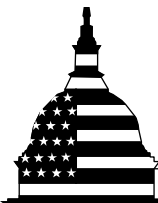GAO

January 2013

ACQUISITION WORKFORCE

DOT Lacks Data, Oversight, and Strategic Focus Needed to Address Significant Workforce Challenges

GAO

Accountability ★ Integrity ★ Reliability

ACQUISITION WORKFORCE

DOT Lacks Data, Oversight, and Strategic Focus Needed to Address Significant Workforce Challenges

Why GAO Did This Study

With $5.6 billion in procurement spending in fiscal year 2011, DOT relies on its acquisition workforce—including contracting and program management staff—to negotiate and administer contracts and manage large-scale acquisition programs. Having sufficient numbers of adequately trained acquisition professionals is critical to ensuring maximum value and benefit to the department.

In a fiscal year 2012 Senate appropriations bill report, GAO was directed to assess (1) DOT's efforts to identify acquisition workforce needs, and (2) the Office of the Secretary of Transportation's role in providing oversight and support for acquisition workforce planning and management. GAO reviewed DOT's acquisition workforce plans for 2010, 2011, and 2012 along with supporting documentation, and interviewed agency officials on how the data were collected and used. The primary focus was on five OAs that accounted for 92 percent of DOT procurement spending in fiscal year 2011.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of Transportation take steps to improve DOT's ability to address workforce needs, such as improving internal controls for acquisition workforce data and providing guidance to ensure that the OAs collect and report workforce data consistently. DOT acknowledged past data and coordination challenges and generally concurred with our recommendations. DOT also stated it now has the management framework needed to effectively monitor and develop the acquisition workforce.

View GAO-13-117. For more information, contact Belva Martin at (202) 512-4841 or martinb@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

The Department of Transportation (DOT) lacks sufficient and reliable data to fully identify its acquisition workforce needs and assess progress in addressing shortfalls over time. Over the last 3 years, the Office of the Senior Procurement Executive—the office within the Office of the Secretary of Transportation responsible for department-wide acquisition workforce management—has submitted acquisition workforce plans that reported progress in increasing the size of the workforce and the number of personnel certified to meet education, training, and experience requirements. However, GAO identified data limitations due to a lack of internal controls to maintain, compare, and reconcile the data compiled from DOT's 11 operating administrations (OA), and determined that the department-level data were not sufficient to assess progress over time. For example, DOT did not maintain the data it used to prepare the 2010 and 2011 plans and in some cases the data were also not available from the OAs. By contrast, GAO obtained the data DOT used to prepare the 2012 plan, compared it with data from the OAs, and interviewed OA officials about the sources and methods they used to report the data. GAO found inconsistencies in how the OAs reported their data that affect the reliability of the department's aggregate data, but determined that the OA-level data were sufficiently reliable to make observations about staffing challenges and certification shortfalls at the individual OAs. Specifically, GAO found that 4 of the 11 OAs would need to replace 50 percent or more of their contract specialists by the end of fiscal year 2013 to meet staffing targets. In addition, some OAs reported low certification rates for program/project managers and contracting officer's representatives, which increases the risk of DOT programs not receiving appropriate oversight.

DOT lacks the strategic focus and oversight needed to ensure that the department can meet its acquisition workforce goals. Federal policy requires agencies to conduct strategic planning to identify short- and long-term needs and plans to address them. The Office of the Senior Procurement Executive relies on the OAs to conduct acquisition workforce planning, but has not provided oversight or support to help ensure that they collect and maintain consistent data or use it to develop strategies to address workforce goals. Officials from the Senior Procurement Executive's office stated that they do not monitor the OAs' acquisition workforce data throughout the year and that their capacity to direct planning efforts is limited in part because they do not have the staff needed to perform oversight. Instead, officials stated that the office provides a focal point for coordination among the OAs, approves certifications, and provides information on training opportunities. According to leading practices identified in prior GAO work, agencies should link workforce goals to budget formulation to ensure that requests are adequate to implement workforce strategies. The Office of the Senior Procurement Executive has taken steps to align workforce plans with its strategic goals and budget, but given the challenges with maintaining reliable data, lacks a sound baseline for assessing progress or for making a business case for directing resources or management attention to OAs that may face the greatest workforce risks. Until DOT addresses these issues, the department faces substantial risk that the workforce will not have the capacity or skills needed to effectively manage the department's acquisitions.

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United States Government Accountability Office

Contents

Abbreviations

DOT	Department of Transportation
FAA	Federal Aviation Administration
OA	Operating Administration
OFPP	Office of Federal Procurement Policy
FAITAS	Federal Acquisition Institute Training Application System

United States Government Accountability Office
Washington, DC 20548

January 23, 2013

The Honorable Chairman
The Honorable Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development,
  and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate

The Honorable Tom Latham
Chairman
The Honorable Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Transportation, Housing and Urban Development,
  and Related Agencies
Committee on Appropriations
House of Representatives

GAO and others have long recognized that the size and capabilities of the government's acquisition workforce is a strategic priority. In our 2011 high risk series update, we reported that the shortage of trained acquisition personnel impedes the capacity and capability of agencies, and puts the federal government at risk for significant overcharges and wasteful spending of the hundreds of billions of contract dollars it spends for goods and services each year.[1] In fiscal year 2011, the Department of Transportation's (DOT) acquisition workforce negotiated and administered more than $5 billion in contracts to procure a range of products and services and managed large-scale acquisition programs to build and maintain the national transportation system. However, DOT's Inspector General reported that the department has not made sufficient progress in implementing strategies and goals to increase the capability of the acquisition workforce and found that gaps in acquisition workforce hiring and development have contributed to poor contract administration and substantial cost overruns on critical programs, such as those related

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[1]GAO, *High Risk Series: An Update*, GAO-11-278 (Washington, D.C.: February 2011).

to the Federal Aviation Administration's (FAA) Next Generation Air Transportation System.[2]

In response to a Senate report mandate, we assessed: (1) the efforts of the Office of the Secretary of Transportation and DOT's operating administrations (OA) to identify acquisition workforce needs, and (2) the Office of the Secretary's role in providing oversight and support for acquisition workforce planning and management.[3] For the purposes of this report, we focused on the Office of the Senior Procurement Executive, the office within the Office of the Secretary with primary responsibility for acquisition workforce planning and management.

We used the following methods to conduct our review:

- To assess the efforts of the Office of the Senior Procurement Executive and DOT's OAs to identify acquisition workforce staffing and training needs, we reviewed DOT's acquisition workforce plans for 2010, 2011, and 2012 and interviewed officials from the Office of the Senior Procurement Executive and the Office of Human Resources to discuss how the plans were compiled. Officials from the Office of the Senior Procurement Executive were not able to provide the OA-level data used to prepare the 2010 and 2011 plans because this information was not retained after the plans were submitted. As a result of this and other limitations, we concluded that the aggregate data presented in DOT's acquisition workforce plans were not a sufficient or reliable basis to identify changes over time in the size of the workforce or the number personnel certified to meet federal requirements for education, training, and experience. We obtained the OA-level data that the Office of the Senior Procurement Executive used to compile the 2012 plan and assessed reliability by comparing it with data we obtained from the OAs. We also interviewed officials from the five OAs with the highest procurement spending in fiscal year 2011, based on data from the Federal Procurement Data System-

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[2]Department of Transportation Office of Inspector General, *Top Management Challenges for Fiscal Year 2012*, Report Number PT-2012-006, November 15, 2011; Department of Transportation Office of Inspector General, *FAA Policies and Plans are Insufficient to Ensure an Adequate and Effective Acquisition Workforce,* Report Number ZA-2011-148, August 2011.

[3]S. Rep. No. 112-83, at 9 (2011), accompanying Transportation and Housing and Urban Development, and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, 2012.

GAO-13-117 DOT Acquisition Workforce

Next Generation, to discuss the sources and methods used to track data on the acquisition workforce. Our review primarily focused on these five OAs because they accounted for 92 percent of the department's procurement activity. The data we reviewed included information on the size and certification rates of the acquisition workforce, as well as hiring targets, and estimated attrition through fiscal year 2013. We found inconsistencies in how the OAs reported their data that would affect the reliability of the department's aggregate data, but determined that the OA-level data used to prepare DOT's 2012 plan were sufficiently reliable to make qualitative observations about staffing and certification challenges at the individual OAs.

- To determine the extent to which the Office of the Senior Procurement Executive has provided oversight and support for acquisition workforce planning and management, we reviewed relevant federal policy and guidance, as well as DOT policy, guidance, and acquisition workforce plans for 2010, 2011, and 2012. We interviewed officials from the Office of the Senior Procurement Executive and the Office of Human Resources to obtain their views on their roles and responsibilities. We also reviewed budget and strategic planning documents from the Office of the Secretary and the Office of the Senior Procurement Executive. In addition, we interviewed officials from the five OAs with the greatest amount of procurement spending in fiscal year 2011 to obtain their views about the level of support and oversight from the Office of the Senior Procurement Executive. Based on this review, we identified the Senior Procurement Executive responsibilities to support and oversee acquisition workforce planning and management and determined the extent to which these functions are performed. We compared these actions to leading practices for workforce planning identified by GAO and others.[4] See appendix I for more information about our scope and methodology.

We conducted this performance audit from March 2012 to January 2013 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain

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[4]GAO, *Human Capital: Key Principles for Effective Strategic Workforce Planning*, GAO-04-39 (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 11, 2003); *Workforce Planning: Interior, EPA, and the Forest Service Should Strengthen Linkages to Their Strategic Plans and Improve Evaluation,* GAO-10-413 (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 31, 2010); and Personnel Management in Agencies, 5 C.F.R. Part 250.

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.

Background

Congress has recognized the need for a professional acquisition workforce by establishing education, training, and experience requirements for entry into and advancement in the acquisition career fields for federal agencies.[5] A number of governmental organizations play critical roles in assisting agencies in building and sustaining their acquisition workforces. Among these agencies, the Office of Management and Budget's Office of Federal Procurement Policy (OFPP) provides government-wide guidance on acquisition workforce issues, and for civilian agencies the Federal Acquisition Institute promotes the development of the civilian acquisition workforce as well as an information management system—the Federal Acquisition Institute Training Application System—to collect and analyze acquisition workforce data.[6]

In 2005, OFPP issued guidance to civilian agencies on developing and managing the acquisition workforce and directed agency Chief Acquisition Officers—responsible for monitoring and evaluating agency acquisition functions—to carry out specific acquisition workforce actions.[7] These actions include appointing an Acquisition Career Manager and developing and maintaining an acquisition career management program to provide coordinated input to the Chief Acquisition Officer and Chief Human Capital Officer regarding short- and long-term agency needs, propose an annual budget for acquisition workforce development, and maintain

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[5]Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act (DAWIA) (10 U.S.C. §§ 1741-46) and the Office of Federal Procurement Policy Act, as amended (41 U.S.C. § 1703).

[6]In 2011, the Federal Acquisition Institute Training Application System replaced the Acquisition Career Management System (ACMIS) as the government-wide repository for acquisition workforce data. In July 2011, the U.S. General Services Administration Office of Inspector General reported that ACMIS did not provide useful management information and exhibited poor data reliability and system functionality. U.S. General Services Administration, Office of Inspector General, *Review of the Federal Acquisition Career Management Information System*, Report Number A090023/O/A/F11006, July 20, 2011.

[7]OFPP Policy Letter 05-01, Developing and Managing the Acquisition Workforce (Apr. 15, 2005), which applies to all executive agencies, except those subject to the Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act, which provides requirements for the Department of Defense acquisition workforce.

consistent agency-wide data on those serving in the acquisition workforce. The guidance also identifies positions that are to be included at a minimum in the definition of the workforce so they can be trained and developed using common standards and directed the Federal Acquisition Institute to develop certification programs to generally serve as one means to demonstrate that an employee meets the core education, training, and experience requirements for a variety of acquisition-related disciplines. The Federal Acquisition Institute established certification programs for contracting in 2006 and for contracting officer's representatives and program and project managers in 2007.[8]

In 2009, OFPP issued the *Acquisition Workforce Development Strategic Plan for Civilian Agencies for Fiscal Years 2010-2014* to further guide agency planning efforts. The plan establishes an annual workforce planning process to be managed by OFPP as well as a 5-year action plan to improve workforce development efforts and the workforce management infrastructure. Agencies are required to develop annual acquisition workforce human capital plans that identify strategies and goals for increasing the capacity and capability of the acquisition workforce for the period ending in fiscal year 2014.[9] According to OFPP, successful workforce planning and implementation should involve significant and meaningful collaboration among agency leaders. Specifically, Chief Acquisition Officers are to work with their Chief Human Capital Officers, Acquisition Career Managers, and Chief Financial Officers to plan for growth in the capacity and capability of the acquisition workforce. In 2011, OFPP also issued a memorandum highlighting hiring flexibilities such as the availability of direct hire authority and the Student Career Experience Program.

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[8]Office of Management and Budget Memorandum, *The Federal Acquisition Certification in Contracting Program* (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 20, 2006); Office of Federal Procurement Policy Memorandum, *The Federal Acquisition Certification for Contracting Officer Technical Representatives* (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 26, 2007); Office of Federal Procurement Policy Memorandum, *The Federal Acquisition Certification for Program and Project Managers* (Washington, D.C., Apr. 25, 2007). Office of Federal Procurement Policy Memorandum, *Revisions to the Federal Acquisition Certification for Contracting Officer's Representatives* (Sept. 6, 2011), effective January 1, 2012, revised and replaced the former 2007 OFPP Memorandum for contracting officer technical representatives.

[9]Specifically, the requirement is for civilian agencies covered by the Chief Financial Officer's Act of 1990, Pub. L. No. 101-576, codified at 31 U.S.C. § 901, which includes the Department of Transportation.

At DOT, the Senior Procurement Executive, within the Office of the Secretary, provides oversight of DOT acquisition policy and is delegated many of the Chief Acquisition Officer responsibilities. Specifically, the Senior Procurement Executive has primary responsibility for acquisition workforce management, issues related to strategic acquisition policy, and implementation of acquisition workforce policies. DOT relies on collaboration between the Senior Procurement Executive and the department's OAs to manage DOT's acquisition workforce. For example, DOT policy directs the Senior Procurement Executive to appoint an Acquisition Career Manager to manage the acquisition workforce, identify workforce development strategies, and coordinate with OA representatives to ensure that the OAs maintain accurate and consistent data on the acquisition workforce. FAA is exempt from the federal acquisition system—the various statutes and regulations that govern federal procurement practices by federal government agencies—and has its own acquisition management system, which includes its own acquisition workforce plan and acquisition workforce career development program.[10] Table 1 provides the roles and responsibilities of key acquisition workforce management positions outside of FAA.

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[10]FAA sought statutory exemption from various statutes that govern federal procurement practices and personnel management, maintaining that these requirements contributed to some of its cost, schedule, and performance problems in the 1980s and early 1990s. Congress enacted legislation in 1995 that exempted FAA from key federal procurement statutes and the Federal Acquisition Regulation and directed FAA to develop a new acquisition management system. FAA issued its new acquisition process—the Acquisition Management System—in 1996.

Table 1: Key Roles and Responsibilities for DOT Acquisition Workforce Planning and Management

Senior Procurement Executive
- Develop and maintain an acquisition career management program
- Appoint an Acquisition Career Manager
- Define the members of the DOT acquisition workforce
- Ensure to the maximum extent practicable that acquisition workforce policies and procedures are uniform in their implementation throughout DOT

Acquisition Career Manager
- Manage the acquisition workforce, including identifying training requirements and other workforce development strategies
- Administer the agency's certification program
- Provide coordinated input to the Senior Procurement Executive and Chief Human Capital Officer regarding short- and long-term human capital strategic planning
- Coordinate with OA representatives to ensure that they maintain accurate and consistent department-wide data on those serving in DOT's acquisition workforce in Federal Acquisition Institute's information management system

Operating Administration Chief Acquisition Officer
- Ensure the acquisition workforce has the necessary competencies, training, and certifications
- Identify a training budget for the acquisition workforce

Source: DOT.

Note: DOT's Acquisition Career Development Policy does not apply to FAA.

DOT has multiple missions—primarily focusing on transportation mobility and safety—that are carried out by its OAs. In fiscal year 2011, 5 of DOT's 11 OAs with procurement spending accounted for 92 percent of the department's $5.6 billion in procurements. See table 2 for fiscal year 2011 procurement spending by the 11 OAs.

Table 2: Department of Transportation Fiscal Year 2011 Procurement Spending by Operating Administration

DOT operating administration	Procurement spending (in millions)	Percent of total procurement spending
Federal Aviation Administration	$3,535	63%
Federal Highway Administration	626	11
Office of the Secretary of Transportation[a]	445	8
Maritime Administration	365	6
Federal Transit Administration	206	4
Research and Innovative Technology Administration	176	3
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration	118	2
Federal Railroad Administration	67	1
Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration	45	0.8
Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration	35	0.6
Saint Lawrence Seaway Development Corporation	16	0.3
Total	**$5,635**	**100%**

Source: Federal Procurement Data System-Next Generation.

[a]According to DOT officials, Office of the Secretary procurements typically include contracts such as those for building security and facilities. The office also procures on behalf of DOT customers including the Office of the Inspector General and the Research and Innovative Technology Administration.

In May 2011, the DOT Inspector General identified a number of weaknesses in the Office of the Secretary's acquisition function.[11] Among the factors contributing to weaknesses, the Inspector General identified an organizational structure that does not support the acquisition function, and long-standing vacancies in key leadership positions, including the Senior Procurement Executive and Acquisition Career Manager. According to the Inspector General, the acquisition structure created an additional layer of management review and restricted direct communication from the Senior Procurement Executive to DOT's leaders, limiting the ability to promote acquisition as a strategic contributor to DOT's success. In December 2011, DOT changed the organizational structure so that the Senior Procurement Executive now has a direct line of reporting to the department's Chief Acquisition Officer on strategic acquisition workforce management and other strategic issues, thereby

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[11]Department of Transportation Office of Inspector General, *Weaknesses in the Office of the Secretary's Acquisition Function Limit Its Capacity to Support DOT's Mission,* Report Number ZA-2011-119, May 2011.

DOT Lacks Sufficient and Reliable Data to Fully Identify and Address Workforce Needs

elevating the procurement executive's ability to raise issues to a more strategic level within the department.

DOT's Senior Procurement Executive, responsible for acquisition workforce planning and management, collects workforce data for federal reporting purposes, but has not maintained sufficient and reliable data needed to fully understand the department's workforce needs or to identify progress in addressing gaps in staffing and certification rates over time. According to OFPP requirements, agencies are to collect, maintain, and utilize data on the acquisition workforce to ensure effective management. Federal internal control standards also call for managers to collect and maintain data to assess performance over time to ensure effectiveness and efficiency of operations and compliance with applicable laws and regulations.[12] DOT submitted acquisition workforce plans to OFPP in 2010, 2011, and 2012 that reported progress in increasing department-wide acquisition workforce staff levels and certification rates, but did not maintain the supporting data in 2010 and 2011, and lacked internal controls to ensure the quality of the data. We also identified data discrepancies about the size of the acquisition workforce reported to OFPP. As a result, we concluded that the aggregate data presented in DOT's acquisition workforce plans were not a sufficient or reliable basis upon which to draw conclusions or identify changes in staffing and certification rates over time. By contrast, we obtained the data DOT used to prepare the 2012 plan, compared it with data from the OAs, and interviewed OA officials about the sources and methods they used to report the data. We found inconsistencies in how the OAs reported their data that would affect the reliability of the department's aggregate data, but determined that the OA-level data were sufficiently reliable to make observations about staffing and certification rates at the individual OAs. Based on our analysis of this data, we found that four OAs would potentially need to replace from 50 percent to over 80 percent of their contract specialists by the end of fiscal year 2013 to meet staffing targets. In addition, some OAs have low certification rates particularly for program/project managers and contracting officer's representatives, which increases the risk that DOT acquisition programs are not being

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[12]GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government,* GAO/AIMD-00-21.3.1 (Washington, D.C.: November 1999).

effectively managed and that contractors are not receiving appropriate oversight.

DOT Lacks Sufficient and Reliable Data to Assess Progress over Time

According to OFPP requirements, agencies are to collect, maintain, and utilize information to ensure effective management of the acquisition workforce. In accordance with OFPP's *Acquisition Workforce Development Strategic Plan for Civilian Agencies for Fiscal Years 2010-2014*, DOT submitted annual acquisition workforce plans in 2010, 2011, and 2012. To do so, the Acquisition Career Manager distributed an OFPP data request template to the OAs and aggregated the OA-level data received into a single department-wide plan. Each of DOT's plans has included data on the size of the acquisition workforce, estimated attrition, and targets for future staffing levels.

Based on the workforce plans DOT submitted to OFPP, DOT reported increases in the size of the acquisition workforce and certification rates for all acquisition workforce segments reported—contract specialists, contracting officers, program/project managers, and contracting officer's representatives—from fiscal year 2009 to 2011.[13] However, the Office of the Senior Procurement Executive did not retain the underlying data it used to prepare the 2010 and 2011 plans and in some cases, the data were also not available from the OAs. As a result, we were unable to independently verify the accuracy and completeness of the department-wide data. Moreover, we found inconsistencies in the data DOT reported to OFPP. For example, DOT's 2010 plan presents conflicting data on the size of the acquisition workforce, ranging from almost 600 to over 3,000 staff. According to DOT officials, one table was developed by acquisition officials and the other by human resources officials. As a result of these discrepancies and other limitations, we concluded that the aggregate data presented in DOT's acquisition workforce plans were unreliable and DOT should not use the information to draw conclusions or identify changes in staffing and certification levels over time.

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[13]The Office of Personnel Management 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. For the purposes of its Acquisition Human Capital Plans, DOT tracks "contract specialists" and "contracting officers outside of the 1102 contracting series" separately. For the purposes of this report, we refer to "contracting officers outside of the 1102 contracting series" as contracting officers.

For DOT's 2012 plan, we compared data we received from the Office of the Senior Procurement Executive and the OAs and interviewed OA officials about the methods and sources they used to collect the data. We found that the OAs were not consistent in how they reported their workforce data due in part to a lack of internal controls to ensure that the OAs are collecting and maintaining reliable and consistent data to inform acquisition workforce planning and management. Internal controls generally should be designed to assure that ongoing monitoring occurs in the course of normal operations to include comparisons, reconciliations, and other management actions that ensure information quality over time. While these inconsistencies affect the reliability of the department's aggregate data, we determined that the OA-level data used to prepare DOT's 2012 plan were sufficiently reliable to make qualitative observations about the staffing challenges and certification shortfalls that the individual OAs face.

Officials from the Office of the Senior Procurement Executive stated that they do not have data reliability checks in place and did not provide guidance to ensure that the OAs are collecting and maintaining reliable and consistent data to inform acquisition workforce planning and management. In the absence of guidance to ensure consistency in the information collected, OAs took different approaches to reporting the number of personnel in the acquisition workforce. For example, some OAs cited challenges with tracking the number of contracting officer's representatives in the workforce or did not track them altogether. In contrast with contract specialists, who are associated with a job series that can be tracked in personnel systems, contracting officer's representatives are not designated by a specific job series and their duties are sometimes performed as a collateral duty on a part-time basis. OA officials also explained that the number of employees performing contracting officer's representative duties changes constantly as contracts begin and end, requiring that lists be revalidated on a continual basis for accuracy. Officials from the Office of the Secretary and the Federal Railroad Administration reported that they had not tracked the number of contracting officer's representatives in the past. The Office of the Secretary was not able to provide us with the number of contracting officer's representatives in the workforce for fiscal years 2009, 2010, and 2011 and the Federal Railroad Administration provided estimates.

Some Operating Administrations Face Significant Acquisition Workforce Staffing Challenges and Certification Shortfalls

Based on our analysis of the data collected from the OAs to prepare the 2012 Acquisition Human Capital Plan, we found that some OAs face significant acquisition workforce staffing challenges and certification shortfalls. We also found that the OAs did not use a consistent or well-documented approach to estimate attrition which could result in an under- or overstatement of the gap they would need to fill to achieve their staffing targets, and that staffing challenges may be understated because some OAs constrained their workforce estimates to reflect budget realities.

Staffing Challenges

We found that the OAs face significant challenges in maintaining sufficient numbers of contract specialists who perform a range of acquisition services, such as market research, preparation of statements of work, and the development and management of acquisition plans. Based on our analysis of DOT data, we found that four OAs would potentially need to replace from 50 percent to over 80 percent of their contract specialists by the end of fiscal year 2013 to manage estimated attrition and achieve their staffing targets as shown in table 3. The data in the table reflect estimated attrition and staffing targets for fiscal years 2012 and 2013 that DOT reported to OFPP in April 2012 and do not take into account actual hiring and attrition, or changes to estimates.

Table 3: Estimated Number of Contract Specialists Needed to Meet Fiscal Year 2013 Staffing Targets

Operating administration	Contract specialists for FY 2011	Estimated attrition, targets, and gaps			
		Combined attrition FY 2012 and FY 2013	FY 2013 staffing target	Potential gap to fill to achieve FY 2013 staffing target	Potential gap as % of FY 2011 staffing level
Federal Aviation Administration	284	100	337	153	54%
Federal Highway Administration	55	6	61	12	22
Office of the Secretary of Transportation	11	4	16	9	82
Maritime Administration	29	6	31	8	28
Federal Transit Administration	13	4	14	5	38
Research and Innovative Technology Administration	24	6	30	12	50
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration	11	0	15	4	36
Federal Railroad Administration	8	2	8	2	25
Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration	15	0	16	1	7
Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration	10	5	12	7	70
Saint Lawrence Seaway Development Corporation	3	0	3	0	0%

Source: GAO analysis of DOT data.

We also found that the OAs did not use a consistent or well-documented approach to estimate attrition which could result in an under- or overstatement of the gap they would need to fill to achieve their staffing targets. For example, seven OAs estimated that fiscal year 2012 and 2013 attrition would be lower than the attrition reported for fiscal year 2011. To illustrate, the Federal Highway Administration lost seven contract specialists in 2011, or 13 percent, but estimated future attrition at 5 percent a year. Similarly, the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration and the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration reported fiscal year 2011 attrition rates of 36 and 16 percent respectively, but estimated no attrition for fiscal year 2012 and 2013. In contrast, FAA estimated future attrition at 15 percent which is consistent with what it reported for fiscal year 2011. While there may be good reasons for estimating attrition based on information other than historical attrition, the Office of the Senior Procurement Executive did not provide guidance to ensure that each OA used a reasonable approach.

Given the high demand for contract specialists across the federal government, staffing increases combined with attrition creates a potential gap that may be challenging for some OAs to address. For example, some OAs plan to hire entry-level staff, which will require investment in training and development to achieve certification requirements. As an added concern, one OA official stated that the September 2012 expiration of direct hire authority for acquisition positions will increase the amount of time it will take to hire a contract specialist from a few weeks to a few months. This authority allowed agencies who could demonstrate a shortage of highly qualified candidates for certain acquisition positions to streamline the application process to hire candidates directly and more quickly.[14]

FAA also identified staffing challenges for other segments of its acquisition workforce including program/project management and research and engineering. According to FAA's 2011 acquisition workforce plan, challenges with these segments are driven by the predicted growth in requirements combined with expected retirements and the difficulty in hiring qualified candidates. For example, FAA reported that 39 percent of its program/project managers are eligible to retire by 2015, and identified the need to develop new in-house program managers. Further, officials reported that entry-level hiring alone is not sufficient due to program complexity and the need for individuals with years of experience. According to FAA, these acquisition professionals must demonstrate considerable leadership, possess the expertise to manage the development of complex, large-scale air traffic systems, and bring diverse stakeholders together. FAA officials also noted the ability to backfill employees lost to attrition is uncertain and that budget constraints have forced FAA to limit what hiring authority is available to the most critical positions. Officials noted that while acquisition positions are deemed critical, so too are air traffic controllers and other mission-critical and safety-related positions. If FAA cannot attain appropriate numbers of personnel for the workforce, it plans to prioritize and shift workload and staffing to best meet priority needs, increase the workload for existing staff where possible, or supplement the workforce by using contractors.

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[14]National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2004, Pub. L. No. 108-136 § 1413, as amended by the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2008, Pub. L. No. 110-181 § 853.

In addition, staffing challenges faced by DOT may be understated because some OAs constrained or revised their workforce estimates to reflect budget realities and did not fully take into account the people needed to do the work. For example, a Maritime Administration official explained that they originally estimated the need to increase the number of program/project managers from 6 in fiscal year 2011 to 36 by the end of fiscal year 2013, but later adjusted the estimate to 12 due to anticipated resource constraints. Similarly, an official from the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration stated that they projected the need to increase the number of contract specialists from 10 in fiscal year 2011 to 12 in fiscal years 2012 and 2013, but later revised their projected need to 10 because the request for additional staff was not approved. FAA officials also told us that managers validate the previous years' projections and adjust the estimates as they come closer to executing the plan to factor in what the budget will accommodate. Despite constrained budgets, OAs could benefit from having an informed understanding of the number of acquisition workforce personnel needed to fulfill their missions. For example, the Department of Defense requires the calculation of both unconstrained and constrained requirements, both of which should be used to prioritize decisions.

Certification Shortfalls

Across the department, some OAs have not ensured that the acquisition workforce is in compliance with federal certification standards. According to OFPP, the quality and effectiveness of the federal acquisition process depends on the development of a capable and competent workforce and the Federal Acquisition Institute has developed certification standards which include a combination of education, training, and experience requirements. In accordance with these requirements, DOT has developed career guidance for contracting professionals, program/project managers, and contracting officer's representatives which outlines the general training and experience requirements for each profession. FAA also has career guidance and certification standards for these three professions, as well as integrated logistics support. In addition, FAA has developed competency models for systems engineering and test and evaluation professionals to serve as the basis for workforce development, and plans to develop certification standards for all of its acquisition disciplines in the future.

Certification for Contract Specialists

DOT reported that 91 percent of its 463 contract specialists were certified in fiscal year 2011. Based on our analysis of DOT data, eight OAs reported contract specialist certification rates of 95 percent or greater

while several others reported much lower rates. For example, the Federal Transit Administration reported that 65 percent, or 8 of its 13 contract specialist were certified. The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration reported that only 36 percent of its contract specialists (4 of 11) were certified. According to DOT's Acquisition Career Manager, the department should be aiming to have all of its contract specialists certified, but he and other officials stated that 100 percent certification is not feasible. For example, Level 1, or entry-level contract specialists, generally need to complete certain core contracting courses and have 1 year of contracting experience to be eligible for certification. Given attrition levels of about 15 percent across the department, a sustained focus on developing and certifying the contracting professionals is critical to improving and maintaining certification levels.

Certification for Program/Project Managers

DOT reported that 58 percent of its 64 program/project managers were certified in fiscal year 2011. Program/project managers perform such duties as developing government requirements, defining measurable performance standards, and managing contractor activities to ensure that the intended outcomes are achieved. FAA, with 54 program/project managers reported that 29 were certified, for a certification rate of 54 percent. The Maritime Administration and the Office of the Secretary both reported that 100 percent of their program/project managers were certified while the Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration reported that it does not have any programs of the magnitude or complexity that require program/project manager certification, but that its two program/project managers are in the process of obtaining certification.

Certification for Contracting Officer's Representatives

DOT reported that 47 percent of its 2,441 contracting officer's representatives were certified in fiscal year 2011 despite the federal requirement that they to be certified within 6 months of their date of

appointment.[15] Contracting officer's representatives are appointed by contracting officers to perform certain contract administration duties, including inspection and acceptance of supplies or services. Across the department, three OAs reported certification rates over 90 percent while the remaining reported certification rates ranging from 18 percent at FAA to 78 percent at the Saint Lawrence Seaway Development Corporation. Table 4 provides information on the number of contracting officer's representatives certified at each OA in fiscal year 2011.

Table 4: Number of Contracting Officer's Representatives and Percent Certified in Fiscal Year 2011

Operating administration	Number of Contracting Officer's Representatives	Number certified	Percent certified
Federal Aviation Administration	1,320	238	18%
Federal Highway Administration	432	393	91
Office of the Secretary of Transportation	93	65	70
Maritime Administration	119	119	100
Federal Transit Administration	67	37	55
Research and Innovative Technology Administration	90	90	100
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration	164	103	63
Federal Railroad Administration	65	35	54
Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration	49	37	75
Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration	33	23	70
Saint Lawrence Seaway Development Corporation	9	7	78
Total	**2,441**	**1,147**	**47%**

Source: DOT.

Although the data we obtained and reviewed were not sufficient to assess DOT's progress in improving certification rates over time, DOT reported that the number of people certified increased substantially between fiscal years 2010 and 2011 and that a focus on certification programs is central to DOT's strategy to strengthen the skills and capabilities of the acquisition workforce. FAA officials also stated that they have made a

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[15]The certification requirement, formerly in Office of Federal Procurement Policy (OFPP) Memorandum, *The Federal Acquisition Certification for Contracting Officer Technical Representatives,* (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 26, 2007) is currently in OFPP Memorandum, *Revisions to the Federal Acquisition Certification for Contracting Officer's Representatives,* (Sept. 6, 2011), effective January 1, 2012, which revised and replaced the former 2007 OFPP Memorandum.

concerted effort to increase certification rates particularly for program/project managers and contracting officer's representatives. For example, FAA officials reported that as of the end of fiscal year 2012, 85 percent of program managers responsible for major programs were certified at the requisite level and that the percentage of contracting officer's representatives certified has improved to 49 percent.

DOT Lacks the Strategic Focus and Oversight Needed for Effective Workforce Planning and Management

DOT lacks the strategic focus and oversight needed to ensure that the department can meet its acquisition workforce goals and that strategies to hire, develop, and retain acquisition professionals are implemented and sustained over time. Federal policy requires agencies to conduct strategic planning to identify short- and long-term agency needs. This includes recruitment and retention strategies for obtaining the acquisition workforce resources and skills required to meet future agency mission needs. GAO has identified leading practices agencies should follow when developing workforce plans which include developing a coordinated planning process to involve stakeholders; analyzing workforce gaps to inform strategic planning and budget formulation; and developing strategies to monitor and evaluate progress.[16] The Office of the Senior Procurement Executive has not developed a coordinated planning process and does not use the acquisition workforce data reported to OFPP for acquisition workforce planning and management. The Office of the Senior Procurement Executive has recently taken steps to align its workforce plans with the department's strategic goals, but given challenges with maintaining reliable data, lacks a sound baseline for assessing progress toward reaching these goals or for making a business case for directing resources or management attention to OAs, which may face the greatest workforce challenges. Further, the Office of the Senior Procurement Executive has only recently identified a limited set of performance metrics to assess progress toward reaching acquisition workforce human capital goals. By contrast, we found that only FAA has a strategic process to align the organization's human capital program with its current and emerging missions, and to develop long-term strategies for acquiring, developing, and retaining the staff needed to perform agency missions. Different approaches may be appropriate, but without strategic workforce planning, agencies risk not meeting mission requirements and are unable to develop strategies for achieving long-term goals. We also

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[16]GAO-04-39; GAO-10-413.

found that the Office of the Senior Procurement Executive has not maintained training and certification data for its acquisition workforce in accordance with federal requirements, but has efforts under way to improve compliance.

DOT Has Not Determined Its Data Needs or Developed a Coordinated Acquisition Workforce Planning Process

The Office of the Senior Procurement Executive collects acquisition workforce data for reporting purposes, but has not determined its own data needs or developed a coordinated planning process to fully involve stakeholders including human capital officials and procurement and program officials at the OAs. 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, top leadership that is engaged in strategic workforce planning can provide organizational vision, help provide stability as the workforce plan is being developed and implemented, and create support within the agency to ensure that workforce strategies to hire, develop, and retain acquisition professionals are implemented and sustained over time. By contrast, the Office of the Senior Procurement Executive has not established specific responsibilities for itself or the OAs for maintaining the data reported to OFPP, or for using the data for management purposes. For example, officials from the Office of the Senior Procurement Executive told us that they have not used the workforce data reported to OFPP to manage the workforce, determined other information that would be useful for planning and oversight, or provided oversight through ongoing monitoring of workforce data. However, the Acquisition Career Manager retained the data for the 2012 plan and indicated that he intends to retain and review data compiled for future plans.

Officials from some of the five OAs we met with reported that they do not use DOT's annual strategic planning effort for long-term planning purposes. FAA, which accounted for more than half of the 3,146 acquisition workforce members reported in DOT's 2012 plan, issues its own annual acquisition workforce plan, which is tailored to meet its workforce management priorities. In contrast with FAA, some OA officials told us that their acquisition workload and workforce is generally stable. For example, officials from the Federal Transit Administration and the Maritime Administration, which reported 80 and 155 acquisition workforce members in fiscal year 2011, respectively, stated that forecasting workforce needs is straightforward due to a stable workload and set number of authorized positions. Additionally, some OA officials stated that

DOT's workforce planning efforts are limited because the reporting instructions are not clear and the data requested varies from year to year.

Our prior work has also shown the importance of collaboration between human capital and acquisition agency leaders and managers to develop acquisition workforce plans. While some OAs reported that they consulted with human resources officials to obtain information such as retirement eligibility to prepare their submissions, we found that DOT's Chief Human Capital Officer and Office of Human Resources have had a limited role in strategic planning for the acquisition workforce. According to a senior human resources official, his office took the lead in preparing DOTs 2010 workforce plan, but had very limited involvement in preparing the plans for 2011 and 2012.

Officials from the Office of the Senior Procurement Executive cited several reasons why the office does not direct the department's acquisition workforce planning efforts. Specifically, officials told us that the OAs are best suited to manage the workforce given the decentralized nature of the department and the wide range of missions performed by the OAs. However, officials stated that their capacity to direct planning efforts is limited because the OAs have their own budget authorities and that the office does not have the staff or resources needed to perform oversight of strategic planning efforts. For example, as of October 2012, the Office of the Senior Procurement Executive had just two staff supporting the department's acquisition workforce program on a part-time basis. In addition, the office's limited focus on acquisition workforce issues is also due in part to other acquisition priorities and challenges facing the office. The current Senior Procurement Executive and Acquisition Career Manager assumed their positions in late 2010 after a period of longstanding vacancies and have been focusing on addressing significant weaknesses in the department's acquisition function identified by the DOT Inspector General.[17] As of December 2012, the Inspector General had closed 14 of the 16 recommendations it made to address weaknesses it identified in the Office of the Secretary's acquisition function based on actions taken by the Senior Procurement Executive in 2011 and 2012.

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[17]ZA-2011-119.

According to Office of the Senior Procurement Executive officials, their role is to provide a focal point for coordination among the OAs, rather than providing direction and support for acquisition workforce planning efforts. For example, in 2009, the Senior Procurement Executive chartered the Strategic Acquisition Council to provide a forum for senior DOT acquisition leaders from each of the OAs to address issues affecting the DOT procurement community, share best practices, and ensure a consistent focus on acquisition improvement throughout the department. The Senior Procurement Executive also chartered the Acquisition Workforce Working Group with the goals of performing comprehensive workforce planning for DOT and developing tools, guidance, and suggestions for recruitment and retention. To date, the group has focused on outreach initiatives to publicize contracting career opportunities, and organized a conference in April 2012 to share knowledge and provide networking opportunities among contract specialists.

The Acquisition Career Manager also administers the department's certification program and aims to leverage limited training resources by identifying and informing the OAs of free and low-cost training opportunities across the government. For example, the Acquisition Career Manager is responsible for approving all certifications and views this as the department's means of providing oversight that the OAs are in compliance with DOT and federal certification requirements. According to the Acquisition Career Manager, the department has also played a role in bringing together individual OAs with other federal partners to support the development of acquisition workforce training programs. For example, the Federal Highway Administration developed and implemented a 40-hour training course for contracting officer's representatives through collaboration with the Federal Acquisition Institute and the Department of Homeland Security. According to officials, the Acquisition Career Manager will continue to work with the Federal Highway Administration to leverage this course to create a low cost, and customizable training course available across the department.

The Office of the Senior
Procurement Executive
Has Taken Steps to Align
Its Workforce Plans with
Strategic Goals, but Faces
Challenges to Assess
Progress

The Office of the Senior Procurement Executive has recently taken steps to align its workforce plans with the department's strategic goals, but given challenges with maintaining reliable data, lacks a sound baseline for assessing progress toward reaching these goals or for making a business case for directing resources or management attention to OAs which may face the greatest workforce risks. According to leading practices identified in our prior work, agencies need to determine the occupations, skills, and competencies that are critical to achieving their missions and goals, as well as to identify any gaps between their current workforce and the workforce they will need in the future. Further, workforce planning that is linked to an agency's strategic goals and budget formulation allows agencies to assess the extent to which the workforce contributes to achieving overarching mission needs and ensure that their annual budget requests include adequate funds to implement their human capital strategies, such as recruitment or retention bonuses, awards, training, student loan repayments, and tuition assistance.

In October 2012, the Senior Procurement Executive issued a strategic plan for fiscal years 2013 through 2016 which identifies acquisition workforce development as one of four strategic goals. The strategies to achieve the acquisition workforce goal focus on efforts to promote existing certification programs, leverage training resources, and make DOT a more attractive workplace for acquisition workforce professionals. One of the indicators intended to measure progress is the percentage of the acquisition workforce certified. By 2016, the department aims to achieve certification rates of 85 percent for contract specialists and 75 percent for program/project managers and contracting officer's representatives. However, without a reliable baseline, the Senior Procurement Executive has no basis for measuring progress.

The Office of the Secretary's fiscal year 2011 and 2012 budget proposals requested $7.6 million for acquisition workforce development with some of the funds to be transferred to the OAs. According to both proposals, funds would be used to increase acquisition workforce capacity through training, recruitment, retention, and hiring additional members of the acquisition workforce. The fiscal year 2012 proposal also specified that funds would be used for business process re-engineering, organizational development, and contractor support costs to collect acquisition workforce data. According to officials, the specific plans were abandoned when funding for these proposals was not approved. Because the Office of the Senior Procurement Executive has not collected and maintained reliable workforce data, the department lacks the basis needed to make informed decisions to justify agency resource needs. For fiscal year 2013,

the Office of the Secretary requested about $700,000 to strengthen the acquisition workforce but did not propose transferring funds to the OAs. The proposal specified three key areas: contractor support costs to collect data and provide training; business process re-engineering; and innovative acquisition approaches.

DOT Has Not Identified Workforce Development Strategies with Metrics to Assess Progress

DOT's workforce plans do not identify clear workforce development strategies or establish metrics to assess progress toward reaching acquisition workforce human capital goals. Once agencies have identified gaps, our prior work has found that they need to develop human capital strategies—the programs, policies, and processes that agencies use to build and manage their workforces—to close these gaps. These strategies, tailored to the agencies' unique needs, may include strategies for hiring, training, staff development, succession planning, performance management, and the use of human capital flexibilities, among other things. While the OAs have identified and utilized some acquisition workforce development strategies such recruiting entry-level hires, they have generally not been linked to specific recruitment, retention, and certification goals. For example, one of the strategies identified in DOT's 2010 acquisition human capital plan was to develop a rotational exchange program within the department to improve retention by providing professional development opportunities for the acquisition workforce. In November 2010, the Office of the Senior Procurement Executive established a rotational exchange program within the department, but the department's plan did not identify goals or metrics such as the desired number of exchanges. According to an official, the program had facilitated one exchange as of July 2012. Similarly, DOT's 2012 workforce plan identified the agency's goals for managing and strengthening the acquisition workforce but did not include any specific metrics to assess progress. These goals include a continued focus on certification programs, staff development and retention, and communication and knowledge sharing.

FAA Has Developed a Strategic Acquisition Workforce Planning Process but DOT's Inspector General Identified Challenges

In contrast with DOT's other OAs, FAA operates under its own acquisition authority and has its own workforce planning process and oversight function that generally includes the key elements of leading practices for workforce planning. For example, FAA has taken steps to identify its acquisition workforce needs and incorporate them into planning decisions and established the Acquisition Workforce Council, an executive-level group that provides strategic leadership and oversight for acquisition workforce planning and management. FAA has since issued acquisition

workforce plans in 2009, 2010, 2011, and 2012 with planning data through 2017. As a basis for its planning efforts, FAA took steps to identify the acquisition workforce and develop career competencies and certification requirements. FAA also developed a model to estimate staffing requirements for each year which is validated by program officials knowledgeable of program needs. FAA's workforce plans include metrics, such as the percentage of acquisition workforce positions filled against forecasted needs and the average time to fill positions, and provides monthly reports on staffing gains and losses to the workforce council. Despite FAA being further along than DOT's other OAs in terms of developing the capacity and framework needed for effective planning, the DOT Inspector General identified several challenges FAA has faced in collecting accurate data on members of its acquisition workforce and addressing workforce gaps and made a series of recommendations to improve the programs, policies, and practices needed to ensure an adequate and effective acquisition workforce.[18] For example, the FAA reported that it met its fiscal year 2009 workforce targets while the Inspector General concluded that the FAA, by over-hiring in some segments of the acquisition workforce and under-hiring in others, had not adhered to its workforce plans. As of December 2012, the Inspector General had closed 8 of the 11 recommendations based on FAA actions.

DOT Has Not Maintained Training and Certification Data in Accordance with Federal Policy, but Has Efforts Under Way to Improve Compliance

DOT policy requires the OAs to maintain current and complete records on acquisition workforce training and certification in accordance with OFPP requirements, but has only recently begun to provide oversight to improve compliance. According to OFPP requirements, agencies are to maintain complete, current records on education, training, experience, and certification for all acquisition workforce members in a government-wide information management system. In 2011, the Federal Acquisition Institute Training Application System (FAITAS) replaced the Acquisition Career Management Information System as the repository of such information. According to FAA officials, FAA is not subject to this requirement and has its own process for tracking comparable data.

The Acquisition Career Manager has efforts under way to improve OA compliance with the requirement to record training and certification data in FAITAS, but current data are not complete. For example, DOT reported

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[18]ZA-2011-148.

that 1,093 acquisition workforce professionals were certified in fiscal year 2011, but as of September 2012, only 472 were registered in the system. Of those, 398 were contracting officer's representatives, fewer than half of the 909 contracting officer's representatives that DOT reported as certified in fiscal year 2011, despite the OFPP requirement that all be entered in the FAITAS system no later than February 15, 2012. The Acquisition Career Manager stated that the data migration from the Acquisition Career Management Information System to FAITAS did not go smoothly and that his office has begun to manually reconcile data in the system with data that the OAs are required by DOT policy to maintain. The Acquisition Career Manager also stated that his office will not approve a certification request unless the individual is registered in FAITAS. While this is a step in the right direction, this level of oversight is not sufficient as it only maintains management control over those who submit certifications for approval, but not those who should be certified, but are not. For example, several OAs were unable to provide us with the number of CORs in the workforce or the number certified for fiscal years 2009 through 2011. As a result of this lack of oversight, the department has no way of knowing whether the workforce meets the minimum requirements needed to meet the department's acquisition missions.

Conclusions

DOT relies on its acquisition workforce to negotiate and administer contracts and manage large-scale acquisition programs, but lacks the reliable data and strategic focus needed to fully understand its workforce needs over time and to ensure that the department can hire, develop, and retain the acquisition professionals needed to perform the agency's current and future missions. This may put the department's acquisition missions at risk. While DOT has submitted annual acquisition workforce plans to OFPP, the Office of the Senior Procurement Executive has not maintained past data or determined what data it needs for management purposes. Further, the Office of the Senior Procurement Executive relies on the OAs to collect and compile acquisition workforce data and conduct strategic planning but has not provided guidance on how to collect and report workforce data, established internal controls to ensure that data provided are accurate and complete, or established specific responsibilities for maintaining the data, or for using it for management purposes. Until the Office of the Senior Procurement Executive determines what data are needed, and assesses resources necessary for performing oversight, input into strategic plans will be inconsistent and ultimately its utility will be diminished which limits the department's ability to plan for and address workforce challenges. While efforts are under way to improve oversight of the agency's certification program, oversight is

needed to ensure OA compliance with the requirement to record training and certification data in FAITAS. To develop a comprehensive strategic acquisition workforce planning framework, DOT needs to incorporate key elements of effective planning, such as fully involving the Chief Human Capital Officer and other stakeholders, analyzing workforce gaps and developing strategies to address them, and monitoring and assessing progress over time. Until DOT establishes such a framework, it will not have a sound basis to identify or justify resources needed to fully address its short- and long-term workforce needs. This exposes the department to substantial risk that the workforce does not have the capacity or skills needed to effectively manage the department's current and future acquisition missions.

Recommendations for Executive Action

To help improve DOT's ability to effectively address workforce needs, we recommend that the Secretary of Transportation take the following five actions:

- Direct the Senior Procurement Executive to define data the department needs to meet OFPP and DOT workforce planning and oversight requirements;
- Provide standards for internal controls or other guidance to ensure the OAs collect, report, and maintain consistent and reliable data for workforce planning and in FAITAS;
- Establish specific responsibilities for the Office of the Senior Procurement Executive and the OAs to maintain workforce data, develop strategies and metrics, and monitor progress toward addressing workforce gaps and certification deficiencies;
- Assess whether the Office of the Senior Procurement Executive has sufficient resources to effectively oversee the acquisition workforce; and
- Direct the Senior Procurement Executive and Chief Human Capital Officer to establish a coordinated process for future acquisition workforce planning.

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

We provided a draft of this report to DOT for its review and comment. DOT provided written comments which are reprinted in appendix II, as well as technical comments, which we incorporated as appropriate. DOT generally agreed with our recommendations and described actions under way or planned to address them. DOT also expressed concern, however, that the draft report did not clearly convey the current status of its acquisition workforce efforts and that much of the information that the draft report relied upon to formulate its findings was drawn from the

period when there was considerable instability at multiple management levels, including the Office of the Senior Procurement Executive.

We disagree that our findings do not reflect the current state at the department. Our findings were largely based on the data and approach that DOT used to prepare the acquisition workforce plan that it submitted to the Office of Federal Procurement Policy in April 2012. Specifically, we found that the operating administrations were not consistent in their approach to reporting workforce data due in part to a lack of guidance, oversight, and internal controls at the department level. DOT agreed in its comments with the need to provide additional guidance to the operating administrations and stated that collaborative efforts are currently underway between the Office of the Senior Procurement Executive and the Chief Human Capital Officer to better ensure the consistency and reliability of the department's acquisition workforce data. If implemented, these steps could help the department establish a more reliable baseline for monitoring and assessing changes in the size and certification rates of the acquisition workforce over time. However, it is premature to determine the effectiveness of the planned actions in addressing the acquisition workforce challenges noted in this report. Continued progress and successful implementation of these recent efforts will require sustained leadership and management attention.

We are sending copies of this report to interested congressional committees, as well as the Secretary of Transportation, and the Director, Office of Management and Budget. In addition, this report will be made available at no charge on the GAO website at www.gao.gov.

Please contact me at (202) 512-4841 or martinb@gao.gov if you or your staff have any questions concerning this report. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made major contributions to this report are listed in appendix III.

Belva M. Martin
Director,
Acquisition and Sourcing Management

Appendix I: Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

This report focuses on the Department of Transportation's (DOT) efforts to identify and address its acquisition workforce needs through its acquisition workforce planning efforts for 2010, 2011, and 2012. While we obtained data from the 11 DOT operating administrations (OA) with procurement spending in fiscal year 2011, we focused our review on the five which accounted for 92 percent of the department's fiscal year 2011 procurement spending based on data reported in the Federal Procurement Data System-Next Generation. Our report assessed: (1) the efforts of the Office of the Secretary of Transportation and DOT's OAs to identify acquisition workforce needs, and (2) the Office of the Secretary's role in providing oversight and support for acquisition workforce planning and management. For the purposes of this report, we focused on the Office of the Senior Procurement Executive, the office within Office of the Secretary with primary responsibility for the acquisition workforce planning and management.

To assess the efforts of the Office of the Senior Procurement Executive and DOT's OAs to identify acquisition workforce staffing and training needs, we reviewed the acquisition workforce plans that DOT submitted to the Office of Federal Procurement Policy (OFPP) for 2010, 2011, and 2012 and took steps to assess the reliability of the data reported. We also interviewed officials from the Office of the Senior Procurement Executive and Office of Human Resources to discuss how the plans were compiled, data sources used, and steps taken to verify the accuracy and completeness of the data. We also collected acquisition workforce data from the 11 OAs included in DOT's human capital plans and interviewed officials from the five OAs with the highest procurement spending in fiscal year 2011 to discuss the data sources and methods used to track data on the acquisition workforce such as attrition, staffing needs, and certification levels. The data we reviewed included information on the size of the acquisition workforce and certification rates for fiscal years 2009, 2010, and 2011, as well as hiring targets, and estimated attrition through fiscal year 2013.

To assess the reliability of the aggregate data reported to OFPP, we reviewed the data presented in DOT's plans for readily apparent errors, omissions, and logical consistency. We also requested the underlying data by OA that the Office of the Senior Procurement Executive used to prepare the plans; however, officials were only able to provide us with the underlying data used to prepare the 2012 plan. Since DOT was not able to provide the underlying data used to prepare the 2010 and 2011 plans, we attempted to obtain the data directly from the OAs. In response to our initial data requests to the OAs, we received a variety of different

documents including resource charts and succession plans. Because the
data from the OAs was not provided in a consistent format and was not
always complete, we prepared and distributed a data collection
instrument to each of the OAs. We pre-populated the instrument based
on data the OAs provided, and asked the OAs to validate the data,
correct errors, or provide missing data. In some cases, the underlying
data was not available from the OAs. As a result, we were unable to
independently verify the accuracy and completeness of the data DOT
reported to OFPP in 2010 and 2011. We also identified discrepancies that
call into question the reliability of the data reported to OFPP. For
example, DOT's 2010 plan includes conflicting information on the size of
the acquisition workforce for fiscal year 2009. DOT officials could not
explain the discrepancy. As a result of these limitations, we concluded
that the aggregate data DOT reported in its plans was not sufficiently
accurate or complete for assessing changes in the size of the acquisition
workforce or certification rates over time.

To assess the reliability of the data DOT used to prepare its 2012 plan,
we compared the OA-level data we received from the Office of the Senior
Procurement Executive with data we received from the OAs. We
compared the data and interviewed OA officials regarding the sources
and methods they used to compile the data. We identified inconsistencies
in how the data were reported by the OAs. These inconsistencies affect
the reliability of the department's aggregate data, but we determined that
the OA-level data were sufficiently reliable to make qualitative
observations about staffing and certification challenges at the individual
OAs.

To determine the extent to which the Office of the Senior Procurement
Executive has provided support and oversight for acquisition workforce
planning and management, we reviewed relevant OFPP policy and
guidance, as well as DOT policy, guidance, and acquisition workforce
plans for 2010, 2011, and 2012. We interviewed DOT procurement and
human resources officials to obtain their views on their roles and
responsibilities. We also reviewed budget and strategic planning
documents from the Office of the Secretary and the Office of the Senior
Procurement Executive and interviewed officials from the five OAs with
the greatest fiscal year 2011 procurement spending to discuss their
approaches to strategic acquisition workforce planning and to obtain their
views about the level of support and oversight from the Office of the
Senior Procurement Executive. Based on this review, we identified Senior
Procurement Executive responsibilities to support and oversee acquisition
workforce planning and management and determined the extent to which

these functions are performed. We compared Office of the Senior
Procurement Executive strategic workforce planning efforts to leading
practices for workforce planning identified by GAO and others. We also
reviewed the Federal Aviation Administration's acquisition workforce
plans for 2009, 2010, 2011, and 2012 and interviewed officials to discuss
their approach workforce planning.

We conducted this performance audit from March 2012 to January 2013
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 Transportation

U.S. Department of Transportation
Office of the Secretary
of Transportation

Assistant Secretary
for Administration

1200 New Jersey Avenue, SE
Washington, DC 20590

January 3, 2013

Ms. Belva Martin
Director, Acquisition and Sourcing Management
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20458

Dear Ms. Martin:

The Office of the Senior Procurement Executive (OSPE) has emerged from a period of turmoil with strong leadership, a clear vision, and the management focus needed to ensure that the Department's acquisition functions, including its acquisition workforce, are sound, effective, and up to the challenges posed by operating efficiently in a resource constrained environment. Unfortunately, much of the information the GAO draft report relied upon to formulate its findings was drawn from the period where there was considerable instability at multiple management levels, including the Senior Procurement Executive and at the line supervisor level within OSPE. Over the last 3 years, leadership has been stabilized; a strong Senior Procurement Executive has been in place who focused on building an effective management team, along with the systems, processes and communications necessary to build a premier procurement organization. This progress is exemplified by the Department's actions to complete, to the Office of Inspector General's satisfaction, action on 14 of the 16 recommendations from its 2011 report on OSPE, (with the two remaining recommendations being longer term actions).

Capabilities in Place to Effectively Address Acquisition Workforce Issues

With a new leadership and management cadre in place, OSPE has been working to ensure that systems and processes are in place to effectively monitor and manage the Department's acquisition workforce. The Senior Procurement Executive has now been in place for 2 years and has assembled a knowledgeable and capable management team. By working increasingly with the acquisition community across the Department, through means such as the Strategic

GAO-13-117 DOT Acquisition Workforce

Acquisition Counsel, OSPE has been building a more extensive and collaborative capability to work consistently across the operating administrations.

The Department of Transportation's operating administrations are in the best position to manage workforce planning and development for the broad range of practitioners in their acquisition workforces, within the context of Governmentwide and departmental requirements, as appropriate. With their primary responsibility for conducting and managing all aspects of acquisition, including their workforces, the operating administrations are best equipped to conduct workforce planning activities, ensure the participation of their senior leadership teams, and focus on individual needs. For context, it is important to recognize that the mission of OSPE is to facilitate the accomplishment of DOT's mission by providing effective, ethical, state-of-the-art business policies, practices, and services in acquisition and grants management; and, to carry out the statutory and regulatory responsibilities of the Chief Acquisition Officer and the Senior Procurement Executive (SPE). Although the OSPE once had a staff dedicated to specific procurement oversight activities, that staff was eliminated and the activity terminated in response to Congress in the late 1990's.[1] During that same period, FAA received extensive procurement autonomy as a result of 49 U.S.C. 106, which made the FAA Administrator the final authority responsible for all matters related to FAA acquisitions and FAA personnel.

The role of OSPE with regard to the acquisition workforce is to provide consistent acquisition policy and developing and maintaining an acquisition workforce career development program and providing training to the DOT acquisition workforce on current policy issues. OSPE is focused on providing a broad view of the Department's acquisition workforce, providing broad policy guidance intended to effectively implement government wide acquisition workforce requirements, and facilitating information sharing across operating administrations and with other agencies. With regard to workforce planning, OSPE's role is to work with the operating administrations to make certain that guidance and requirements are applied and considered in a manner that is consistent throughout the Department. As a result of the types of issues that have occurred in the past, as highlighted in the GAO draft report, OSPE has set about strengthening its processes to better ensure consistent interpretation of requirements and consideration of data calls.

Strategic Plan Enumerates Acquisition Workforce Focus

In the OSPE Strategic Plan for the period covering fiscal year (FY) 2013 – 2016, issued on October 1, 2012, the office identified specific strategic goals relating to the Department's Acquisition workforce. These include (1) developing and maintaining workforce policies

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[1] See House Report 105-648, Department of Transportation and Related Agencies Appropriations Bill, 1998, 1999.

consistent with Governmentwide requirements; (2) managing acquisition certification programs and participating on Governmentwide working groups to further improve certification programs; (3) leveraging training resources to maximize learning opportunities for the acquisition workforce; and (4) enhancing the acquisition community, sharing accomplishments and providing opportunities for professional development.

The strategic plan makes clear that OSPE will provide the leadership necessary for developing policies and guidance in compliance with Federal certification standards. Through its monitoring and interactions with the operating administrations, OSPE will ensure that the acquisition workforce has the skills necessary to meet existing and future challenges. Finally, the strategic plan offers 5 specific metrics that will help us track progress on the goals established in the plan.

OSPE Working to Provide Consistent Acquisition Workforce Data

OSPE and the Chief Human Capital Officer (CHCO) have multiple efforts underway internally, across the Department, and in concert with OFPP to provide more consistent departmentwide data on acquisition workforces. While workforce planning efforts are susceptible to numerous analytical challenges, and the Department faces the same challenges confronting all government agencies in obtaining, training and maintaining an adequate acquisition workforce, we are working to provide high quality, comparable data for workforce planning across the Department. Specifically, the OSPE is establishing metrics for certification rates across all Federal Acquisition Certification (FAC) Programs. Further, in anticipation of the FY 13 Acquisition Human Capital Plan annual report data call, OSPE is jointly working with the CHCO and the operating administrations to provide more specific guidance intended to yield data that is consistent across the operating administrations. This joint OSPE/CHCO activity is focused heavily upon identifying data needs and sources/systems to support workforce planning and oversight data requirements. In addition, the CHCO has taken a leadership role in monitoring and managing employee sentiment and engagement across the acquisition workforce through the Employee Viewpoint Survey.

Consistent with DOT policy, OSPE has traditionally relied upon the OA's to collect and report workforce data. DOT policy has prescribed that OA's collect and maintain records, and report data in the Acquisition Career Management Information System (ACMIS) and now Federal Acquisition Institute Training Application System (FAITAS). OSPE is also exploring the potential for utilizing the enhanced data capabilities of FAITAS to improve OA management of acquisition workforce data and make it more consistent across organizations. The OSPE currently requires all FAC applications to be registered in FAITAS prior to certification. This will help with data quality over time. In concert with this ongoing registration, the OSPE is working on a data

reconciliation project with the OA's to validate FAITAS data for older records; and the deployment of on-line certification programs through FAITAS.

In collaboration with the CHCO, the OSPE is reviewing the OFPP format for future Acquisition Human Capital Plans and developing additional guidance in an effort to gain consistent data from across the Department. This additional guidance will also contain instructions for the operating administrations to coordinate with each of their individual HR communities to verify the accuracy of data, to the extent possible, and to document the assumptions built into reported data. Specifically, this guidance will require submission of future OA reports to be submitted under the tri-lateral signature of the OA, CAO and CHCO.

Conclusion

In summary, the OSPE has the framework in place to effectively monitor and develop its acquisition workforce, including strong leadership, necessary goals, policies and procedures, and useful performance metrics. We recognize the challenges we have faced as a result of past issues and perhaps because of them we are in a stronger position to face the challenges of the future. So while the draft report may focus on data and coordination issues that have challenged us in the past, we do not agree that its title or the primary findings convey a clear sense of the current status or future conduct of our acquisition workforce efforts. Nonetheless, we do generally agree with the need to better ensure that data calls pertaining to the acquisition workforce receive a consistent response across the organization, that there is strong and effective communication among the Senior Procurement Executive and the Chief Human Capital Officer, and that we do everything possible to ensure the OSPE has sufficient resources to fulfill its role in the Department

We appreciate this opportunity to comment on the GAO draft report. Please contact Martin Gertel, Director of Audit Relations, with any questions or if we may be of further assistance.

Brodi Fontenot

Appendix III: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

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Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, W. William Russell, Assistant Director; MacKenzie Cooper; Danielle Greene; Julia Kennon; Jean K. Lee; Steven Lozano; Angie Nichols-Friedman; Carol Petersen; and Marie Ahearn also made key contributions to the report.