

SUBCOMMITTEE ON MODERNIZATION HEARING  
“LEGISLATIVE BRANCH ADVANCEMENT: GAO MODERNIZATION”  
September 27, 2023

**Questions for Dr. Tim Persons, Principal, Digital Assurance and Transparency,  
PricewaterhouseCoopers**

1. In your testimony, you explain how the rapid evolution of science, technology, and data governance demands innovation and statutory updates. In your view, what statutory revisions or updates would benefit GAO and Congress, especially in the fields of science and technology?

TMP: The statutory revisions or updates I believe would benefit GAO and Congress, especially in the fields of science and technology are as follows:

**Regarding digital innovation toward EBP:**

In my view, the GAO Audit Act (a.k.a. the Good Accounting Obligation in Government Act (GAO-IG Act) of 2019 should be updated several ways as follows:

1. ***It should be updated with a special provision or section to authorize and recognize the GAO Innovation Lab within STAA***; an entity created to meet the evidence-based policymaking (EBP) needs of the Congress by exploring, building, and deploying scaled digital solutions involving advanced data analytics, AI, and other emerging technologies.
2. ***The EBP needs of Congress should drive expanded data and information access and retention authorities for GAO – particularly for the Innovation Lab – for data and information of all types***. While the language should reiterate/uphold data governance principles based on existing statutory requirements, it should also empower the GAO (and the Innovation Lab in particular) to have more expansive and enduring access to data to bring the congressional EBP agenda to life (*i.e.*, imagine the power of longitudinal data access to track program/project/department/agency performance over time to drive deeper and more incisive insights for legislators beyond the normal one-year budget cycles)
3. ***It should grant special hiring, acquisition, data management, and external partnerships authorities to the Innovation Lab*** in recognition of its innovation mission, and special capabilities/needs to deliver EBP to GAO and the Congress (*i.e.*, think the 18F equivalent of the Legislative Branch)
4. For a bolder and more decisive step, it should be retitled the “Congressional Innovation Lab” to better reflect a broader purpose than supporting GAO Audits. EBP needs are clear and present and the congressional demand signal has been high. This could be a profoundly important step toward bringing nonpartisan, fact-based, nonideological EBP to the bipartisan client base on the Hill. The ideal legislative authorities would grant such an entity the access powers of GAO, but the flexibility of action of the Congress itself. I

realize that this would, legislatively speaking, be more work than clarifications of the GAO-IG Act, however I do believe this is the right answer to bring a meaningful, sustainable, accountable, and effective EBP ecosystem to life.

**Regarding S&T in general:**

Adding depth to my answer to Chairwoman Bice's question during the hearing about why I believe authorizing STAA is a recommended policy action, this recommendation is underscored by it having a unique mandate to conduct technology assessments and produce Science & Technology (S&T) Spotlights in addition to GAO's conventional oversight work (i.e., S&T audits). Just as GAO itself needs independence, so STAA requires a high degree of research independence within the Agency to ensure the integrity and credibility of their findings as well as an ability to deliver S&T services to the Congress in an agile manner. For instance, in 2021, the STAA team attempted to produce an S&T Spotlight on ransomware in response to a request from the Committee on House Administration (CHA) following the Colonial Pipeline attack. However, this effort was internally blocked since, topically speaking, it was declared to be outside the jurisdiction of STAA's remit. The committee was ultimately supported with information, but did not get what it (reasonably) asked for – specifically, an S&T Spotlight on ransomware. This incident highlights the potential for internal dynamics to impede STAA's ability to respond swiftly and independently to pressing technological issues. By granting STAA the status of an authorized entity within GAO, it would ensure that it has the operational independence necessary to carry out its important work without undue interference., would enhance the quality and timeliness of STAA's output, and would strengthen GAO's overall capacity to provide Congress with reliable and unbiased technology assessments.