HUMAN CAPITAL

Increasing Agencies’ Use of New Hiring Flexibilities

What GAO Found

Although Congress, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), and agencies have all recently undertaken efforts to help improve the federal hiring process, agencies report they are making limited use of the two new hiring flexibilities contained in the Homeland Security Act of 2002: category rating and direct-hire authority. These flexibilities could help agencies in expediting and controlling their hiring processes. GAO surveyed members of the interagency Chief Human Capital Officers Council (CHCO) to determine the extent to which their respective agencies were using the new hiring flexibilities and to identify barriers to greater use of these flexibilities. Frequently cited barriers included (1) the lack of OPM guidance for using the flexibilities, (2) the lack of agency policies and procedures for using the flexibilities, (3) the lack of flexibility in OPM rules and regulations, and (4) concern about possible inconsistencies in the implementation of the flexibilities within the department or agency.

The federal government is now facing one of the most transformational changes to the civil service in half a century. Today’s challenge is to define the appropriate roles and day-to-day working relationships for OPM and individual agencies as they collaborate on developing innovative and more effective hiring systems. Moreover, human capital expertise within the agencies must be up to the challenge for this transformation to be successful and enduring.