent years, and DHS OIG has not taken steps to understand the causes of such increases or determine how to address them. For example, in the Office of Audits, eight of 102 projects completed in fiscal year 2017 took more than 18 months, compared to more than half (35 of 67) of projects completed in fiscal year 2020. Without timely DHS OIG reports, DHS's ability to respond to such oversight efforts and Congress's ability to conduct effective oversight of DHS operations are limited.
- **Coordination with DHS:** DHS OIG does not have a consistent process for coordinating with DHS components to receive and respond to technical and management comments on DHS OIG audit, inspection, and evaluation work. Further, DHS officials do not have confidence in DHS OIG's processes to (1) correct factual errors before finalizing reports and (2) redact sensitive but unclassified information before publicly issuing reports. As a result, the process by which DHS OIG resolves DHS's comments is at risk of miscommunication and misunderstandings.

These and additional weaknesses GAO identified are of particular concern given that OIGs need to maintain high standards of professionalism and integrity in light of their mission, according to quality standards for federal OIGs. Without addressing these and other long-standing management and operational weaknesses, DHS OIG is not well positioned to fulfill its oversight mission.