# [GAO Recommendations to Improve OPM Performance](https://www.fedsmith.com/2019/04/15/gao-recommendations-improve-opm-performance/%22%20%5Co%20%22Permanent%20Link%20to%20GAO%20Recommendations%20to%20Improve%20OPM%20Performance%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank)

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## GAO Takes OPM to Task

The Government Accountability Office (GAO) recently [wrote about the Office of Personnel Management](https://www.gao.gov/assets/700/698381.pdf) (OPM) that “we reported that on a government-wide basis 77 percent of our recommendations made 4 years ago were implemented. OPM’s recommendation implementation rate was about 38 percent. As of April 2019, OPM had 89 open recommendations. Fully implementing these open recommendations could significantly improve OPM’s operations.”

## Creating OPM to Improve Government

For those who were working for the federal government when the Civil Service Reform Act was passed in the late 1970’s, the irony of these GAO recommendations is obvious.

OPM was created to replace important sections of the U.S. Civil Service Commission. By restructuring government and having OPM focus on key functions, the theory was the new law would create a more effective government and a more productive federal workforce with an emphasis on performance management.

The Civil Service Reform Act of 1978 abolished the Civil Service Commission and distributed its functions to the [Office of Personnel Management](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Office_of_Personnel_Management) (OPM), the [Merit Systems Protection Board](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Merit_Systems_Protection_Board) (MSPB), and the [Federal Labor Relations Authority](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Federal_Labor_Relations_Authority) (FLRA).

From the list of GAO recommendations, one could conclude these changes addressed in the Reform Act failed and creating OPM failed.

This month, GAO wrote that OPM has 13 priority recommendations remaining to be implemented and that the agency is “adding five new recommendations as priorities this year related to addressing employee misconduct and improving performance management.” There are now 18 priority recommendations outstanding.

### Employee Misconduct and Improving Performance Management

One new GAO recommendation that was the subject in an Executive Order issued by President Trump in 2018 was **Addressing Employee Misconduct and Improving Performance Management**. Misconduct is generally defined as an action by an employee that impedes the efficiency of the agency’s service or mission. GAO writes that “OPM…needs to take steps to help agencies improve the training they provide supervisors and managers on addressing misconduct.”

Performance management has been a constant theme of government reform for decades and continues to be a topic of concern. GAO says that “OPM needs to implement a process to update its performance management website, create a mechanism for agencies to share lessons learned, and share innovations in performance management with agencies.”

OPM apparently intends to do this. GAO recommended implementing a system for agencies to post practices and lessons learned by allowing agencies to post the information on OPM’s Performance Management portal.

### Strengthening Controls over IT Systems

With the well-publicized hacking of OPM data resulting in an apparent theft of [massive personal information from an OPM database](https://www.fedsmith.com/2015/07/09/personal-data-of-21-5-million-individuals-stolen-in-second-opm-data-breach/), the GAO recommendation to OPM to strengthen its control over IT systems is not surprising. Recent [accounts indicate](https://freebeacon.com/national-security/china-using-opm-records-for-spying/) that China is using this data for spying operations against the United States.

OPM has agreed with this recommendation. According to OPM, it is configuring an automated system to allow for management of security controls and security plans. OPM plans to complete these actions by June 2019.

OPM is also working with its learning management system vendor to develop role-based training requirements for a continuous monitoring program. GAO writes that OPM needs to issue role-based training requirements for diagnostics and mitigation tools but that the agency has not provided evidence of taking such actions.

## Other Areas Requiring Action by OPM

Other areas addressed by GAO for improving the success of OPM include:

  Addressing Mission Critical Skills Gaps

  Delivering Agencies’ Missions in an Era of Constrained Resources

  Improving the Federal Classification System

  Making Hiring and Special Pay Authorities More Effective

  Improving Enterprise Human Resource Integration (EHRI) Payroll Data

## Proposal to Eliminate OPM

While not addressed in the GAO report, the Administration is moving out on [dismantling OPM](https://www.fedsmith.com/2018/06/25/abolish-opm-administrations-proposal/).

Under this proposal, OPM functions would be divided among three other departments. An executive order to implement some of this transition is reportedly in final stages of review. According to a [report](https://www.stamfordadvocate.com/news/article/If-Trump-has-his-way-this-major-federal-agency-13755554.php), “the breakup of the 5,565-employee federal personnel agency would offer a jolt of bureaucratic defibrillation to a slow-to-change workforce that the president and his top aides have targeted as a symptom of a sluggish, inefficient government.”

It is easy to imagine that the well-publicized reports of eliminating OPM would have an impact within the agency. If the agency is going to be dismantled, the recommendations would still be important, although implementing them is likely to be seen as the responsibility of management in the organizations taking over these OPM functions rather than those in the existing structure.