



Highlights of [GAO-06-801T](#), a report to Subcommittee on Aviation, Committee on Commerce, Science and Transportation

Why GAO Did This Study

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) is a relatively small agency that plays a vital role in transportation safety and has a worldwide reputation for investigating accidents. With a staff of about 400 and a budget of \$76.7 million in fiscal year 2006, NTSB investigates all civil aviation accidents in the United States, and significant accidents in railroad, highway, marine, and pipeline; and issues safety recommendations to address issues identified during accident investigations. To support its mission, NTSB built a training academy, which opened in 2003 and provides training to NTSB investigators and others. It is important that NTSB use its resources efficiently to carry out its mission and maintain its preeminence. This testimony, based on ongoing work for this committee, addresses the extent to which NTSB follows leading practices in selected management areas, addresses challenges in completing accident investigations and closing safety recommendations, and generates sufficient revenues to cover costs at its academy.

What GAO Recommends

Based on completed work to date, GAO recommends, among other things, that NTSB develop a revised strategic plan that follows performance-based practices, develop a full cost accounting system, and develop a marketing plan for the academy. NTSB agreed with GAO's recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-801T.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Gerald L. Dillingham at (202) 512-2834 or dillinghamg@gao.gov.

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

Preliminary Observations on the Value of Comprehensive Planning, and Greater Use of Leading Practices and the Training Academy

What GAO Found

NTSB has recently made progress in following leading management practices, but overall has a mixed record. For example, NTSB has improved its financial management by hiring a Chief Financial Officer and putting controls on its purchasing activities, which should address past problems with unapproved purchases. However, NTSB lacks a full cost accounting system, which would inform managers of the resources spent on individual investigations and provide data to balance office workload. NTSB has also begun to develop a performance management system that should eventually link each individual's performance to the agency's strategic goals and objectives. However, the performance management system will not be fully functional until NTSB has developed a strategic plan with results-oriented goals and objectives and specific strategies for achieving them, which are lacking in the current strategic plan. Other areas, such as human capital and communications, partially follow leading practices.

Extent to Which NTSB Is Following Leading Practices in Selected Management Areas

Management area	Extent to which NTSB follows leading practices
Strategic planning	○
Performance management	◐
Human capital	◑
Financial management	●
Communications	◐

● Leading practices are mostly followed
 ◐ Leading practices are partially followed
 ○ Leading practices are minimally followed

Source: GAO's analysis of NTSB information.

While NTSB is accomplishing its accident investigation mission, it faces challenges that affect the efficiency of the report production and recommendation close out processes. NTSB routinely takes longer than 2 years to complete major investigations. Several factors may affect the length of report production, including several revisions of draft reports through multiple layers of the organization. In addition, the processes for federal transportation agencies to implement NTSB's safety recommendations and for NTSB to change the status of recommendations are lengthy, paper-based, and labor intensive. While Department of Transportation officials have been working with NTSB to find acceptable means of implementing its recommendations, they cite the lengthy rule-making process as a challenge to speedy implementation.

For fiscal years 2004 and 2005, NTSB's academy did not generate sufficient revenues to cover the costs of providing training. As a result, those portions of the academy's costs that were not covered by the revenues from tuition and other sources—approximately \$6.3 million in fiscal year 2004 and \$3.9 million in fiscal year 2005—were offset by general appropriations to the agency. While NTSB has taken action to generate revenue from other sources, such as renting academy space for conferences, it does not have a marketing plan that seeks to optimize opportunities for additional revenues at the academy.