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Aviation Group Client Update

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GAO: FAA COULD IMPROVE HOW IT DEVELOPS ITS PORTFOLIO AND REPORTS ITS ACTIVITIES

On April 24, 2017, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) released a [report](#) on how the FAA could improve its process for developing its portfolio and reporting activities.

Background. This study was performed by GAO to review the FAA's management of its research and development (R&D) portfolio, including the extent to which FAA's R&D is structured and operated to achieve its mission. GAO assessed FAA's actions to manage its R&D portfolio in three key areas: (1) developing its portfolio of R&D projects, (2) tracking and evaluating these projects, and (3) reporting on the portfolio. GAO compared FAA's R&D management activities from 2012 through 2016 against statutory requirements, agency guidance and leading practices drawn from literature on R&D management and collaboration. GAO met with FAA and NASA and aviation stakeholders to discuss R&D coordination.

Summary. This report addresses (1) the extent to which FAA's management of its R&D portfolio follows requirements, guidance and leading practices, (2) the extent to which FAA and NASA coordinate on their R&D activities, and (3) how FAA cooperates with the private sector on R&D.

Findings. GAO found that the FAA's actions are not fully in line with requirements, agency guidance, and leading practices related to the management of its R&D portfolio. With regards to how the FAA develops its portfolio of R&D projects, the GAO concluded that the FAA could be more strategic in how it develops its R&D portfolio, mainly in identifying long-term research needs and in improving disclosure of how projects are selected so that FAA management can be assured that the highest priority R&D is conducted. GAO also found that when it comes to tracking and evaluating R&D projects, the FAA does not fully address all statutory reporting requirements, such as identifying long-term research resources in the National Aviation Research Plan (NARP) or preparing the R&D Annual Review in accordance with government performance-reporting requirements. GAO concluded that such deficiencies can limit the usefulness of the reports to internal and outside stakeholders.

With regard to FAA's cooperation with the private sector on R&D, GAO found that FAA and the private sector cooperate on R&D activities through formal and informal mechanisms and that FAA, through funding agreements, uses private sector expertise and technology-transfer partnerships to share facilities, equipment, and staff.

Regarding coordination between FAA and NASA on R&D activities, GAO found that FAA and NASA have: (1) written agreements that define the scope and conditions for collaboration; (2) defined the roles and responsibilities of collaboration leaders and participants; (3) defined desired outcomes and accountability mechanisms; (4) bridged their two organizational cultures through coordinating bodies and joint activities; and (5) identified and leveraged resources through agreements. FAA and NASA officials that GAO interviewed reported that they coordinated on R&D.

To address some of the short comings of the FAA with regards to its R&D activities, GAO recommends that the Secretary of DOT require the FAA Administrator to: (1) identify long-term R&D research priorities, (2) disclose how projects are selected, and (3) ensure that the NARP and R&D Annual Reviews meet statutory requirements for content. DOT concurred with the recommendations.

If you have any questions or would like further information, please contact Shelley Ewalt.

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