INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Justice Plans to Improve Oversight of Agency Projects

Why GAO Did This Study

To help carry out its mission to protect the public from criminal activity, the Department of Justice invests about $2 billion annually in information technology (IT). In particular, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), a Justice agency, invested about $459 million in IT in fiscal year 2002. GAO was asked to determine, for key INS IT system investments, whether Justice's oversight has been effective, ensuring that these systems deliver promised capabilities and benefits on time and within budget.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that Justice treat oversight of IT investments as a departmental priority, that it expeditiously plan and implement initiatives to introduce missing oversight controls and capabilities, and that INS adhere to existing life cycle and investment requirements to manage cost, schedule, capability, and expectations. Justice stated that it generally agreed with the substance of our report.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-135

To view the full report, 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.

What GAO Found

Justice has not effectively overseen INS's investment in IT systems. A key indicator of oversight effectiveness is the quality of the process followed in conducting oversight. In this regard, successful public and private organizations ensure that such processes, at a minimum, provide for measuring progress against investment commitments—that is, project agreements defining what system capabilities and benefits will be delivered, by when, and at what cost. Justice does not yet have such an oversight process. Moreover, for four key INS IT investments that GAO was asked to review (see table), oversight activities that Justice has performed have not included measuring progress against approved cost, schedule, performance, and benefit commitments. As a result, Justice has not been positioned to take timely corrective action to address its component agencies' deviations from established investment commitments, and adequately ensure that promised capabilities are delivered on time and within budget. According to Justice officials, the department has not conducted this level of oversight because it has not given enough priority to the task, and because INS does not have the data that Justice would need to conduct such oversight.

Justice recognizes the need to strengthen its oversight of component agencies' IT investments, and has plans to do so. Among these is an initiative to develop steps and procedures for overseeing component agency IT investments so that they meet cost, schedule, and performance goals. However, these initiatives have not progressed to the point that the department has detailed plans governing what will be done and when it will be done. Moreover, the process improvements that these initiatives are intended to put in place must still be implemented and followed before they will produce real benefits.

INS Systems That GAO Was Asked to Review

System	Function
Automated I-94 System	Captured arrival and departure data at selected air ports of entry (system retired in February 2002 because it did not meet mission needs)
Enforcement Case Tracking System	Provides a standardized method to book an apprehended individual and sends data to a common database; is planned eventually to support all INS enforcement case processing and management functions
Automated Biometric Identification System	Screens aliens encountered by INS using biometric or other unique identification data and verifies and authenticates asylum benefit applicants; collects fingerprints, photographs, and biographical data and compares to data for previously apprehended aliens and aliens that have been previously deported or have a significant criminal history
Integrated Card Production System	Produces three types of cards: Employment Authorization Document, Permanent Resident Card ("Green Card"), and Laser Visa/Border Crossing Card (allowing Mexican nationals entrance into the United States)

Source: GAO analysis based on INS data.