



Highlights of [GAO-06-378](#), a report to the Chairman, House Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure

Why GAO Did This Study

Pursuant to various statutes, federal agencies develop an abundance of performance, budget, and financial information that could be useful for Congress' review and monitoring of agencies. However, agencies' understanding of Congress' information needs is often limited and agencies may not be providing timely information in a format that aids congressional understanding of trends and issues. Thus, Members and their staff may not be aware of or avail themselves to certain information. To describe the information available and how it might be used to support congressional oversight, the Federal Aviation Administration was selected as a case study in part due to the large quantity of information already available. GAO was asked to identify: (1) information FAA produces that could enhance congressional oversight, (2) other technology and information resources that could enhance congressional oversight, and (3) how committee access to FAA's information could be improved to enhance its timeliness and usefulness.

What GAO Recommends

While FAA makes much of its information available on its Web site, GAO recommends that FAA further use technology to enhance congressional access to information, and offer regular meetings with Members of the committee and key staff to discuss areas of mutual concern. The agency generally concurred.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-378.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Bernice Steinhardt at (202) 512-6543 or steinhardtb@gao.gov.

CONGRESSIONAL OVERSIGHT

FAA Case Study Shows How Agency Performance, Budgeting, and Financial Information Could Enhance Oversight

What GAO Found

The Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) has made available much of the information and analytic resources that Congress needs to carry out its oversight function. For example, FAA has a strategic plan with long-term, outcome-oriented goals and objectives. Its annual Performance and Accountability Report includes the agency's progress in achieving its goals, and allows Congress to monitor performance trends. This report also provides financial information useful for analyzing its operating results and financial position. FAA's budget documents combined with performance data could provide Congress information to use in determining whether resources are achieving the planned performance improvements. Used together, this information could assist Members of Congress and congressional staff in their oversight responsibilities.

Through its legislative support agencies—GAO, Congressional Research Service and the Congressional Budget Office—and the Department of Transportation's (DOT) Inspector General (IG), congressional committee staff also have access to considerable resources for oversight. For example, GAO's 2005 High Risk Series Update includes FAA's Air Traffic Control Modernization program and discusses progress the agency has made in addressing its problems. DOT's IG annually reports on the top management challenges facing FAA, such as safety and capacity challenges.

Effective communication is needed to ensure that information agencies provide meets congressional needs. While considerable information resources are available, they may not be available in a manner that is useful to committees. We have reported that although agencies collect and produce a great deal of information, much of it did not reach the interested committees, and the information that did reach them was difficult to digest, highly aggregated, or was received too late to be useful. In the case of FAA, House Transportation and Infrastructure Committee staff said FAA has a large quantity of information available and effective communication between the staff and agency, but is interested in using technology to gain additional agency data. While FAA provides a great deal of information on its Web site, it could take additional advantage of technology to improve the timeliness and usefulness of information to the Congress. For example, a *Frequently Asked Questions* section could provide quick access to information often requested by committees. As a result of our discussions with committee and agency staff, FAA has initiated two suggested technology enhancements, a *For Congress* page on its Web site, providing a single point of access for information relevant for oversight, and a Web site subscription service notifying committee staff when relevant information has been updated on its Web site. Further, regular meetings between congressional committees and agency officials could identify the committee's oversight objectives, provide a forum to discuss the issues, and develop approaches to meet them. Importantly, these findings constitute lessons learned that may be transferable to other agencies.