INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY MANAGEMENT

Census Bureau Has Implemented Many Key Practices, but Additional Actions Are Needed

Why GAO Did This Study

The Census Bureau's mission is to serve as the leading source of high quality data about the American people and the economy. This information is used to determine congressional and state legislative districts and to distribute hundreds of billions of dollars in federal funds each year. Information technology (IT) plays a critical role in the bureau's ability to carry out its missions by supporting data collection, analysis, and dissemination activities. In the past, the bureau has experienced problems with the development, acquisition, and implementation of IT systems. GAO was asked to (1) provide an IT profile of the Census Bureau, including an overview of information technology management and plans for the 2010 decennial census and (2) evaluate the adequacy of the bureau's IT policies, procedures, and practices in the areas of investment management, system development/management, enterprise architecture management, information security, and human capital.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making recommendations to the Secretary of Commerce to improve the bureau's ability to effectively manage IT by addressing weaknesses found in each of the management areas GAO reviewed. In written comments on a draft of this report, Commerce agreed with GAO's recommendations and noted that the bureau has already begun improvements.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-661.
To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact David A. Powner at (202) 512-9286 or pownerd@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

The Census Bureau has a decentralized approach to IT management. The chief information officer is responsible for establishing policy and strategies and shares responsibility for implementing policies and managing systems and staff with the associate directors for different bureau program areas. In its 5-year strategic IT plan, the bureau identified 10 major investments that are currently estimated to total about $4 billion through 2009. Three of the bureau's 10 major investments—estimated to cost $2.7 billion—are expected to support the 2010 decennial census. For example, the bureau plans to invest about $1.8 billion in the 2010 Testing, Evaluation, and Systems Design program—an effort to redesign procedures and increase the use of automation planned for the 2010 decennial census through a multiyear effort of planning, development, and testing.

The bureau has developed policies and procedures and initiated key practices in many of the areas that are important to successfully managing IT, including investment management, system development/management, enterprise architecture management, information security, and human capital management. However, many of these practices are not fully and consistently performed (see figure). For example, in the IT investment management area, the bureau has established executive-level investment boards, but it lacks written procedures outlining how the investment boards are to operate and ensuring a consistent and repeatable approach to investment management and decision making. As a result of this and other weaknesses, the bureau is at increased risk of not adequately managing major IT investments and is more likely to experience cost and schedule overruns and performance shortfalls. Because the bureau plans to spend billions of dollars on information technology to prepare for the 2010 decennial census, building in sound IT practices now is more critical than ever.

Number of Key Information Technology Management Activities Implemented

Information Technology Management Area	◯ Incomplete or obsolete policies and procedures; ad hoc practices	◑ Policies or procedures for key functions; only selected practices in place	● Comprehensive, current policies and procedures; practices adhere to policies, procedures, and generally accepted standards
IT Investment Management[a]	0	4	1
System Development/Management[a]	1	7	0
Enterprise Architecture Management[a]	0	2	14
Information Security	0	5	2
IT Human Capital	0	3	1
Total	**1**	**21**	**18**

Source: GAO.

[a]Denotes areas assessed at less than full maturity within a maturity framework.

United States Government Accountability Office