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How Long Will This Project Really Take?

GAO Issues Final Version of Its Schedule Assessment Guide in the U.S.

22 December 2015, Washington, DC, USA – The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) today issued a final version of a manual to help federal, state, and local government agencies develop more reliable schedule assessments for government projects of all sizes. The ***Schedule Assessment Guide: Best Practices for Project Schedules*** ([GAO-16-89G](#)), available free on-line, applies to civilian and defense projects managed by either government entities or private contractors.

"A well-planned schedule is an essential tool for program management," said Gene Dodaro, Comptroller General of the United States and head of the GAO. "The best practices described in the guide are intended to help agencies create and maintain schedules that are comprehensive, well-constructed, credible, and controlled."



Drawing on scheduling concepts introduced in GAO's March 2009 *Cost Estimating and Assessment Guide* ([GAO-09-3SP](#)) and the draft *Schedule Assessment Guide* released for comment on May 30, 2012 (GAO-12-120G), the final version of the Schedule Assessment Guide presents 10 best practices for developing and maintaining a reliable, high-quality schedule. As a companion to the Cost Estimating Guide and the forthcoming Technology Readiness Assessment Guide, the final version of the GAO Schedule Assessment Guide is designed to assist not only GAO auditors in evaluating the economy, efficiency, and effectiveness of government programs, but also all government agencies in developing, managing, and evaluating capital programs. The draft guide was available for comment for a full year and GAO addressed over 1,000 comments resulting in the final version being released today that includes new appendixes and case studies.

"Over the last 5 years, GAO has worked with experts in cost estimating, scheduling, and earned value management from government agencies, private industry, and academia to develop and formalize scheduling best practices" said Timothy Persons, Chief Scientist at the GAO. "Using these criteria, managers and auditors will be able to assess the reliability of planned dates for projects."

Developed with help from industry experts as well as federal officials, the 224-page final Schedule Assessment Guide lays out a multi-step process for developing high-quality, trustworthy schedules; explains how to manage schedules once they have been developed; and presents 19 case studies drawn from GAO's published audits that illustrate typical pitfalls and successes in scheduling and schedule risk analysis. The guide stresses sound scheduling practices, such as setting realistic program baselines and managing risk. GAO plans to use the Schedule Assessment Guide to assess the accuracy and realism of agencies' schedules in its future audits.

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