

# GAO@100 Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-21-103792](#), a report to congressional requesters

## Why GAO Did This Study

Extreme weather events, such as tornadoes and hurricanes, have caused major damage and loss of life in the United States. NWS is responsible for developing weather forecasts and issuing warnings to help protect life and property from such events. NWS has determined that it needs to reform its operations and workforce to effectively carry out this responsibility and to improve its provision of services to emergency managers and other partners.

GAO was asked to review NWS's reform efforts under the Evolve Program. This report examines, among other things, the actions NWS has taken under the Evolve Program and the extent to which it has followed selected leading practices for effective agency reforms. GAO reviewed relevant NWS documents, interviewed officials, and assessed the Evolve reform efforts against selected leading practices.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is making three recommendations to NWS: (1) incorporate key attributes of successful performance measures as it develops measures for the Evolve Program, (2) develop a two-way communications strategy for the program that outlines how the agency will listen and respond to employee concerns, and (3) revise its approach to staffing the program to improve leadership and staff continuity. The Department of Commerce agreed with GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-21-103792](#). For more information, contact Cardell D. Johnson at (202) 512-3841 or [JohnsonCD1@gao.gov](mailto:JohnsonCD1@gao.gov).

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## NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE

### Additional Actions Needed to Improve the Agency's Reform Efforts

## What GAO Found

The Department of Commerce's National Weather Service (NWS) initiated the Evolve Program in 2017 to carry out a series of agency reforms to help it achieve its strategic vision of strengthening the nation's readiness and responsiveness to extreme weather events. The program has 20 reform initiatives that are in varying stages of completeness and are intended to free up staff time and improve service to the agency's partners, among other things.

NWS has substantially followed five of eight leading reform practices.

#### Extent to Which NWS Has Followed Selected Leading Practices for Effective Agency Reforms

Practice	Extent followed
Establishing goals and outcomes	○
Involving employees and key stakeholders	○
Using data and evidence	●
Addressing fragmentation, overlap, and duplication	●
Leadership focus and attention	○
Managing and monitoring	●
Strategic workforce planning	●
Employee performance management	●

Legend:

- **Substantially followed**—NWS took actions that addressed most or all aspects of the selected key questions GAO examined for the practice.
- **Partially followed**—NWS took actions that addressed some, but not most, aspects of the selected key questions GAO examined for the practice.

Source: GAO analysis of National Weather Service (NWS) documents and interviews with NWS officials. | GAO-21-103792

However, the agency has only partially followed the other three practices, resulting in gaps.

- **Establishing goals and outcomes.** NWS has established goals for the Evolve Program but has not established performance measures for key elements of the program's reform efforts.
- **Involving employees and key stakeholders.** NWS has engaged its employees in a number of ways in developing the Evolve reforms, including by sending quarterly email updates to all employees. However, the agency has not developed a two-way communications strategy for the program that listens and responds to employee concerns about the proposed reforms.
- **Leadership focus and attention.** NWS has designated three leadership positions as having primary responsibility for leading the implementation of the reforms. However, the agency has not established a dedicated implementation team that has the capacity to manage the reform process. Instead, the agency has primarily relied on rotating leaders and part-time staff for the Evolve Program, an approach that has not provided adequate leadership and staff continuity for the program.

By addressing gaps in these areas, NWS would have better assurance that its Evolve reform efforts will succeed.