



Highlights of [GAO-10-190R](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

The Smithsonian Institution (Smithsonian) is the world's largest museum complex. Its funding comes from its own private trust fund assets and federal appropriations. The Smithsonian Board of Regents, the Smithsonian's governing body, is responsible for the long-term stewardship of the Smithsonian. In recent years, GAO and others have documented significant governance and accountability breakdowns at the Smithsonian, which could ultimately put funding and the organization's credibility at risk.

In 2007 the Board of Regents Governance Committee released a report recommending 42 governance reforms. In May 2008 GAO found that the Board of Regents had implemented 30 of these 42 reforms. GAO also made 4 additional recommendations.

In response to a congressional mandate, this report provides an update on the status of the Smithsonian's implementation of governance reforms recommended by the Board of Regents Governance Committee and GAO. The work for this report is based on analysis of Smithsonian documents, interviews with Smithsonian officials, and a GAO report on Smithsonian governance (GAO-08-632).

GAO is not making any new recommendations. The Smithsonian and the Board of Regents concurred with the findings of this report.

View [GAO-10-190R](#) or key components. For more information, contact Mark L. Goldstein, (202) 512-2834 or goldsteinm@gao.gov.

SMITHSONIAN INSTITUTION

Implementation of Governance Reforms Is Progressing, but Work Remains

What GAO Found

Since May 2008, the Smithsonian has implemented 9 reforms recommended by its Governance Committee—in addition to the 30 it had implemented prior to May 2008—and 1 of 4 GAO recommendations, but work remains on 3 reforms and 3 recommendations, as summarized in the following table.

Status of the Smithsonian's Implementation of Governance Reforms and Recommendations

Source	Total	Implemented as of May 2008	Implemented as of December 1, 2009	Work Remains
Governance Committee, June 2007	42	30	9	3
GAO, May 2008	4	N/A	1	3

The nine Governance Committee reforms implemented since May 2008 include efforts such as revising policies related to travel and expense reimbursement and event expenses, creating a regents' annual public forum, and clarifying roles and responsibilities of and developing an assessment process for the Board of Regents. The Smithsonian has not completed implementation of three Governance Committee reforms related to the Smithsonian's contracting policy, a comprehensive review of financial reporting and internal controls, and enhancing the role of advisory boards.

Regarding GAO's May 2008 recommendations, the Smithsonian implemented GAO's recommendation to evaluate what actions it can take in the event of persistent neglect of duties by a regent, but has not completed implementation of the following three recommendations:

- The Board of Regents took steps towards, but has not implemented, GAO's recommendation to develop and make public its process for the selection, use, and evaluation of nonregents. The Board of Regents posted on its Web site the process for selecting nonregent committee members but did not make a final decision regarding a proposed bylaw to give nonregent committee members the same roles and responsibilities as regents.
- The Board of Regents took steps to improve its relationship with stakeholders, including advisory boards. However, due to limitations of the efforts thus far—such as their informal nature and focus on dissemination of information from the regents rather than two-way communication—several advisory board chairs with whom we spoke expressed concern that the Board of Regents still lacked a sufficient understanding of Smithsonian museums and other entities to govern as effectively as possible.
- The Board of Regents has not yet conducted a comprehensive evaluation of its reforms but plans to do so in fiscal year 2010.