

Why GAO Did This Study

Agencies must engage in a whole-of-government approach to protect the nation and its interests from diverse threats such as terrorism and infectious diseases. However, GAO has reported that gaps in national security staff knowledge and skills pose a barrier to the interagency collaboration needed to address these threats. Training and other professional development activities could help bridge those gaps. GAO was asked to identify: (1) training and other professional development activities intended to improve the ability of key national security agencies' personnel to collaborate across organizational lines and (2) how these activities were intended to improve participants' collaboration abilities.

To address these objectives, GAO asked nine key agencies involved in national security issues to submit information on professional development activities that were explicitly intended to build staff knowledge or skills for improving interagency collaboration. In addition, GAO gathered and analyzed other information such as target audience, participation levels, and participating agencies. GAO also interviewed responsible human capital and training officials. GAO will explore how interagency participation and other factors may influence the success of these activities in a subsequent review.

GAO does not have any recommendations in this report. Technical comments from the agencies reviewed were incorporated where appropriate.

View [GAO-11-108](#) or key components. For more information, contact Bernice Steinhardt at (202) 512-6543 or steinhardt@gao.gov.

NATIONAL SECURITY

An Overview of Professional Development Activities Intended to Improve Interagency Collaboration

What GAO Found

GAO identified 225 professional development activities intended to improve participants' ability to collaborate across agency lines. These ranged from ten-month joint professional military education programs and year-long rotations to 30-minute online training courses. Because these activities varied widely across dimensions such as length and learning mode, the activities were grouped to allow for appropriate analysis and comparisons of their characteristics, as shown in the table.

Types and Quantity of Professional Development Activities Identified

Activity type	Description	Quantity
Training Courses and Programs	Planned learning for acquiring and retaining the skills, knowledge, and attitudes required to complete specific tasks.	104
Exercise Programs	Scenario-based training that allows for the development, improvement, or display of specific capabilities or skills.	90
Interagency Rotation Programs	Work assignments at a different agency from the one in which the participant is normally employed, with an explicit professional development purpose.	7
Joint Professional Military Education Programs	A subset of military career education intended to foster collaboration across service branches, agencies, and countries for a whole-of-government approach to national security.	13
Leadership Development Programs	Programs with a national security focus, intended to build leadership skills such as communication, teamwork, and staff development.	11

Source: GAO analysis of agency data.

Overall, we found that DOD, State, and DHS provided most of the professional development activities that met our criteria. We found some variation within the different types of activities, mostly related to provider, mode of delivery, or participation levels. DHS, DOD, and State provided the majority of training activities, which primarily consisted of short-term, online, or classroom courses. DOD provided most of the exercise programs and all of the JPME programs. DOD and State provided the majority of interagency rotational programs and all of the leadership development programs that met our criteria. Although agencies could not provide participation data in every instance, the data obtained indicated that overall, interagency participation was lower in activities that required a longer time commitment, such as rotations and full-time joint professional military education.

Analysis of the activities GAO identified showed that they are intended to provide opportunities to (1) build common foundational knowledge of the national security arena; (2) develop specific skills, such as how to plan, lead, and execute interagency efforts; and (3) establish networks among personnel from national security agencies that could lead to improved interagency collaboration. According to human capital and training officials at several agencies, the level of interagency participation may affect how a given professional development activity can improve its participants' ability to collaborate.