

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-18-609SP](#), a report to congressional requesters

## Why GAO Did This Study

To reform the federal government and make it more efficient and effective, agencies need to use data about program performance. The benefit of collecting performance information is only fully realized when it is used by managers to make decisions aimed at improving results.

GAO was asked to review agencies' use of performance information. This report assesses, among other things, the extent to which: (1) 24 agencies' reported use of performance information and related leading practices has changed since 2013 and (2) the Executive Branch has taken actions to enhance the use of performance information.

To address the first objective, GAO analyzed results from its 2017 survey of federal managers, and compared them to 2013 results. The survey covered a stratified random sample of 4,395 managers from the 24 Chief Financial Officers Act agencies. The survey had a 67 percent response rate and results can be generalized to the population of managers government-wide and at each agency. For the second objective, GAO reviewed agency documents and interviewed staff from OMB and the PIC.

## What GAO Recommends

To improve the use of performance information within agencies and across the federal government, GAO recommends that OMB work with (1) fellow goal leaders to more fully develop action plans for the new goal to improve the use of data and (2) the PIC to prioritize efforts to identify and share proven practices and challenges. OMB had no comments on this report.

View [GAO-18-609SP](#). For more information, contact Triana McNeil at (202) 512-6806 or [mcnelt@gao.gov](mailto:mcnelt@gao.gov).

## MANAGING FOR RESULTS

### Government-wide Actions Needed to Improve Agencies' Use of Performance Information in Decision Making

#### What GAO Found

Agencies' reported use of performance information to make decisions, and leading practices that can promote such use, generally has not improved since GAO's last survey of federal managers in 2013. However, GAO's survey results continue to point to certain practices that could help agencies improve managers' use of performance information. For example, as shown in the table below, GAO's survey found that managers whose programs were subject to data-driven reviews (regular reviews used to assess progress on select agency goals) to a greater extent reported statistically significantly greater use of performance information to make decisions.

**Agency Reviews Associated with Increased Use of Performance Information in 2017**

Extent Managers Report Their Programs Have Been Subject to Agency Data-Driven Reviews	Manager's Average Use of Performance Information Index Score
No Extent	2.86
Small Extent	3.02
Moderate Extent	3.33
Great Extent	3.59
Very Great Extent	4.08

*Managers more subject to data-driven reviews report greater use of performance information.*

Source: GAO analysis of survey results. | GAO-18-609SP

Note: GAO's index score is an average of responses to 11 related survey questions that approximates the reported use of performance information in decision making. The index runs from 1 to 5, where 1 reflects managers reported they and others use performance information to "no extent," and 5 reflects to a "very great extent."

The Executive Branch has begun taking steps to improve the use of performance information within agencies and across the government. For example,

- In the President's Management Agenda and government-wide reform plan, released in March and June 2018 respectively, the administration acknowledged the need to do more, and announced a goal, among other actions, to improve the use of data in federal decision making. However, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and others responsible for this goal have yet to fully develop action plans to hold agencies accountable for achieving it.
- The Performance Improvement Council (PIC), which is chaired by OMB, has undertaken efforts to improve the use of performance information by, for example, creating a working group on agency performance reviews. But it has not yet taken a systematic approach to identify and share proven practices that led to, or challenges that may be hampering, increased use of performance information by managers. GAO's survey results identified agencies that may have insights into such practices and challenges.

More fully developing action plans for the new goal, and identifying and sharing proven practices and challenges, could help ensure the Executive Branch takes further steps to improve the use of performance information by managers within agencies and across the federal government.