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Highlights

INFORMATION AND TECHNOLOGY MANAGEMENT

Responsibilities, Reporting Relationships, Tenure, and Challenges of Agency Chief Information Officers

Why GAO Did This Study

Federal agencies rely extensively on information technology (IT) to effectively implement major government programs. To help agencies manage their substantial IT investments, the Congress has established a statutory framework of requirements, roles, and responsibilities relating to IT management.
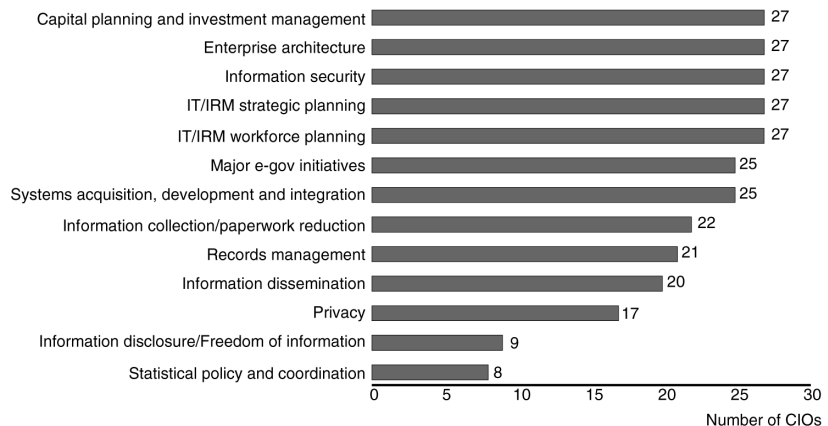
GAO was asked to summarize its report, being issued today, on federal chief information officers' (CIO) responsibilities, reporting relationships, and tenure and on the challenges that CIOs face (*Federal Chief Information Officers: Responsibilities, Reporting Relationships, Tenure, and Challenges*, GAO-04-823, July 21, 2004) and to offer suggestions for actions that both the Congress and the agencies can take in response to these findings.

What GAO Found

In looking at 27 agencies, GAO found that CIOs generally were responsible for most of the 13 areas that had been identified as either required by statute or critical to effective information and technology management (see figure below) and that about 70 percent reported directly to their agency heads. Among current CIOs and former agency IT executives, views were mixed on whether it was important for the CIO to have responsibility for each of the 13 areas and a direct reporting relationship with the agency head. In addition, current CIOs come from a wide variety of professional and educational backgrounds and, since the enactment of the legislation establishing this position, the permanent CIOs who had completed their time in office had a median tenure of about 2 years. Their average time in office, however, was less than the 3 to 5 years that both current CIOs and former agency IT executives most commonly cited as the amount of time needed for a CIO to be effective. Too short of a tenure can reduce a CIOs' effectiveness and ability to address major challenges, including implementing effective IT management and obtaining sufficient and relevant resources.

Both the Congress and the federal agencies can take various actions to address GAO's findings. First, as the Congress holds hearings on and introduces legislation related to information and technology management, there may be an opportunity to consider the results of this review and whether the existing statutory framework offers the most effective structure for CIOs' responsibilities and reporting relationships. Second, agencies can use the guidance GAO has issued over the past few years to address, for example, agencies' IT management and human capital challenges. Finally, agencies can also employ such mechanisms as human capital flexibilities to help reduce CIO turnover or to mitigate its effect.

Number of CIOs with Responsibility for Information Technology Management Areas

Source: Agency CIOs.