



Office of Audits
Office of Inspector General
U.S. General Services Administration

IMPLEMENTATION REVIEW OF CORRECTIVE ACTION PLAN

GSA's Robotic Process Automation Program Lacks Evidence to Support Claimed Savings

Report Number
A210057/B/5/F24001
November 30, 2023

Assignment Number A260045
June 18, 2026

Table of Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	<i>1</i>
<i>Results</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>Appendix A – Corrective Action Plan for Report Number A210057/B/5/F24001</i>	<i>4</i>
<i>Appendix B – Report Distribution</i>	<i>7</i>

Introduction

We have completed an implementation review of the management actions taken in response to the recommendations contained in our November 2023 audit report, *GSA's Robotic Process Automation Program Lacks Evidence to Support Claimed Savings*, Report Number A210057/B/5/F24001.

Objective

The objective of our review was to determine whether GSA's Office of the Chief Financial Officer (OCFO) has taken the actions as outlined in the corrective action plan for *GSA's Robotic Process Automation Program Lacks Evidence to Support Claimed Savings* (see **Appendix A**). To accomplish our objective, we:

- Reviewed the original audit report to understand the recommendations and provide context to the corrective action plan;
- Met and corresponded with OCFO management;
- Examined documentation submitted by OCFO personnel to support completion of the corrective action plan steps; and
- Performed limited testing of the OCFO's implementation of the guidance and procedures contained in the submitted documentation.

Background

GSA introduced its Robotic Process Automation (RPA) initiative in January 2018 to address the *President's Management Agenda* priority goal to shift federal employees "from low-value to high-value work." Examples of low-value work include data entry, repetitive tasks, and routine customer communications. The idea is that if these routine, low-value tasks can be automated, it will free up time for federal employees to do non-routine, high-value work that often involves human judgment.

GSA formalized its RPA program in June 2019 with the goal of using RPAs (commonly referred to as "bots") to perform routine tasks. Bots are rules-based software that simulate human actions on a computer, such as copying data, filling in forms, signing into applications, and analyzing data. Bots usually require fewer technology resources and can be implemented quickly at a lower cost than traditional software.

In its Fiscal Year 2020 *Agency Financial Report*, GSA reported on its RPA program by highlighting the progress of deployed bots. The report stated that over 70 bots automated a diverse number of tasks and "they allow GSA to reclaim more than 240,000 work hours every year."

On November 30, 2023, we issued an audit report, *GSA's Robotic Process Automation Program Lacks Evidence to Support Claimed Savings*, to the OCFO. The objective of the audit was to determine whether GSA effectively uses bots to free up work hours and achieve cost savings.

Our audit found that GSA lacks evidence to support its claims that its RPA program is generating savings.

To address the finding identified in our report, we recommended that the GSA Chief Financial Officer:

1. Establish a performance evaluation process for its bots to ensure they are performing as intended and that the RPA program is achieving its goals. As part of this effort, the OCFO should develop objective and auditable measures and metrics that support the work hours saved by bots, as described in the *RPA Program Playbook*.
2. Track the costs to develop each bot to allow the RPA program to develop objective statistics, such as return on investment.

The GSA Chief Financial Officer acknowledged our report recommendations.

Results

Our implementation review determined that the OCFO has taken appropriate corrective actions to address the recommendations. We determined that no further action is necessary.

Appendix A – Corrective Action Plan for Report Number A210057/B/5/F24001

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Office of Financial Management, Process Optimization & Automation Division (BGR) Corrective Action Plan

Designated Responding Official: Kathy Hammer

Signature Kathy Hammer Date 2/14/2024

Contact Person: Anthony Cavallo (BGR)

Telephone Number: 202-527-0978

Date: January 8, 2024

A210057/B/5/F24001 GSA's Robotic Process Automation Program Lacks Evidence to Support Claimed Savings	001	09/30/2024
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Finding(s): GSA lacks evidence to support its claims that the RPA program is generating savings.

Root Cause (RC) of Finding(s): Audit Review Methodology Disagreement between OIG and OCFO Process Optimization & Automation Division (PO&A).

At the time of the audit, the PO&A Division had only calculated time associated with bots to address initial program prioritization needs for project ideas being submitted (see RPA Dashboard excerpt: "These values are calculated before an automation is deployed and represent an estimate of the projected amount of capacity, in hours, the process would require if carried out manually during one calendar year. The estimates are not audited and are intended to help prioritize automation efforts.").

The PO&A team defines "value" as the production of process improvements and automations through development. This team has created and released 140+ automations since its inception and maintains a pipeline of 40+ new projects; our limited resources are programmed to work on value-added activities, such as new projects and continued Operations & Maintenance (O&M), instead of non-value added activities such as audits of individual bots and other forms of quality checks (for more

Version Date: 3/01/2023

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information, please see resources such as: <https://www.isixsigma.com/dictionary/non-value-added/>).

Our program designed a process/method to further evidence the impact that the automations had, which began just as the IG Audit began. At the time of the audit field work conclusion, this newly established process was still collecting evidence to support the claims in question. PO&A evidence collection was ongoing during the period after the field work and once the scope of the audit changed (1 year after field work), the field work portion of the audit did not review these results nor reflect them in the final report.

Recommendation:

Establish a performance evaluation process for its bots to ensure they are performing as intended and that the RPA program is achieving its goals. As part of this effort, the OCFO should develop objective and auditable measures and metrics that support the work hours saved by bots, as described in the RPA Program Playbook.

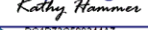
<u>Action to be Taken Step by Step</u>	<u>Supporting Documentation to be sent to the OCFO BA or BG office</u>	<u>Documentation will be sent Last Duty Day of the month</u>
001 - Continue to send automation impact surveys for process owners to assess the post-deployment effectiveness of operating bots. Additionally, OCFO PO&A will add impact questions to our annual recertification process (at automation anniversary date.)	001a - Sample Annual Automation Recertification/Impact Survey email. 001b - Sample of Process Owner responses.	001a - 1/31/2024 001b - 9/30/2024
002 - Continue to use advanced operational metrics dashboarding to provide daily insights into automation	002 - Exports of reports generated from Automation Performance Dashboard.	002 - 1/31/2024

Version Date: 3/01/2023

execution impact for the RPA Program.		
003 - Continue to collect and review formal acceptance criteria in the automation intake process, including documentation for all phases of RPA assessment and development. New criteria assessed for every potential automation includes: • Cost (e.g., money savings, avoidance, FTE time savings) • Speed (e.g., improved cycle time, improved lead time) • Quality (e.g., error proofing, customer experience and satisfaction, compliance) • Mission alignment (e.g., criticality of function, alignment with organizational goals) • Suitability for automation (e.g., IT systems impacted, process complexity, volume)	003 - Collection of recently approved project assessment forms using new acceptance criteria.	003 - 1/31/2024
004 - Will update and publish program guidance to include new Process Optimization offerings.	004 - Published program guidance document.	004 - 04/30/2024

Version Date: 3/01/2023

Designated Responding Official: Kathy Hammer

Signature  Date 2/14/2024

Contact Person: Anthony Cavallo (BGR)

Telephone Number: 202-527-0978

Date: January 8, 2024

A210057/B/5/F24001 GSA's Robotic Process Automation Program Lacks Evidence to Support Claimed Savings	002	03/31/2024
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Finding(s): GSA lacks evidence to support its claims that the RPA program is generating savings.**Root Cause (RC) of Finding(s):** Audit Review Methodology Disagreement between OIG and PO&A.

The OCFO Process Optimization and Automation Division collects and will continue to monitor automation costs and impacts of automations at the program level. One of the key objectives of the program is to automate low-value repetitive tasks and calculating a typical return on investment for individual automations can be cost prohibitive. The initial RPA Program designed the Eliminate-Optimize-Automate (EOA) framework that was identified as an effective CAP Goal 6 initiative for the President's Management Agenda ([Case Study: https://www.gsa.gov/system/files/CAPGoal6_GSA_CFOCaseStudy_Aug2018.pdf](https://www.gsa.gov/system/files/CAPGoal6_GSA_CFOCaseStudy_Aug2018.pdf)), and was introduced as a government-wide best practice in 2019. The program has since evolved to focus on more than just RPA as a means to optimize and automate business processes across GSA which, in turn, optimizes the GSA business for the Taxpayer.

Recommendation: Track costs to develop each bot to allow the RPA program to develop objective statistics, such as return on investment.

Action to be Taken Step by Step	Supporting Documentation to be sent to	Documentation will be sent Last Duty
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Version Date: 3/01/2023

	<u>the OCFO BA or BG office</u>	<u>Day of the month</u>
001 - Continue to utilize advanced operational metrics dashboarding to provide daily insights into automation execution impact for the RPA Program.	001 - Exports of reports generated from Automation Performance Dashboard tool.	001 - 1/31/2024
002 - Continue to collect and review formal acceptance criteria implemented as part of the automation intake process, including documentation requirements for all phases of RPA assessment and development. New criteria assessed for every potential automation includes: • Cost (e.g., money savings, avoidance, FTE time savings) • Speed (e.g., improved cycle time, improved lead time) • Quality (e.g., error proofing, customer experience and satisfaction, compliance) • Mission alignment (e.g., criticality of function, alignment with organizational goals) • Suitability for automation (e.g., IT systems impacted, process complexity, volume)	002 - Collection of recently approved project assessment forms using new acceptance criteria.	002 - 1/31/2024

Version Date: 3/01/2023

003 - Determine the best criteria to use in order to track and report automation impacts.	003 - Final Report from study.	003 - 3/31/2024
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Version Date: 3/01/2023

Appendix B – Report Distribution

GSA Administrator (A)

GSA Deputy Administrator (AD)

Office of Digital Finance (BT)

Business Modernization Division (BTD)

Chief Financial Officer (B)

Deputy Chief Financial Officer (B)

Audit Management Division (BPA)

Assistant Inspector General for Auditing (JA)

Deputy Assistant Inspector General for Acquisition Audits (JA)

Deputy Assistant Inspector General for Real Property Audits (JA)

Director (JAO)



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