

November 2008

DEPARTMENT OF
HOMELAND
SECURITY

A Strategic Approach
Is Needed to Better
Ensure the Acquisition
Workforce Can Meet
Mission Needs





Highlights of [GAO-09-30](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is one of the largest procurement spending agencies in the federal government. In fiscal year 2007, DHS obligated about \$12 billion for a wide range of goods and services to meet complex mission needs. Like other federal agencies, DHS has faced challenges in building and sustaining a capable workforce to support its acquisitions.

GAO was asked to identify and assess DHS's efforts to build and sustain an effective acquisition workforce and determine the extent to which DHS has planned strategically for the acquisition workforce. To conduct the work, GAO collected and reviewed data and interviewed officials from the Office of the Chief Procurement Officer (CPO), DHS's nine procurement offices, and nine program offices, and reviewed in detail workforce information and data for acquisition support contracts from selected offices.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DHS take several actions to better address acquisition workforce challenges, including: establishing an interim acquisition workforce definition and an implementation plan for current initiatives; developing plans as appropriate to expand current initiatives; establishing a coordinated planning process; and improving acquisition workforce data. DHS generally concurred with these recommendations and noted efforts under way to address them.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-09-30](#). For more information, contact John Hutton at (202)512-4841 or huttonj@gao.gov.

DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

A Strategic Approach Is Needed to Better Ensure the Acquisition Workforce Can Meet Mission Needs

What GAO Found

DHS has undertaken several initiatives, mostly focused on contract specialists, to begin addressing acquisition workforce challenges. Initiatives related to recruiting, hiring, and training have made progress. In January 2008, CPO implemented a contract specialist intern program, and 49 contract specialists were hired through this initiative as of September 2008. In addition, CPO developed DHS-specific training for program managers through a training program begun in spring 2008. However, most initiatives related to defining and identifying the acquisition workforce and assessing workforce needs have not yet produced results and in some cases are progressing more slowly than originally projected. CPO is considering expanding some of its recruiting and hiring initiatives to address identified shortages in acquisition-related positions other than contract specialists, but has not determined how it will implement such an expansion. Moreover, DHS generally lacks documented performance goals and implementation steps—such as actions to be taken, needed resources, and milestones—for its current initiatives. Without developing this foundation, DHS will not be in a position to effectively monitor and evaluate implementation of these initiatives.

DHS has not developed a comprehensive strategic acquisition workforce plan to direct its future acquisition workforce efforts and generally lacks several elements key to developing such a plan: a coordinated planning process; a comprehensive acquisition workforce definition; and sufficient data on workforce size and skills, including the use of acquisition support contractors. DHS has not set an overall direction for acquisition workforce planning or fully involved key stakeholders, such as the Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer and component procurement and program offices. However, DHS has recently taken steps that may help to include program office stakeholders in workforce planning. The department's narrow acquisition workforce definition, which includes only a portion of the employees performing acquisition-related functions, further limits the scope of planning. While DHS recognizes the importance of expanding the definition, it has not yet established an interim definition that identifies which positions should be included. DHS also lacks sufficient data to fully assess its acquisition workforce needs, including gaps in the numbers of employees needed or the skills of those employees. Understanding such workforce gaps is key to developing effective strategies to address current and future workforce needs. Further, prior GAO work has found that agencies should develop workforce strategies that include contractors; however, DHS has limited insight into the numbers of contractors supporting its acquisition function or the types of tasks performed. While GAO has previously reported that strategic acquisition workforce planning is not an easy task and can take several years to accomplish, government agencies will not be in a sound position to ensure they have capable acquisition workforces without this planning.

Contents

Letter		1
	Results in Brief	3
	Background	5
	DHS Has Taken Initial Steps to Address Acquisition Workforce Challenges, but Has Primarily Focused on Contract Specialists	10
	DHS Generally Lacks Several Elements Key to Planning Strategically for the Acquisition Workforce	20
	Conclusion	27
	Recommendations for Executive Action	28
	Agency Comments and Our Evaluation	29
Appendix I	Objectives, Scope, and Methodology	33
Appendix II	Comments from the Department of Homeland Security	36
Appendix III	Procurement and Program Offices Reviewed	41
Tables		
	Table 1: DHS Contract Specialist Staffing and Vacancy Rates for Federal Employees as of February 2008	11
	Table 2: DHS Acquisition Workforce Initiatives	15
Figures		
	Figure 1: DHS Components with Heads of Contracting Activity and Lines of Reporting	9
	Figure 2: Cumulative Percentage of the Contract Specialist Population at DHS Eligible to Retire as of the End of Each Fiscal Year	12

Abbreviations

CBP	Customs and Border Protection
CHCO	Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer
COTR	contracting officer's technical representative
CPO	Office of the Chief Procurement Officer
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
DOD	Department of Defense
FAR	Federal Acquisition Regulation
ICE	Immigration and Customs Enforcement
OFPP	Office of Federal Procurement Policy
OPM	Office of Personnel Management
TSA	Transportation Security Administration

This is a work of the U.S. government and is not subject to copyright protection in the United States. It may be reproduced and distributed in its entirety without further permission from GAO. However, because this work may contain copyrighted images or other material, permission from the copyright holder may be necessary if you wish to reproduce this material separately.



United States Government Accountability Office
Washington, DC 20548

November 19, 2008

The Honorable Joseph I. Lieberman
Chairman
The Honorable Susan M. Collins
Ranking Member
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
United States Senate

The Honorable Daniel K. Akaka
Chairman
The Honorable George V. Voinovich
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal
Workforce, and the District of Columbia
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
United States Senate

The Honorable Bennie G. Thompson
Chairman
Committee on Homeland Security
House of Representatives

The federal acquisition workforce plays a key role in ensuring the government receives the best value for the hundreds of billions of dollars it spends each year for goods and services. However, changes in the federal acquisition environment have created significant challenges to building and sustaining a capable acquisition workforce across the government. While the federal acquisition workforce has decreased in number, the size and complexity of investments and the acquisition workload have increased. As a result, agencies have increasingly relied on contractors to support the acquisition workforce. Despite these significant changes, agencies have not given adequate attention to the size of the acquisition workforce and the skills it needs and planned accordingly.

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS), which began operations in March 2003, is one of the largest agencies for procurement spending within the federal government. In fiscal year 2007, DHS obligated about \$12 billion to acquire a wide range of goods and services. DHS and its components—which are jointly responsible for managing the department’s acquisition workforce—have faced a number of challenges related to

procurement of services and major acquisitions. Specifically, our prior work has shown negative cost and schedule implications for complex services acquisitions at DHS that did not have adequate staff to effectively plan and execute contracts.¹ In addition, our work over a period of 7 years on the Coast Guard's Integrated Deepwater System—a multibillion dollar effort to upgrade an array of critical Coast Guard assets that has experienced significant cost, schedule, and performance problems—has highlighted ineffective program management due, in part, to staffing shortfalls and the Coast Guard's inability to adequately oversee its contractors.² Most recently, we reported in June 2008 that despite positive changes to management and acquisition approaches, the Coast Guard continued to have difficulties in building an adequate government workforce to acquire and manage Deepwater and relied on contractors to provide critical skills and knowledge.³

Given the acquisition workforce challenges DHS faces, you asked us to (1) identify and assess DHS's efforts to build and sustain an effective acquisition workforce and (2) determine the extent to which DHS has planned strategically for the acquisition workforce. To conduct our work, we reviewed available documents and interviewed representatives from DHS's Office of the Chief Procurement Officer (CPO), the Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer (CHCO), and the nine procurement offices that support DHS's components.⁴ We also selected program offices of major investments associated with each of DHS's procurement offices that included a range of investment sizes, staffing levels, and project phases. In addition to collecting information from each office on the composition of

¹GAO, *Department of Homeland Security: Better Planning and Assessment Needed to Improve Outcomes for Complex Service Acquisitions*, [GAO-08-263](#) (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 22, 2008).

²GAO, *Coast Guard: Status of Efforts to Improve Deepwater Program Management and Address Operational Challenges*, [GAO-07-575T](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 8, 2007); and GAO, *Contract Management: Coast Guard's Deepwater Program Management Needs Increased Attention to Management and Contractor Oversight*, [GAO-04-380](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 9, 2004).

³GAO, *Coast Guard: Change in Course Improves Deepwater Management and Oversight, but Outcome Still Uncertain*, [GAO-08-745](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 24, 2008).

⁴In April 2008, DHS established a new procurement office, the Office of Selective Acquisitions. As of June 2008, this office had three staff members. Because this office was not in existence at the time we began our work, we did not include it in our review. For the purposes of this report, we refer to offices that carry out contracting functions as procurement offices, although some components use different titles for these offices (see app. III for a full list of office titles).

its workforce, we also interviewed key program representatives. To gather more detailed information, we selected three procurement offices—the Office of Procurement Operations, Transportation Security Administration’s (TSA) Office of Acquisition, and Customs and Border Protection’s (CBP) Procurement Directorate—and two program offices—TSA’s Electronic Baggage Screening Program and CBP’s Automated Commercial Environment Program—for in-depth review. To learn about the type of work performed by acquisition support contractors, we collected and analyzed statements of work for all acquisition support contracts active as of the end of fiscal year 2007 associated with these procurement and program offices. Finally, we reviewed data from the Office of Personnel Management’s (OPM) Central Personnel Data File on contract specialists in DHS’s workforce to assess the department’s hiring and retention of this population.⁵ We have previously assessed the reliability of the Central Personnel Data File and based on that assessment and information provided by OPM in February 2008, we found it sufficiently reliable for our purposes.⁶ We conducted this performance audit from September 2007 until November 2008 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. See appendix I for additional information on our scope and methodology.

Results in Brief

DHS has undertaken several initiatives, mostly focused on contract specialists, to begin addressing acquisition workforce challenges. DHS’s recruiting, hiring, and training initiatives have made progress in hiring new contract specialists and expanding access to training. In January 2008, CPO implemented the Acquisition Professional Career Program and, as of September 2008, had hired 49 contract specialist interns through the

⁵ Of the positions in DHS’s current acquisition workforce definition, only contract specialists are associated with a specific job series, so it was the only position for which we could obtain reliable data from OPM.

⁶ GAO, *OPM’s Central Personnel Data File: Data Appear Sufficiently Reliable to Meet Most Customer Needs*, [GAO/GGD-98-199](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 30, 1998). Also, in a document dated February 28, 2008, an OPM official confirmed that OPM continues to follow the Central Personnel Data File data quality standards and procedures contained in our 1998 report. OPM’s data do not include uniformed Coast Guard personnel.

program. In addition, CPO established an Acquisition Training Program in spring 2008 that has developed DHS-specific training for program managers and formed a council to coordinate acquisition workforce training opportunities across components. However, most of DHS's initiatives related to defining and identifying the acquisition workforce and assessing acquisition workforce needs have not yet produced results and in some cases are progressing more slowly than originally projected. CPO is considering expanding some recruiting and hiring initiatives to address identified shortages for acquisition-related positions other than contract specialists, but has not determined how it will implement an expansion. Moreover, DHS generally lacks documented performance goals and implementation steps—such as actions to be taken, needed resources, and milestones—for its current acquisition workforce initiatives. Without establishing this foundation, DHS will not be in a sound position to effectively monitor and evaluate the implementation of these initiatives.

DHS has not developed a comprehensive strategic acquisition workforce plan to direct the department's future acquisition workforce efforts and generally lacks several elements key to developing such a plan. These elements include: a coordinated planning process fully involving stakeholders; a comprehensive acquisition workforce definition; and sufficient data to completely assess workforce needs including the use of acquisition support contractors. DHS has not set an overall direction for acquisition workforce planning or fully involved key stakeholders, such as CHCO and component procurement and program offices, actions that our past work has shown can increase the likelihood of success for workforce planning. However, DHS has recently taken steps that may help to include program office stakeholders in workforce planning. The department's narrow acquisition workforce definition, which includes only a portion of the employees performing acquisition-related functions, further limits the scope of planning. While DHS recognizes the importance of expanding the department's definition, it has not yet established an interim definition that identifies which positions should be included. DHS also lacks sufficient data to fully assess its acquisition workforce needs, including the gaps in the numbers of employees needed or the skills of those employees. Understanding such workforce gaps is key to developing effective strategies to address current and future workforce needs. Further, our prior work has found that agencies should develop workforce strategies that include contractors; however, DHS has limited insight into the numbers of contractors supporting its acquisition function or the types of tasks performed. While we have previously reported that strategic acquisition workforce planning is not an easy task and can take several

years to accomplish, government agencies will not be in a sound position to ensure they have capable acquisition workforces without this planning.

To improve DHS's ability to effectively manage its acquisition workforce initiatives and plan strategically for its acquisition workforce, we are recommending that the Under Secretary for Management take several actions. These actions include establishing an interim definition of the acquisition workforce and an implementation plan for current acquisition workforce initiatives; developing plans as appropriate to expand current recruiting and hiring initiatives to positions beyond contract specialists; establishing a process to coordinate future acquisition workforce planning efforts between CPO, CHCO, and the components; and improving the department's acquisition workforce data. In written comments on a draft of this report, DHS generally concurred with our recommendations and provided information on efforts under way and plans to address them. While the efforts cited by DHS are important steps toward building an effective acquisition workforce, we believe additional actions are needed to fully address our recommendations. The department's comments are reprinted in appendix II. DHS also provided technical comments, which we incorporated as appropriate.

Background

In fiscal year 2007, federal agencies spent over \$450 billion to acquire goods and services. Under the Services Acquisition Reform Act of 2003, Congress authorized the establishment of a panel to review all federal acquisition laws, regulations, and certain policies and recommend changes to them that would result in improved federal acquisition practices.⁷ In its 2007 report, the panel found that the federal acquisition workforce's shortcomings in terms of size, skills, and experience could affect a variety of areas addressed by its findings and recommendations, such as commercial practices and the use of performance-based acquisition.⁸ Among the acquisition workforce issues raised by the Acquisition Advisory Panel's report was the substantial reduction in the federal acquisition workforce during the 1990s, which led to a period when the hiring of new acquisition professionals virtually ceased, thereby contributing to a current lack of experienced personnel. The Acquisition Advisory Panel's report and our prior work have also raised concerns about the reliance on

⁷Pub. L. No. 108-136, § 1423 (2003).

⁸*Report of the Acquisition Advisory Panel to the Office of Federal Procurement Policy and the United States Congress*, January 2007.

contractors to support acquisition-related functions. Our prior work at DHS found that the department did not always assess the risk of contractors performing selected professional and management support services that closely support the performance of inherently governmental functions. Further, the level of oversight DHS provided for these services, which include those for acquisition support, did not always ensure accountability for decisions or the ability to judge whether the contractor was performing as required.⁹

A number of governmental organizations play critical roles in assisting civilian agencies in building and sustaining their acquisition workforces. Among these agencies, OPM provides human capital advice and leadership to ensure federal agencies have an effective civilian workforce; the Office of Management and Budget's Office of Federal Procurement Policy (OFPP) provides governmentwide guidance on acquisition workforce issues for agencies other than the Department of Defense (DOD); and the Federal Acquisition Institute promotes the development of the civilian acquisition workforce as well as an information management system that collects and maintains acquisition workforce information.

In 2005, OFPP issued guidance to civilian agencies on defining and identifying their acquisition workforces.¹⁰ The guidance provides minimum categories of positions that define an agency's acquisition workforce, which include positions such as contract specialist, program manager, and contracting officer's technical representative (COTR). Contract specialists perform a range of acquisition services, such as market research, preparation of statements of work, and the development and management of acquisition plans. Some contract specialists receive warrants as government contracting officers and thereby have the authority to enter

⁹GAO, *Department of Homeland Security: Improved Assessment and Oversight Needed to Manage Risk of Contracting for Selected Services*, [GAO-07-990](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 17, 2007).

¹⁰Office of Federal Procurement Policy, *Developing and Managing the Acquisition Workforce*, Policy Letter 05-01 (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 15, 2005).

into, administer, or terminate contracts.¹¹ Program managers perform duties such as developing government requirements, defining measurable performance standards, and managing contractor activities to ensure that intended outcomes are achieved. COTRs, who are federal employees appointed by contracting officers, perform certain contract administration duties, including inspection and acceptance of supplies or services. The OFPP guidance further suggests that the acquisition workforce may be broadened to include all individuals who perform functions related to acquisition. Examples of functional positions given in the guidance, such as test and evaluation, and business and finance, provide key support for the management of programs and extend beyond the few procurement-related positions that have been traditionally considered in OFPP guidance as part of the civilian acquisition workforce.

Agencies addressing workforce challenges similar to those facing the federal acquisition workforce have used strategic workforce planning to position themselves to meet these challenges. Strategic workforce planning is an iterative, systematic process that addresses two critical needs: (1) aligning an organization's human capital program with its current and emerging mission and programmatic goals and (2) developing long-term strategies for acquiring, developing, and retaining an organization's workforce to achieve programmatic goals. Agency approaches to such planning can vary, as necessary, to address each agency's particular needs and mission. However, our prior work suggests that irrespective of the context in which workforce planning is done, such a process should incorporate five key principles: (1) involve management and employees, (2) analyze workforce gaps, (3) employ workforce strategies to fill the gaps, (4) build the capabilities needed to support workforce strategies, and (5) evaluate and revise strategies.¹²

¹¹OPM identifies those federal employees in the General Schedule Contracting series (GS-1102) as contract specialists. Contracting officers are federal employees with the authority to bind the government by signing a contract. Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR) 2.101. This authority is delegated to them through "warrants" issued by the head of their contracting activity. DHS has stated that all of the warrants currently held at the department are held by GS-1102s. For this reason, and in the interest of clarity, our use of the term contract specialist throughout this report refers to unwarranted contract specialists and warranted contracting officers.

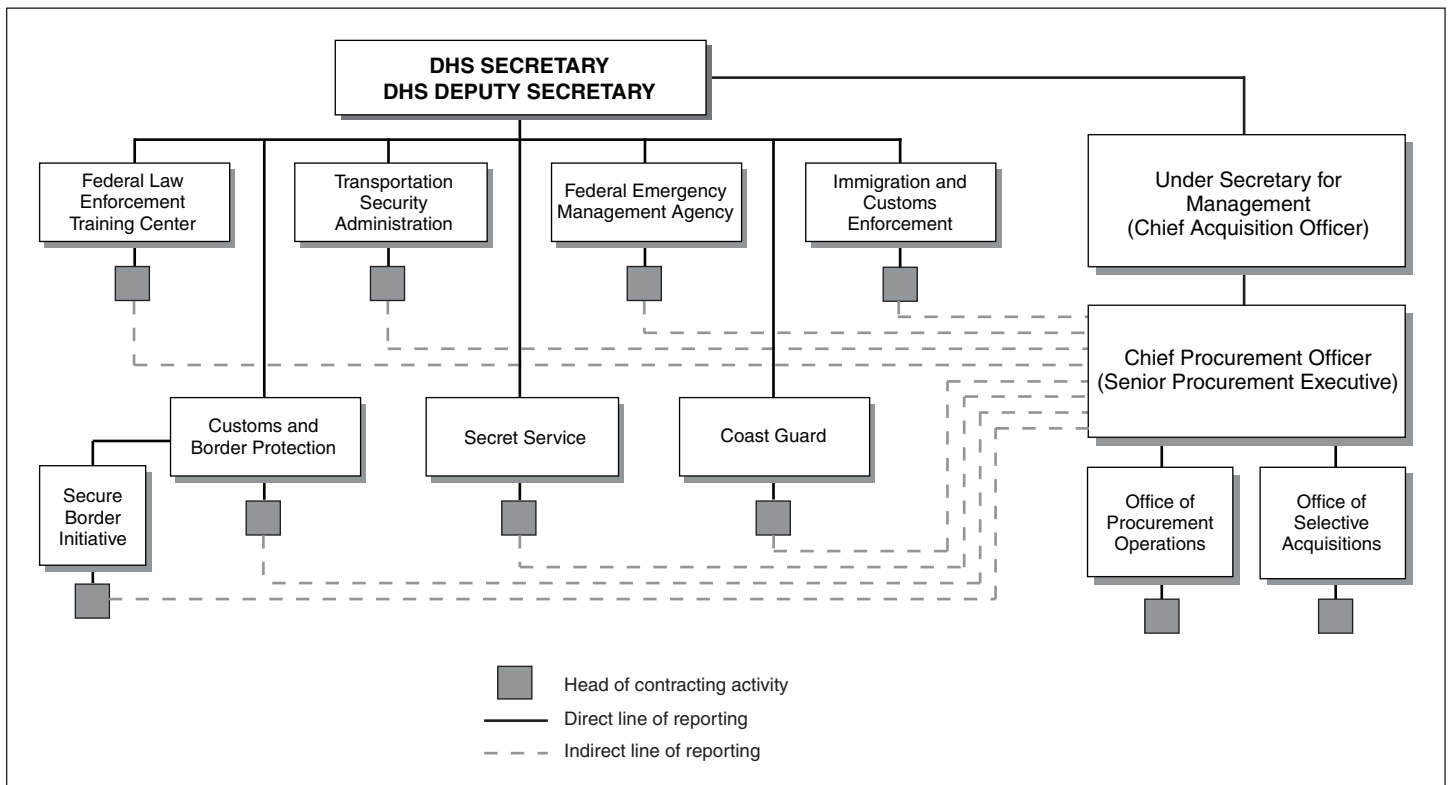
¹²GAO, *Human Capital: Key Principles for Effective Strategic Workforce Planning*, [GAO-04-39](#) (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 11, 2003).

Within DHS, CPO is responsible for creating the departmentwide policies and procedures for managing and overseeing the acquisition function, including procurement.¹³ For the purposes of this report, the term procurement refers to the actual transaction to acquire goods and services, while the term acquisition includes the development of operational and life-cycle requirements, such as formulating concepts of operations, developing sound business strategies, exercising prudent financial management, assessing trade-offs, and managing program risks. DHS relies on a structure of dual accountability and collaboration between the CPO and the heads of DHS's components to carry out the acquisition function. Seven DHS components have internal procurement offices with a Head of Contracting Activity who has overall responsibility for the day-to-day management of the procurement function for his or her respective DHS entity.¹⁴ Component Heads of Contracting Activity report directly to the head of the component and are accountable to the CPO. Two other procurement offices are located within DHS headquarters and have Heads of Contracting Activity who report directly to the CPO. Figure 1 shows the organizational relationship between Heads of Contracting Activity, heads of components, and the CPO.

¹³The FAR and the Homeland Security Acquisition Manual do not distinguish between the terms "acquisition" and "procurement."

¹⁴Within CBP, there are two procurement offices: the CBP Procurement Directorate, and the Secure Border Initiative Acquisition Office, which supports the Secure Border Initiative program.

Figure 1: DHS Components with Heads of Contracting Activity and Lines of Reporting



Source: DHS (data); GAO (analysis and presentation).

Similarly, CPO and the components rely on a structure of dual accountability and collaboration to manage DHS's acquisition workforce. Although DHS has not formally defined its acquisition workforce, according to CPO representatives, the definition currently includes contract specialists, program managers, and COTRs. To address workforce needs, in 2004 CPO established an Acquisition Workforce Branch with responsibility for leading departmentwide efforts on recruitment, development, training, certification, and retention of the acquisition workforce. This branch has been developing its capacity and had 10 staff in place as of August 2008. Components are responsible for accomplishing these same efforts as well as for planning and budgeting for their acquisition workforce positions and hiring individuals to fill those positions.

DHS Has Taken Initial Steps to Address Acquisition Workforce Challenges, but Has Primarily Focused on Contract Specialists

DHS has identified staffing level and training challenges related to the acquisition workforce. Over the past 2 years, CPO has undertaken several acquisition workforce initiatives, largely focused on contract specialists, in an effort to begin addressing these challenges. DHS identified contract specialists as one of its most critical staffing shortage areas. CPO's initiatives related to recruiting, hiring, and training have made progress. However, most initiatives related to defining and identifying the acquisition workforce and assessing needs have not yet produced results and in some cases are not progressing as projected. Although CPO is considering expanding some of its recruiting and hiring initiatives to include positions other than contract specialists, it has not yet determined how this expansion will be implemented. Moreover, DHS generally lacks documentation of key elements needed to monitor and evaluate the progress of its acquisition workforce initiatives, including performance goals for the initiatives and implementation steps such as actions to be taken and related milestones.

DHS Has Identified Acquisition Workforce Staffing Level and Training Challenges

DHS has identified contract specialist staffing levels as a serious concern for the department. According to OPM data, DHS increased its government contract specialist population from 577 to 1041, or approximately 80 percent, from the department's inception in 2003 to the end of fiscal year 2007, with the largest annual increase of 180 federal employees from 2006 to 2007. However, in February 2008, DHS's procurement offices reported contract specialist vacancy rates for federal employees ranging from 12 percent to 35 percent (see table 1). To help address the need for government employees, DHS has hired contractors to perform some acquisition support functions.

Table 1: DHS Contract Specialist Staffing and Vacancy Rates for Federal Employees as of February 2008

DHS Procurement Office	Authorized full time equivalent positions	Filled full time equivalent positions	Vacancies	Vacancy rate^a
Customs and Border Protection ^b	220	143	77	35
Office of Procurement Operations	190	135	55	29
Immigration and Customs Enforcement	170	133	37	22
Federal Emergency Management Agency	154	131	23	15
Coast Guard	343	290	53	15
Secret Service	26	22	4	15
Federal Law Enforcement Training Center	41	36	5	12
Transportation Security Administration	N/A ^c	87	N/A ^c	N/A ^c

Source: GAO analysis of DHS data.

^aVacancy rate is calculated by dividing the number of vacancies by the number of authorized positions reported.

^bData for the Secure Border Initiative Acquisition Office is included with the CBP data.

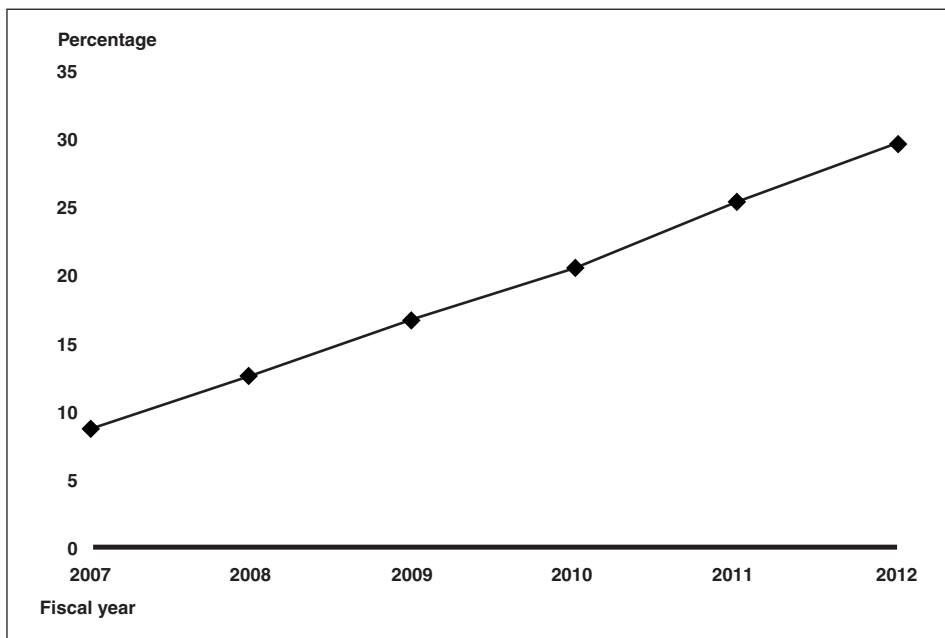
^cA contract specialist vacancy rate cannot be calculated for TSA's Office of Acquisition because it does not request or authorize positions by series or function.

Representatives from DHS's procurement offices told us that they had difficulty finding contract specialists to fill available government positions, particularly for those positions that required experience. They attributed this condition to factors such as competition from other federal agencies and private industry in the Washington, D.C., area and the lengthy federal hiring process, and reported that this condition has led to hiring individuals who lack the experience needed to handle DHS's complex acquisitions and needing support contractors to perform some contract specialist duties. Procurement office representatives also noted difficulty in retaining qualified staff. Our analysis of OPM data showed that DHS's fiscal year 2007 attrition rate for contract specialists, 7 percent, was somewhat above the overall rate for cabinet-level departments of 5.4 percent.¹⁵ In addition to transfers outside of DHS, the data also showed approximately 40 contract specialist transfers among DHS components in fiscal year 2007, which adds to the retention challenge for some components. DHS also has identified increased retirement eligibility of its

¹⁵For the purposes of this analysis, we defined attrition as resignations and transfers of permanent employees to other departments and agencies outside of DHS. The attrition rate does not include retirements.

contract specialists as a concern. OPM data show that nearly one third of contract specialists at DHS will be eligible to retire by the end of fiscal year 2012 (see fig. 2).¹⁶

Figure 2: Cumulative Percentage of the Contract Specialist Population at DHS Eligible to Retire as of the End of Each Fiscal Year



Source: GAO analysis of data from OPM's Central Personnel Data File.

Note: The percentages eligible to retire are for those contract specialists at DHS in September 2007. Actual percentages eligible to retire in future years could change with movement of contract specialists into and out of DHS over the next 4 years.

DHS also faces staffing shortages in other acquisition-related positions, including certified program managers, business and financial management staff, and technical support staff. For example, we recently reported that during fiscal year 2007, more than 40 percent of DHS's major investments lacked a program manager certified by DHS as having the required

¹⁶Eligibility to retire was calculated according to the age and years of service requirements for the Civil Service Retirement System, the Federal Employees Retirement System, and retirement plans for law enforcement officers. For Federal Employees Retirement System employees, we defined eligibility to retire as eligible to retire with an unreduced annuity.

knowledge and skills to oversee complex acquisition programs.¹⁷ In March 2007, DHS's Under Secretary for Management stated that the department had a shortage of people experienced in program management and related functional areas, such as acquisition logistics and cost analysis.¹⁸ Similarly, a 2007 CPO review determined that program offices had very limited technical support staff such as systems engineers, and that very few offices had someone functioning as a business or financial manager. Our past work has also raised concerns about adequate training and numbers of COTRs at DHS. For example, we reported in September 2007 on cases in which COTRs lacked the capacity to oversee contractor performance because of limited expertise and workload demands.¹⁹ Additionally, our work on contracting issues following Hurricane Katrina indicated that the number of contract monitoring staff was not always sufficient.²⁰ CPO generally does not collect data on attrition and retirement eligibility of program managers, COTRs, or other program management-related employees. However, overall retirement eligibility trends for federal employees could challenge the department's ability to attain and maintain sufficient staffing levels for these positions.

Further, DHS representatives have expressed concerns about providing adequate training to the department's acquisition workforce, and the Under Secretary for Management has stated that advanced training programs for the acquisition workforce are necessary to reduce the department's reliance on contractors.²¹ The DHS acquisition workforce

¹⁷GAO, *Department of Homeland Security: Billions Invested in Major Programs Lack Appropriate Oversight*, [GAO-09-29](#) (Washington D.C.: Nov. 18, 2008). Per DHS Management Directive No. 0782, Acquisition Certification Requirement for Program Managers, DHS Program Managers must be certified at a level commensurate with the responsibilities of the acquisition being managed or eligible for certification within 18 months of designation. The DHS CPO may consider temporary waivers to training requirements in rare cases.

¹⁸*The Department of Homeland Security's Management Directorate: Goals and Objectives of the New Under Secretary: Hearing Before the House Committee on Homeland Security, Subcommittee on Management, Investigations, and Oversight*, 110th Cong. (2007).

¹⁹[GAO-07-990](#).

²⁰GAO, *Catastrophic Disasters: Enhanced Leadership, Capabilities, and Accountability Controls Will Improve the Effectiveness of the Nation's Preparedness, Response, and Recovery System*, [GAO-06-618](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 6, 2006).

²¹*The Department of Homeland Security's Management Directorate: Goals and Objectives of the New Under Secretary: Hearing Before the House Committee on Homeland Security, Subcommittee on Management, Investigations, and Oversight*, 110th Cong. (2007).

obtains training through various means, such as attending component-sponsored training or courses offered by the Defense Acquisition University or Federal Acquisition Institute.²² However, according to DHS representatives, none of these sources satisfies DHS's long-term requirement for training to meet its specific needs. For example, the representatives explained that relying on components to provide training makes it difficult to ensure that the workforce will be able to obtain and maintain certifications because components have to obtain funding through their own budgets and funding levels can fluctuate. In addition, the representatives noted that Defense Acquisition University courses are not tailored specifically to DHS's homeland security mission and that Federal Acquisition Institute courses are primarily focused on contracting.

DHS Has Undertaken Several Acquisition Workforce Initiatives

At the departmental level, CPO has identified building the DHS acquisition workforce as one of the office's top priorities. To assist procurement and program offices in building and sustaining their workforces, CPO launched several initiatives during 2007 and 2008 for defining and identifying the acquisition workforce, assessing acquisition workforce needs, recruiting and hiring acquisition workforce professionals, and training the acquisition workforce (see table 2). Most of these initiatives are targeted at contract specialists. To some extent, this focus was the result of DHS's identifying contract specialists as one of its most critical staffing shortages.

²²Although Defense Acquisition University courses are primarily geared towards DOD, DHS has been able to obtain slots for its acquisition workforce in some of the University's courses.

Table 2: DHS Acquisition Workforce Initiatives

Initiative	Description	Current target population
Define and identify the acquisition workforce		
Pilot test to identify acquisition workforce positions	Effort to identify and code all DHS acquisition workforce positions in the National Finance Center database; the pilot test is focused on contract specialists.	Contract specialists
Expanding the acquisition workforce definition	Effort to expand DHS's existing acquisition workforce definition to include additional acquisition-related functions, such as business and financial management, logistics, and systems engineering.	Program offices
Assess acquisition workforce needs		
Procurement office workforce model/ CPO procurement staffing work group	Effort focused on developing a staffing model for DHS procurement offices; after considering the results of a contractor-developed study, CPO formed an internal work group focused on developing a contract specialist staffing model suitable to DHS.	Contract specialists
Contract specialist human capital plan	DHS is preparing a contract specialist human capital plan in preparation for a succession plan required by the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008.	Contract specialists
Pilot test of program office staffing model	Pilot effort focused on identifying program office staffing needs using a contractor-developed model.	Program offices
Recruit and hire acquisition professionals		
Acquisition Professional Career Program	Program that includes three 1 year placements in different components, after which participants are eligible for permanent placement with a component based on mutual interest.	Contract specialists
Human capital hiring flexibilities	Direct hire authority allows DHS to expedite hiring by eliminating, among other things, competitive rating and ranking. DHS is also authorized to hire reemployed annuitants to fill acquisition-related positions, including contract specialist vacancies.	Contract specialists
Centralized hiring initiative	CPO, in conjunction with CHCO, coordinates departmentwide vacancy announcements for contract specialists and works with components in the selection process.	Contract specialists
Train the acquisition workforce		
Acquisition Training Program	Effort to develop or procure training classes and training related services to meet acquisition workforce certification requirements; also includes a qualitative training needs assessment of DHS procurement and program office staff.	Contract specialists, program managers, COTRs

Source: GAO analysis of DHS data.

DHS's components also have initiatives to address their acquisition workforce needs. For example, in fiscal year 2007, the Immigration and Customs Enforcement's (ICE) Office of Acquisition Management began tracking attrition data for its employees—who are primarily contract specialists—including their release date, reason for leaving, and new employer. Each employee is also given an opportunity to participate in an exit interview. ICE representatives noted that they are gathering this

attrition data for the purpose of identifying areas where improvements could be made to reduce employee turnover. In addition, in 2007, TSA's Acquisition and Program Management Support Division developed and proposed a staffing model for TSA's program offices that recommends positions and staffing levels for program offices in various program phases. According to TSA representatives, several programs have used the model to assess staffing. For example, the Electronic Baggage Screening and Passenger Screening Programs used the model to restructure their offices. However, the model has not been adopted across TSA, and it is too soon to tell whether the model addresses concerns about program office staffing.

Recruiting, Hiring, and Training Initiatives Have Made Progress, but Focus Largely on Contract Specialists

DHS's initiatives have been used to hire new contract specialists. For example, as of September 2008, DHS had hired 49 contract specialist interns through its Acquisition Professional Career Program, which started in January 2008. According to CPO representatives, these contract specialists will be working in eight of DHS's nine procurement offices. In addition, CPO has implemented two statutory hiring flexibilities to assist in recruiting qualified contract specialists—direct hire authority and reemployed annuitant authority. According to OPM data, DHS used direct hire authority for just over half of the 265 contract specialists hired during fiscal year 2007.²³ DHS uses its centralized hiring initiative in conjunction with direct hire authority to assist components with finding qualified candidates. According to CPO representatives, as of July 2008, DHS had made more than 300 resumes available to the components through the centralized hiring initiative. CPO and component representatives stated that the use of direct hire authority has expedited the hiring process and makes it easier to hire candidates who are the best fit for DHS. DHS is also using reemployed annuitants to supplement its contract specialist workforce. Since the beginning of 2007, DHS procurement offices have hired four annuitants—three with the Coast Guard and one with the Office

²³Services Acquisition Reform Act of 2003, enacted as part of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2004, Pub. L. No. 108-136, § 1413 (2003) allowed most federal agencies to exercise direct hire authority to recruit and appoint highly qualified persons using existing statutory authorities by determining, under regulations issued by OPM, that certain federal acquisition positions (including GS-1102s) are shortage category positions. This authority was extended to September 30, 2012, by the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008, Pub. L. No. 110-181, § 853.

of Procurement Operations—and recommended two other annuitants to be hired.²⁴

CPO has also begun to improve DHS's ability to train its acquisition workforce through the establishment of its Acquisition Training Program, which aims to centralize required training classes for all acquisition professionals across DHS. The program was established in spring 2008, and since that time, CPO has developed, in coordination with the Defense Acquisition University, customized certification training courses for DHS program managers. Courses for the first level of certification have been implemented, and according to CPO representatives, courses for the second level are in the process of being developed and will be offered in the third quarter of fiscal year 2009, while the third and final level of program manager courses should be completed by the end of fiscal year 2010. CPO has also established a training coordinators' council that consists of component representatives who coordinate training opportunities across the components and advertise these opportunities to a wider audience within DHS.

Overall, while these initiatives have shown preliminary results, they have largely targeted one career field: contract specialists. However, DHS has also identified shortages among other acquisition-related staff, but has not yet developed strategies to fully address those gaps. Developing strategies to address identified workforce gaps creates the road map needed to move from the current to the future workforce. According to CPO representatives, DHS is considering expanding some recruiting and hiring initiatives, including the Acquisition Professional Career Program and the centralized hiring initiative, to other acquisition career fields. For example, CPO representatives told us they recently met with representatives from three components to gauge interest in an expanded Acquisition Professional Career Program. However, CPO has not fully assessed its recruiting and hiring initiatives to determine whether they are appropriate for other workforce needs or developed plans for how they would be expanded.

²⁴General Services Administration Modernization Act, Pub. L. No. 109-313, § 4 (2006) granted agency heads authority, after consulting with OPM and OFPP, to approve reemployment of annuitants in acquisition-related positions.

Most Efforts to Define and Identify the Workforce and Assess Needs Have Not Yet Produced Results

While CPO's recruiting, hiring, and training initiatives are positive steps toward building and sustaining DHS's acquisition workforce, most initiatives to define and identify DHS's acquisition workforce and determine workforce needs have not yet produced results. Specifically, while the department's pilot test of a contractor-developed program office staffing model has been completed and the model has been approved by the department for components to use as an optional tool for forecasting staffing needs, CPO's other initiatives in these areas have not yet been completed. For example, CPO's human capital plan for the contract specialist career field is not expected to be completed until January 2009, when DHS and other agencies are required by Congress to have developed acquisition workforce succession plans.²⁵ In addition, CPO's effort to conduct a pilot test of a process for identifying members of the acquisition workforce had not been completed as of September 2008. CPO representatives expect this initiative, which involves coding individuals performing acquisition-related functions in the National Finance Center database, will help to ensure these positions are filled with qualified applicants and to monitor the certifications and training of individuals in the acquisition workforce. CPO representatives reported that they provided CHCO with the data needed to conduct the pilot test in January 2008, but CHCO representatives told us their workload required them to put the testing effort on hold and that they did not expect to be able to focus on it until fiscal year 2009.

DHS's effort to develop an improved method for assessing contract specialist staffing needs has also not yet produced results. Since 2004, DHS has projected its staffing needs using a method that relies on a ratio of staffing-related expenses to contract obligations. DHS has established a metric for a minimal staffing level of staffing-related expenses of at least 1.2 percent and optimally at 1.9 percent of total contract obligations. However, this method is limited as it does not account for the complexity of an acquisition, or the type of contract—variables that can affect the time and skills needed to complete required tasks. In 2005, we found the department had not conducted an assessment of whether contracting staff

²⁵Section 855(e) of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008 requires that not later than 1 year after the date of the enactment of the act, each Chief Acquisition Officer for an executive agency develop, in consultation with the Chief Human Capital Officer for the agency and the Associate Administrator for Acquisition Workforce Programs, a succession plan consistent with the agency's strategic human capital plan for the recruitment, development, and retention of the agency's acquisition workforce, with a particular focus on warranted contracting officers and program managers of the agency.

are properly distributed for the varying workloads in each procurement office and recommended that it conduct such an assessment.²⁶ We also recently identified the need for the Office of Procurement Operations to determine the number of contract specialists needed to help ensure a sufficient contracting workforce to execute other transaction authority at DHS's Science and Technology Directorate.²⁷ In August 2007, DHS initiated a study to develop an improved staffing model. After considering the results of the study, in May 2008 the CPO formed a work group of representatives from each of DHS's procurement offices and tasked this group with developing a method for the department to assess contract specialist staffing needs. At the time of our review, CPO had not released the results of this work, which CPO representatives told us was originally planned to be released at the end of July 2008.

Moreover, DHS generally lacks documented performance goals and other implementation steps—such as actions to be taken, milestones, needed resources, responsible parties, and an evaluation process—for its current acquisition workforce initiatives. Our prior work has shown that developing such implementation steps is part of pursuing a results-oriented management approach.²⁸ DHS has focused on getting acquisition workforce initiatives up and running rather than on how results will be measured. However, without developing this foundation, DHS will not be in a sound position to effectively monitor and evaluate the implementation of its current initiatives to ensure the intended purpose of building and sustaining the acquisition workforce is met.

²⁶GAO, *Homeland Security: Successes and Challenges in DHS's Efforts to Create an Effective Acquisition Organization*, [GAO-05-179](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 29, 2005).

²⁷GAO, *Department of Homeland Security: Improvements Could Further Enhance Ability to Acquire Innovative Technologies Using Other Transaction Authority*, [GAO-08-1088](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 23, 2008). Other transactions are agreements other than government contracts, grants, and cooperative agreements.

²⁸GAO, *Defense Space Activities: Additional Actions Needed to Implement Human Capital Strategy and Develop Space Personnel*, [GAO-04-697](#) (Washington D.C.: Aug. 11, 2004).

DHS Generally Lacks Several Elements Key to Planning Strategically for the Acquisition Workforce

DHS has not developed a comprehensive strategic acquisition workforce plan to direct the department's future acquisition workforce efforts and generally lacks several elements key to developing such a plan. These elements include: a coordinated planning process fully involving stakeholders; a comprehensive acquisition workforce definition; and sufficient data to fully assess workforce needs including the use of contractors. Our prior work has found that planning strategically for the acquisition workforce can facilitate good acquisition outcomes.²⁹ The Acquisition Advisory Panel noted in its 2007 report that most federal agencies have not engaged systematically in human capital planning for their acquisition workforces.³⁰ However, while our past work at DOD has shown that acquisition workforce planning is not an easy task and can take several years to accomplish, we have also emphasized that government agencies will not be in a sound position to adjust to the systemic challenge of creating a capable acquisition workforce without proper strategic workforce planning.³¹

DHS Has Not Developed a Coordinated Acquisition Workforce Planning Process

Our prior work has shown that strategic workforce planning is most likely to succeed if top management officials set the overall goals and direction of the effort and involve stakeholders in developing and implementing strategies to achieve the goals. For example, we found that workforce planning efforts at the National Aeronautics and Space Administration were facilitated by the agency's leaders and human capital managers setting the agency's overall direction and goals and further involving the mission directorates and centers in developing human capital strategy documents.³² However, DHS has not set an overall direction or fully involved stakeholders—including component procurement and program offices, CHCO, and component human capital offices—for acquisition workforce planning. DHS's current departmentwide human capital

²⁹GAO, *Framework for Assessing the Acquisition Function at Federal Agencies*, [GAO-05-218G](#) (Washington, D.C.: September 2005).

³⁰*Report of the Acquisition Advisory Panel to the Office of Federal Procurement Policy and the United States Congress*, January 2007.

³¹GAO, *Acquisition Workforce: Status of Agency Efforts to Address Future Needs*, [GAO-03-55](#) (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 18, 2002) and GAO, *Federal Acquisitions and Contracting: Systemic Challenges Need Attention*, [GAO-07-1098T](#) (Washington, D.C.: July 17, 2007).

³²GAO, *NASA: Progress Made on Strategic Human Capital Management, but Future Program Challenges Remain*, [GAO-07-1004](#) (Washington, D.C.: Aug. 8, 2007).

planning documents provide only limited information about the contract specialist career field and do not include data on other acquisition-related career fields. While these documents will be revised for fiscal year 2009, CPO and CHCO representatives told us they do not expect the acquisition workforce will be more fully addressed in the updated documents, but instead that CPO will develop a separate plan in the future.

Currently, DHS components have the primary responsibility for workforce planning, and representatives from the procurement and program offices we reviewed generally told us that workforce needs are identified within their offices as they arise or on an annual basis, such as during the budget process. Some components and offices independently developed acquisition-related workforce plans. For example, the Coast Guard developed a strategic human capital plan for its acquisition workforce; TSA developed a human capital plan for its Office of Acquisition as we recommended in 2004; and the United States Visitor and Immigrant Status Indicator Technology program developed a strategic human capital plan.³³ However, DHS has not developed guidance that outlines specific goals or expectations for acquisition workforce planning, such as the types of acquisition-related positions to be included, a time frame for planning, or how results should be communicated between components and CPO.³⁴ CPO representatives told us their goal is to play a supporting role with the components, providing assistance and tools for workforce planning, but noted that they do not have a formal role in reviewing components' acquisition workforce planning efforts.

In addition, the department generally has not established focal points within the components on acquisition workforce issues that extend beyond procurement. This situation inhibits CPO's efforts to inform planning for acquisition workforce needs outside of the procurement offices. Acquisition Workforce Branch representatives told us that they do not have points of contact who would enable them to understand program office staffing needs or obtain input from program office stakeholders on workforce planning. DHS has recently taken steps that may help to better address program office staffing needs, although it is not yet clear whether

³³GAO, *Transportation Security Administration: High-Level Attention Needed to Strengthen Acquisition Function*, GAO-04-544 (Washington, D.C.: May 28, 2004).

³⁴In July 2007, CHCO issued a departmentwide guide that includes principles and a model for workforce planning, but this guide does not address the acquisition workforce specifically.

these steps will fully address this challenge. In fiscal year 2007, DHS created a Program Management Council that included DHS and CPO program management personnel and program managers from the various components to address departmentwide program management issues, including workforce issues. CPO also formed an Acquisition Program Management Division to provide oversight and support for acquisition program offices throughout DHS. Finally, DHS representatives told us that they are considering establishing a position with authority for acquisition issues within components, a step that could provide a centralized point of contact for program office information.

Further, while our prior work has shown the importance of human capital professionals partnering with agency leaders and managers, including acquisition officials, to develop workforce plans, CHCO has a limited role in strategic planning for the acquisition workforce. According to CHCO representatives, only one person within the office is responsible for workforce planning. In addition, for two of the three procurement offices where we conducted in-depth reviews of workforce planning, DHS representatives noted that their human capital offices had no involvement in procurement office workforce planning efforts.

DHS's Narrow Acquisition Workforce Definition Limits the Scope of Planning

According to CPO representatives, formally incorporating a workforce position into the acquisition workforce definition encompasses identifying the current career field population, determining core competencies, developing certification standards, and ensuring relevant training. DHS's current acquisition workforce definition—composed of contract specialists, program managers, and COTRs—generally parallels the minimum set of acquisition functions outlined in OFPP guidance but does not encompass the range of acquisition activities beyond the minimum standard.³⁵ DHS officials acknowledge the need to expand their acquisition workforce definition as suggested by OFPP guidance, but have not yet established an interim definition that identifies which positions should be included. CPO representatives told us that while they expect to add some positions from DOD's acquisition workforce definition, they believe DHS's

³⁵OFPP Policy Letter 05-01. According to the letter, the Services Acquisition Reform Act of 2003 defines acquisition to include, among traditional contracting functions, requirements definition, measurement of contract performance, and technical and management direction. One of the principal purposes of this letter is to include formally these individuals in the definition of the acquisition workforce so they can be trained and developed using common standards.

definition and certification standards need to be tailored to its homeland security mission and the statutes and executive orders under which the department operates.³⁶

The current definition does not include most of the acquisition-related functions we found staff performing in the nine program offices we reviewed. In these offices, some of the most commonly reported acquisition-related functions beyond those already included in the current definition are budgeting, logistics, systems engineering, and test and evaluation. Since CPO generally only monitors staff included in the current definition of the acquisition workforce, DHS has limited insight into the number and skill sets of the full range of employees performing acquisition-related work. Without a broader acquisition workforce definition that reflects the workforce performing acquisition-related functions, DHS cannot determine critical skills and competencies needed by particular positions and establish a baseline count of personnel currently performing acquisition-related functions—key information needed for an effective workforce plan. A narrow definition also hinders CPO's ability to monitor staff performing acquisition-related functions and ensure that these staff receive appropriate training, both of which are steps toward monitoring progress in closing workforce gaps. For example, according to the CPO, expanding the definition would lead to improved tracking of the broader acquisition workforce and development of certification standards and competencies for additional career fields.

While DHS has recognized the benefits of expanding its acquisition workforce definition, and officials have stated that expanding the definition is part of the agency's human capital planning efforts, the department is in the early stages of doing so. The department has taken initial steps towards adding its first new career field—test and evaluation—to its definition, but, according to CPO representatives, staff turnover and competing priorities have significantly slowed this expansion effort. Estimated time frames and current allocation of staff resources suggest that it will likely be many years before the acquisition workforce definition expansion is complete. CPO representatives estimated that determining core competencies and developing DHS-specific certification standards for each career field would take between 12 and 18 months and

³⁶The Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act of 1990 (10 U.S.C. §1701 et seq.) recognized acquisition as a multidisciplinary career field for DOD comprised of 11 functional areas and directed the Secretary of Defense to establish minimum education, training, and experience requirements.

would require the full-time commitment of one staff member. Currently, one staff member in CPO is responsible for the acquisition workforce definition expansion, but this individual is also partly responsible for managing acquisition workforce training and certification for existing career fields. As a result, CPO is only able to expand the definition one career field at a time. However, in September 2008, CPO representatives told us that they anticipated they would implement an interim certification process that will leverage DOD certification standards while they work to develop DHS-specific certification standards, and that they plan to hire additional staff to support the expansion effort.

DHS Lacks Sufficient Data to Fully Assess Total Acquisition Workforce Needs

DHS also lacks sufficient data to fully assess total acquisition workforce needs, including the use of contractors. For example, DHS does not have data to comprehensively determine where workforce gaps exist in the competencies, skills, and staffing levels required to meet programmatic goals. Understanding these needs is key to helping agencies develop effective workforce strategies. For example, in October 2007 we reported that OPM used a combination of agencywide and division-level strategies to assess the skills and competencies of its mission critical occupations and used the results to develop plans to address current and projected deficiencies in these occupations.³⁷

CPO collects and maintains some data on positions in DHS's current acquisition workforce definition, such as the numbers of personnel employed and certified. However, CPO generally does not have other information on these employees that is critical to acquisition workforce planning, such as a workforce inventory of employees' knowledge, skills, and competencies and data on the use of incentives, the average time period to fill vacancies, and attrition, including feedback from exit interviews. Without such data, DHS cannot create a comprehensive profile of its current acquisition workforce to help identify workforce gaps for these positions, develop effective workforce strategies, or evaluate the effectiveness of its current human capital approaches. For example, while Congress requires DHS and other agencies to develop an acquisition workforce succession plan that focuses on warranted contracting officers and program managers by January 2009, CPO representatives told us that they lack sufficient data on program managers to include these positions

³⁷GAO, *Office of Personnel Management: Opportunities Exist to Build on Recent Progress in Internal Human Capital Capacity*, [GAO-08-11](#) (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 31, 2007).

in the plan. Further, while DHS officials have identified various other positions that they consider important for successful acquisitions, such as test and evaluation and business and financial management, DHS generally does not collect workforce data to identify the number of department personnel performing these functions.

DHS's lack of comprehensive acquisition workforce data is due in part to inadequate systems for collecting and maintaining data. For example, some acquisition-related positions, such as program managers, are not directly associated with specific government position classification series and therefore cannot be identified through DHS's human capital information systems. In addition, DHS does not have an effective system for maintaining training and certification data on its current acquisition workforce. The DHS Inspector General reported in May 2008 that DHS and three of its components likely do not have all of the training and certification information they need to make sound acquisition workforce management decisions, such as a current inventory of certified personnel and the acquisitions to which they are assigned.³⁸ Further, the department, like other executive civilian agencies, is required to maintain such information in the Federal Acquisition Institute's Acquisition Career Management Information System; however, CPO representatives told us they have several issues with this system, including difficulty in importing data from existing DHS systems and restrictions on what reports can be produced and who can view the reports.

DHS has recognized the need to improve its collection and maintenance of acquisition workforce data, but is just starting to address these issues. In addition to beginning a pilot test with CHCO to identify acquisition-related positions in one of DHS's human capital systems, CPO has also begun exploring a web-based training registration system as an option for identifying acquisition-related workforce positions. Efforts to improve staffing and certification data on its current acquisition workforce are also under way. For example, CPO recently revised a data collection instrument that gathers staffing and certification data from procurement

³⁸Department of Homeland Security, Office of Inspector General, *Acquisition Workforce Training and Qualifications*, OIG-08-56 (Washington, D.C.: May 2008).

offices as part of a larger acquisition oversight effort, but it is too early to assess the results of this modification.³⁹

DHS also has little insight into the extent of its components' use of contractors to support the acquisition function and the types of activities performed—despite the department's reliance on these contractors. Representatives from the procurement and program offices we reviewed noted that in some cases, contractor support is intended to be a temporary measure, and they would prefer to use government employees. However, DHS's reliance on acquisition support contractors was evidenced by the number of offices we found using these contractors and the types of tasks performed. Each of the nine procurement offices we reviewed, except the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center, hired acquisition support contractors.⁴⁰ Procurement offices hired contractors to perform tasks such as solicitation formation, contract award and management support, and contract closeout, as well as conducting audits and compliance reviews. Within the three procurement offices for which we reviewed statements of work, we found 14 statements of work that called for acquisition support contractors to provide services similar to those provided by government contract specialists. Five of the fourteen statements of work were for contracts that had been in effect for 1 year or longer as of the end of fiscal year 2007. In addition, six of the nine program offices we reviewed reported that support contractors were performing acquisition-related functions such as program management support, budgeting, cost estimating, logistics, or test and evaluation. In the two program offices for which we reviewed statements of work, contractors were hired to perform such tasks as preparing project and budget documents, monitoring and assisting with the development of program requirements and performance measures, supporting program oversight requirements, and developing strategic plans.

CPO generally does not collect data on the numbers of contractors performing acquisition-related functions or the types of tasks performed. CPO representatives explained that they do not consider contractors to be

³⁹See GAO, *Department of Homeland Security: Progress and Challenges in Implementing the Department's Acquisition Oversight Plan*, [GAO-07-900](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 13, 2007) for more information on DHS's Acquisition Oversight Plan.

⁴⁰Federal Law Enforcement Training Center representatives told us there are some contractors performing acquisition support functions, such as competitive sourcing, outside of the Procurement Division.

part of the acquisition workforce. Even at the component level, insight into the use of acquisition support contractors is likely limited. For example, according to ICE representatives, ICE does not collect data on the use of support contractors, and TSA Office of Acquisition representatives told us that program offices decide when to use support contractors, and that the Office of Acquisition may not know when a program office has hired a contractor. Our prior work has found that agencies need appropriate workforce planning strategies that include contractor personnel and that agencies' workforce plans should include data on the deployment of contractors and a consideration of which acquisition functions to maintain in house.⁴¹ In addition, our work and the work of others has identified risks associated with increased reliance on contractors, including acquisition support contractors, and has noted that additional staff resources may be needed to monitor contractors' performance of certain mission critical functions.⁴² Without greater insight into the department's use of acquisition support contractors, DHS cannot adequately assess its overall need for these contractors and determine the appropriate workforce mix, or ensure that oversight of these contractors is sufficient.

Conclusion

The magnitude and complexity of DHS's acquisition portfolio demands a sufficient, capable, flexible, and properly trained workforce. DHS's initiatives are positive steps toward building an effective acquisition workforce; however, these initiatives focus primarily on contract specialists and only partially address identified workforce challenges. While DHS has acknowledged the need to expand its efforts beyond contract specialists, it has not yet determined how it would implement such an expansion. DHS also has acknowledged the need for a broader acquisition workforce definition, but without establishing such a definition, even on an interim basis, the department will be challenged to more fully address acquisition workforce needs. Further, without documented performance goals and implementation steps for its current

⁴¹GAO, *Defense Management: DOD Needs to Reexamine Its Extensive Reliance on Contractors and Continue to Improve Management and Oversight*, [GAO-08-572T](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 11, 2008) and [GAO-05-218G](#).

⁴²GAO, *Department of Homeland Security: Progress and Continuing Concerns with Acquisition Management*, [GAO-08-1164T](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 17, 2008) and [GAO-07-990](#).

initiatives, DHS will not be able to evaluate the extent to which these initiatives are helping to build and sustain the acquisition workforce.

Even if fully implemented, these initiatives are not a substitute for long-term strategic workforce planning. Such planning would allow DHS to fully assess its actual acquisition workforce needs and determine whether its current efforts are sufficient and prioritized appropriately. To develop a comprehensive strategic acquisition workforce plan, DHS needs to incorporate key elements of effective planning, such as a coordinated planning process that fully includes stakeholders and a comprehensive analysis of acquisition workforce gaps. While DHS has made strides toward broadening its focus to more fully include program management stakeholders, the department has not developed a CPO and CHCO led planning process to provide the organizational vision and stability needed. Further the department has not collected and maintained comprehensive data on its government and contractor workforce to develop the insight required to assess acquisition workforce gaps. Until DHS improves its strategic acquisition workforce planning, the department will continue to be at risk of not having a sufficient acquisition workforce to support current and future homeland security mission needs.

Recommendations for Executive Action

To improve DHS's ability to effectively manage its current initiatives and plan strategically for its acquisition workforce, we recommend that the Under Secretary for Management implement the following five actions:

- establish an interim working definition of the acquisition workforce that more accurately reflects the employees performing acquisition-related functions to guide current efforts, while continuing to formally add career fields to the definition;
- determine whether the department's current initiatives related to recruiting and hiring are appropriate for acquisition-related career fields other than contract specialists and, if so, develop plans to implement the initiatives within the broader acquisition workforce;
- develop a comprehensive implementation plan to execute the existing DHS acquisition workforce initiatives. The implementation plan should include elements such as performance goals, time frames, implementation actions and related milestones, and resource requirements;

-
- direct CHCO and CPO to establish a joint process for coordinating future acquisition workforce planning efforts with the components for the purpose of informing departmentwide planning efforts; and
 - improve the collection and maintenance of data on the acquisition workforce by:
 - assessing what additional data on current acquisition workforce members, such as attrition data, would help inform workforce planning efforts and then developing a strategy to collect that information;
 - expanding the collection of acquisition workforce data from the appropriate component point of contact to include all positions that DHS determines to be acquisition-related;
 - collecting data on the use of acquisition support contractors to inform the strategic acquisition workforce planning process; and
 - conducting an assessment of options for creating systems to maintain comprehensive acquisition workforce data and selecting the appropriate system.

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

We provided a draft of this report to DHS for review and comment. In written comments, the department generally concurred with our recommendations, citing actions taken and efforts under way to address acquisition workforce challenges. The department's comments are reprinted in appendix II. DHS also provided technical comments, which we incorporated as appropriate.

Many of the initiatives DHS cites in its comments, such as the Acquisition Professional Career Program to hire entry-level contract specialists, centralized hiring for contract specialists, and plans to add career fields to the acquisition workforce definition, are noted in our report and are important steps toward building an effective acquisition workforce. Building and sustaining an acquisition workforce has been an ongoing challenge since the department was created; continued progress and successful implementation of these recent efforts will require sustained leadership and management attention.

In response to our first recommendation, to establish an interim working definition of the acquisition workforce that more accurately reflects the employees performing acquisition-related functions, DHS agreed and stated that it has established an interim acquisition workforce definition that includes positions that devote a minimum of 50 percent of time and responsibilities to performing acquisition duties. The department further noted that this interim definition includes contract specialists, program

managers, and COTRs, and that efforts have been initiated to add four additional positions. However, as we describe in this report, the three positions that comprise this interim definition were already considered by the department to be included in its definition. Since CPO generally only monitors staff included in the current definition, without a broader definition, DHS has limited insight into the number and skill sets of the full range of employees performing acquisition-related work. Therefore, we continue to believe that in order to guide current acquisition workforce efforts, the interim definition should be broadened to reflect the career fields that the department plans to add.

Regarding our second recommendation, that DHS determine whether the department's current recruiting and hiring initiatives are appropriate for acquisition-related career fields other than contract specialists and, if so, develop expansion plans accordingly, DHS stated it plans to expand its Acquisition Professional Career Program. We agree this is a step in the right direction. However, assessing the appropriateness of the department's two other current recruiting and hiring initiatives—the use of human capital hiring flexibilities and the centralized hiring initiative—for additional career fields could provide further opportunities for DHS to leverage existing initiatives to address identified acquisition workforce shortages. Further, the department's response did not address the development of implementation plans for the expansion of the Acquisition Professional Career Program, a key step for guiding the department's efforts in this area going forward.

In response to our third recommendation, that DHS develop a comprehensive implementation plan to execute the existing acquisition workforce initiatives, DHS stated that the Acquisition Workforce Branch has a comprehensive strategy focused on eight current initiatives. However, DHS has not developed some of the key elements contained in our recommendation, including implementation actions and related milestones and resource requirements. Developing a plan that includes these elements is important to ensuring that the department can effectively monitor and evaluate the implementation of these initiatives.

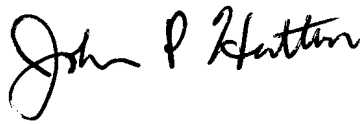
Regarding our fourth recommendation, that CHCO and CPO establish a joint process for coordinating future acquisition workforce planning efforts with the components, the department noted several ways in which CHCO and CPO currently work together on acquisition workforce issues. However, DHS's response does not address what process the department will use for CHCO and CPO to coordinate future acquisition workforce planning efforts with the components. As we explain in this report, a

process to facilitate the involvement of key stakeholders—such as component procurement and program offices, CHCO, and component human capital offices—can increase the likelihood of success for workforce planning. Further, although DHS’s response noted that members of the Acquisition Career Managers committee provide feedback and guidance on workforce initiatives, component acquisition career managers are primarily located within procurement offices and therefore represent only some of the key stakeholders needed to provide input on a comprehensive strategic acquisition workforce plan that would include program office staffing needs.

In response to our recommendations to improve the department’s collection and maintenance of acquisition workforce data, DHS noted its ongoing efforts to collect data on the current acquisition workforce through quarterly reports as well as its pilot test with CHCO to identify members of the acquisition workforce in an existing human capital system. While these efforts are an important part of beginning to improve acquisition workforce data, we believe DHS needs to take additional steps. Specifically, the only new plans mentioned are to collect attrition and retirement eligibility data on the current acquisition workforce and to collect data on additional acquisition career fields after those career fields are formally defined. However, as we found in this report, DHS lacks other information on employees in its current workforce critical to acquisition workforce planning, such as an inventory of employees’ knowledge, skills, and competencies, and data on the use of incentives and the average time period to fill vacancies. DHS also generally lacks basic information on acquisition-related positions not in the current definition, such as the number of employees performing these functions, which could help in workforce planning efforts. Moreover, although acquisition support contractors were used by more than three quarters of the procurement and program offices we reviewed, DHS does not have data to adequately assess its overall need for these contractors, determine the appropriate workforce mix of government and contractor employees, or ensure sufficient oversight. Without taking further actions to address the need for comprehensive acquisition workforce data, the department will continue to be challenged to effectively develop and evaluate acquisition workforce strategies.

We are sending copies of this report to the Secretary of Homeland Security, the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, and other interested parties. This report will also be available at no charge on GAO’s Web site at <http://www.gao.gov>.

If you have any questions concerning this report, please contact me at (202) 512-4841 or by e-mail at huttonj@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. Other staff making key contributions to this report were Amelia Shachoy, Assistant Director; Anne McDonough-Hughes; Janet McKelvey; Anthony Bova; Kathryn O'Dea; Ann Marie Udale; Karen Sloan; Sylvia Schatz; Arthur James Jr.; and Gregory Wilmoth.



John P. Hutton
Director
Acquisition and Sourcing Management

Appendix I: Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

Our objectives were to identify and assess the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) efforts to build and sustain an effective acquisition workforce and determine the extent to which DHS has planned strategically for the acquisition workforce.

To identify and assess DHS's efforts to build and sustain an effective acquisition workforce, we interviewed representatives from the Office of the Chief Procurement Officer (CPO)—including the Chief Procurement Officer and members of the Acquisition Workforce Branch within the Contracts Operation Division and the Acquisition Program Management Division—the Office of the Chief Financial Officer, and the Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer (CHCO). We discussed topics such as the current status of the acquisition workforce, planning and budgeting processes for the acquisition workforce, current and planned acquisition workforce initiatives, and the use of acquisition support contractors. When available, we obtained and reviewed supporting documents, such as plans for acquisition workforce initiatives and acquisition workforce data collected by CPO. In addition, we reviewed recent testimonies given by senior DHS leadership as well as relevant reports issued by GAO and the DHS Inspector General. Finally, we reviewed data from the Office of Personnel Management's (OPM) Central Personnel Data File on contract specialists in DHS's workforce to assess the department's hiring and retention of this population.¹ We have previously assessed the reliability of the Central Personnel Data File and based on that assessment and information provided by OPM in February 2008, we found it sufficiently reliable for our purposes.²

To gain additional perspective on acquisition workforce issues, we interviewed representatives from the nine procurement offices that

¹Of the positions in DHS's current acquisition workforce definition, only contract specialists are associated with a specific job series, so it was the only position for which we could obtain reliable data from OPM.

²GAO, *OPM's Central Personnel Data File: Data Appear Sufficiently Reliable to Meet Most Customer Needs*, [GAO/GGD-98-199](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 30, 1998). Also, in a document dated February 28, 2008, an OPM official confirmed that OPM continues to follow the Central Personnel Data File data quality standards and procedures contained in our 1998 report. OPM's data do not include uniformed Coast Guard personnel.

support DHS headquarters and components.³ Also, we selected nine program offices of major investments—one associated with each of DHS’s procurement offices—that included a range of investment sizes, staffing levels, and project phases (see app. III for a list of programs). At procurement offices, topics we discussed included the current status of the acquisition workforce, planning and budgeting processes for the acquisition workforce, acquisition workforce initiatives, and the use of acquisition support contractors. For each program, we interviewed key program representatives—such as the program manager, the contracting officer’s technical representative, and the contract specialist assigned to that program. We discussed subjects such as the composition of the program office, the process for identifying and filling acquisition workforce needs, and the program’s use of acquisition support contractors. In addition, we collected information from each program office on the functional composition of its workforce as of the end of March 2008. At both procurement and program offices, we also requested and reviewed available documentation, such as acquisition workforce staffing reports and human capital planning documents.

To gather more detailed information about selected acquisition workforce topics, such as the use of acquisition support contractors, we selected three procurement offices and two program offices for in-depth review. Specifically, the Office of Procurement Operations, Transportation Security Administration’s (TSA) Office of Acquisition, and Customs and Border Protection’s (CBP) Procurement Directorate were selected based on fiscal year 2007 procurement spending, the office’s history and reporting structure, and consideration for GAO’s ongoing work. We also reviewed the previously selected program offices associated with TSA and CBP (the Electronic Baggage Screening Program and the Automated Commercial Environment Program, respectively). To learn about the type of work performed by acquisition support contractors, we reviewed statements of work for all acquisition support contracts active as of the end of fiscal year 2007 associated with the selected procurement and program offices. We also spoke with representatives from the component

³In April 2008, DHS established a new procurement office, the Office of Selective Acquisitions. As of June 2008, this office had three staff members. Because this office was not in existence at the time we began our work, we did not include it in our review. For the purposes of this report, we refer to offices that carry out contracting functions as procurement offices, although some components use different titles for these offices (see app. III for a full list of office titles).

human capital offices and budget offices associated with these procurement and program offices.

To determine the extent to which DHS has planned strategically for its acquisition workforce, we reviewed the information gathered during interviews with CPO and procurement and program offices. In addition, we reviewed and analyzed recent testimonies given by senior DHS leadership and past GAO reports on DHS acquisition and workforce issues and other reports on the federal acquisition workforce.

We conducted this performance audit from September 2007 until November 2008 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Appendix II: Comments from the Department of Homeland Security

U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, DC 20528

NOV 12 2008



**Homeland
Security**

Mr. John Hutton
Director, Acquisition and Sourcing Management
Government Accountability Office
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Hutton:

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) appreciates the opportunity to review and comment on Draft Report GAO-09-30, Department of Homeland Security: A Strategic Approach Is Needed to Better Ensure the Acquisition Workforce Can Meet Mission Needs (GAO Job Code 120688).

The Department's Office of the Chief Procurement Officer (OCPO) generally concurs with the recommendations. As with other federal agencies, DHS faces challenges in building and sustaining a capable acquisition workforce, and, as the youngest and in many ways most visible Department, DHS faces even steeper challenges in this regard. Although many challenges remain, significant progress has been made since we began to resource acquisition workforce activities in late summer and fall of 2007. Since that time, several initiatives highlight our commitment to a strategic approach that will enable the Department's acquisition workforce to meet its needs.

While aggressive progress continues to be made in defining all DHS acquisition career fields, OCPO officials have established an interim acquisition workforce definition, to include contracting officers, program managers, and contracting officer technical representatives. Further, we have initiated the expansion of the workforce to include Test and Evaluation, Logistics, Systems Engineering, and Program Cost Estimating. In addition, that office continues its close partnership with the Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer (CHCO) on numerous strategic human capital planning initiatives, to include but not limited to the use of existing federal databases to capture critical workforce data. The OCPO's Acquisition Career Managers (ACM) Committee continues its groundbreaking work in defining the individual components' human capital priorities. The ACM Committee is comprised of the individual component acquisition career managers and OCPO representatives. CHCO is also represented, adding valuable insight into the processes necessary for the success of the committee's initiatives. The committee's work has resulted in DHS-wide acquisition hiring, training, and retention initiatives impacting acquisition personnel across all DHS component organizations.

Positions within the Department that devote a minimum of 50% of time and responsibilities to performing acquisition duties comprise our interim-defined workforce. Currently, DHS has established two acquisition workforce career fields and one acquisition workforce assignment

specific specialty: (1) contract specialists, (2) program managers, and (3) contracting officer's technical representatives. Further, the Department has initiated the expansion of the workforce to include Test and Evaluation, Logistics, Systems Engineering, and Program Cost Estimating. OCPO personnel will begin by utilizing the Department of Defense definition and competencies for the new career fields until such time as DHS specific or Federal-wide certification programs are developed.

To address long-term projected skill gaps, OCPO personnel initiated and executed a successful entry-level program to hire extremely talented individuals. The success of this effort is enabling the program's expansion in dual tracks (business and technical). Furthermore, OCPO personnel are partnering with the Federal Acquisition Institute for support services to develop strategies to recruit mid-level career professionals.

Despite an average attrition rate of 15% per year for contract specialists across the Department, DHS has a net gain of 19% from the end of FY 2007 to the end of FY 2008. OCPO plans to leverage this success in centralized recruiting to successfully staff all acquisition DHS billets.

OCPO officials understand the need to engage systemically in acquisition workforce human capital planning. Data gathering and analysis are key to our understanding of the acquisition workforce. The OCPO quarterly Operational Status Reports provide insight into on-board and vacancy totals for our defined acquisition career fields and specialties across all component organizations, and OCPO is waiting for Department of Defense and/or Office of Federal Procurement Policy methodology for effectively capturing contractor support data. As we implement current initiatives and consider future efforts, OCPO personnel will be sure not to duplicate existing federal-wide initiatives such as those prescribed in the FY 2009 National Defense Authorization Act, Section 869, Acquisition Workforce Development Strategic Plan. Accordingly, OCPO will continue to coordinate with the DHS Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer, the Office of Management and Budget's Office of Federal Procurement Policy, and other federal workforce organizations as DHS develops its strategic plan that complements the federal initiatives and addresses the GAO recommendations.

Various OCPO initiatives have merged into a consolidated plan of action. Each initiative is a critical part of the recruitment-hiring-training-certifying-retention continuum. Specific actions to be taken are detailed herein, and timelines where applicable are also noted.

GAO recommends that the Under Secretary for Management take five actions to improve DHS's ability to effectively manage its current initiatives and plan strategically for its acquisition workforce. We have taken or plan to take the following actions.

Recommendation 1

Establish an interim workforce definition of the acquisition workforce that more accurately reflects the employees performing acquisition-functions to guide current efforts, while continuing to formally add career fields to the definition.

Response

The Department agrees with the recommendation and has established the following interim workforce definition: Positions within the Department that devote a minimum of 50% of time and responsibilities to performing acquisition duties. Currently, DHS has established two acquisition workforce career fields and one acquisition workforce assignment specific specialty: (1) contract specialists, (2) program managers, and (3) contracting officer's technical representatives. Further, the Department has initiated the expansion of the workforce to include Test and Evaluation, Logistics, Systems Engineering, and Program Cost Estimating.

Recommendation 2

Determine whether the Department's current initiatives related to recruiting and hiring are appropriate for acquisition-related career fields other than contract specialists and, if so, develop plans to implement the initiatives within the broader acquisition workforce.

Response

The Department agrees with the recommendation. DHS will leverage the successful execution of the Department-wide Acquisition Professional Career Program (APCP) to help build the broader acquisition workforce. Plans are to expand the program by 52 additional participants in FY 2009 in dual tracks (business and technical) by the fourth quarter of FY 2009, equating to a cumulative total of 100 participants. Furthermore, DHS will partner with the Federal Acquisition Institute for support services to develop a plan and execution strategy to recruit mid-level career professionals seeking to transition to an acquisition career field.

Recommendation 3

Develop a comprehensive implementation plan to execute the existing DHS acquisition workforce initiatives. The implementation plan should include elements such as performance goals, time frames, implementation actions and related milestones, and resource requirements.

Response

We agree. The DHS Acquisition Workforce Branch in the OCPO has a comprehensive implementation strategy focusing on these current initiatives:

1. Further expand the Department definition of the Acquisition Workforce by developing the Test and Evaluation, Logistics, Systems Engineering, and Program Cost Analysis certification programs.
2. Develop and implement a process to code all acquisition billets to better identify positions within the Department that devote a minimum of 50% of time and responsibilities to performing acquisition duties.
3. Develop and execute a Department-wide, Acquisition Workforce Human Capital and Succession Plan by January 28, 2009 in accordance with the FY 2008 National Defense Authorization Act.

4. Continue the successful execution of the Department-wide Acquisition Professional Career Program to help build the broader acquisition workforce. Expand the program by 52 additional participants in FY 2009 in dual tracks (business and technical) by the fourth quarter of FY09, equating to a cumulative total of 100 participants.
5. Continue the successful leveraging of the direct hire and reemployed annuitant hiring flexibilities to expedite hiring and to fill critical vacancies.
6. Grow the centralized hiring concept through assumption of the lead role in all Department-wide acquisition-related vacancy announcement postings.
7. Develop and execute a centralized acquisition workforce training program comprising of certification, targeted, and developmental training opportunities.
8. Publish a DHS course catalog and implement a central registration system to be deployed by the third quarter of FY 2009.

Recommendation 4

Direct CHCO and CPO to establish a joint process for coordinating future acquisition workforce planning efforts with the components for the purpose of informing Department-wide planning efforts.

Response

The Department agrees with the recommendation. The OCPO's primary interface with CHCO is close coordination on the development of the FY 2008 National Defense Authorization Act-required acquisition workforce human capital plan and succession plan as well as on reporting requirements on the Department's use of the Direct Hire and Reemployed Annuitant hiring authorities. In addition, OCPO and CHCO jointly work on a quarterly Office of Personnel Management requirement for a Contracting Specialist Competency Gap Analysis. OCPO staff partner with OCHCO personnel to code all DHS acquisition billets in the National Finance Center personnel database. This effort will help identify the workforce. Further joint efforts with CHCO include the current leveraging of the successful work of the Department's Acquisition Career Manager's (ACM) Committee allowing CHCO membership, thus enabling increased committee focus on recruitment, hiring, training, certification, and retention initiatives. Component members regularly offer feedback and guidance on workforce initiatives. CHCO has reciprocated by allowing OCPO to participate with senior component human resources (HR) representatives in the Department's HR Council.

Recommendation 5

Improve the collection and maintenance of data on the acquisition workforce by:

- A. Assessing what additional data on current acquisition workforce members, such as attrition data, would help inform workforce planning efforts and then developing a strategy to collect that information.

We agree. OCPO has leveraged its work in revamping the quarterly Operational Status Reports to include additional data points for analysis. Current data collected focuses on authorized, on-board, vacancy, and certification information, but plans call to expand the data collected to include attrition and retirement eligibility data as well.

- B. Expanding the collection of acquisition workforce data from the appropriate component point of contact to include all positions that DHS determines to be acquisition-related.

We generally concur with this part of the recommendation. OCPO is working with CHCO to utilize an existing system to capture all workforce data. Data specific to Contracting Specialists, Program Managers, and COTRs is currently captured via the quarterly Operational Status Reports. As additional acquisition career fields are formally defined, data on each defined career field will be specifically captured.

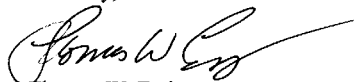
- C. Collecting data on the use of acquisition support contractors to inform the strategic acquisition workforce planning process.

We generally concur. We are waiting for Department of Defense and/or the Office of Federal Procurement Policy methodology for effectively capturing this data.

- D. Conducting an assessment of options for creating systems to maintain comprehensive acquisition workforce data and selecting the appropriate system.

The Department agrees with this part of the recommendation. OCPO is working with CHCO to utilize an existing system to capture all workforce data. Data specific to Contracting Specialists, Program Managers, and COTRs is currently captured via the quarterly Operational Status Reports. As additional acquisition career fields are formally defined, data on each defined career field will be specifically captured.

Sincerely,



Thomas W. Essig
Chief Procurement Officer
Department of Homeland Security

Appendix III: Procurement and Program Offices Reviewed

Component	Procurement office	Program office	Program description
DHS Headquarters/ National Protection and Programs Directorate ^a	Office of Procurement Operations	United States Visitor and Immigrant Status Indicator Technology	Program to provide biometric identity verification services to DHS components, including U.S. immigration and border management officials, and state and local law enforcement.
Coast Guard	Office of Contracting and Procurement	Rescue 21	Command, control, and communication system that improves mission execution in the coastal zone and results in improved response to distress calls and better coordination and interoperability with other government agencies and first responders.
Customs and Border Protection	Procurement Directorate	Automated Commercial Environment	Web-based import/export system consolidates seven systems into one portal; will provide advanced technology and information to decide, before shipment reaches U.S. borders, what cargo should be targeted, and what cargo should be expedited.
Customs and Border Protection	Secure Border Initiative Acquisition Office	Secure Border Initiative Tactical Infrastructure Program	Program is responsible for two major construction projects: Pedestrian Fence 225, the construction of 225 miles of pedestrian fence; and Vehicle Fence 300, the construction of 300 miles of vehicle fence. Tactical infrastructure includes fencing, roads, and lighting.
Federal Emergency Management Agency	Office of Acquisition Management	Flood Map Modernization	Program establishes a technology-based, cost effective process for updating, validating, and distributing flood risk data and digitalized flood maps nationwide.
Federal Law Enforcement Training Center	Procurement Division	Student Administration and Scheduling System	System will provide the support required for the integration of partnering organization recruitment, resource scheduling, student registration, student enrollment, marks processing, exam scheduling, automated testing, and transcript production.
Immigration and Customs Enforcement	Office of Acquisition Management	Student and Exchange Visitor Program	Web-based system manages data on schools, program sponsors, foreign students, exchange visitors, and their dependents during their approved participation in the U.S. education system so that only legitimate visitors enter the U.S.
Secret Service	Procurement Division	Enterprise Financial Management System	Integrated financial system provides for more efficient and effective business processes.
Transportation Security Administration	Office of Acquisition	Electronic Baggage Screening Program	Program implements a national checked-baggage screening system to protect against criminal and terrorist threats, while minimizing transportation industry and traveling public burdens.

Source: DHS data and GAO analysis.

^aThe Office of Procurement Operations provides contracting support to multiple DHS components that do not have their own acquisition staff, and its head of contracting activity reports directly to the chief procurement officer. The office provides contracting support to the United States Visitor and Immigrant Status Indicator Technology Program, which is under the National Protection and Programs Directorate.

GAO's Mission

The Government Accountability Office, the audit, evaluation, and investigative arm of Congress, exists to support Congress in meeting its constitutional responsibilities and to help improve the performance and accountability of the federal government for the American people. GAO examines the use of public funds; evaluates federal programs and policies; and provides analyses, recommendations, and other assistance to help Congress make informed oversight, policy, and funding decisions. GAO's commitment to good government is reflected in its core values of accountability, integrity, and reliability.

Obtaining Copies of GAO Reports and Testimony

The fastest and easiest way to obtain copies of GAO documents at no cost is through GAO's Web site (www.gao.gov). Each weekday, GAO posts newly released reports, testimony, and correspondence on its Web site. To have GAO e-mail you a list of newly posted products every afternoon, go to www.gao.gov and select "E-mail Updates."

Order by Mail or Phone

The first copy of each printed report is free. Additional copies are \$2 each. A check or money order should be made out to the Superintendent of Documents. GAO also accepts VISA and Mastercard. Orders for 100 or more copies mailed to a single address are discounted 25 percent. Orders should be sent to:

U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street NW, Room LM
Washington, DC 20548

To order by Phone: Voice: (202) 512-6000
TDD: (202) 512-2537
Fax: (202) 512-6061

To Report Fraud, Waste, and Abuse in Federal Programs

Contact:

Web site: www.gao.gov/fraudnet/fraudnet.htm

E-mail: fraudnet@gao.gov

Automated answering system: (800) 424-5454 or (202) 512-7470

Congressional Relations

Ralph Dawn, Managing Director, dawnr@gao.gov, (202) 512-4400
U.S. Government Accountability Office, 441 G Street NW, Room 7125
Washington, DC 20548

Public Affairs

Chuck Young, Managing Director, youngc1@gao.gov, (202) 512-4800
U.S. Government Accountability Office, 441 G Street NW, Room 7149
Washington, DC 20548