

# The Missing Function in Government: Independent Governance Verification

**Not audit. Not procurement. Not IT. Something the AI era requires.**

On April 30, 2026, the White House signed Executive Order 14402.

The order makes fixed-price contracts the default across federal agencies in response to approximately \$120 billion in cost-reimbursement consulting contracts in FY 2024 alone. It targets cost overruns, weak performance incentives, and poorly defined deliverables.

It is a serious attempt at procurement reform.

But it leaves a deeper structural gap unresolved.

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## What No One Measures

Auditors verify money. Procurement officers verify contract compliance. IT departments verify technical functionality. Ombudsmen investigate individual complaints.

But no one in government is specifically responsible for answering a different question:

Did this system actually make it easier for people to get what they need?

A system can launch on time, meet technical specifications, and satisfy contract requirements while still forcing citizens through endless forms, repeated documentation, confusing workflows, and long waiting periods.

That is not necessarily a failure of existing oversight institutions. It is a gap in the governance architecture itself.

EO 14402 improves procurement accountability. It does not solve outcome accountability.

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## **Procurement Accountability Is Not Governance Accountability**

The EO focuses on how contracts are structured: fixed-price versus cost-reimbursement, approval authority, and reporting requirements.

Those reforms matter. But they focus on contract discipline before and during implementation.

They do not answer what happens after deployment.

A system can be delivered under budget and still fail the public at the point of service delivery.

Governments know how to measure spending. They are improving how they monitor procurement discipline. But they still lack a mechanism for independently verifying whether services actually became easier, faster, or more accessible for citizens.

The missing layer is outcome verification.

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## **The Hidden Cost of Administrative Friction**

Administrative friction creates costs that rarely appear in budgets.

When citizens wait weeks for unemployment assistance, the costs extend beyond personal hardship. Delays generate customer service calls, appeals hearings, emergency support burdens, staff overload, and public distrust.

When systems become too confusing to navigate, eligible people often abandon the process entirely. That burden does not disappear. It simply reappears elsewhere in government.

These costs are real, but governments rarely measure them systematically after implementation.

The White House focused attention on \$120 billion in consulting contracts. The long-term cost of administrative friction may be even larger.

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## **A Missing Government Function**

What is needed is not another temporary task force or advisory committee.

What is needed is a permanent institutional function dedicated to post-deployment outcome verification.

This function would not replace auditors, procurement officers, inspectors general, or IT departments. It would answer a different question entirely.

Before deployment:

- establish baseline waiting times
- identify friction points
- measure completion rates and citizen burden

After deployment:

- independently verify whether service delivery improved
- assess whether waiting times decreased
- determine whether administrative burden was reduced

Findings should be publicly reportable so citizens, legislators, and oversight bodies can evaluate whether systems actually deliver meaningful improvements.

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## **Why Independence Matters**

An honest outcome verification report may reveal increased burden, failed workflow design, or worsening delays despite successful technical deployment.

Those findings may conflict with agency narratives, vendor interests, or political messaging.

Without operational independence and protected reporting authority, few people inside the government will be willing to deliver those findings honestly.

The same institutional logic behind judicial independence applies here: some functions only work when they are insulated from pressure.

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## **Why AI Makes This Urgent**

AI does not automatically improve governance.

It amplifies whatever system it is placed into.

Effective workflows become more efficient. Fragmented workflows become faster fragmentation. Poorly designed systems scale more quickly.

Without independent outcome verification, governments may not realize whether AI improved delivery or amplified failure until significant damage has already occurred.

And the same procurement systems that delivered many fragmented public systems today are now being used to procure tomorrow's AI systems.

The accountability gap remains.

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## Conclusion

Governments create new institutional functions when existing structures can no longer answer emerging questions.

Auditors emerged when financial complexity outgrew informal trust. Inspectors general emerged when governments required independent investigative oversight.

The defining governance question of the AI era is becoming increasingly clear:

Did the system actually make it easier for people to get what they need?

At present, no permanent government function is specifically responsible for answering that question.

EO 14402 was an important step toward procurement discipline. But procurement accountability alone cannot guarantee governance outcomes.

Until governments establish independent mechanisms for verifying real-world delivery results, they will continue measuring activity while remaining partially blind to public experience.

It is time to create that function.