



Highlights of [GAO-03-1083](#), a report to Subcommittees on Homeland Security, Senate and House Committees on Appropriations

# HOMELAND SECURITY

## Risks Facing Key Border and Transportation Security Program Need to Be Addressed

### Why GAO Did This Study

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) plans to establish a program to strengthen management of the pre-entry, entry, status, and exit of foreign nationals who travel to the United States. The goals of the program, known as the United States Visitor and Immigrant Status Indicator Technology (US-VISIT), are to facilitate legitimate trade and travel, enhance national security, and adhere to U.S. privacy laws and policies. By congressional mandate, DHS is to develop and submit for approval an expenditure plan for US-VISIT that satisfies certain conditions, including being reviewed by GAO. GAO was asked to determine, among other things, whether the plan satisfies these conditions and to provide observations about the plan and DHS's management of the program.

### What GAO Recommends

GAO is making a number of recommendations to the Secretary of DHS aimed at minimizing the risks facing US-VISIT, including (1) establishing an executive body, composed of appropriate stakeholder representatives, to guide and direct the program, be held accountable for the program's progress and outcomes, and address key program issues and make associated decisions and (2) taking steps to establish an effective program management capability. DHS concurred with our recommendations and stated that it has made progress toward addressing them.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-1083](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-1083)

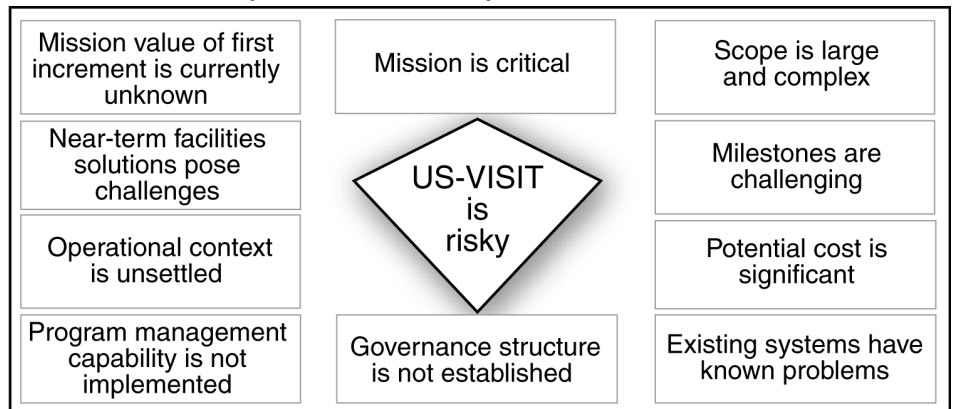
To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Randolph C. Hite at (202) 512-3439 or [hiter@gao.gov](mailto:hiter@gao.gov).

### What GAO Found

DHS's fiscal year 2003 US-VISIT expenditure plan and related documentation partially satisfied the conditions imposed by the Congress, which include meeting the capital planning and investment control review requirements of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). For example, DHS fulfilled the OMB requirement that agencies state whether projects are approved by investment review boards and reviewed by Chief Financial and Procurement Officers; the plan was conditionally approved by DHS's review board, which includes DHS's Chief Financial and Procurement Officers. On the other hand, OMB guidance requires that agency plans summarize life cycle costs and include a cost/benefit analysis that covers return on investment. DHS has not yet established a date and plan for developing these for US-VISIT, although program officials stated that they intend to do so.

GAO also identified 10 factors (see figure) affecting US-VISIT and concluded that the program is a very risky endeavor. Some risk factors are inherent to the program, such as its mission criticality, its size and complexity, and its enormous potential costs. Others, however, arise from the program's relatively immature state of governance and management. For example, although the program has governmentwide scope, an accountable governance structure to direct and oversee the program that reflects this scope is not yet established. In addition, a US-VISIT program management capability has yet to be established, important aspects defining the program's operating environment are not decided, facility needs are unclear and challenging, and the mission value to be derived from the program's initial operating capability is unknown. Because of the risk factors, GAO concluded that it is uncertain that US-VISIT will be able to measurably and appreciably achieve DHS's stated goals for the program. Further, DHS's near-term investment in the program is at risk of not delivering promised capabilities on time and within budget and not producing mission value commensurate with investment costs.

Factors That Collectively Make US-VISIT a Risky Endeavor



Source: GAO.