



Highlights of [GAO-07-900](#), a report to congressional committees

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

Progress and Challenges in Implementing the Department's Acquisition Oversight Plan

Why GAO Did This Study

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS), the third largest department in federal procurement spending in fiscal year 2006, has faced ongoing cost, schedule, and performance problems with major acquisitions and procurement of services. In December 2005, DHS established an acquisition oversight program to provide insight into and improve components' acquisition programs.

In 2006, GAO reported that DHS faced challenges in implementing its program. Congress mandated that DHS develop an oversight plan and tasked GAO with analyzing the plan. GAO (1) evaluated actions DHS and its components have taken to implement the acquisition oversight plan and (2) identified implementation challenges. GAO also identified opportunities for strengthening oversight conducted through the plan.

GAO reviewed relevant DHS documents and GAO and DHS Inspector General reports and interviewed officials in the office of the Chief Procurement Officer (CPO) and nine DHS components.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is recommending that the CPO reevaluate the approach to the acquisition planning reviews and that DHS enhance internal controls to strengthen the oversight plan through periodic external reviews and knowledge sharing. DHS concurred with GAO's recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-900.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact John Hutton at (202) 512-4841 or huttonj@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

The CPO has taken several actions to implement DHS's acquisition oversight plan—which generally incorporates basic principles of an effective and accountable acquisition function. The plan monitors acquisition performance through four recurring reviews: self-assessment, operational status, on-site, and acquisition planning. Each component has completed the first self-assessment, which has helped components identify and prioritize acquisition weaknesses. In addition, each component has submitted an initial operational status report to the CPO and on-site reviews are being conducted. Despite this progress, the acquisition planning reviews are not sufficient to determine if components adequately plan their acquisitions—in part because a required review has not been implemented and the CPO lacks visibility into components' planning activities.

DHS faces two key challenges in implementing its acquisition oversight plan. First, the CPO has had limited oversight resources to implement plan reviews. However, recent increases in staff have begun to address this challenge. Second, the CPO lacks sufficient authority to ensure components comply with the plan—despite being held accountable for departmentwide management and oversight of the acquisition function. GAO has previously recommended that DHS provide the CPO with sufficient enforcement authority to enable effective acquisition oversight.

In addition to these challenges, GAO identified two opportunities to strengthen internal controls for overseeing the plan's implementation and for increasing knowledge sharing. Specifically, independent evaluations of DHS's oversight program could help ensure that the plan maintains its effectiveness over time. Sharing knowledge and lessons learned could provide DHS's acquisition workforce with the information needed to improve their acquisition processes and better achieve DHS's mission.