

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-23-105853](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

NTSB plays a vital role in advancing transportation safety by investigating and reporting on the probable cause of accidents and issuing safety recommendations. Despite growth and technological advancement in the transportation sector, NTSB's staffing levels have remained about the same for the past 20 years, according to NTSB. Congress has expressed concerns about the timeliness of NTSB's accident investigation reports, the quality of its accident investigation data, and whether the agency has sufficient staff to conduct its work.

GAO was asked to review NTSB's management and operations. This report evaluates, among other things, NTSB's (1) performance planning efforts; (2) efforts to improve its use of data in decision-making; and (3) recent workforce planning activities to identify skill gaps in its workforce.

GAO analyzed NTSB reports, plans, procedures, and other documents related to the agency's management and operations; compared NTSB's efforts with relevant laws and guidance; reviewed NTSB investigation and contracting data; and interviewed agency officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making six recommendations, including that NTSB ensure its future performance planning documents meet all statutory requirements; finalize a system that enables the agency to more effectively analyze and use labor cost data; and conduct a skill gap assessment. NTSB did not take a position on the recommendations but identified actions to address them.

View [GAO-23-105853](#). For more information, contact Heather Krause at (202) 512-2834 or krauseh@gao.gov.

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NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Additional Actions Needed to Improve Management and Operations

What GAO Found

The National Transportation Safety Board's (NTSB) most recent strategic plan, annual performance plan, and annual performance report fully met 14 of the 25 statutory content requirements that GAO analyzed specified in federal laws on agency performance planning. For example, NTSB's strategic plan described the agency's mission and identified external factors that could affect achievement of the agency's goals. Other requirements that NTSB did not satisfy are fundamental tools in federal performance management. For example, within its strategic plan, NTSB established strategic goals targeting organizational efficiency, process improvements, and preparedness for emerging technologies. However, none of these strategic goals directly link to NTSB's mission of improving transportation safety, as required. Without mission-focused strategic goals, it will be difficult for NTSB to determine how the agency's actions connect to the broader outcomes it hopes to achieve. By fully meeting this and all other statutory content requirements for performance planning documents, NTSB can better ensure accountability to Congress and the public.

Summary of Extent to Which the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) Met 25 Statutory Content Requirements for Its Performance Planning Documents

Performance planning document	Summary of extent to which NTSB met content requirements
Strategic plan	●●●●○●○○○
Annual performance plan	●●●●●●●●●●●●●●○
Annual performance report	●●●●●○

Legend: Each dot represents one statutory requirement that GAO assessed. ● = Met; ◐ = Partially met; ○ = Not met

Source: GAO analysis of NTSB information. | GAO-23-105853

NTSB has improved its use of investigation data to inform decisions, but it has made limited progress in doing so for labor cost data (i.e., data on staff time spent on individual investigations and other activities). NTSB has previously taken steps to improve the usability of its labor cost data but, despite years of effort, continues to be unable to use these data for resource allocation and other decision-making. NTSB officials said that they recently improved NTSB's labor cost data system, and that they expect to receive approval to fully implement the updated system later this year. Until then, NTSB is limited in its ability to use labor cost data to make more informed decisions, in alignment with federal guidance that directs agencies to leverage data in carrying out their missions.

NTSB has recently taken steps to determine whether its workforce has the skills needed to carry out the agency's mission. However, these efforts do not provide comprehensive information on the skills staff need, how many staff have those skills, and where skill gaps exist. In 2022, NTSB issued a survey and held listening sessions with staff to identify training needs, but these efforts did not include all mission-critical staff, as leading practices recommend, nor did they identify the range of skills needed. Moreover, NTSB officials indicated that they do not have a consolidated inventory of current staff skills. As a result of these shortcomings, NTSB is hampered in its ability to identify skill gaps across the agency, including in all mission-critical occupations, and to implement strategies to address its most pressing needs.