

Why GAO Did This Study

DOE obligates tens of billions of dollars annually on contracts to support critical missions and the management and operation of its laboratories and production facilities. Aspects of DOE's acquisition process have been on GAO's High Risk List since 1990. Congressional committees and industry have raised questions about the prolonged nature of some DOE acquisitions and abrupt cancellations of multibillion-dollar contract awards.

Several congressional committee reports include provisions for GAO to review aspects of DOE's acquisition planning. GAO examined the extent to which DOE (1) implemented selected acquisition planning practices and (2) has readily available information about solicitation cancellations and contract award terminations and delays.

GAO reviewed federal procurement data as of January 2023, along with relevant contract files, for selected contracts awarded in fiscal years 2017 through 2022 (the most recent at the time of review). GAO identified contracts for review based on criteria such as potential total contract value and having a written acquisition plan. GAO also interviewed DOE officials and representatives from 10 selected industry entities.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making 12 recommendations, including that DOE revise its acquisition lessons learned process, implement procedures to improve how certain data are collected, and assess the role of requirements setting in causing solicitations to be canceled or awards to be terminated. DOE and NNSA agreed with the 12 recommendations.

View [GAO-25-106207](#). For more information, contact Allison Bawden at (202) 512-3841 or bawdena@gao.gov.

DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY CONTRACTING

Actions Needed to Strengthen Certain Acquisition Planning Processes

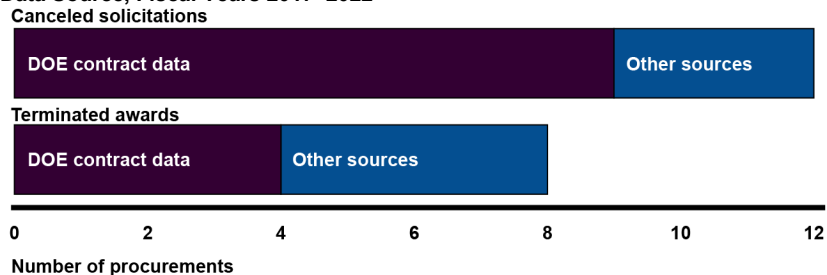
What GAO Found

Offices in the Department of Energy (DOE), including the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA), implemented eight of 10 selected acquisition planning practices for 20 contracts GAO reviewed. For example, DOE offices conducted market research and created written acquisition plans and milestones for all 20 contracts. However, independent government cost estimates, important for estimating potential contract costs, were not always developed, even though DOE guidance directs officials to perform them. Instead, DOE offices sometimes obtained waivers of office-specific direction to conduct such estimates or used a budget-based model that is typically based on current budget forecasts.

DOE offices also did not always include evidence indicating that contracting officers reviewed lessons learned from prior acquisitions or followed a lessons learned process for acquisitions that employs all leading practices. Consistently reviewing and leveraging knowledge gained from prior acquisitions, as well as using a process that follows all lessons learned leading practices, can help ensure that past mistakes are not repeated and opportunities to improve acquisition planning are not lost.

DOE does not have readily available procurement data on the number of canceled solicitations and terminated awards for fiscal years 2017 through 2022 in its contract database. Reviewing other data sources, GAO identified canceled solicitations and terminated awards that were not captured in DOE's contract data (see figure).

Number of Department of Energy (DOE) Canceled Solicitations and Terminated Awards, by Data Source, Fiscal Years 2017–2022



Source: DOE procurement data, Federal Procurement Data System, agency documents, and media reports. | GAO-25-106207

DOE and office requirements and guidance provided limited instruction about how to record and report cancellations and terminations. DOE officials reported that cancellations and terminations are infrequent, but GAO found that such actions can have considerable negative effects on industry and DOE, including financial losses. By providing clearer guidance to contracting officials on how to properly record and report data on these actions, DOE could improve the reliability of information to better understand the frequency with which they occur, and any underlying causes and necessary corrective actions. Changes to requirements contributed to the majority of canceled solicitations and terminated contracts, but DOE officials told GAO they had not assessed this issue. Doing so would better position DOE to determine any root causes or potential improvements to requirements setting.