INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Management Improvements Needed on Immigration and Customs Enforcement's Infrastructure Modernization Program

Why GAO Did This Study

The Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Atlas program is intended to modernize Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) information technology (IT) infrastructure. By congressional mandate, DHS is to develop and submit for approval an expenditure plan for Atlas that satisfies certain legislative conditions, including a review by GAO. GAO was asked to determine whether the plan satisfied certain legislative conditions and to provide observations on the plan and management of the program.

What GAO Recommends

To strengthen Atlas planning and management, GAO recommends that the Secretary of DHS ensure that ICE follows through on commitments to implement effective management controls and capabilities by, among other things, revising and updating the cost-benefit analysis; making the program office operational; developing and implementing rigorous performance program management practices; and ensuring that future expenditure plans fully disclose the system capabilities, schedule, cost, and benefits to be delivered. In its written comments on this report, DHS concurred with GAO's recommendations and stated actions that it was taking to implement them.

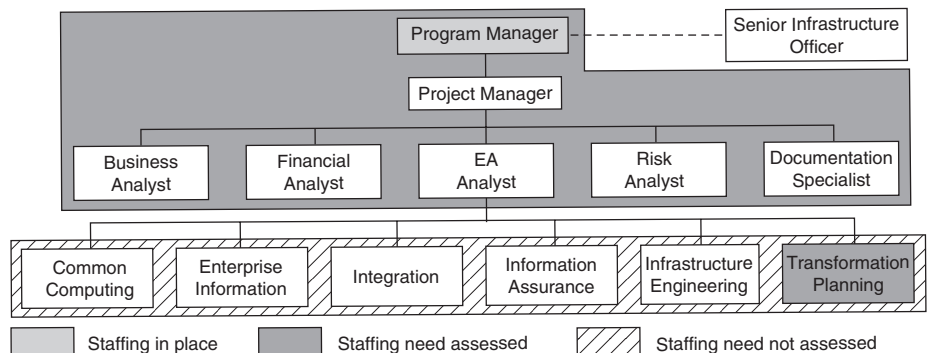www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-805.

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

What GAO Found

DHS's fiscal year 2004 Atlas expenditure plan, related documentation, and program officials' statements satisfied all conditions imposed by Congress, including (1) meeting the capital planning and investment control review requirements established by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB); (2) complying with the DHS enterprise architecture; (3) complying with the acquisition rules, requirements, guidelines, and systems acquisition management practices of the federal government; and (4) being reviewed and approved by ICE's Investment Review Board, DHS, and OMB. However, this satisfaction is based more on plans and commitments that provide for meeting these conditions than on completed actions. As such, much remains to be accomplished for Atlas planning and management efforts to be considered effective and thereby minimize the risks associated with the program's capacity to deliver promised IT infrastructure capabilities and benefits on time and within budget.

GAO developed a number of observations about the expenditure plan and DHS's management of the program. The observations address the need for economic justification of Atlas, rigorous and disciplined program management practices, performance measurements that are linked to goals and benefits, and an expenditure plan that provides sufficient information on program commitments for it to be a useful accountability tool. For example, Atlas's existing economic justification does not reflect recent and planned changes in the program's scope and purpose, including plans to expand the program beyond IT infrastructure upgrades. In addition, program management controls and capabilities have yet to be established. While ICE has begun to establish an Atlas program office, this office is not yet operational and is not adequately staffed. For example, while ICE has assigned a program manager and three contracting staff, it has not yet determined how many staff will be needed on the Atlas projects. In addition, while the program manager recently assessed staffing needs for program support positions, and identified several, none have been filled (see graphic).

Proposed Program Management Office

Source: GAO analysis of DHS data.