

Why GAO Did This Study

Many of the meaningful results that the federal government seeks to achieve—such as those related to protecting food and agriculture, providing homeland security, and ensuring a well-trained and educated workforce—require the coordinated efforts of more than one federal agency and often more than one sector and level of government. Both Congress and the executive branch have recognized the need for improved collaboration across the federal government. The Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (GPRA) Modernization Act of 2010 establishes a new framework aimed at taking a more crosscutting and integrated approach to focusing on results and improving government performance. Effective implementation of the act could play an important role in facilitating future actions to reduce duplication, overlap, and fragmentation.

GAO was asked to identify the mechanisms that the federal government uses to lead and implement interagency collaboration, as well as issues to consider when implementing these mechanisms. To examine these topics, GAO conducted a literature review on interagency collaborative mechanisms, interviewed 13 academic and practitioner experts in the field of collaboration, and reviewed their work. GAO also conducted a detailed analysis of 45 GAO reports, published between 2005 and 2012. GAO selected reports that contained in-depth discussions of collaborative mechanisms and covered a broad range of issues.

MANAGING FOR RESULTS

Key Considerations for Implementing Interagency Collaborative Mechanisms

What GAO Found

Federal agencies have used a variety of mechanisms to implement interagency collaborative efforts, such as the President appointing a coordinator, agencies co-locating within one facility, or establishing interagency task forces. These mechanisms can be used to address a range of purposes including policy development; program implementation; oversight and monitoring; information sharing and communication; and building organizational capacity, such as staffing and training. Frequently, agencies use more than one mechanism to address an issue. For example, climate change is a complex, crosscutting issue, which involves many collaborative mechanisms in the Executive Office of the President and interagency groups throughout government.

Although collaborative mechanisms differ in complexity and scope, they all benefit from certain key features, which raise issues to consider when implementing these mechanisms. For example:

- **Outcomes and Accountability:** Have short-term and long-term outcomes been clearly defined? Is there a way to track and monitor their progress?
- **Bridging Organizational Cultures:** What are the missions and organizational cultures of the participating agencies? Have agencies agreed on common terminology and definitions?
- **Leadership:** How will leadership be sustained over the long-term? If leadership is shared, have roles and responsibilities been clearly identified and agreed upon?
- **Clarity of Roles and Responsibilities:** Have participating agencies clarified roles and responsibilities?
- **Participants:** Have all relevant participants been included? Do they have the ability to commit resources for their agency?
- **Resources:** How will the collaborative mechanism be funded and staffed? Have online collaboration tools been developed?
- **Written Guidance and Agreements:** If appropriate, have participating agencies documented their agreement regarding how they will be collaborating? Have they developed ways to continually update and monitor these agreements?