

GAO

Testimony

Before the Subcommittee on Legislation and National
Security, Committee on Government Operations,
House of Representatives

For Release on Delivery
Expected at
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INFORMATION
MANAGEMENT

Need for a Chief Information
Officer for the
General Services
Administration

Statement of Jack L. Brock, Jr., Director
Information Resources Management/Policies and
Issues Group
Accounting and Information Management Division



059480/151138

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to be here today to discuss the need for establishing a chief information officer (CIO) within the General Services Administration (GSA). Information management--along with effective program management, human resources management, and financial management--is a critical function that must be performed well if an agency's mission and program objectives are to be effectively and efficiently met. We believe that all these functions must be the responsibility of top management.

In a January 1994 testimony (GAO/T-OCCG-94-1), the Comptroller General advocated the need for improved information management throughout government. He noted that current technology offers unprecedented opportunities to improve the delivery of government services and reduce program costs. GAO has found, however, that agencies too often fail to take advantage of these opportunities. Consistently, our reports document a lack of basic business planning, inadequate skills, and poorly institutionalized management practices within agencies. This can be largely attributed to management breakdowns within agencies. Federal agencies have simply not kept pace with the evolution of management practices necessary to control and apply technology within the agency and have not developed the basic infrastructure needed to apply good management practices.

The results of these problems are well-documented: system weaknesses at many, if not most, agencies that have greatly limited the government's ability to provide effective, efficient service to the American public. Corrective action must be taken before the government can fully realize the benefits of its \$25 billion annual investment in information technology. While no simple solutions exist, the answer must start with improved management processes at the agency level.

The government has recently made strides to improve the management infrastructure--most notably through the passage of the Chief Financial Officers (CFO) Act of 1990 and the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993. However, more needs to be done. As the Comptroller General recommended, chief information officers need to be established at each agency to work with agency senior management to (1) define strategic information management priorities and (2) support program officials and the CFO in defining information needs and developing strategies, systems, and capabilities to meet those needs.

GSA's Internal Information Management

GSA plays a substantial role in providing various services to its client agencies. GSA manages billions of dollars of federal property, administers the government's telephone service, and is involved in the technology acquisitions of every agency. As such, the effectiveness of GSA's internal management can influence the effectiveness of every other federal agency. Like most agencies, GSA faces current staffing and budget restraints that challenge its ability to meet--and hopefully improve--current service levels with fewer resources. Again, like other agencies, GSA must make effective use of information and information technology to address this challenge.

- provide an opportunity for better control and management over internal technology and system investment decisions; and
- provide improved consistency among GSA's Services in effectively managing information resources.

In conclusion, I want to stress that creating a CIO within GSA--or any agency--is no guarantee that information resources management will be completely effective. However, a strong CIO is a critical initial step in creating the necessary management processes. This in turn can provide the framework for ensuring that information and information technology are appropriately used to support agency missions, programs, and service objectives.

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Mr. Chairman, that concludes my testimony. I would be pleased to address any questions you or the other members may have.

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