



# GAO at a Glance

Current for fiscal year 2010

## Agency Head

Gene L. Dodaro  
Comptroller General of the  
United States

## Staff

3,350 employees

## Budget

\$571.1 million

## Financial Benefits from GAO Work

\$49.9 billion

(an \$87 return on every dollar  
invested in GAO)

## GAO Headquarters

Washington, D.C.

## Other Locations

Atlanta, GA; Boston, MA; Chicago, IL;  
Dallas, TX; Dayton, OH; Denver, CO;  
Huntsville, AL; Los Angeles, CA;  
Norfolk, VA; San Francisco, CA; and  
Seattle, WA.

For more information, go to GAO's  
Web site at [www.gao.gov](http://www.gao.gov)

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# About



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# GAO

MAKING A DIFFERENCE FOR CONGRESS AND THE NATION

## GAO's MISSION

The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) is an independent agency in the legislative branch of the federal government. Commonly known as the “investigative arm of Congress” or the “congressional watchdog,” GAO examines how taxpayer dollars are spent and advises lawmakers and agency heads on ways to make government work better.

GAO exists to support Congress in meeting its constitutional responsibilities and to help improve the performance and ensure the accountability of the federal government for the benefit of the American people. It provides Congress with timely information that is objective, fact-based, nonpartisan, nonideological, fair, and balanced. GAO is unique among legislative branch support agencies in that its reports often present original data and professional analyses drawn from extensive fieldwork.

Every GAO report reflects three core values: accountability, integrity, and reliability. The agency also operates under strict professional standards of review and referencing; all facts and analyses in GAO work are thoroughly checked for accuracy.

Most GAO work is done at the request of congressional committees or subcommittees or is mandated by public laws or committee reports. GAO also undertakes research under the authority of the Comptroller General. GAO supports congressional oversight by

- auditing agency operations to determine whether federal funds are being spent efficiently and effectively;
- investigating allegations of illegal and improper activities;
- reporting on how well government programs and policies are meeting their objectives;
- performing policy analyses and outlining options for congressional consideration; and
- issuing legal decisions and opinions, such as bid protest rulings and reports on agency rules.

## GAO's WORKFORCE

GAO is headed by the Comptroller General of the United States, who is appointed to a 15-year term—one of the longest in government. Gene L. Dodaro became the eighth Comptroller General of the United States on December 22, 2010, when he was confirmed by the Senate after having been chosen by the President from a list of candidates proposed by Congress. A career civil servant, Mr. Dodaro previously held a number of key executive posts at GAO.

GAO's independence is further safeguarded by the fact that its workforce consists of career employees hired on the basis of their knowledge, skills, and ability. GAO's diverse staff includes economists, social scientists, accountants, public policy analysts, attorneys, and computer experts as well as specialists in fields ranging from foreign policy to health care.



President Harry S. Truman laying the cornerstone of GAO's Washington headquarters in 1951. The GAO Building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

## Agency HISTORY

Concerned by the mounting national debt from World War I, Congress sought better information on and greater control over government spending. The Budget and Accounting Act of 1921 required the President to issue an annual federal budget and established GAO as an independent agency to investigate how federal dollars are spent.

In its early years, GAO mainly did voucher auditing. Audit clerks reviewed stacks of paperwork documenting agency payments and purchases. After World War II, GAO began to do more comprehensive financial audits that examined the economy and efficiency of government operations.

In the 1960s, the agency began to get into the type of work it is known for today—program evaluation—which examines whether government programs are meeting their objectives. Recent GAO work has addressed the use of Recovery Act and TARP funds, problems in mortgage financing, the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, food safety, climate change, postal reform, border security, and the financial pressures facing state and local governments. GAO has earned a reputation as one of the world's leading accountability organizations—one that is well equipped to handle Congress' toughest assignments.

## Oversight **Insight** AND FORESIGHT

GAO provides Congress with oversight of federal programs, insight into ways to improve government, and foresight into long-term trends. Although much of its work reviews the effectiveness of day-to-day government operations, GAO also stays alert to emerging issues that warrant lawmakers' attention. For example, GAO has analyzed the challenges posed by new security threats and globalization and has raised concerns about the nation's growing fiscal imbalance and the problems plaguing our health care and retirement systems. GAO has issued a report—“21st Century Challenges: Reexamining the Base of the Federal Government”—to help policymakers and the public think more strategically about the mission of government, how agencies do business, and how those activities should be financed.

## Agency **Performance** MEASURES

Financial benefits from GAO work in fiscal year 2010 totaled \$49.9 billion—an \$87 return on every dollar invested in GAO. The agency's budget was \$571.1 million. GAO also documented nearly 1,400 nonfinancial benefits that shaped legislation and improved services to the public.

In fiscal year 2010, GAO issued nearly 1,000 reports and other products, many suggesting ways to strengthen government programs and policies. More than 80 percent of GAO's recommendations are being implemented by Congress or federal agencies. Last year, GAO witnesses testified 192 times at hearings before various committees and subcommittees.