A Guide to Better Implement FITARA Provisions

New GAO report outlines agency best practices to hasten acquisition reform.
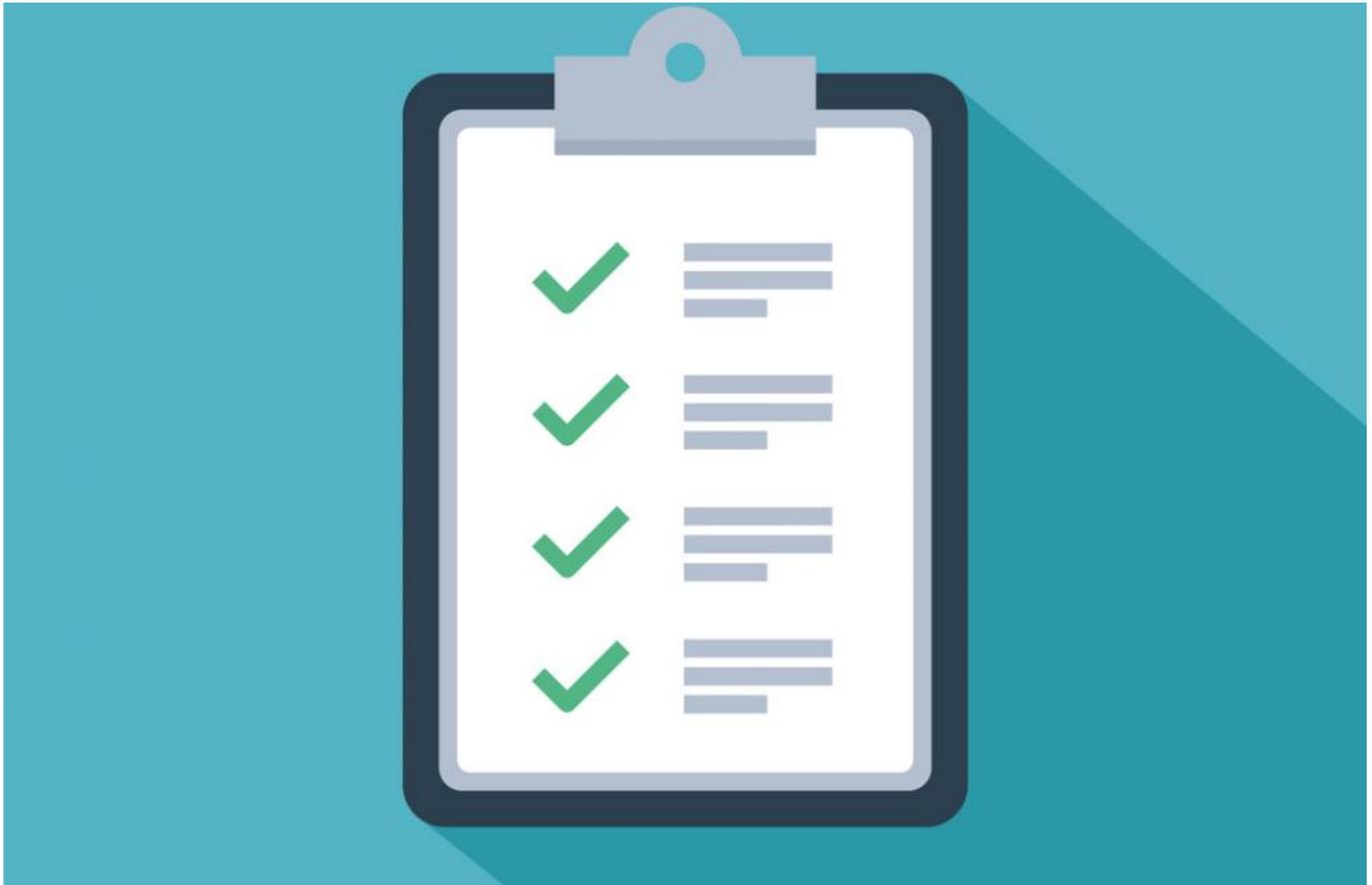
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The Government Accountability Office last week published a report detailing successful practices at nine federal agencies that have helped them better meet provisions in the Federal Information Technology Acquisition Reform Act (FITARA). The report came in response to a congressional request to identify agencies' FITARA implementation practices.

"Congress has long recognized that IT has the potential to enable federal agencies to accomplish their missions more quickly, effectively and economically. However, fully exploiting this potential has presented challenges to covered agencies, and the federal government's management of IT has produced mixed results," the report

said.

In the report, GAO identified agencies whose successes may help other agencies successfully implement key FITARA provisions to achieve IT improvements and savings across the federal government. The agencies included the departments of Veterans Affairs, Health and Human Services, Commerce, Homeland Security, Justice and Agriculture, as well as the General Services Administration, U.S. Agency for International Development and NASA, and comprised "about $27 billion (or about 59%) of the $45.8 billion in estimated non-defense IT spending for fiscal year 2019," according to the report.

Congress passed FITARA in December 2014 as part of the 2015 fiscal year National Defense Authorization Act to reform federal IT management, which had been identified as in need of significant transformation. Since then, the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform (OGR) has released seven FITARA scorecards to assess agency implementation on an A to F scale. OGR released the most recent scorecard in December 2018.

Republican Rep. Will Hurd of Texas recently commented on the transformative impact of the scorecards. "When the concept of the FITARA scorecard came about, I was at first suspicious. How is this going to change behaviors? But it has because it is a consistent focus on key drivers that are going to lead to good behavior," Hurd told attendees at IBM's Think Gov 2019 in Washington, D.C., March 14.

The GAO report evaluated the following five FITARA provisions:

- CIO authority improvements

- Increased risk management and transparency

- Portfolio review

- Data center consolidation

- And software acquisition

The report identified four overarching practices that can help agencies implement all of the five selected FITARA provisions moving forward:

- Obtain support from senior leadership

- Treat the implementation of FITARA as a program

- Establish FITARA performance measures for component agencies

- Appoint an executive accountable for FITARA implementation in each component agency

Additionally, for each of the five selected FITARA provisions, the report identified practices from one or more of the nine target agencies that can help others implement that provision.

For the CIO authority enhancements provision, the report recommended "develop[ing] policy to explain how the authorities that FITARA provided to the agency CIO are to be carried out."

For the increased risk management and transparency provision, the report recommended "implement[ing] a risk rating process for information technology investments that incorporates risks."

For the portfolio review provision, the report recommended "perform[ing] application rationalization activities."

For the data center consolidation provision, the report recommended:

- Conducting site visits to all data centers

- Transitioning to a virtual or cloud-based environment

- Incentivizing component agencies to accelerate the pace of data center

consolidation

- Utilizing data centers with excess capacity

For the software acquisition provision, the report recommended "centraliz[ing] the management of software licenses."

"As a result of implementing these practices, each of the agencies was better positioned to implement FITARA," the report said.

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