

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-23-105472](#), a report to the Ranking Member, Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

CBP—a component of DHS—invests billions of dollars each year acquiring systems to support its missions. GAO and DHS reviews have found CBP is not consistently meeting its acquisition programs' cost and schedule goals, and is deploying capabilities that are not fully tested.

GAO was asked to review CBP's processes for planning and managing its acquisition programs. This report assesses, among other objectives, the extent to which (1) key CBP stakeholders are collaborating when planning selected acquisition programs, and (2) CBP demonstrates lessons learned practices when developing acquisition programs.

GAO reviewed acquisition policies and guidance and selected a nongeneralizable sample of 10 programs based on the programs' acquisition level and type, among other factors. For those programs, GAO reviewed documentation and lessons learned and interviewed acquisition and contracting officials. GAO assessed CBP's efforts against leading practices for collaboration and lessons learned identified in prior GAO work.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is making four recommendations to CBP, including to update guidance; to formalize contracting officer involvement in program acquisition strategies; to collect, analyze, and validate lessons learned; and to develop a lessons learned repository. DHS agreed with these recommendations.

View [GAO-23-105472](#). For more information, contact Marie A. Mak at (202) 512-4841 or [makm@gao.gov](mailto:makm@gao.gov).

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## CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION

### Actions Needed to Enhance Acquisition Management and Knowledge Sharing

## What GAO Found

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) acquires systems—including software, marine vessels, and aircraft—to protect Americans from terrorism, secure U.S. borders, and facilitate lawful trade, among other missions.

### Examples of U.S. Customs and Border Protection Acquisition Programs



Source: U.S. Customs and Border Protection; Coastal Interceptor Vessel photographer Carlos Rivera. | GAO-23-105472

A number of key stakeholders collaborate to manage CBP's acquisition programs. Yet recent changes to the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) policy have reduced formal involvement of one stakeholder—the contracting officer. Prior to the policy change, CBP contracting officers had a defined role in developing acquisition strategies through program-level acquisition plans, which were intended to discuss the overall strategy for relevant contracts supporting the program. Now, CBP contracting officers GAO spoke with coordinate with program managers on a contract-by-contract basis. Moreover, CBP has not yet updated its guidance to define the role contracting officers should have in developing program-level acquisition strategies. Doing so would help ensure that contracting officers are involved in ensuring that an acquisition program's overall contracting approach aligns with program goals and risks that may otherwise be obscured at the individual contract level.

CBP does not consistently demonstrate leading practices for lessons learned when developing acquisition programs. Lessons learned can be a valuable tool for evaluating the success or failure of a program and for applying those lessons to future efforts. CBP requires programs to conduct activities—such as post-implementation reviews—that can capture lessons learned. But the programs GAO reviewed did not consistently conduct these activities or collect, analyze, and validate these lessons learned. Updating guidance to require that programs' lessons learned are consistently collected, analyzed, and validated will help to ensure that CBP has identified root causes and appropriate actions to address them, and determined the applicability of lessons learned to other programs. GAO also found that, while CBP has taken some steps to share lessons learned, it does not have a formal process or a repository in place to consistently archive and share them. Without consistently archiving and sharing lessons learned, CBP is at risk of missing opportunities to improve its planning for similar acquisition programs and of losing lessons learned that could inform future acquisition programs.