



October 30, 2023

The Honorable Stephanie Bice
Chairwoman
The Honorable Derek Kilmer
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Modernization
Committee on House Administration
U.S. House of Representatives

Dear Representatives Bice and Kilmer:

Attached please find responses to the questions for the record from the Subcommittee on Modernization's September 27, 2023, hearing on the U.S. Government Accountability Office's (GAO) modernization efforts.

I appreciated the opportunity to discuss how GAO has modernized and innovated to meet evolving congressional needs. I also appreciated hearing the suggestions and ideas for improvement raised at the hearing. GAO is committed to continuous improvement. We welcome suggestions that could help us better serve Congress while maintaining our independence and professional standards.

A suggestion that was raised in both panels was the need for continued outreach to individual Members of Congress. We agree that further attention to Member outreach is warranted. We have identified additional efforts that we will undertake to increase our outreach to Member offices to help ensure they are aware of GAO's services, work, and impact. These efforts include:

- **Ambassador program.** Through this program, we will seek to cultivate a relationship with each Member of Congress. Our goal is to ensure they are aware of GAO's work, services, and impact. GAO executives and managers will be assigned a Member's office and be expected to conduct periodic outreach, including flagging reports that may be of interest to the Member. We will assign GAO leadership based on the Member's interests and priorities.
- **Distribution of GAO reports.** Currently, only the Chairs and Ranking Members generally receive a copy of our issued reports to their committees/subcommittees. Moving forward when we publicly release a report to the Chair or Ranking Member we send a copy to the legislative team of all Members on the respective committee/subcommittee.
- **Biannual meetings.** We will offer twice-a-year meetings to the legislative teams of the Members on each standing committee. The purpose of these meetings is to make them aware of the recent and ongoing work that we are conducting for the committees.

- **Office space.** We plan to invite Member offices to meet with GAO subject matter experts in our new space in the Longworth building to learn about certain bodies of work based on the Members' interests and priorities.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to highlight GAO's role in helping Congress carry out its constitutional responsibilities. I look forward to continuing to work with you.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Gene L. Dodaro". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "G".

Gene L. Dodaro
Comptroller General
of the United States

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

Questions for U.S. Comptroller General Gene Dodaro

Workforce

1. **For many years, GAO has consistently ranked as one of the best places to work in government. What are the reasons for GAO’s high performance in workforce retention, morale, and work culture?**

GAO has an important and unique mission that draws talented individuals who are committed to improving government performance and accountability. We work on issues of national importance, and our work makes a difference. We also provide a workplace where employees feel valued, respected, and treated fairly. We value and promote teamwork and collaboration and are committed to continued learning and development. We also offer many important employee programs and flexibilities for today’s worker, such as telework.

- a. **What lessons and/or best practices do you believe other governmental agencies and congressional support agencies could draw from the GAO’s success in that regard?**

One key practice is utilizing an intern program to bring in talent. We have a robust intern program that draws undergraduate and graduate students from top universities from across the country. The program serves as an important recruiting mechanism; most of the people that we hire each year come from our intern program.

Another key practice is the establishment and active involvement of the Educators Advisory Panel. The Panel advises me and other GAO executives on strategies, best practices, and trends related to recruiting, hiring, and developing a talented workforce. The panel is composed of deans and highly qualified professors from a range of public and private academic institutions and helps us maintain effective communication with the schools from which we recruit.

An additional key practice is developing constructive working relationships with the employee union and other affinity groups. Through constructive dialogue with our union partners and other employee groups, and the results of our employee feedback surveys, we obtain employee input about potential internal policy and program changes. As a result, we can implement policies and programs that allow us to achieve our mission and meet the needs of our employees.

A final key practice is communication. We use a variety of communication channels to keep our employees informed and connected. For example, I and the other executive committee members hold monthly townhalls with all agency

personnel to share the latest agency developments and address employee questions.

- b. What are the staff offices, structures, workplace policies, procedures, or other institutional mechanisms that would equip GAO to avoid any future declines in workforce retention or morale?**

We have institutional mechanisms needed to manage retention and morale. Our established mechanisms have kept our morale very high, and GAO has been named a best place to work for 15 years running. Our attrition rate is also very low, most recently around 6 percent. We need to continue to have flexibility in organizing and managing our staff in a manner that allows us to meet mission and employee's needs.

Products and Services

- 2. You note in your testimony that GAO is reluctant to duplicate CBO's cost estimate work in the estimation of the total cost of implementing open recommendations. Do you think that services to Congress could be enhanced by greater collaboration between GAO and CBO?**

GAO and CBO have solid working relationships, and we consult with each other on a frequent basis. For example, at the start of every audit, GAO auditors are required to contact CBO subject matter experts to ensure the new audit does not duplicate ongoing CBO work and to identify relevant CBO publications. In addition, GAO and CBO share information and consult each other regarding operational issues.

While enhancing collaboration is a worthwhile goal—and something we will consider how we can do—it is important to also note that GAO and CBO serve distinct roles. As the investigative arm of Congress, GAO evaluates the effectiveness and efficiency of programs and activities, seeks to root out fraud, waste, and abuse, and makes recommendations for improvements. CBO supports the budget process by analyzing the budgetary and economic implications of issues, including estimating the costs of proposed legislation.

Like GAO, CBO responds to congressional priorities. In CBO's case, this includes the Budget committees and all other members trying to obtain a timely official CBO score. While we will further explore the possibilities of CBO scoring GAO recommendations, it is highly unlikely it would have the resources and/or time to accommodate us. We believe the best option would be to have the GAO recommendation incorporated into proposed legislation and have the legislation scored based on congressional priorities.

- a. Are there any barriers or challenges that come with collaboration between GAO and CBO or CRS that Congress could remedy or improve upon?**

We have not experienced barriers or challenges to collaboration between GAO, CRS, and CBO. As we mentioned in our testimony, we collaborate with these agencies at the executive level on a regular basis, and at the team level for every audit to ensure we are not duplicating work.

3. How do you think the future GAO satellite office on the Hill could enhance cooperation between Congress and GAO? Can you briefly describe your current plans to maximize the utility of this future satellite office?

We are looking forward to having office space in a House building. We appreciate the committee's efforts in securing this space. Having space on site will offer several benefits, including more visibility with congressional staff, increased opportunities for impromptu consults, and space for in-person meetings or training sessions. For example, we plan to schedule trainings or briefings for House staff on GAO's work and services as well as technical and policy issues. We also plan to hold "office hours" with our different subject matter experts. Some of these office hours days will serve as general outreach and education about the services we can provide. Others could be based on legislative action or hearings. For instance, we could have our artificial intelligence (AI) experts on hand for impromptu consults during a week with multiple House hearings or legislative markups on AI.

4. How many GAO individuals have been detailed to congressional committees in 2023 to date?

By law, details are limited to 1-year. Details begin and end at different times during each fiscal year. The timing is dependent on when we receive the request for a detailee and when GAO staff with the appropriate expertise and experience becomes available. At any given time, we have about 15-20 staff detailed to committees. In FY2023, we detailed 32 GAO staff to multiple committees in the Senate and House.

a. Annually, what was the average number of detailees over the previous 10 years?

Over the past 10 years, the average number of detailees was 26 each fiscal year.

b. What are the opportunities and challenges associated with detailing GAO experts to Congress?

Details provide significant opportunities for both the committees and GAO. The committee receives a highly-trained policy analyst, who usually has experience in the topics of interest to the committee. GAO pays for the analyst's salary, benefits, and other costs throughout the 1-year detail. GAO benefits by exposing its staff to the internal workings of the committees and Congress. Analysts return with a better understanding of the needs of the committees and how committees use GAO work.

The challenges boil down to resources. There is significant demand for GAO detailees, and this demand can exceed the number of details that we can field at any given time. Also, with each detailee that we provide to committees, we have one less auditor to work on the reviews requested or required by committees.

- c. Does GAO have a target goal for the number of detailees to send to Congress on a regular basis? Does GAO conduct proactive outreach to Congress to encourage and/or facilitate GAO details?**

GAO does not have a minimum goal for the total number of detailees, but we attempt to manage the demand to keep the number of detailees to no more than 20 at any given time. We limit the number to this level due to the demands we face for our audit work and our current resources. Decades ago, GAO provided more detailees to the committees; however, that was when GAO had over 5,000 FTEs compared to today's 3,500 FTEs.

We do not outreach to committees to encourage details on a regular basis. However, because we are nonpartisan and serve both sides of the aisles, we make sure committee staff are aware of the option to request a detailee if their counterparts have asked for a GAO detailee.

- 5. Do you track the congressional engagement, including views and downloads, for GAO reports?**

We track the engagement on our "For Congress" section of our website. This tracking shows that the section was visited 4,600 times in the six months prior to when we launched the redesigned section, versus 6,700 times in the six months afterward, a 45 percent increase. We track views and downloads for all GAO reports, but we do not currently have a mechanism in place to isolate congressional engagement from all other users of our website (gao.gov).

We have also experienced increased engagement in the amount of technical assistance provided to individual Members and congressional committees. Technical assistance is quick-turnaround, informal assistance on discrete topics. Examples of this assistance include reviewing draft legislation, analyzing publicly available data, providing congressional hearing support, or briefing Hill staff on the workings of a particular federal program or technical issue. Technical assistance requests have increased as more Members and committees are made aware of this service. We are currently developing systems to better track this increased form of engagement.

- a. If so, are these numbers ever analyzed to evaluate ways to improve congressional engagement with GAO's work (as opposed to the public more generally)? Are these numbers considered when evaluating the value of work products or considered in the performance evaluations of report authors?**

While we currently cannot link report downloads to Congress, we have many other indicators of engagement. For example, we systematically seek feedback on the usefulness, clarity, and timeliness on hundreds of individual products that we issue by sending a survey to Congressional addressees. We also periodically undertake extensive, systematic efforts to collect feedback from a wide range of staff and committees; in our most recent effort, we obtained feedback from 71 congressional staff representing 19 committees. Based on this input, we developed 20 recommendations we implemented to improve client services. For example, based on the feedback that we received, we have implemented new, quick-read products such as the Snapshots, two-to-three-page summaries of a body of work in a policy area. Snapshots also highlight open recommendations.

GAO analysts are rated on multiple performance competencies, which vary by band level. But all levels have a competency that focuses on delivering results. Members of GAO's Senior Executive Service are rated on providing quality and timely client service, managing expectations and issues, and addressing the concerns of our congressional clients.

6. **What new products and services does GAO anticipate creating to continue meeting the evolving needs of congressional staff?**
 - a. **Is GAO working on any ongoing projects to improve its products or customer service to Congress?**

We are currently developing quick-reads for additional bodies of work to make policy-relevant information quickly available and easily understandable. Over the past 5 years we have introduced multiple quick read products that synthesize and package information relevant to current or emerging issues. These products are generally no more than two pages. We have published them for science and technology, health care, defense-related acquisition, and energy and anticipate expanding their use for other policy topics.

We are testing shorter versions of our Highlights pages—the executive summaries of full reports. The goal is a shorter version of our Highlights page, that gives readers information at the level between Fast Facts—our brief online summaries—and the full audit report.

We are currently working on implementing a Digital strategy. Components of this strategy include ensuring all products are accessible digitally on any devices and focusing on writing that is clear, concise, and uses plain language. Part of the strategy will entail greater use of digital platforms, producing more infographics, interactive graphics, and videos to supplement reports, making data more accessible, and making our science, policy, and economics information easier to absorb.

In terms of services, to make it easier for congressional staff to access our services, experts, and work, we revamped our “[For Congress](#)” webpage. This one-stop page is designed to contain everything that a staff person may want to know about GAO or our

services—from contact information for all GAO subject matter experts (searchable by topic) to how to request a GAO study or legal decision.

We are also implementing practices to make all members of Congress more aware of our services. In the new year, we will implement an “ambassador program” that makes GAO senior executives points of contact for member offices. GAO senior executives will reach out to senior office staff to foster a relationship that enhances the office’s ability to benefit from GAO services.

We will continue to assess the efficacy of our feedback tools. As mentioned in my testimony, we revamped our product survey tool. This revamp allows congressional staff to provide feedback in just minutes using any handheld device. This applies to all requested products. To understand how Congress and the public use the information we produce, we use analytics to measure the number of visits to our website and the number of post views. To understand Congress’s and the public’s experience with our web resources, we do usability tests that include congressional staff members and use pop-up surveys on our website to assess satisfaction.

7. **As GAO has developed new reporting techniques, methods, and types of reporting products, how does GAO institutionally evaluate, develop, and modernize its products and services?**
 - a. **If an office, team, or staff within GAO develops a new innovative idea, technique, tool, product, or service to support GAO’s work to aid Congress, what are the processes to evaluate and assess internal innovations and, if credible, apply them broadly within the agency, as appropriate?**

You are correct in noting that our products and services continue to evolve. Reports once issued as paper copies are now accessible on hand-held devices in a format that allows users to easily navigate to sections of most interest. We will be offering more of our products in digital formats and working to improve the users’ experience. In using our products, readers have the choice of using Fast Facts for an overview of a report and the status of its related recommendations, or the executive summary (the “Highlights” page). We are currently piloting new versions of the Highlights page to achieve a right-sized summary. We have also taken steps to right-size products, offering two-page encapsulations of bodies of work. In terms of services, we have worked hard to make all member offices aware that they can tap our expertise by either speaking directly with our staff or by requesting short turn around information requests. We will continue to put practices in place that allow all members to benefit from our services. These include the ambassador program mentioned earlier and our plans for using our Hill office space.

The evolution of our products and services is guided by a system that encourages, evaluates, and implements new ideas.

There are several mechanisms for GAO to evaluate, assess, and apply innovations at the agency. Enterprise-wide changes are considered by the Continuous Process Improvement Leadership Board (CPILB), a governance body chaired by members of GAO's executive committee and that includes senior managers from across GAO. The CPILB provides overall strategic guidance, direction, and sponsorship of process improvement projects across the agency.

GAO's Continuous Process Improvement Office (CPIO), which helps chair the CPILB, maintains a portfolio of process improvements identified by GAO leadership and teams, and assigns its experts in the disciplines of Lean/Six Sigma to guide projects to completion. CPIO also maintains an open mailbox for any staff to submit ideas for innovation. Where applicable, the innovations discovered in these efforts are evaluated and assessed by the CPILB for potential application elsewhere in the agency.

Additionally, the agency maintains a project repository of innovative ideas, techniques, tools, products, and services that is shared with the Chief Operating Officer (COO). The repository incorporates a governance and workflow process that ensures innovative ideas advance through stages of exploration if key controls are met. For example, the innovative idea must align with GAO strategic goals, offer business value, and have multiple approvals from managers. Ideas that advance to the prototype stage must deliver value to be considered for broader adoption within the agency. The COO determines further investment of agency resources and prioritizes those innovative projects that have the largest urgency and impact to the agency.

Finally, within our Science, Technology Assessment, and Analytics team (STAA), the Innovation Lab applies data science and emerging technology to improve efficiency and effectiveness. This includes gaining hands-on understanding of properties, characteristics, inner-mechanics, and cybersecurity implications across a range of emerging technologies to support evidence-based oversight evaluations, and developing and scaling GAO-specific use cases through experimentations to enhance our oversight capacity.

8. How does GAO conduct its foresight work within the agency? How does this foresight work benefit Congress?

GAO conducts foresight work in two major ways. First, our foresight work is reflected in the planning and delivery of reports and technical assistance we provide directly to Congress. This foresight work takes many forms, including our [strategic plan](#), which incorporates [trends in our society and government](#), technology assessments, technology spotlights, and a range of work that is prospective in nature performed by all of GAO's mission teams. Examples include analysis of the future of America's retirement system, our [annual fiscal health report](#) which projects ratios of the deficit and debt to GDP over a 75-year horizon, and prospective analyses on topics such as future defense capabilities, climate-related fiscal risks, future aviation systems, healthcare, physical infrastructure protection, and quantum computing, to name just a few. Our foresight work is also present in the real-time auditing that we conduct during times of national emergencies, like COVID. Lessons learned from this work help our nation better prepare for future

emergencies. Most of this work included forward-looking analysis that directly benefits Congress in its oversight and legislative responsibilities.

Second, GAO conducts foresight work by building expertise and capabilities in foresight among our people who provide analysis and assistance to Congress. We have a dedicated strategic planning and foresight team that has established a foresight ecosystem across GAO. These agency-wide foresight efforts are primarily conducted and coordinated through GAO staff in the Center for Strategic Foresight (CSF). GAO established CSF in 2018 to provide a platform to highlight our foresight activities and to help GAO fulfill its mission to support the Congress. Some of the efforts of this foresight ecosystem include 1) a horizon scanning program designed to provide GAO staff with insight into emerging issues and trends that may impact federal programs and operations; 2) internal management briefings on emerging issues and trends that may impact federal programs and operations; 3) training of GAO executives on the key practices of strategic foresight; 4) the development of foresight methods and audit guides to assist audit staff conducting prospective analysis; 5) external expertise and perspectives provided through communication with global networks of foresight experts and external experts who discuss emerging issues with GAO staff; and 6) working directly with GAO's mission teams through facilitated workshops, trainings, and internal projects that enable GAO staff to incorporate forward-looking approaches into their planning of work for Congress.

a. Does GAO plan to expand its foresight work to support Congress?

Yes. We continue to grow foresight expertise across GAO to continue to support Congress. We are also exploring new product types that will provide Congress with insight into emerging issues and trends across a variety of subject matter areas, including but not limited to science and technology. Our growing foresight capacity is designed to ensure that GAO's planned work and ongoing engagement with Congress are informed by a forward-looking perspective. GAO's Center for Strategic Foresight will continue to expand its horizon scanning efforts and internal foresight network to ensure we continue to provide a variety of forward-looking work to support Congress.

This growth will build on our existing body of foresight work. Much of GAO work contains elements of foresight. For example, many GAO products include prospective analysis to review the implications of trends and future uncertainties on federal programs, spending, and policymaking.

b. Are there areas where foresight work may conflict or be difficult to reconcile with GAO's traditional auditing function? If so, how do you reconcile those two objectives?

No. We see no conflict between foresight and GAO's traditional audit function. In fact, we believe foresight is an essential best practice that enhances GAO's ability to perform its mission to serve Congress through audits and prospective analysis. We use foresight in our agency-wide planning processes to ensure GAO is looking ahead and can anticipate

the audit and oversight needs of Congress on the most important national issues and priorities, including a range of emerging issues.

Moreover, prospective analysis is one of the performance audit types that is defined in the Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards (GAGAS) “Yellow Book”. This type of prospective analysis is rooted in foresight and similar methods. As defined in the Yellow Book, prospective analysis provides analysis or conclusions about information that is based on assumptions about events that may occur in the future, along with possible actions that an audited entity may take in response to the future events. This type of analysis is useful for audits and oversight of federal programs and spending because, as the Yellow Book mentions, it can provide conclusions based on current and projected trends, future potential impact on government programs and services, and their implications for program or policy alternatives.

9. Would GAO’s Center for Audit Excellence benefit from increased resources or its own line-item appropriation?

The Center for Audit Excellence has been providing high-quality audit training and technical assistance to domestic and international accountability organizations since 2016. The Center charges fees to these organizations, or to donors, to cover the costs of its services. The Center is not seeking additional resources or a line-item appropriation.

10. Has GAO considered creating completion dates for the recommendations that it regularly issues? What is the feasibility of creating completion dates for recommendations? What are the possible benefits and challenges expected from creating completion dates?

Implementation of GAO recommendations is an agency’s management function. Management must prioritize the implementation of GAO recommendations against other competing priorities and available resources. Therefore, it is not appropriate for GAO to impose timeframes on an agency and assume this management function.

To hold agencies accountable for implementing recommendations in a timely manner, Congress could require agencies to identify the time frames. Specifically, under 31 U.S.C. 720, as amended, agencies are required to report to the committees of jurisdiction if they agree or disagree with the recommendations within 180-days of receiving them. This requirement could be amended to require agencies to also include a time frame for implementing the recommendation.

Information Technology

11. Congress has changed in various ways over the past 20 years and, certainly, technology has changed. When you look at these changes in Congress and how it uses technology, what do you see, and what is your vision for GAO to meet this changing reality?

The single biggest change we see on the near-term technology horizon is Congress’s use, as well as the nation’s use, of artificial intelligence. As mentioned in my statement, GAO developed a first-of-its-kind AI Accountability Framework to identify key practices to help ensure accountability and responsible AI use by federal agencies and others. Our Chief Data Scientist, who is also the Director of the Innovation Lab, also testified on the use of AI in Government this spring. (May 2023 before HSGAC). We anticipate a Congressional focus not only on AI but many S&T-related areas, and we will continue providing timely and ongoing technical assistance to Congress, supporting capacity building, and expanding our portfolio of foresight work on technologies.

a. Have you considered how artificial intelligence could be deployed to help you do your work more efficiently and cost effectively?

Our vision for GAO’s use of AI is evolving. As mentioned in my statement, our Innovation Lab is also developing a Generative AI prototype with the same basic capabilities as those found in industry. We will learn and form our vision from this work. However, the use of transformative technologies such as AI go beyond technological and productivity considerations. As GAO’s Innovation Lab continues AI experimentation and exploration, we will be vigilant to ensure these actions and data are transparent, secure, and sustainable. We also appreciated the opportunity to participate in the Congress’s House Hackathon this fall.

b. How are you conducting evaluations of how to best utilize data science and AI at GAO to improve its efficiency or effectiveness?

The Innovation Lab has established a rapid prototyping process that grounds the use of emerging technology to bona fide challenges. This process is consistent with GAO’s strategic plan; helps navigate risks associated with uncertainties; and accommodates the iterative nature of exploratory and experimental activities. Our agile process provides staff and process efficiency.

Examples of ongoing Lab projects include:

- Deployment of a foundational Large Language Model to serve downstream use cases.
- Development of an extended reality solution to enhance collaboration and improve evidence collection.
- Optimization of transuranic waste disposal based on a digital twins model.
- Large-scale data mining of the federal Single Audit Clearinghouse to identify persistent and significant challenges across federal programs.

12. Regarding GAO’s New Blue initiative to modernize and improve technology, what products or modernizations has New Blue delivered?

a. What was the projected timeline for the completion of the New Blue initiative and how has that initiative and its timeline changed? What were the reasons for this change?

New Blue delivers responsive, user-friendly versions of GAO products that allow congressional clients and the public to access our work on any device. New Blue also increases internal efficiencies by reducing or eliminating numerous manual steps in readying the product for distribution. We have issued about 30 products through New Blue, including all 10 comprehensive CARES Act reports, 5 duplication and cost savings reports, 2 High Risk reports, and 3 Tracking the Funds reports.

Our initial focus in producing products through New Blue was on our most visible, signature products. We are now piloting to expand the use of New Blue to more products, with a current pilot for traditional reports. With the successful completion of the pilot we would expand to all GAO products.

In 2015, we awarded a 5-year contract for development work for New Blue. During this development period we conducted two pilots, which allowed us to better understand how staff would interact with the system and the system's limitations. Based on this learning, we made some adjustments to our plans and timelines, including seeking more out-of-the-box functionality and allowing more time for staff to get comfortable with the system. We also prioritized issuing more mobile-friendly products. In March 2021 we signed another 5-year contract to complete the development work.

Science and Technology Policy

13. How does GAO meet the congressional need for nonpartisan expertise in the fields of science and technology, and how does GAO include foresight planning in this work?

We meet the needs of Congress on science and technology matters by recruiting and retaining top talent. We can draw this talent because we offer an important and unique mission, which draws talented individuals who are committed to improving government performance and accountability. GAO's recruiting, hiring, and assignments emphasize non-partisan work, and we have procedures in place to ensure staff independence. We also provide a workplace where employees feel valued, respected, and treated fairly. We value and promote teamwork and collaboration and are committed to continued learning and development. We also offer our staff workplace flexibilities, with accountability, to provide work/life balance; this allows us to better retain top talent.

Through our hiring efforts and the priority that we have placed in our S&T and cybersecurity mission teams, we are positioning ourselves for the future. For example, staff on the STAA team hold over 100 advanced STEM-related degrees, including 38 STEM PhDs, in fields such as microbiology, quantum mechanics, nuclear physics, public health, chemical engineering, mathematics, physical sciences, and digital sciences. Our Information

Technology and Cyber security team has dozens of cyber security experts. The high caliber of in-house expertise is vital to our assessments of the government's performance in emerging science and technology areas.

We also use foresight planning in anticipating emerging technologies and trends that should be examined. We identify what is on the horizon through environmental scanning (e.g., literature reviews), interactions with industry and academia, consultations with science societies, our audit work, and internal discussions. STAA meets annually with an advisory council called the Polaris Council, seeking their input to ensure STAA's foresight-oriented science and technology work is sound, sophisticated, and useful to Congress and the public. The Council is comprised of senior leadership with deep expertise across government, academia, non-profit, and industry sectors. We also partner with the National Academy of Sciences to identify experts in academia, industry, the private sector, government, technology, science, and medicine fields to inform our work. Additionally, we use foresight in the development of trend papers as part of our Strategic Plan. These trends cover a wide spectrum of issues, including the implications of key science and technology trends that are affecting government and society.

c. What functions of the historic Office of Technology Assessment are now fulfilled by GAO's work in science, technology, and foresight?

STAA provides all of the services and products that the former OTA provided. STAA issues technology assessments, 2-page explainers (called Spotlights) on emerging issues, networks and solicits ideas from industry and academia, and provides just-in-time assistance and consultation to Congress.

Also, STAA's work benefits from the multi-disciplinary way in which we conduct our work. STAA specialists work alongside GAO's policy analysts. As a result, STAA's products are grounded in the appropriate policy context.

Select Committee on the Modernization of Congress (Select Committee) Recommendations

14. Recognizing the need to strengthen science and technology policy support for Congress and the important work that the STAA mission team has done, last Congress the Select Committee recommended that STAA be specifically authorized by Congress to further support its work.

a. What are your views on authorizing STAA and/or the Innovation Lab?

GAO's current authorities, which are permanently codified in Title 31 of the U.S. Code, are sufficiently broad to carry out the technology policy support and related work GAO provides to Congress. In addition, these permanent authorities supported the creation and development of the STAA team and the Innovation Lab as GAO increased its work and

portfolio on science and technology issues. GAO's longstanding mission and statutory authorities include the ability to evaluate the results of programs or activities carried out by the Government, investigate all matters related to the use of appropriated funds, and carry out program evaluations. These authorities allow GAO to carry out engagements, investigations, assistance in drafting legislation, and to make recommendations to agencies and Congress to support the Congress in its constitutional oversight and legislative responsibilities. (31 U.S.C. §§ 712, 717). GAO's broad access authority and its experience in obtaining information about agency duties, powers, activities, organization, and financial transactions as well as access to agency records also support GAO's work on wide ranging topics including science and technology issues (31 U.S.C. § 716).

In addition to GAO's permanent authorities, Congress includes mandates for GAO, including STAA, in laws, Congressional committee reports, and direct requests from committees and members. In addition, the Comptroller General has the statutory ability to initiate work on his own authority (31 U.S.C. § 717(b)(1)). GAO coordinates closely with all committees, including the appropriations and oversight committees with responsibility for GAO, to ensure we're meeting expectations for the entirety of the agency's functions within the context of the budgetary resources that GAO receives from Congress. Within these broad authorities and direction from Congress, GAO has been able to strategically plan for and address pressing science and technology issues for Congress. Therefore, GAO does not believe additional authorization provisions are necessary for STAA and the Innovation Lab.

We have been able to meet and deliver on all mandates, requests, and work that our STAA team has undertaken. GAO has always taken a collaborative approach, drawing upon the strength and expertise of its 15 mission teams and exchange of ideas. However, STAA, like all of GAO's 15 mission teams, has the independence to do its work effectively. Other mission teams in GAO conduct S&T-related work where STAA serves as stakeholder, and I want to continue to build upon that expansive knowledge and not stovepipe it or separate our scientists from our policy analysts. While we do not currently have a backlog of work, we would be able to do more, including additional foresight work, with additional resources.

b. In a related vein, how has GAO been able to satisfy congressional science and technology policy demand through STAA without an authorization?

As noted above, we do not believe we need additional authorization for STAA to meet the needs of Congress. This is also evidenced by the body of S&T work we have provided to Congress in recent years.

For more than 20 years, GAO has conducted technology assessments, examined science and technology issues, and reviewed science agencies. Since 2019, STAA has issued 22 Technology Assessments that have analyzed technological innovations in fields such as healthcare, energy, and computing, and we have eight more currently underway. In addition, STAA has issued 44 two-page Spotlights that have provided concise information on emerging scientific or technological issues. Specifically, within the last

fiscal year, STAA has issued Technology Assessments or Spotlights on a range of emerging issues including Pandemic Origins, Fusion Energy, Regenerative Medicine, Generative AI, and Synthetic Biology. We have also met the high congressional demand for oversight work stemming from numerous mandates and requests to examine research security, S&T workforce, intellectual property, and management of research. STAA issued 46 products under the audit portfolio of which 22 were in response to mandates or a potential mandate; 21 were in response to Congressional requests; and 3 were issued under the Comptroller General's authority.

We also provided technical assistance throughout the year to further enhance the focus on congressional demand for our services. In 2023, we provided this assistance in critical S&T areas such as artificial intelligence, quantum computing, manufacturing and innovation, and STEM workforce. As stated in my Sept. 27, 2023, written testimony, we also worked with the Congressional Staff Academy to offer seminars in 2022 on AI, blockchain, food safety, and security policy.

Further, we have implemented an aggressive hiring effort for S&T scientists and specialists with strategic stewardship of these resources to prioritize greatest needs and deliver timely information to Congress. We highly matrix these resources so we can leverage this exceptional range of expertise across GAO.

15. The Select Committee recommended providing bipartisan oversight training for staff by leveraging the GAO's expertise and working through the Congressional Staff Academy.

a. Can you describe GAO's ongoing plans to provide bipartisan oversight training to Congress?

GAO is working with the Congressional Staff Academy (CSA) and the Coaching Program within the House Office of the Chief Administrator to offer training opportunities to congressional staff. As we noted earlier in the statement, in FY 2022 and 2023 we provided trainings on Artificial Intelligence, Blockchain and Food and Nutrition programs. We are currently drafting oversight training materials and working with these offices to determine the best approach to offer the training.

In FY 2023, GAO provided appropriations training. This included 24 classes provided to 15 agencies. It also included 15 appropriations law seminars for the staffs of multiple congressional committees and for the Library of Congress. One of those sessions was conducted at the special request of a Member of Congress. The solo session provided an opportunity to share a condensed version of the full session while engaging and answering direct questions from the Member. GAO's Principles of Appropriations Law Course acquaints participants with the purposes and principles of federal fiscal law. It blends lecture, case studies, and student participation in a way that engages and challenges participants, while maximizing the exchange of both practical and theoretical information. The sessions are taught

by experienced GAO attorneys in our Appropriations Law team. For FY 2023, GAO offered both virtual and in-person sessions.

b. What additional training topics could GAO provide to congressional staff to educate them on bipartisan oversight issues?

As part of the oversight training, we would like to highlight how GAO can assist Congress in fulfilling its oversight function. The training could include how GAO can help develop oversight hearings, inform committee investigations, and how Congress can target legislation to improve agency transparency and accountability.

c. What other training options has GAO considered to continue effectively reaching hill staff?

GAO is also working with CSA to offer a Contracting 101 course this fall to congressional staff. This course will provide a background on contracting terms and processes and GAO's bid protest function.

In addition to continuing to build a partnership with CSA to deliver other trainings, we believe the new space on the Hill will open additional opportunities for us to reach congressional staff. We envision using the space to provide small group training on specific policy or technical topics, as well as one-on-one consultations.

d. What roadblocks or concerns does GAO have, if any, in establishing more training options for hill staff?

One concern is our ability to directly reach out to Hill staff and make them aware of our trainings. We do not have access to congressional list serves that might help target training or a full list of trainings offered by other entities so that we do not duplicate efforts. We are looking forward to working more closely with CSA and CAO to address this. We also hope our congressional office space, which is directly next to CSA, will help facilitate conversations about how to best to expand our training options.

Relationship with CRS and CBO

16. How do you view the appropriate roles and responsibilities of, and the relationships between, GAO, CRS, and CBO?

a. Do you think that GAO and Congress would benefit from more exploration into the matter of increased coordination or the creation of a helpdesk to facilitate and direct information between Congress and its support agencies?

The roles of GAO, CRS, and CBO are clear, with each serving a different purpose. The agencies maintain strong relationships and work to coordinate and leverage each others' work, where possible.

Coordination among the support agencies is critical, and we are happy to explore ways to further facilitate information flow between Congress and its support agencies. In that regard, we requested that GAO's Web link be more prominently placed on the House intranet in our September 27, 2023 testimony. Links to the other support agencies could be grouped with ours, with a brief explanation of what each agency does. This could help direct congressional staff to the appropriate support agency.

Questions from Ranking Member Kilmer

- 1. GAO has been briefing my team and other involved offices on its ongoing report in response to my August 15, 2022 [letter](#) asking for GAO to undertake a review of the efforts of the federal government to improve constituent facing agency operations, specifically the federal customer experience and administrative burden. I wanted to reiterate my support for this effort, and to share that my team and I eagerly anticipate the report and your recommendations. This topic, with the book *Recoding America*, also came up during the hearing with the second panel. Could you provide me with a status update on your work on this?**

We are continuing to regularly brief our congressional requesters in response to the August 15, 2022 [letter](#) asking GAO to undertake a review of the efforts of the federal government to improve constituent-facing agency operations, specifically the federal customer experience and administrative burden. With regard to federal customer experience improvement efforts, we are currently reviewing OMB's efforts to work with agencies to implement the administration's federal customer experience improvements through the President's Management Agenda and related Cross-Agency Priority Goals. As a part of this review, we are also assessing customer experience efforts at three High-Impact Service Providers (HISPs)—those entities that directly serve the public. These three HISPs are the Department of Housing and Urban Development, Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration, and U.S. Department of Agriculture's Food and Nutrition Service. We are now in the process of finalizing our audit work and developing our report, which we expect to issue in the Spring of 2024.

Next month, we are also starting a related review of administrative burdens associated with improving federal customer service. This review will focus on the Paperwork Reduction Act and what steps federal agencies are taking to minimize paperwork burden, especially on underserved communities. We will share the objectives, relevant federal agencies, and timeframes for this engagement with our congressional requesters in the coming months. We will share the objectives and time frames with you and our other congressional requesters.

- 2. Second, I wanted to make you aware of a bipartisan letter asking for your help on an additional topic. Specifically, I would like GAO to undertake a review of the US Forest Service's failures on timber harvesting and meeting timber harvest levels. As we finalize that request, what data and information will you need to complete it? And do you expect your team will be able to access the necessary data from the Forest Service, or will you need additional assistance from Congress?**

I am aware of your interest in this topic, and we have discussed a potential review with your staff. The data and information we would need from the Forest Service will depend on the exact scope of the review, but could include information such as how the Forest Service determines how much timber to offer for sale, data on how much it offered for sale and how much it sold for a given time period, and agency and external perspectives on the reasons for any difference between target harvest levels, amount offered for sale, and amount sold. At this time, we have no reason to expect we would not be able to receive the needed information from the Forest Service, provided the data exists. When we conduct a review, one of the first steps we take is to determine data and information needed, the extent to which it exists, and any challenges in obtaining it (e.g., is data available centrally or does it have to be compiled at the regional or local level). We are happy to discuss this topic further with your staff.