

## Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-22-900369](#), a testimony before the Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress

### GAO's History and Impact

The Budget and Accounting Act of 1921 established GAO as an independent agency to investigate how federal dollars are spent. Early in GAO's history, it conducted reviews of federal payments and focused on conducting financial reviews.

By the 1970s, the size, scope, and complexity of the federal government had expanded, and congressional interest in whether government programs were meeting their objectives was growing. Consequently, GAO shifted its efforts to evaluating the efficiency and effectiveness of federal programs. In 2004, GAO changed its name from the General Accounting Office to the Government Accountability Office to better reflect this expanded role.

Today, GAO's work spans all federal programs and spending—from agriculture to space programs, banking regulation to public health, and cybersecurity to international aid. We also do financial audits of the US government and assessments of its fiscal outlook.

The impact of this work is significant: since 2005, GAO's findings and recommendations have resulted in \$1 trillion in financial benefits and more than 21,000 operational benefits for the U.S. government. Over the past 5 years, GAO's average return on investment is \$165 for every \$1 invested in GAO.

In this testimony, GAO describes the wide range of services it provides to Congress, how these services have evolved to meet congressional needs, and how it is positioned to meet future needs and challenges.

View [GAO-22-900369](#). For more information, contact A. Nicole Clowers at (202) 512-4400 or [clowersa@gao.gov](mailto:clowersa@gao.gov).

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## GAO

### A Century of Strategic Evolution to Meet Congressional Needs

#### GAO's Evolution of Expertise and Services

Over the last century, GAO has strategically adapted its services and products—all with an eye towards informing congressional decision-making and improving government operations through nonpartisan and fact-based work.



**Evaluating government programs.** This now represents the majority of GAO's work, and these evaluations result in hundreds of recommendations each year to improve government operations and billions in financial benefits. Agencies typically implement 75 percent or more of GAO's recommendations.



**Conducting real-time analyses.** From monitoring the implementation of economic stimulus programs and the Troubled Assets Relief Program during the global financial crisis to providing oversight of the federal response to the COVID-19 pandemic, GAO gathers information in real time, from its source. GAO also provides quick-turnaround, technical support, such as reviewing draft legislation.



**Conducting technology assessments.** GAO has strengthened its capacity to analyze the latest developments in science and technology, draw attention to the implications of technological change, and make core concepts accessible to policymakers. Recent assessments have examined smartphone contact tracing applications, 5G wireless technology, and artificial intelligence in health care. GAO also recently issued an artificial intelligence accountability framework as a foundational document for evaluation of these systems government wide.



**Identifying high-risk issues.** GAO's biennial high-risk report has evolved from identifying government operations that are vulnerable to mismanagement to also including those in need of transformation. Since 2005, this work has led to nearly \$575 billion in financial benefits and key operational improvements, such as more sophisticated satellites for weather forecasting in light of extreme weather.



**Providing legal decisions and other work.** GAO issues decisions on bid protests and appropriations law. Since the mid-1990s, GAO's decisions also address whether an agency action is a rule and vacant executive positions. Since 2005, GAO has maintained, and produces summaries of, agency Antideficiency Act violation reports.

Source: GAO. | [GAO-22-900369](#)

GAO continues to evolve to meet the needs of Congress. From establishing a team to serve as the lead for its science and technology work, to growing its cybersecurity expertise, to developing quick-read products, GAO strives to anticipate or respond to changing congressional needs and emerging issues. For example, one of GAO's newest products, the "Science and Technology Spotlight," explains emerging science and technology with its associated opportunities and challenges, and relevant policy considerations.

GAO's unique mission and structure, diverse and talented workforce, and external network makes it well-positioned to continue to support Congress into the future. The agency's highly-skilled workforce and well-developed professional network that spans the globe enable GAO to anticipate emerging issues, challenges, and opportunities and craft strategic plans for serving the Congress and the country.