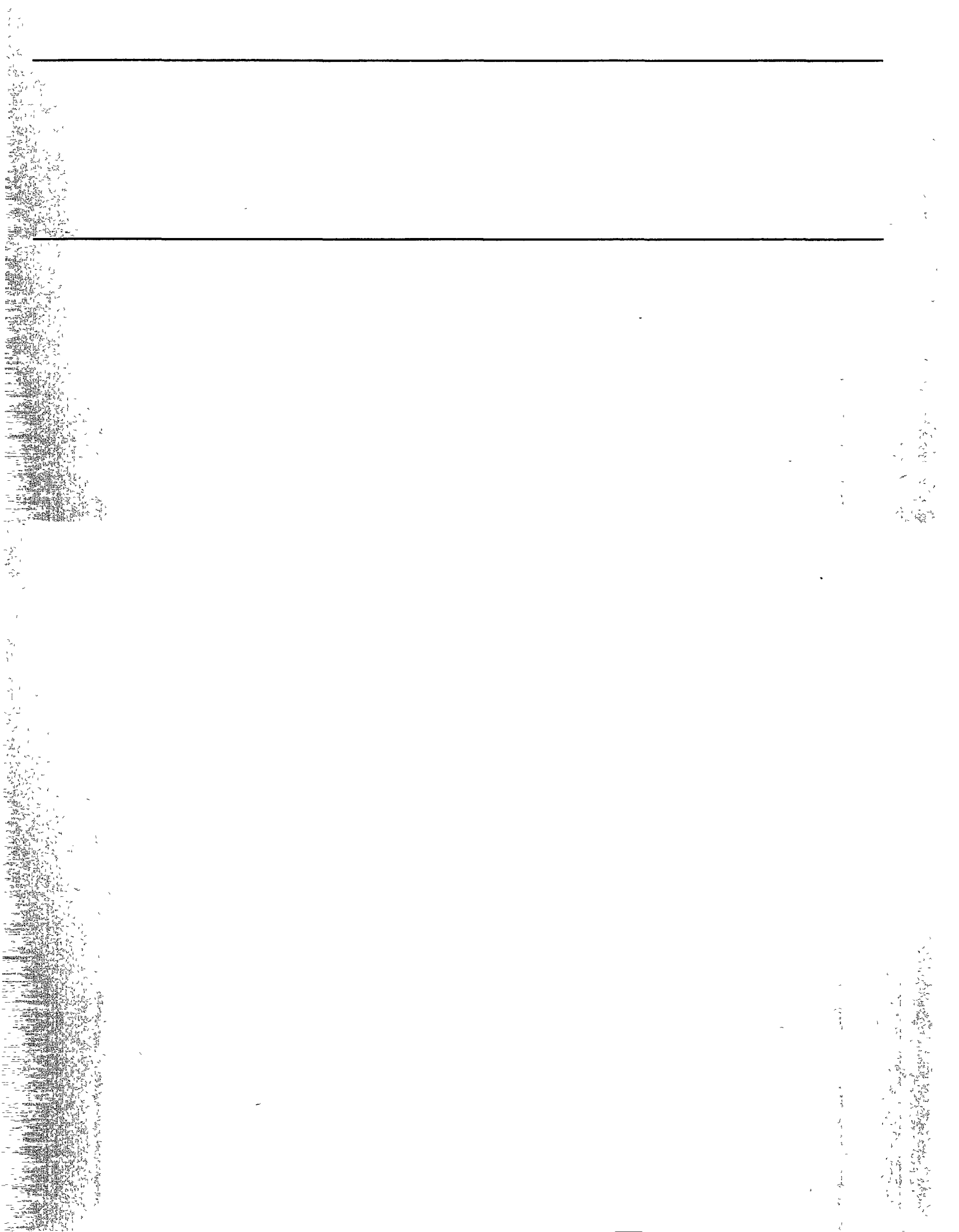

GAO

General Government Division

September 1997**Government Business
Operations Issue Area
Plan****Fiscal Year 1998**



Foreword

As the investigative arm of Congress and the nation's auditor, the General Accounting Office is charged with following the federal dollar wherever it goes. Reflecting stringent standards of objectivity and independence, GAO's audits, evaluations, and investigations promote a more efficient and cost-effective government; expose waste, fraud, abuse, and mismanagement in federal programs; help Congress target budget reductions; assess financial and information management; and alert Congress to developing trends that may have significant fiscal or budgetary consequences. In fulfilling its responsibilities, GAO performs original research and uses hundreds of databases or creates its own when information is unavailable elsewhere.

To ensure that GAO's resources are directed toward the most important issues facing Congress, each of GAO's issue areas develops a strategic plan that describes the significance of the issues it addresses, its objectives, and the focus of its work. Each issue area relies heavily on input from congressional committees, agency officials, and subject-matter experts in developing its strategic plan.

The Government Business Operations issue area does program and evaluation work involving operations and activities of the General Services Administration, which controls or oversees over \$60 billion in annual government spending, and the U.S. Postal Service, which has revenue in excess of \$55 billion annually. This issue area also responds to other congressional inquiries, usually in areas where GAO does not have dedicated resources, on a special response basis. Special response work has involved inquiries regarding numerous federal agency activities, such as the Smithsonian Institution, the U.S. Mint, and the Library of Congress.

We have recently issued reports on federal courthouse utilization and testified on government downsizing and office space reductions. We have also testified and reported on Postal Service reform and significant internal control concerns, which could negatively impact their revenues.

The principal themes in the Government Business Operations issue area are

- effective acquisition, use, and disposition of government assets to reduce costs and provide a greater return on investment;
- improved management for greater responsiveness in meeting agency goals and consumers' needs; and

- improved and more efficient operations through alternative strategies for providing service.

In the following pages we describe our key planned work on these themes.

Because events may significantly affect even the best of plans, our planning process allows for updating the plan to respond quickly to emerging issues. If you have any questions or suggestions about this plan, please call me at (202) 512-4232.



Bernard L. Ungar
Director, Government
Business Operations Issues

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Table I: Key Issues

| Issue | Significance |
|--|---|
| Asset and support services acquisition: Are facilities, goods, and services acquired in the most effective, efficient, and economical ways to achieve mission goals and return on investment? | The General Services Administration (GSA) acts as the main government focal point for over \$60 billion of federal procurements each year, ranging from buildings and telecommunications equipment to everyday support services. Postal Service acquisition programs constitute several billion dollars each year, primarily in support of meeting customer needs and accurate and timely delivery of the mail to over 223 million locations daily, moving over 177 billion pieces of mail annually. |
| Asset maintenance and use: Are maintenance and use of financial assets, facilities, goods, and services being used to optimize value, reduce costs, and achieve mission goals? | GSA maintains over 1,700 federal buildings whose operation, modernization, and general maintenance require continuous oversight and attention. The proper maintenance of these buildings is critical to the quality, health, safety, and usefulness of hundreds of thousands of federal employees. Proper maintenance is vital to maintaining their service value as well as ensuring continued income producing capability commensurate with the private sector. |
| Asset disposition: Are asset disposition policies and practices maximizing benefits to the government and U.S. citizens? | Congressional oversight assumes even greater importance as the inventory of federal historic buildings grows, and the buildings deteriorate for lack of renovation, which is needed to establish them as entities capable of housing tenants, consistent with current technology. This could be especially true for the Courthouse construction program where large numbers of old courthouses will become available for disposition or modernization as new courthouses are constructed. With federal downsizing and budget deficits as a watchword, these issues remain at the forefront. |
| Management improvement: Are management systems and processes improving performance and being responsive to customer needs? | GSA and the Postal Service are key providers of services that contribute to smooth government operation as well as provide for a vital network of communication for business transactions and household-to-household contacts. |

Table I: Key Issues

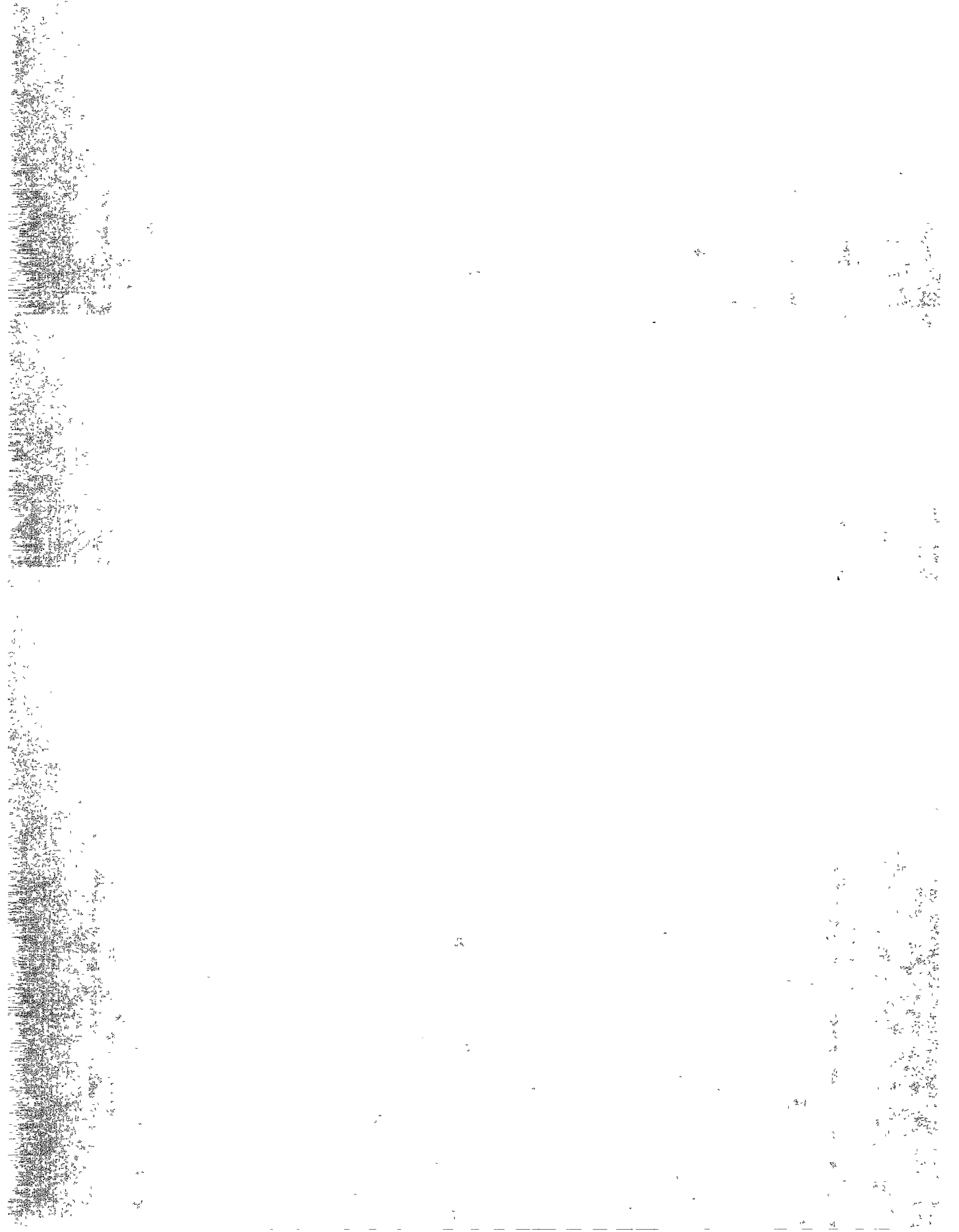
| Objectives | Focus of work |
|--|---|
| (1) Improve agency capabilities to plan for long- and short-term needs and to satisfy them. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Monitor implementation of prior recommendations.• Assess ongoing major reform efforts. |
| (2) Improve the federal acquisition process by streamlining policies and procedures, improving contracting systems, and making the process more responsive. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Examine agency controls to prevent waste, fraud, and abuse• Evaluate profitability of selected pieces of currency (\$1 coin, penny, and commemorative coin) |
| (3) Identify obstacles that impede cost-effective, businesslike acquisitions and assess their impact | |
| (1) Improve maintenance and use of real and other property used to enhance mission accomplishment and productivity | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Examine systemic obstacles, such as budgetary limitations and lack of strategic planning, which impede cost-effective approaches |
| (2) Promote the adoption of more economically sound, businesslike practices in maintaining and using properties as valuable national assets. | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Focus on agency best practices and initiatives• Inform Congress and agency leaders of best practices for inclusion in other businesslike activities |
| (3) Promote the adoption of "best practices" in the real estate management area | |
| (1) Promote the adoption of innovative, economically sound, businesslike incentives and strategies for disposing of government assets, which improve the return on investment to the government and the taxpayer | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify process incentives and private sector strategies• Work with executive branch and congressional officials to design better approaches for identifying and closing facilities deemed no longer needed |
| (2) Improve federal agencies' organizational structures and processes for disposing of real and personal property and financial assets. | |
| (1) Identify opportunities to promote improvements in agency systems and practices | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Review and evaluate agency management systems and processes |
| (2) Evaluate how agency management reform initiatives are tracked and what progress they show | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify objective measurement systems• Examine results from program implementation of management improvements• Review surveys of customer satisfaction and evaluate measurement techniques |
| (3) Assess whether agencies are achieving mandated social policy goals in real estate asset disposition programs | |
| (4) Ensure quality management efforts result in improved service and responsiveness to customers. | |

Table II: Planned Major Work

| Issue | Planned major job starts |
|---|--|
| Asset and support services acquisition | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Federal building funds shortfall • Prison construction • Building security and safety • Federal Prison Industries (FPI) customer satisfaction • FPI pricing policies and procedures • FPI timeliness in filling customer orders |
| Asset maintenance and use | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identification of best practices • GSA's building modernization program • Deterioration of federal buildings • Building energy conservation • Management of historical buildings |
| Asset disposition | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disposition of old courthouses |
| Management improvement | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitoring of GSA ongoing major reform efforts • Managing real property operations • Adequacy of Postal Service controls over \$55 billion in Postal revenue • International mail customs treatment • New Postal products and services • Outsourcing by the Postal Service • Postal initiatives to improve working conditions and organizational performance • Adequacy of Postal measures and data |

Table III: GAO Contacts

| | | |
|----------------------------|----------------------|----------------|
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