WORKFORCE PLANNING

Interior, EPA, and the Forest Service Should Strengthen Linkages to Their Strategic Plans and Improve Evaluation

What GAO Found

Interior, EPA, and the Forest Service vary in their approaches to workforce planning. Interior’s workforce planning occurs at its eight bureaus, which use departmental guidance to develop their own workforce plans in a generally consistent format. EPA issued an agencywide plan in 2006 that is currently being updated, and the Forest Service has issued annual agencywide workforce plans since 2007.

The agencies vary in the extent to which they incorporate the six leading workforce planning principles, but they generally do not link their workforce plans and their strategic plans or monitor and evaluate their workforce planning efforts. The six leading principles and agency actions are as follows:

- **Align workforce planning with strategic planning and budget formulation.** The agencies generally do not align their workforce and strategic plans and differ in whether they considered their workforce plans when formulating their budgets.
- **Involve managers, employees, and other stakeholders in planning.** The agencies varied in the extent to which they involved top managers and others in developing workforce plans.
- **Identify critical occupations, skills, and competencies and analyze workforce gaps.** The agencies have taken some steps to identify mission-critical occupations and competencies, which form the basis for much of the agencies’ workforce planning.
- **Develop strategies to address workforce gaps.** The agencies have identified some strategies to address certain workforce gaps.
- **Build capacity to support workforce strategies.** The agencies varied in the actions they have taken to support workforce planning efforts through the effective use of human capital flexibilities, such as recruitment and retention incentives.
- **Monitor and evaluate progress.** The agencies generally have not monitored and evaluated the results of their workforce planning efforts.

The agencies do not directly link their workforce planning and budget allocation processes. At Interior, although unit and program officials in some bureaus use workforce plans to distribute staff geographically, the bureaus do not track how program officials use workforce plans to allocate funds. EPA’s process for allocating resources involves making annual incremental adjustments to prior year allocations and does not directly link to workforce plans. The Forest Service’s budget allocation guidance does not mention workforce planning directly. However, according to Forest Service executive leaders, the agency takes workforce planning information into consideration at the unit and program levels during budget formulation and again during the annual budget allocation process.