

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-18-487](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

CBP is responsible for securing U.S. borders and employs nearly 45,000 law enforcement officers across its three operational components at and between U.S. ports of entry, in the air and maritime environment, and at certain overseas locations. In recent years, CBP has not attained target staffing levels for its law enforcement positions, citing high attrition rates in some locations, a protracted hiring process, and competition from other law enforcement agencies. GAO was asked to review CBP's efforts to recruit, hire, and retain law enforcement personnel.

This report examines CBP's efforts to (1) recruit qualified law enforcement officers, (2) more efficiently hire law enforcement applicants, and (3) retain law enforcement officers. GAO analyzed CBP data on recruitment, hiring, and retention from FY 2013 through 2017, as well as selected data for the first two quarters of FY 2018. GAO also reviewed CBP strategies and the recent contract it awarded to augment its recruiting and hiring activities and interviewed officials from CBP and three other selected law enforcement agencies.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that CBP systematically collect and analyze data on departing law enforcement officers and use this information to inform retention efforts. DHS concurred with this recommendation.

View [GAO-18-487](#). For more information, contact Rebecca Gambler at (202) 512-8777 or gamblierr@gao.gov.

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U.S. CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION

Progress and Challenges in Recruiting, Hiring, and Retaining Law Enforcement Personnel

What GAO Found

U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) increased its emphasis on recruitment by establishing a central recruitment office and increasing its participation in recruitment events, among other things. As a result, the number of applications it received for law enforcement positions across its operational components—the Office of Field Operations, U.S. Border Patrol, and Air and Marine Operations—from fiscal years (FY) 2013 through 2017 more than tripled. Also, in November 2017, CBP hired a contractor to more effectively target potential applicants and better utilize data to enhance CBP's recruitment efforts. However, it is too early to gauge whether the contractor will be effective in helping CBP to achieve its goal to recruit and hire more law enforcement officers.

CBP improved its hiring process as demonstrated by two key metrics—reducing its time-to-hire and increasing the percentage of applicants that are hired. As shown in the table, CBP's time-to-hire has decreased since FY 2015. CBP officials stated these improvements, paired with increases in applications, have resulted in more hires. For example, the number of Border Patrol agents hired in the first half of FY 2018 increased by about 83 percent when compared to the same period for FY 2017. However, the hiring process remains lengthy—for example, in FY 2017 it took more than 300 days, on average, for CBP officer applicants to complete the process. Certain factors contribute to the lengthy time-to-hire, including process steps that can be challenging and time-consuming for applicants to complete—such as the polygraph exam—as well as CBP's reliance on applicants to promptly complete certain aspects of the process—such as submitting their background investigation form.

U.S. Customs and Border Protection's (CBP) Time-to-Hire for Law Enforcement Officer Positions, Fiscal Years (FY) 2015–2017

Law enforcement officer position	Days		
	FY 2015	FY 2016	FY 2017
CBP officer	396	365	318
Border Patrol agent	628	306	274
Air and Marine Interdiction Agents	365	338	262

Source: GAO analysis of CBP data. | [GAO-18-487](#)

CBP enhanced its efforts to address retention challenges. However, staffing levels for law enforcement positions consistently remained below target levels. For example, CBP ended FY 2017 more than 1,100 CBP officers below its target staffing level. Officials cited employees' inability to relocate to more desirable locations as a key retention challenge. CBP has offered some relocation opportunities to law enforcement personnel and has recently pursued the use of financial incentives and other payments to supplement salaries, especially for those staffed to remote or hard-to-fill locations. However, CBP does not have a formal process for capturing information on all departing employees, such as an exit survey. Ensuring that operational components are systematically collecting and analyzing such information would better position CBP to understand its retention challenges and take appropriate action to address them.