



Testimony

Before the Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia; Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

For Release on Delivery
Expected at 2:30 p.m. EST
Wednesday, March 29, 2006

HOMELAND SECURITY

The Status of Strategic Planning in the National Capital Region

Statement of William O. Jenkins, Jr.
Director, Homeland Security and Justice Issues





Highlights of [GAO-06-559T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia of the Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs; U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

The Subcommittee asked GAO to provide comments on the National Capital Region's (NCR) strategic plan. GAO reported on NCR strategic planning, among other issues, in May 2004 and September 2004, testified before the House Committee on Government Reform in June 2004, and testified before the Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia in July 2005.

In this testimony, we addressed completion of the NCR strategic plan, national and regional priorities, and strengthening any plan that is developed.

What GAO Recommends

Although we include no new recommendations in this statement, GAO continues to recommend that the ONCRC work with the NCR jurisdictions to quickly complete a coordinated strategic plan to establish and monitor the achievement of regional goals and priorities.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-559T.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact William Jenkins, Jr., 202-512-8757, jenkinswo@gao.gov.

HOMELAND SECURITY

The Status of Strategic Planning in the National Capital Region

What GAO Found

Among its other statutory responsibilities, the Office of National Capital Region Coordination is charged with coordinating with NCR agencies and other entities to ensure adequate planning, information sharing, training, and execution of domestic preparedness activities among these agencies and entities. In May 2004 and again in July 2005, we recommended that the ONCRC complete a regional strategic plan to establish goals and priorities for enhancing first responder capacities that could be used to guide the effective use of federal funds.

Although work has continued on a NCR strategic plan for the past 2 years, a completed plan is not yet available. According to NCR officials, completion of the plan requires integrating information and analyses from other documents completed or nearly completed, and a plan may not be available before September or October of 2006.

The NCR's strategic planning should reflect both national and regional priorities and needs. The majority of the individual documents ONCRC provided to us as representing components for its strategic plan were developed in response to Department of Homeland Security fiscal year 2006 grant guidance to support the NCR's fiscal year 2006 grant application. It is appropriate and necessary that the NCR address national priorities, but the NCR's strategic plan should not be primarily driven by these requirements. It should integrate national and regional priorities and needs.

A well-defined, comprehensive strategic plan for the NCR is essential for assuring that the region is prepared for the risks it faces. A November 18, 2005, NCR PowerPoint presentation describes the NCR's vision, mission, goals, objectives, and priority initiatives. That presentation includes some elements of a good strategic plan, including some performance measures, target dates, and cost estimates. A completed NCR strategic plan should build on the current elements that the NCR has developed and strengthen others based on the desirable characteristics of a national strategy that may also be useful for a regional approach to homeland security strategic planning. As it completes its strategic plan, the NCR could focus on strengthening (1) initiatives that will accomplish objectives under the NCR strategic goals, (2) performance measures and targets that indicate how the initiatives will accomplish identified strategic goals, (3) milestones or timeframes for initiative accomplishment, (4) information on the resources and investments for each initiative, and (5) organizational roles, responsibilities, and coordination, and integration and implementation plans.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

I appreciate the opportunity to be here today to discuss the National Capital Region's (NCR) strategic planning. The NCR is an area comprising the District of Columbia and surrounding counties and cities in the states of Maryland and Virginia. The NCR is the only area in the nation that has a statutorily designated regional coordinator—the Office of the National Capital Region Coordination (ONCRC) under the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

One ONCRC mandate is to coordinate with NCR agencies and other entities to ensure adequate planning, information sharing, training, and execution of domestic preparedness activities among these agencies and entities. We reported on NCR strategic planning, among other issues, in May 2004 and September 2004, testified before the House Committee on Government Reform in June 2004, and testified before your committee in July 2005.¹ In our previous work, we provided recommendations regarding NCR strategic planning and the preparation of a strategic plan.

My statement today provides our preliminary observations on documents provided by ONCRC that describe current NCR strategic planning efforts. Specifically, I will comment on completion of the strategic plan, the impact of federal homeland security grant program requirements on NCR strategic planning, and observations on strengthening any plan that is developed.

We have only recently received new documentation related to the NCR's strategic plan and its development from the ONCRC and have not had an opportunity to review them fully. Consequently, my remarks are necessarily preliminary and are based on our limited review and analysis of the documents. We did our work in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

¹ GAO, *Homeland Security: Management of First Responder Grants in the National Capital Region Reflects the Need for Coordinated Planning and Performance Goals*, [GAO-04-433](#) (Washington, D.C.: May 28, 2004); *Homeland Security: Coordinated Planning and Standards Needed to Better Manage First Responder Grants in the National Capital Region*, [GAO-04-904T](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 24, 2004); *Homeland Security: Effective Regional Coordination Can Enhance Emergency Preparedness*, [GAO-04-1009](#) (Washington, D.C.: September 15, 2004); *Homeland Security: Managing First Responder Grants to Enhance Emergency Preparedness in the National Capital Region*, [GAO-05-889T](#) (Washington, D.C.: July 14, 2005).

Summary

In May 2004 and again in July 2005 we recommended that the Secretary of Department of Homeland Security work with the NCR jurisdictions to develop a coordinated strategic plan to establish goals and priorities to enhance first responder capacities that can be used to guide the use of federal emergency preparedness funds—a recommendation that the department agreed to implement. Although work has continued on a NCR strategic plan for the past 2 years, a completed plan is not yet available to guide decision making such as assessment of NCR’s strategic priorities and funding needs and aid for NCR jurisdictions in ascertaining how the NCR strategic plan complements their individual or combined efforts. ONCRC officials have explained that integration of additional information such as from an Emergency Management Accreditation Program (EMAP) assessment has delayed completion of a strategic plan.² ONCRC officials provided us several individual documents that they stated constituted the basic elements of the NCR’s strategic plan. According to the ONCRC, one of the documents, a November 18, 2005, NCR Plenary Session PowerPoint presentation (updated from a November 15 document), contains the core elements of the NCR’s strategic plan—the mission, vision, guiding principles, long-term goals, and objectives. According to ONCRC officials, an initial strategic plan will not be available until at least September or October 2006.

NCR strategic planning should reflect both national and regional priorities and needs. The November 18 PowerPoint presentation presents the NCR’s goals, objectives, and initiatives, including those considered priorities. If the NCR’s homeland security grant program funding documents prepared for DHS are used extensively in NCR strategic planning, a NCR strategic plan might primarily reflect DHS priorities and grant funding—national priorities—and not regionally developed strategic goals and priorities. The majority of the individual documents ONCRC represented as the basic elements of the NCR’s strategic plan were developed in response to DHS homeland security grant program funding. Under the DHS funding guidance, the homeland security strategy of applicants for funding must incorporate DHS’s National Preparedness Goal and related target

² The Emergency Management Accreditation Program is a voluntary assessment and accreditation process for state/territorial, tribal, and local government emergency management programs. Among other things, EMAP is intended to provide a structure for identifying areas in need of improvement and a methodology for strategic planning and justification of resources. EMAP uses national emergency management standards along with peer assessment teams to evaluate a program’s activities. These standards are based on the National Fire Protection Association 1600 standard covering functional areas such as program management and hazard identification and risk assessment.

capabilities. According to DHS, the strategy is to provide a strategic plan for the use of related federal, state, local, and private resources within a state and/or urban area before, during, and after threatened or actual domestic terrorist attacks, major disasters, and other emergencies. NCR initiatives developed to implement NCR's strategic goals and objectives presented in ONCRC documents are not all addressed in the DHS grant program funding documents and would require implementation and funding by NCR jurisdictions acting individually or in combination with others. Our preliminary work did not include an assessment of jurisdictional efforts to implement the NCR initiatives.

A complete NCR strategic plan based on the November 18 PowerPoint presentation should build on current elements and strengthen others based on our six characteristics for a national strategy that may be useful for a regional approach to homeland security strategic planning. These include characteristics such as goals, objectives, activities, and performance measures; resources, investments, and risk management; and organizational roles, responsibilities, and coordination. Our limited review indicates that as the ONCRC fleshes out the November 18 PowerPoint presentation that contains the core elements of the NCR's strategic plan, such strengthening could address: (1) initiatives that will accomplish objectives under the strategic goals, (2) performance measures and targets that indicate how the initiatives will accomplish identified strategic goals, (3) milestones or time frames for initiative accomplishment, (4) information on the resources and investment for each initiative, and (5) organizational roles, responsibilities, and coordination, and integration and implementation plans.

Background

Strategic plans developed by regional organizations can be effective tools to focus resources and efforts to address problems. Effective plans often contain such features as goals and objectives that are measurable and quantifiable. These goals and objectives allow problems and planned steps to be defined specifically and progress to be measured. By specifying goals and objectives, plans can also give planners and decision makers a structure for allocating funding to those goals and objectives. A well-defined, comprehensive strategic plan for the NCR is essential for assuring that the region is prepared for the risks it faces.

The Homeland Security Act established the Office of National Capital Region Coordination within the Department of Homeland Security.³ The ONCRC is responsible for overseeing and coordinating federal programs for and relationships with state, local, and regional authorities in the NCR and for assessing, and advocating for, the resources needed by state, local and regional authorities in the NCR to implement efforts to secure the homeland. One of the ONCRC mandates is to coordinate with federal, state, local, and regional agencies and the private sector in NCR on terrorism preparedness to ensure adequate planning, information sharing, training, and execution of domestic preparedness activities among these agencies and entities.

In our earlier work, we reported that ONCRC and the NCR faced three interrelated challenges in managing federal funds in a way that maximizes the increase in first responder capacities and preparedness while minimizing inefficiency and unnecessary duplication of expenditures. These challenges included the lack of

- a set of accepted benchmarks (best practices) and performance goals that could be used to identify desired goals and determine whether first responders have the ability to respond to threats and emergencies with well-planned, well-coordinated, and effective efforts that involve police, fire, emergency medical, public health, and other personnel from multiple jurisdictions;
- a coordinated regionwide plan for establishing first responder performance goals, needs, and priorities, and assessing the benefits of expenditures in enhancing first responder capabilities; and
- a readily available, reliable source of data on the funds available to first responders in the NCR and their use.

Without the standards, a regionwide plan, and data on spending, we observed it would be extremely difficult to determine whether NCR first responders were prepared to effectively respond to threats and emergencies. Regional coordination means the use of governmental resources in a complementary way toward goals and objectives that are mutually agreed upon by various stakeholders in a region.⁴ Regional coordination can also help to overcome the fragmented nature of federal programs and grants available to state and local entities. Successful

³ 6 U.S.C. 462.

⁴ [GAO-04-1009](#).

coordination occurs not only vertically among federal, state, and local governments, but also horizontally within regions. The effective alignment of resources for the security of communities could require planning across jurisdictional boundaries. Neighboring jurisdictions may be affected by an emergency situation in many ways, including major traffic or environmental disruptions, activation and implementation of mutual aid agreements, acceptance of evacuated residents, and treating casualties in local hospitals.

NCR Has Not Produced a Strategic Plan

Although work has continued on a NCR strategic plan for the past 2 years, a completed plan is not yet available to guide decision making such as assessment of NCR's strategic priorities and funding needs and aid for NCR jurisdictions in ascertaining how the NCR strategic plan complements their individual or combined efforts. In May 2004, we recommended that the Secretary of DHS work with the NCR jurisdictions to develop a coordinated strategic plan to establish goals and priorities to enhance first responder capacities that can be used to guide the use of federal emergency preparedness funds, and the department agreed to implement this recommendation. A related recommendation—that DHS monitor the plan's implementation to ensure that funds are used in a way that promotes effective expenditures that are not unnecessarily duplicative—could not be implemented until the final strategic plan was in place. In July 2005, we testified that, according to a DHS ONCRC official, a final draft for review had been completed and circulated to key stakeholders. The plan was to feature measurable goals, objectives, and performance measures.

ONCRC officials state that past references to a NCR strategic plan reflect availability of the core elements of the NCR strategic plan—the mission, vision, guiding principles, long-term goals, and objectives, but not a complete plan. They told us that these core elements, along with other information, will need to be compiled into a strategic planning document. ONCRC officials said that NCR leadership had elected to make the core elements available but to concentrate on preparing other planning and justification documents required for the fiscal year 2006 DHS grant process. NCR planning timelines indicate this decision was made in September 2005.

Because a strategic plan was not available, ONCRC officials provided us with several documents, which they have said that taken as a whole, constitute the basic elements of NCR's strategic plan. These documents include

-
- a November 18, 2005, NCR Plenary Session PowerPoint presentation containing information on NCR strategic goals, objectives, and initiatives;
 - a February 1, 2006, National Capital Region Target Capabilities and NCR Projects Work Book;
 - the March 2, 2006, District of Columbia and National Capital Region Fiscal Year 2006 Homeland Security Grant Application Program and Capability Enhancement Plan;
 - the March 2, 2006, National Capital Region Initiatives; and
 - the Fiscal Year 2006 NCR Homeland Security Grant Program Funding Request Investment Justification, submitted to DHS in March 2006.

According to ONCRC officials, a complete strategic plan is awaiting integration of additional information that in some cases is not yet complete. These include an Emergency Management Accreditation Program (EMAP) assessment of all local jurisdictions in the NCR and regional-level activities, which, according to the ONCRC, is completed but will not be available until sometime in April; the peer review of the status of state and urban area emergency operations plans after Hurricane Katrina, whose completion is anticipated in April 2006; and the fiscal year 2006 homeland security program grant enhancement plan for funding, which was completed in early March 2006. ONCRC officials estimate that after April 2006, it will take approximately 90 more days to integrate these documents and the core framework of the strategic plan, plus approximately 60 days for final review and coordination by the NCR leadership. Thus, an initial strategic plan will not be available until at least September or October 2006.

NCR Strategic Planning Should Reflect Both National and Regional Priorities and Needs

NCR strategic planning should reflect both national and regional priorities and needs. ONCRC officials have said that the November 18, 2005, NCR plenary session PowerPoint presentation represents the vision, mission, and core goals and objectives of the NCR's strategic plan. If the NCR's homeland security grant program funding documents prepared for DHS are used extensively in NCR strategic planning, a NCR strategic plan might primarily reflect DHS priorities and grant funding—national priorities—and not regionally developed strategic goals and priorities.

NCR's current goals and objectives are shown in table 1.

Table 1: NCR Vision, Mission, Goals, and Objectives from the November 18, 2005, NCR Plenary Session PowerPoint Presentation

Vision	Mission
Working together towards a safe and secure National Capital Region	Build and sustain an integrated effort to prepare for, prevent, protect against, respond to, and recover from “all-hazards” threats or events
Goals	Objectives for each goal
1. A collaborative culture for planning, decision making, and implementation across the NCR	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Enhance and continually adapt the framework for regional strategic planning and decision making to achieve an optimal balance of capabilities across the NCR 2. Design and implement an integrated and iterative performance and risk-based regional planning process that engages appropriate NCR homeland security partners 3. Establish an NCR-wide assessment process to identify and remedy gaps in regional, jurisdictional, and sector preparedness 4. Develop a requirements generation and prioritization process to effectively utilize available public and private homeland security resources to satisfy NCR regional, jurisdictional, and sector preparedness 5. Enhance the oversight and accountability process that coordinates, tracks, and evaluates the implementation and effectiveness of regional decisions 6. Adopt a life cycle cost and investment approach to generate enduring and sustainable preparedness across the NCR
2. An informed and prepared community of those who live, work, and visit within the region, engaged in the safety and security of the NCR	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Deliver timely, coordinated, and targeted emergency information across the NCR before, during, and after emergencies 2. Raise the level of preparedness across the NCR by utilizing and enhancing public awareness and education campaigns 3. Strengthen public-private-nongovernmental organization partnerships and communication through increased sharing of information and resources, and expanded participation in preparedness planning across the NCR 4. Engage those who live, work and visit within the region in emergency preparedness across the NCR
3. An enduring capability to protect the NCR by preventing or mitigating “all-hazards” threats or events	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop and sustain common, multidisciplinary standards for planning, equipping, training, operating, and (cross-jurisdictional) exercising to maximize prevention and mitigation capabilities across the NCR 2. Strengthen the gathering, fusion, analysis, and exchange of multidiscipline strategic and tactical information and data for shared situational awareness 3. Employ a performance and risk-based approach to critical infrastructure protection across the NCR, targeting resources where the threat, vulnerability, and impact are greatest
4. A sustained capacity to respond to and recovery from “all-hazards” events across the NCR	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Develop, adopt, and implement integrated plans, policies, and standards to facilitate response and recovery 2. Ensure the capacity to operate multilevel coordinated response and recovery 3. Ensure adequate and effective sharing of resources 4. Comprehensively identify long-term recovery issues

Source: NCR Plenary Session Presentation, November 18, 2005.

The other four documents that ONCRC represents as constituting the NCR strategic plan were developed in response to federal requirements under the National Preparedness Goal and to support the NCR's federal funding application. Required by Homeland Security Presidential Directive 8, the National Preparedness Goal is a national domestic all-hazards preparedness goal intended to establish measurable readiness priorities and targets. The fiscal year 2006 Homeland Security Grant Program (HSGP) integrates the State Homeland Security Program, the Urban Areas Security Initiative, the Law Enforcement Terrorism Prevention Program, the Metropolitan Medical Response System, and the Citizen Corps Program. For the first time, starting with the fiscal year 2006 HSGP, DHS is using the National Preparedness Goal to shape national priorities and focus expenditures for the HSGP. According to DHS, the combined fiscal year 2006 HSGP Program Guidance and Application Kit streamlines efforts for states and urban areas in obtaining resources that are critical to building and sustaining capabilities to achieve the National Preparedness Goal and implement state and urban area homeland security strategies.

All states and urban areas were required to align existing preparedness strategies within the National Preparedness Goal's eight national priorities.⁵ States and urban areas were required to assess their preparedness needs by reviewing their existing programs and capabilities and use those findings to develop a plan and formal investment justification outlining major statewide, substate, or interstate initiatives for which they will seek funding. According to DHS, these initiatives are to focus efforts on how to build and sustain programs and capabilities within and across state boundaries while aligning with the National Preparedness Goal and national priorities.

It is, of course, important and necessary that the ONCRC, and other regional and local jurisdictions, incorporate the DHS's National Preparedness Goal and related target capabilities into their strategic planning. The target capabilities are intended to serve as a benchmark against which states, regions, and localities can measure their own

⁵ Those priorities are (1) implement the National Incident Management System and National Response Plan; (2) expand regional collaboration; (3) implement the interim National Infrastructure Protection Plan; (4) strengthen information-sharing and collaboration capabilities; (5) strengthen interoperable communications capabilities; (6) strengthen chemical, biological, radiological/nuclear, and explosive detection, response, and decontamination capabilities; (7) strengthen medical surge and mass prophylaxis capabilities; and (8) review emergency operations plans and the status of catastrophic planning.

capabilities. However, these national requirements are but one part of developing regional preparedness, response, and recovery assessments and funding priorities specific to the NCR. The NCR's strategic plan should provide the framework for guiding the integration of DHS requirements into the NCR's overall efforts.

While the NCR strategic plan is not complete, our preliminary review of the NCR initiatives developed to implement NCR's strategic goals and objectives presented in ONCRC documents indicates they are not completely addressed in the DHS HSGP documents. Using the November 18, 2005, PowerPoint presentation as our primary framework, we identified whether the NCR's 39 individual regional initiatives were specifically supported in whole or in part by programs or investments in the fiscal year 2006 HSGP documents (enhancement plan and investment justification) prepared for DHS. Our preliminary analysis indicates that regional initiatives defined under NCR strategic goals and objectives have some coverage—individual programs or projects—in the NCR documents prepared for DHS HSGP funding, but not complete coverage. We found that of the NCR's 16 priority initiatives, 10 were partially addressed in the enhancement plan and 12 were partially addressed in the investment justification. Of the other 23 NCR initiatives, 8 were partially addressed in the enhancement plan and 12 were partially addressed in the investment justification.

Implementation of regional initiatives not covered by HSGP funding likely would require NCR jurisdictions acting individually or in combination with others. Our preliminary work did not include an assessment of individual jurisdictional efforts to implement the NCR initiatives to determine if uncovered initiatives, particularly those considered priority initiatives, might be addressed by one or more of the NCR jurisdictions. Further work would be required to determine to what extent, if any, the NCR initiatives are addressed in other federal funding applications or individual NCR jurisdictional homeland security initiatives.

As I stated earlier, ONCRC officials told us a complete NCR strategic plan is awaiting information from the EMAP assessment, DHS's peer review of the status of emergency operations plans in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, and the fiscal year 2006 homeland security grant program enhancement plan for funding. This information may further emphasize federal priorities in the regional planning process. However, information from these sources should complement the region's own assessment of preparedness gaps and the development of strategic goals, objectives, and initiatives. Officials from the District of Columbia, Virginia, and Maryland

emphasized this point when they testified before this committee in July 2005. At that time, they said that the regional strategic plan would be a comprehensive document that defined priorities and objectives for the entire region without regard to any specific jurisdiction, discipline, or funding mechanisms. In our view, a NCR plan should complement the plans of the various jurisdictions within NCR. In the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks and the creation of the ONCRC, we would have expected that the vast majority of this assessment work should have been completed. The NCR is considered a prime target for terrorist events, and other major events requiring a regional response can be anticipated, such as large, dangerous chemical spills.

A Completed NCR Strategic Plan Could be Strengthened in Several Ways

A complete NCR strategic plan based on the November 18 PowerPoint presentation could be strengthened in several ways. In earlier work we have identified characteristics that we consider to be desirable for a national strategy that may be useful for a regional approach to homeland security strategic planning.⁶ The desirable characteristics, adjusted for a regional strategy, are

- purpose, scope, and methodology that address why the strategy was produced, the scope of its coverage, and the process by which it was developed;
- problem definition and risk assessment that address the particular regional problems and threats the strategy is directed towards;
- goals, subordinate objectives, activities, and performance measures that address what the strategy is trying to achieve, steps to achieve those results, as well as the priorities, milestones, and performance measures to gauge results;
- resources, investments, and risk management that address what the strategy will cost, the sources and types of resources and investments needed, and where resources and investments should be targeted by balancing risk reductions and costs;
- organizational roles, responsibilities, and coordination that address who will be implementing the strategy, what their roles will be

⁶ GAO. *Combating Terrorism: Evaluation of Selected Characteristics in National Strategies Related to Terrorism*, [GAO-04-408T](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 3, 2004).

compared to those of others, and mechanisms for them to coordinate their efforts; and

- integration and implementation that address how a regional strategy relates to other strategies' goals, objectives and activities, and to state and local governments within their region and their plans to implement the strategy.

According to the ONCRC, the November 18 PowerPoint presentation contains the core elements of the NCR's strategic plan—the mission, vision, guiding principles, long-term goals, and objectives. Our preliminary review of the presentation indicates it reflects many of the characteristics we have defined as desirable for a strategy. The presentation includes some material on the purpose, scope, and methodology underlying the presentation; what it covers; and how it was developed. For example, the presentation contains a detailed timeline of key activities in the execution of the strategic plan and how initiatives were prioritized. Particular regional problems and performance gaps are described, including a section on regionwide weaknesses and gaps such as the lack of a regionwide risk assessment framework and inadequate response and recovery for special needs populations. These gaps are cross-referenced to priority initiatives. Specific goals, objectives, and initiatives are in the presentation, cross-referenced to the regional gaps. Some initiative descriptions identify if a cost is either high, medium, or low with more detailed cost information summarized in other places.

Our preliminary review indicates that as the ONCRC fleshes out the November 18 PowerPoint presentation into an initial, complete strategic plan, improvements might be made in (1) initiatives that will accomplish objectives under the strategic goals, (2) performance measures and targets that indicate how the initiatives will accomplish identified strategic goals, (3) milestones or time frames for initiative accomplishment, (4) information on the resources and investment for each initiative, and (5) organizational roles, responsibilities, and coordination, and integration and implementation plans. A discussion of how these elements could be strengthened follows.

Initiative Development to Match Goal Objectives

A NCR strategic plan could more fully develop initiatives to accomplish objectives under the strategic goals. For example, the presentation contains several objectives that have only one initiative. A single initiative may not ensure that objectives are accomplished, and it may merely be restating the objective itself. For example, there is only one initiative

(regional strategic planning and decision making process enhancements) for Goal 1's first objective (enhancing and adapting the framework for strategic planning and decision making to achieve an optimal balance of capabilities across the NCR). The initiative in large part restates the objective. This initiative might be replaced by more specific initiatives or the objective restated and additional initiatives proposed. Other objectives in the November 18 PowerPoint presentation provide a more complete picture of initiatives intended to meet the objective. For any future plan, these initiatives should be reviewed to determine if the current initiatives will fully meet the results expected of the objectives.

Performance Measure and Target Improvements

A NCR strategic plan could more fully measure initiative expectations by improving performance measures and targets. First, in some cases, the performance measures will not readily lend themselves to actual quantitative or qualitative measurement through a tabulation, a calculation, a recording of activity or effort, or an assessment of results that is compared to an intended purpose. Additional measures might be necessary. For example, Goal 1, Objective 1, Initiative 1 (regional strategic planning and decision-making process) includes measures such as (1) the decision-making system is well understood by all stakeholders based on changed behaviors and (2) time and resources required of stakeholders in the region to participate in the decision-making process is more efficient. These could be either refined for more direct measurement or additional measures posed, such as specifying behaviors for assessment or what parts of the process might be assessed for efficiency. Other measures in the document might serve as examples of more direct measurement, such as those that assess accomplishments using percentages in Goal 2, Objective 4, Initiative 1 (increasing civic involvement in all phases of disaster preparedness).

Second, a strategic plan could be improved by (1) expanding the use of outcome measures and targets in the plan to reflect the results of its activities and (2) limiting the use of other types of measures. ONCRC officials said that the performance measures in the November 18 PowerPoint presentation had a greater emphasis on tracking outcomes, rather than inputs. They stated that as programs and projects are funded and implemented, a more thorough effort to develop associated measures for each will be undertaken. With regard to revising measures to reflect funded programs and projects, we would suggest NCR officials focus on measuring outcomes of programs and projects to meet strategic goals and objectives.

Our preliminary analysis indicates that several measures are outcome-oriented, such as those for Goal 2, Objective 4, Initiative 1 (increase civic involvement in all phases of disaster preparedness) that has outcome measures such as the percentage of the population that has taken steps to develop personal preparedness and the percentage of the population familiar with workplace, school, and community emergency plans. However, the majority of the presentation's performance measures and targets are process- or output-oriented and may not match the desired result of the initiative. For example, the Goal 1, Objective 4, Initiative 2 (facilitating practitioner priorities into the program development process) desired outcomes are (1) an easily understood process for participation and feedback of the practitioner stakeholder communities to influence programmatic initiatives and priorities defined in Goal Groups 2, 3, and 4 and (2) an awareness and increased participation in the range of resource opportunities. Measures for this initiative include communication across Emergency Support Functions (ESFs), an accountability chart, and governance guidance document show the feedback loop between ESFs and Senior Policy Group/Chief Administrative Officer (SPG/CAO) and Regional Working Groups. Such measures identify completed activities or tasks, not how well understand the process is. A fourth measure for this initiative—understanding/agreeing on roles, responsibility, and accountability—might closer to measuring the desired outcome.

Third, many initiatives do not have performance targets. For example, targets are missing for all or some measures for initiatives under Goal 1, Objectives 1, 3, 4, and 5. Other targets are unclear. For example, one measure for both Goal 1, Objective 3, Initiative 1 (tasks and capabilities for the NCR) and Goal 1, Objective 3, Initiative 2 (gap analysis, recommendations, and appropriate actions) is the progress toward closing the gap between baseline and target capabilities. The target is “what we think we need to accomplish in HSPD 7/8.”⁷ Any targets such as this would require clarification if progress toward results is to be assessed.

Timeframes

A future NCR strategic plan could also be strengthened by including more complete time frames for initiative accomplishment, including specific milestones. In some cases, the time frame description is missing or is inconsistent with timeframes provided within performance measure descriptions that generally cover activities or tasks. For example, Goal 3,

⁷ HSPD stands for Homeland Security Presidential Directive.

Objective 1, Initiative 1 (region prevention and mitigation framework) has a time frame for fall 2006, but measures include targets in 2007. In several instances, measures of tasks or activities include milestones, but an overall time frame is not indicated. For example, Goal 3, Objective 3, Initiative 1 (critical infrastructure and high-risk targets risk assessments) and Goal 4, Objective 1, Initiative 1 (corrective action program for gaps) do not have timeframes identified, but measures have dates extending into 2007 and 2009 respectively.

Time frames should also match the initiative. In some cases, it is unclear if the initiative description should be expanded to encompass activities that appear outside the scope of the initiative as written, but result in the time frame for the overall initiative. For example, Goal 3, Objective 1, Initiative 3 (health surveillance, detection, and mitigation functions plan) has an overall time frame of December 2010, but the 2010 date reflects implementation of a patient tracking system. In the list of measures, the plan itself is targeted for December 2008. Either the initiative description could be changed to include the system or the patient tracking system measure could be removed or revised.

Resources and Investments

A future NCR strategic plan could provide fuller information on the resources and investments associated with each initiative. For example, each initiative in the November 18 PowerPoint presentation has a section for cost and cost factors. However, there is not an explanation in the document as to what cost categories of high, medium, or low mean in terms of dollar ranges. ONCRC officials told us that these descriptions should be considered more notional in nature, with a low usually meaning well under \$1 million and those rated high in the tens of millions. In many cases, the categorization of cost for an initiative is missing from the November 18 PowerPoint presentation initiative sections. More specific cost information by initiative, such as the funded and unfunded grant information that is provided in a summary format, would facilitate decision making in comparing trade-offs as options are considered. A plan also could be improved by including the sources of funding for the anticipated costs, whether federal, state, or local, or a combination of multiple sources.

Organizational Contributions and Integration and Implementation Planning

Last, any future NCR strategic plan could expand on organizational roles, responsibilities, coordination, and integration and implementation plans. Organizational roles, responsibilities, and coordination for each initiative would clarify accountability and leadership for completion of the initiative. The plan might also include information on how the plan will be integrated with the strategic plans of NCR jurisdictions and that of the ONCRC and plans to implement the regional strategy.

Concluding Observations

There is no more important element in results-oriented management than the effort of strategic planning. This effort is the starting point and foundation for defining what an organization seeks to accomplish, identifying the strategies it will use to achieve desired results, and then determining how well it succeeds in reaching results-oriented goals and achieving objectives. Establishing clear goals, objectives, and milestones; setting performance goals; assessing performance against goals to set priorities; and monitoring the effectiveness of actions taken to achieve the designated performance goals are all part of the planning process. If done well, strategic planning is not a static or occasional event, but rather a dynamic and inclusive process. Continuous strategic planning provides the foundation for the most important things an organization does each day, and fosters informed communication between the organization and those affected by or interested in the organization's activities.

We appreciate the fact that strategic plans, once issued, are living documents that require continual assessment. There is an understandable temptation to delay issuing a strategic plan at some point in the ongoing strategic planning process until the plan is considered perfect and all information has been collected, analyzed, and incorporated into the plan. However, failure to complete an initial strategic plan makes it difficult for decision makers to identify and assess NCR's first strategic goals, objectives, priorities, measures, and funding needs, and how resources can be leveraged across the region as events warrant. We continue to recommend that the Secretary of DHS work with the NCR jurisdictions to quickly complete a coordinated strategic plan to establish regional goals and priorities.

- - - - -

That concludes my statement, Mr. Chairman. I would be pleased to respond to any questions you or other members of the Committee may have.

Contacts and Acknowledgments

For questions regarding this testimony, please contact William O. Jenkins, Jr. at (202) 512-8757, email jenkinswo@gao.gov. Sharon L. Caudle also made key contributions to this testimony.

This is a work of the U.S. government and is not subject to copyright protection in the United States. It may be reproduced and distributed in its entirety without further permission from GAO. However, because this work may contain copyrighted images or other material, permission from the copyright holder may be necessary if you wish to reproduce this material separately.

GAO's Mission

The Government Accountability Office, the audit, evaluation and investigative arm of Congress, exists to support Congress in meeting its constitutional responsibilities and to help improve the performance and accountability of the federal government for the American people. GAO examines the use of public funds; evaluates federal programs and policies; and provides analyses, recommendations, and other assistance to help Congress make informed oversight, policy, and funding decisions. GAO's commitment to good government is reflected in its core values of accountability, integrity, and reliability.

Obtaining Copies of GAO Reports and Testimony

The fastest and easiest way to obtain copies of GAO documents at no cost is through GAO's Web site (www.gao.gov). Each weekday, GAO posts newly released reports, testimony, and correspondence on its Web site. To have GAO e-mail you a list of newly posted products every afternoon, go to www.gao.gov and select "Subscribe to Updates."

Order by Mail or Phone

The first copy of each printed report is free. Additional copies are \$2 each. A check or money order should be made out to the Superintendent of Documents. GAO also accepts VISA and Mastercard. Orders for 100 or more copies mailed to a single address are discounted 25 percent. Orders should be sent to:

U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street NW, Room LM
Washington, D.C. 20548

To order by Phone: Voice: (202) 512-6000
TDD: (202) 512-2537
Fax: (202) 512-6061

To Report Fraud, Waste, and Abuse in Federal Programs

Contact:

Web site: www.gao.gov/fraudnet/fraudnet.htm

E-mail: fraudnet@gao.gov

Automated answering system: (800) 424-5454 or (202) 512-7470

Congressional Relations

Gloria Jarmon, Managing Director, JarmonG@gao.gov (202) 512-4400
U.S. Government Accountability Office, 441 G Street NW, Room 7125
Washington, D.C. 20548

Public Affairs

Paul Anderson, Managing Director, AndersonP1@gao.gov (202) 512-4800
U.S. Government Accountability Office, 441 G Street NW, Room 7149
Washington, D.C. 20548