



Highlights of [GAO-10-822T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Recent terrorist events such as the attempted bomb attacks in New York's Times Square and aboard an airliner on Christmas Day 2009 are reminders that national security challenges have expanded beyond the traditional threats of the Cold War Era to include unconventional threats from nonstate actors. Today's threats are diffuse and ambiguous, making it difficult—if not impossible—for any single federal agency to address them alone. Effective collaboration among multiple agencies and across federal, state, and local governments is critical.

This testimony highlights opportunities to strengthen interagency collaboration by focusing on four key areas: (1) developing overarching strategies, (2) creating collaborative organizations, (3) developing a well-trained workforce, and (4) improving information sharing. It is based on GAO's body of work on interagency collaboration.

What GAO Recommends

GAO has recommended that federal agencies incorporate desirable characteristics of national strategies; take actions to create collaborative organizations; address human capital issues such as staffing shortages, training, and strategic planning; and establish or clarify guidelines for sharing national security information. Agencies have generally concurred with GAO's recommendations and have taken some actions to enhance interagency collaboration, but much work remains.

[View GAO-10-822T or key components.](#)
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NATIONAL SECURITY

Key Challenges and Solutions to Strengthen Interagency Collaboration

What GAO Found

Federal agencies have an opportunity to enhance collaboration by addressing long-standing problems and better positioning the U.S. government to respond to changing conditions and future uncertainties. Progress has been made in enhancing interagency collaboration, but success will require leadership commitment, sound plans that set clear priorities, and measurable goals. The agencies involved in national security will need to make concerted efforts to forge strong and collaborative partnerships, and seek coordinated solutions that leverage expertise and capabilities across communities. Today, challenges exist in four key areas:

- *Developing and implementing overarching strategies.* Although some agencies have developed or updated overarching strategies on national security-related issues, GAO's work has identified cases where U.S. efforts have been hindered by the lack of information on roles and responsibilities of organizations involved or coordination mechanisms.
- *Creating collaborative organizations.* Organizational differences—including differences in agencies' structures, planning processes, and funding sources—can hinder interagency collaboration. Agencies lack adequate coordination mechanisms to facilitate this collaboration during planning and execution of programs and activities.
- *Developing a well-trained workforce.* Agencies do not always have the right people with the right skills in the right jobs at the right time to meet the challenges they face—including having a workforce that is able to quickly address crises. Moreover, agency performance management systems often do not recognize or reward interagency collaboration, and training is needed to understand other agencies' processes or cultures.
- *Sharing and integrating national security information across agencies.* U.S. government agencies do not always share relevant information with their national security partners due to a lack of clear guidelines for sharing information and security clearance issues. Additionally, incorporating information drawn from multiple sources poses challenges to managing and integrating that information.

Strengthening interagency collaboration—with leadership as the foundation—can help transform U.S. government agencies and create a more unified, comprehensive approach to national security issues at home and abroad.