

GAO

Accounting and Information  
Management Division

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# IRM-RCED Issue Area Plan

## Fiscal Years 1994-96



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# Foreword

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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 fraud, waste, 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 to compile and analyze information.

To ensure that GAO's resources are directed toward the most important issues facing Congress, each of GAO's 35 issue areas develops a strategic plan that describes its key issues and their significance, how those issues influence audit objectives, the focus of its work, and the planned major job starts. Each issue area relies heavily on input from congressional committees, agency officials, and subject-matter experts in developing its strategic plan.

The IRM-RCED issue area covers information resources management of the key agencies covered by GAO's Resources, Community, and Economic Development (RCED) Division—the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Energy, Housing and Urban Development (HUD), Interior, and Transportation; and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Information resources in the IRM-RCED area support over \$160 billion in annual program expenditures. These information resources are vital to agencies achieving critical missions ranging from ensuring the safety of millions of air travelers to overseeing loan portfolios valued at over \$1 trillion.

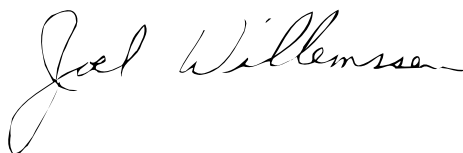
GAO's IRM-RCED work assists Congress in determining how effectively and efficiently key agencies use the billions of dollars they invest annually in information technology. The principal issues in this area are

- acquiring cost-effective Transportation computer and communication systems;
- developing Agriculture computer and communication systems that support revised business strategies;
- improving the development and operation of National Weather Service systems;

- strengthening environmental systems to help recover cleanup costs, help achieve missions, and reduce potential technological duplications;
- resolving problems with HUD systems supporting high-risk programs; and
- using information technology at Energy to effectively and efficiently support missions.

In the pages that follow, we describe our objectives and planned work on these issues.

Because events may affect this plan, GAO's planning process allows the flexibility to update the plan and respond quickly to emerging issues. If you have any questions or suggestions, please call me at (202) 512-6253.



Joel Willemsen  
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Community, and Economic Development Issues

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# Table I: Key Issues

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Issue	Significance
<b>Transportation:</b> Is the Department of Transportation effectively acquiring computer and communications systems, providing reliable safety data, and using innovative technologies?	The Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) Air Traffic Control System Modernization Program is a \$38-billion effort that encompasses almost 200 individual projects. In 1995, GAO designated this as a high-risk information technology program because it had experienced past failures, involves complex technology, and is critical to FAA's mission.
<b>Agriculture:</b> Is the Department of Agriculture effectively developing computer and communications systems to support its revised business strategies?	In its effort to consolidate and streamline operations, Agriculture plans to spend billions of dollars on information and communications technologies to support new reengineered business processes. To be successful, it must carefully select enabling technologies that will serve business needs in the most cost-effective manner possible.
<b>National Weather Service:</b> Are the systems supporting the National Weather Service's \$4.5-billion modernization program being effectively and efficiently managed and operated?	The National Weather Service is undertaking one of the largest system modernization programs in the federal government to streamline and improve its aging weather service capabilities and downsize its organization. In 1995, GAO designated the modernization as a high-risk information technology program because of its size and use of complex technologies.

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**Table I: Key Issues**

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**Objectives**

**Focus of work**

- Enhance the cost-effectiveness of computer and communications systems supporting the \$38-billion air traffic control modernization program.
- Recommend needed enhancements in safety systems and data.

- Review of high-risk air traffic control modernization program
- Assessment of adequacy of airway safety systems and data

- 
- Identify unnecessary system development projects and redundant and inefficient telecommunications services.

- Reviews of \$2.6-billion Info Share initiative, Agriculture's management of its telecommunications networks, and financial systems development efforts

- Recommend streamlining of agency business processes via information technology.

- Assessment of information systems to support revised missions

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- Recommend improvements in the development, operation, and integration of key system components leading to strengthened weather forecasting.

- Evaluation of systems architecture needed to guide the Weather Service's effort
  - Review of development and operation of systems such as surface observing systems, doppler radar, and the advanced weather interactive processing system
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**Table I: Key Issues**

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Issue	Significance
<b>Environment:</b> Can environmental systems be strengthened to obtain additional recoverable costs, help achieve missions, and reduce potential technological duplications?	With annual environmental compliance costs reaching \$115 billion, federal facility cleanup costs projected at \$1 trillion, and environmental issues permeating almost every facet of our lives, interest in environmental protection programs remains at the forefront of the public and congressional agendas. To address these issues and carry out its various environmental missions, EPA needs effective and efficient systems to provide critical information to decisionmakers.
<b>Housing:</b> Can HUD effectively resolve problems with the systems supporting its high-risk programs and reengineer its business processes?	Information system weaknesses are a major reason why GAO designated HUD a high-risk agency. To address these and other program problems, HUD has proposed a major reinvention initiative to consolidate programs and streamline operations. System improvements are key to successfully transition from a high-risk agency to one that is efficient and responsive to customers.
<b>Energy:</b> Is Energy effectively using information technology to support its missions and providing effective oversight of contractors' IRM activities?	The Department of Energy spends about \$2 billion annually on information technology—the third highest among civilian agencies. Concerns are escalating about whether these expenditures (1) are helping the Department achieve its missions and (2) may be unnecessarily duplicative among contractors.

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**Table I: Key Issues**

<b>Objectives</b>	<b>Focus of work</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Enhance the information systems supporting EPA's Superfund program to enable the recovery of additional costs.</li><li>• Improve EPA information systems to help support environmental missions such as monitoring solid and hazardous waste, and air quality.</li><li>• Recommend reducing duplications in the federal government's technological approaches to collecting environmental data.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Review of information systems supporting Superfund cost recovery</li><li>• Reviews of systems supporting missions such as hazardous and solid waste and air quality</li><li>• Assessment of potential duplication of technology developments supporting environmental data collection</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Recommend system enhancements necessary to provide managers with better information to control high-risk programs.</li><li>• Recommend improvements in information resources management and opportunities to streamline business processes.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Reviews of systems supporting HUD's high-risk programs</li><li>• Evaluation of HUD's management of information resources</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Recommend improvements in information systems and data so that Energy can more effectively carry out its missions.</li><li>• Strengthen Energy's oversight of its contractors' IRM activities and identify possible reductions in contractor expenditures.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Evaluations of whether information systems are adequately supporting key missions, such as nuclear tracking</li><li>• Reviews of Energy's oversight of contractor IRM activities</li></ul>

# Table II: Planned Major Work

Issue	Planned major job starts
<b>Transportation</b>	<p>—Perform investment portfolio analysis of air traffic control modernization systems.</p> <p>—Evaluate FAA’s Standard Terminal Automation Replacement System.</p> <p>—Evaluate FAA’s Oceanic Automation System.</p> <p>—Analyze FAA software acquisition capability.</p>
<b>Agriculture</b>	<p>—Analyze Agriculture’s component agencies’ development of financial information systems.</p> <p>—Evaluate opportunities to achieve telecommunications savings by extending USDA approach governmentwide.</p> <p>—Assess Agriculture’s implementation of its Modernization of Administrative Processes Program.</p> <p>—Evaluate the consolidation and integration of systems within Agriculture’s new natural resources and environment mission area.</p>
<b>Weather Service</b>	<p>—Assess Commerce restructuring of the Advanced Weather Interactive Processing System.</p> <p>—Evaluate operational testing of integrated weather systems.</p>
<b>Environment</b>	<p>—Analyze potential duplication of technology developments supporting environmental data collection.</p>
<b>Housing and Urban Development</b>	<p>—Assess HUD’s efforts to strengthen its IRM program to support evolving information needs.</p>
<b>Energy</b>	<p>—Assess DOE’s oversight of contractors’ IRM activities and expenditures.</p> <p>—Evaluate information systems supporting DOE’s environmental management program.</p>
<b>Other congressional requests</b>	<p>—Evaluate the testing of Interior’s Automated Land Management System.</p>

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