



Highlights of [GAO-07-1065](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has established a program known as U.S. Visitor and Immigrant Status Indicator Technology (US-VISIT) to collect, maintain, and share information, including biometric identifiers, on certain foreign nationals who travel to the United States. By congressional mandate, DHS is to develop and submit an expenditure plan for US-VISIT that satisfies certain conditions, including being reviewed by GAO. GAO reviewed the plan to (1) determine if the plan satisfied these conditions, (2) follow up on certain recommendations related to the program, and (3) provide any other observations. To address the mandate, GAO assessed plans and related documentation against federal guidelines and industry standards and interviewed the appropriate DHS officials.

What GAO Recommends

Because outstanding recommendations already address all of the management weaknesses discussed in this report, GAO is reiterating prior recommendations and recommending that the Secretary of DHS report to the department's authorization and appropriations committees on its reasons for not fully addressing the legislative conditions and prior GAO recommendations. DHS largely agreed with the report and provided additional information and views that GAO has incorporated and addressed in the report as appropriate.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-1065.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Randolph C. Hite at (202) 512-3439 or hiter@gao.gov.

HOMELAND SECURITY

U.S. Visitor and Immigrant Status Program's Long-standing Lack of Strategic Direction and Management Controls Needs to Be Addressed

What GAO Found

The US-VISIT expenditure plan, including related program documentation and program officials' statements, satisfies or partially satisfies some but not all of the legislative conditions required by the Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act, 2007. For example, the department satisfied the condition that it provide certification that an independent verification and validation agent is currently under contract for the program and partially satisfied the condition that US-VISIT comply with DHS's enterprise architecture. However, the department did not satisfy the conditions that the plan include a comprehensive US-VISIT strategic plan and a complete schedule for biometric exit implementation.

DHS partially implemented GAO's oldest open recommendations pertaining to US-VISIT. For example, while the department partially completed the recommendation that it develop and begin implementing a US-VISIT system security plan, the scope of the plan does not extend to all the systems that comprise US-VISIT. In addition, while the expenditure plan provides some information on US-VISIT's cost, schedule, and benefits associated with planned capabilities, the information provided is not sufficiently defined and detailed to address GAO's recommendation and provide a reasonable basis for measuring progress and holding the department accountable for results.

GAO identified several additional observations. On the positive side, DHS data show that the US-VISIT prime contract is being executed according to cost and schedule expectations. However, DHS continues to propose disproportionately heavy investment in US-VISIT program management-related activities without adequate justification or full disclosure. Further, DHS continues to propose spending tens of millions of dollars on US-VISIT exit projects that are not well-defined, planned, or justified on the basis of costs, benefits, and risks.

Overall, the US-VISIT fiscal year 2007 expenditure plan and other available program documentation do not provide a sufficient basis for effective program oversight and accountability. Both the legislative conditions and GAO's open recommendations are aimed at accomplishing both, and thus they need to be addressed quickly and completely. However, despite ample opportunity to do so, DHS has not done so and the reasons why are unclear. Until these recommendations are addressed, GAO does not believe that the program's disproportionate investment in management-related activities represents a prudent and warranted course of action or to expect that the newly launched exit endeavor will produce results different from past results—namely, no operational exit solution despite expenditure plans allocating about a quarter of a billion dollars to various exit activities.