



Highlights of [GAO-04-823](#), a report to congressional requesters

# FEDERAL CHIEF INFORMATION OFFICERS

## Responsibilities, Reporting Relationships, Tenure, and Challenges

### Why GAO Did This Study

Although the federal government has invested substantially in information technology (IT), its success in managing information resources has varied. Agencies have taken steps to implement modern strategies, systems, and management policies and practices, but they still face significant information and technology management challenges. Recognizing the key role of the chief information officer (CIO) in helping an agency to achieve better results through IT, congressional requesters asked GAO to study the current status of CIOs at major departments and agencies. Among the topics this report describes are (1) CIOs' responsibilities and reporting relationships, and (2) current CIOs' professional backgrounds and the tenures of all of the CIOs since enactment of the Clinger-Cohen Act.

### What GAO Recommends

As Congress holds hearings on and introduces legislation related to information and technology management, GAO suggests that Congress consider the results of this review and whether the existing statutory requirements related to CIO responsibilities and reporting to the agency head reflect the most effective assignment of information and technology management responsibilities and reporting relationships. In responding to a draft of this report, most agencies stated that they had no comment.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-823](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-823).

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact David A. Powner, 202-512-9286 or [pownerd@gao.gov](mailto:pownerd@gao.gov).

### What GAO Found

GAO administered a questionnaire and interviewed CIOs at 27 major departments and agencies, finding that respondents were responsible for most of the 13 areas we identified as either required by statute or critical to effective information and technology management (see figure below). All of the CIOs had responsibility for five areas, including enterprise architecture and IT investment management. However, two of these areas—information disclosure and statistics—were outside the purview of more than half of the officers. Although the CIOs generally did not think placing responsibility for some areas in separate units presented a problem, having these responsibilities performed by multiple officials could make the integration of various information and technology management areas, as envisioned by law, more difficult to achieve. Given these results, it may be time to revisit whether the current statutory framework of responsibilities reflects the most effective assignment of information and technology management responsibilities. The law also generally requires that CIOs report directly to their agency heads, and 19 of the 27 said that they did. However, views were mixed among current and former officers on whether such a direct reporting relationship was important.

Agency CIOs come from a wide variety of professional and educational backgrounds, but they almost always have IT or IT-related work or educational experience. Since enactment of the Clinger-Cohen Act, the median tenure of a federal CIO has been about 2 years; in contrast, both current CIOs and former agency IT executives most commonly cited 3 to 5 years as the time they needed to become effective. According to some current CIOs, high turnover is a problem because it can limit CIOs' ability to put their agendas in place. Various mechanisms, such as human capital flexibilities, are available for agencies to use to help them try to reduce CIO turnover or mitigate its effect.

**Number of CIOs with Responsibility for Information and Technology Management Areas**



Source: Agency CIOs.