

# Still More Work Ahead to Improve IT Acquisition and Implementation

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Expanded use of critical success factors in IT acquisition, such as active stakeholder engagement and support from agency executives, along with further implementation of government and industry best practices, will better position agencies to more effectively deliver mission-critical systems, according to GAO.

Leveraging previous research and oversight efforts, GAO Director of IT Management Issues, David Powner, delivered [testimony](#) before the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform last week as part of the sixth major Congressional hearing regarding the botched launch of Healthcare.gov.

With over \$80 billion in federal IT spending per year, it's incumbent upon agencies and the administration to learn from successful IT implementations, as well as failed projects. As reported by GAO, effective implementations possess common critical success factors. GAO interviewed IT officials at the top ten federal departments based on IT budgets to determine mission-critical, major IT investments that best achieved cost, schedule, scope, and performance goals. Seven investments were identified, totaling \$5 billion in lifecycle costs. GAO, in conjunction with agency officials, identified nine common factors critical to the success of these investments:

- Program officials were actively engaged with stakeholders
- Program staff had the necessary knowledge and skills
- Senior department and agency executives supported the programs
- End users and stakeholders were involved in the development of requirements
- End users participated in testing of system functionality prior to formal end user acceptance testing
- Government and contractor staff were consistent and stable
- Program staff prioritized requirements
- Program officials maintained regular communication with the prime contractor

A number of IT acquisition best practices have been developed by government and industry, along with legislation to support effective IT implementation:

- Software Engineering Institute Capability Maturity Model® Integration for Development (CMMI-DEV) and Capability Maturity Model® Integration for Acquisition (CMMI-ACQ)
- GAO's Information Technology Investment Management Framework
- Clinger-Cohen Act of 1996
- E-Government Act of 2002

Further, OMB has put in place several initiatives to improve IT programs and outcomes. In 2009, OMB established the IT Dashboard to improve the transparency and oversight of agency IT investments. CIOs are required to post evaluations of the investments on an ongoing basis to allow Congress, OMB, other oversight organizations, and the general public to view the performance of these investments.

In 2010, OMB began holding TechStat sessions with agency leadership to review selected IT investments and increase accountability, transparency and performance. Additionally in the same year, OMB released a plan to reform IT management over an 18 month period, part of which involved the goal of turning around or terminating at least one-third of underperforming projects by June 2012.

Overall, GAO commended OMB and agency efforts at improving IT acquisition and implementation, however numerous troubled projects and investments still exist. While use of best practices, legislation, and OMB efforts at transparency and oversight have improved IT execution and spending, continued leadership and attention is necessary to build on current progress.