
The Government Accountability Office: Mission and Products

2015 Depository Library Council Meeting and Federal Depository Library Conference

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GAO on the Web

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About GAO: Mission

- Independent agency in the legislative branch of government
- Supports Congress in meeting its constitutional responsibilities
- Helps improve the federal government's performance and ensure its accountability for the benefit of the American people
- Functions as the investigative arm of the US Congress, often call the "congressional watchdog"
- Reference:
<http://gao.gov/about/index.html>



About GAO: History

- GAO got its start in July 1921—The Budget and Accounting Act (67 S. 1084) transferred auditing responsibilities, accounting, and claims functions from the Treasury Department to a new agency: The General Accounting Office
- 2004 – Comptroller General Walker reorganizes and changes the agency name to the General Accountability Office to better reflect the type of work conducted
- Reference:
<http://gao.gov/about/history/building.html>



About GAO: Our Work

Origins of GAO Work

- Congressional Requests
- Statutes, often called mandates
- Committee or Conference Reports
- Self-Initiated under the Comptroller General's authority

Types of Work

- Reporting on the effectiveness of government programs and policies
- Auditing agency operations
- Investigating allegations of illegal or improper activities
- Issuing legal decision and opinions, e.g. bid protests and reports on agency rules

GAO's Work: Products

- Reports
 - Originally called "Blue Books" from the color of the printed covers
 - No longer printed; reports are now in PDF
 - Started issuing e-Reports: <http://www.gao.gov/ereport/gao-10-799>
 - All Unclassified GAO Reports are available to the public via our web site
 - Congressional requesters of GAO work are allowed to restrict reports for up to 30 days before public release.
 - Sensitive and classified product titles will be posted on the web site starting 2015. See: http://www.gao.gov/restricted/restricted_reports
- Testimonies
 - Agency statements before Congressional Committees
 - <http://gao.gov/products/GAO-16-140T>

GAO's Work: Products

- Decisions & Opinions
 - Appropriations
 - GAO's Office of General Counsel issues decisions and opinions on appropriations law.
 - Reference : <http://gao.gov/legal/appropriations-law-decisions/what-we-do>
 - Example: <http://gao.gov/products/D11253>
 - Comptroller General Decisions
 - Comptroller General decisions and opinions are identified by a B-number and date.
 - Bid Protest Decisions
 - A bid protest is a challenge to the award or terms of a solicitation of a contract for procurement of goods or services or a challenge to the terms of a solicitation for such a contract. Federal government procurement contracts may be protested by bidders or other interested parties.
 - Reference: <http://gao.gov/legal/bid-protests/our-process>

GAO's Work: Products

Other legal functions (Reference: <http://gao.gov/legal#t=1>)

- Contract Appeals Board
 - GAO's Contract Appeals Board considers appeals of decisions by contracting officers in legislative branch agencies only, including the Architect of the Capitol, the Congressional Budget Office, and the Government Publishing Office, among others.
- Federal Vacancy Act
 - The act provides that the Comptroller General report to specified congressional committees, the President, and the Office of Personnel Management if an acting officer is determined to be serving longer than the 210 days (including applicable exceptions) established by the act.
- Congressional Review Act
 - This Act requires GAO to report on major rules that federal agencies make, including summaries of the procedural steps taken by the agencies. We have a searchable database of major and non-major rules.
- Antideficiency Act
 - This Act prohibits federal agencies from obligating or expending federal funds in advance or in excess of an appropriation, and from accepting voluntary services.

GAO's Work: Product Classifications

Reports and Testimonies are numbered by fiscal year. They are also classified by type.

- Standard Report: <http://gao.gov/products/GAO-15-768>
- Testimony: has a T after the number, <http://gao.gov/products/GAO-15-673T>
- Numbered Correspondance: Has an R after the number, <http://gao.gov/products/GAO-15-764R>
- Guidance: has a G after the number, for example the FISCAM - <http://www.gao.gov/products/GAO-09-232G>
- Fact Sheet have an FS after the number
- Comptroller General presentations or speeches have a CG
- Special Publications have an SP
- Unreleaseable Unclassified reports have an NI for Not Internet.
 - Determination is made at the request of the agencies concerned

GAO's Work: Product Classifications

Bid Protest Decisions

- Assigned B-Numbers
 - A unique number assigned by GAO to identify correspondence; was assigned to all audit products with non-unique number; some historic material may require the associated year for differentiation
 - A protest decision is identified by: Party Name, B-Number
 - <http://www.gao.gov/legal/bid-protests/search>
 - If related decisions are issued, those decisions are identified by: Party Name, B-Number.2; Party Name, B-Number.3 and so on.

GAO's Work: Products by the Numbers

- Reports FY 2015*: 1345
- Decisions and Other Legal Documents FY2015: 384
- Testimonies FY 2015: 111
- Special Publications FY 2015: 22
- CG Presentations: 8
- Guidance FY 2015: 0
- Fact Sheets FY 2015: 0

*(1 October 2014 to 30 September 2015)

GAO's Work: How to obtain documents

- Almost everything is available on GAO's Web Site:
<http://www.gao.gov>
- The web site is divided by Document Types and Topics
- Two search options:
 - Basic: functions like Google; will take phrases and multiple terms
 - Advanced: allows some fielded searching and date limits
- Narrowing by document types or agency names or other data available via the results page
- If you're looking for a particular decision, start on the Protests & Other Decisions page

GAO's Work: How to Obtain Documents

Search Demonstration

Questions?

If you need assistance
with a research question:

- By phone: 202-512-5941
- By email:
Research@gao.gov
- Please allow time for a response.

