



June 2018

U.S. CUSTOMS AND BORDER PROTECTION

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

Accessible Version

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 gambler@gao.gov.

June 2018

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

n/a	Days		
	FY 2015	FY 2016	FY 2017
Law enforcement officer position			
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.

Contents

Letter	1
Background	7
CBP Has Enhanced Its Recruitment Efforts and Applications for Law Enforcement Officer Positions Have Increased	16
CBP Has Taken Steps to Improve Its Hiring Process, but the Process Remains Lengthy	27
CBP Has Enhanced Its Retention Efforts, but Does Not Systematically Collect and Analyze Data on Departing Law Enforcement Personnel	43
Conclusions	60
Recommendation for Executive Action	61
Agency Comments and Our Evaluation	61
Appendix I: Comments from the Department of Homeland Security	64
Appendix II: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments	69
Appendix III: Accessible Data	70
Data Tables	70
Agency Comment Letter	75
Tables	
Table 1: Overview of Recruitment, Relocation, and Retention Incentives Available to Federal Agencies	15
Table 2: U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Recruitment Budget by Component, Fiscal Years (FY) 2015–2017	18
Table 3: Total Number of U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Recruiters by Component as of March 2018	22
Table 4: U.S. Customs and Border Protection’s (CBP) Time-to-Hire for Law Enforcement Officer Positions, Fiscal Years (FY) 2015–2017	28
Table 5: Overall Applicant Pass Rates for U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Law Enforcement Officer Positions, Fiscal Years (FY) 2015–2017	29

Table 6: Total Number of U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Law Enforcement Officers that Entered on Duty in the First Half of Fiscal Years (FY) 2017 and 2018	30
Table 7: Average Durations and Pass Rates for U.S. Customs and Border Protection's (CBP) Polygraph Examination by Law Enforcement Officer Position, Fiscal Years (FY) 2015–2017	
Table 8: U.S. Customs and Border Protection's (CBP) Average Durations for Selected Phases of the Hiring Process, Fiscal Year 2017	42
Table 9: Annual Attrition Rates for Law Enforcement Officer Positions at U.S. Customs and Border Protection and Other Selected Law Enforcement Agencies, Fiscal Years (FY) 2013–2017	44

Figures

Figure 1: Overview of U.S. Customs and Border Protection's Operational Components and Law Enforcement Officer Positions	9
Figure 2: U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Onboard versus Authorized Staffing Levels for Law Enforcement Officer Positions, Fiscal Years 2013–2017	11
Figure 3: U.S. Customs and Border Protection's (CBP) Hiring Process for Border Patrol Agent and CBP Officer Positions	13
Figure 4: U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Recruitment Events, Fiscal Years 2013–2017	20
Figure 5: U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Recruitment Incentive Use by Location for CBP Officers, Fiscal Years 2015–2017	23
Figure 6: U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Applications for Law Enforcement Officer Positions by Fiscal Year	25
Figure 7: Office of Field Operations Net Staffing Gains and Losses and Overall Staffing Levels for Customs and Border Protection Officer Positions, Fiscal Years 2013–2017	46
Figure 8: Border Patrol Net Staffing Gains and Losses and Overall Staffing Levels for Border Patrol Agent Positions, Fiscal Years 2013–2017	47
Figure 9: Air and Marine Operations Net Staffing Gains and Losses and Overall Staffing Levels for Law Enforcement Officer Positions, Fiscal Years (FY) 2013–2017	49

Figure 10: Border Patrol Agent Losses to Other Federal Agencies and Total Losses, Fiscal Years 2013–2017	51
Figure 11: Onboard and Authorized Staffing Levels for Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Officer Positions by Selected Field Offices, Fiscal Years (FY) 2015–2017	52
Accessible Data for Figure 1: Overview of U.S. Customs and Border Protection’s Operational Components and Law Enforcement Officer Positions	70
Accessible Data for Figure 2: U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Onboard versus Authorized Staffing Levels for Law Enforcement Officer Positions, Fiscal Years 2013–2017	71
Accessible Data for Figure 4: U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Recruitment Events, Fiscal Years 2013–2017	71
Accessible Data for Figure 5: U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Recruitment Incentive Use by Location for CBP Officers, Fiscal Years 2015–2017	71
Accessible Data for Figure 6: U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Applications for Law Enforcement Officer Positions by Fiscal Year	72
Accessible Data for Figure 7: Office of Field Operations Net Staffing Gains and Losses and Overall Staffing Levels for Customs and Border Protection Officer Positions, Fiscal Years 2013–2017	72
Accessible Data for Figure 8: Border Patrol Net Staffing Gains and Losses and Overall Staffing Levels for Border Patrol Agent Positions, Fiscal Years 2013–2017	73
Accessible Data for Figure 9: Air and Marine Operations Net Staffing Gains and Losses and Overall Staffing Levels for Law Enforcement Officer Positions, Fiscal Years (FY) 2013–2017	74
Accessible Data for Figure 10: Border Patrol Agent Losses to Other Federal Agencies and Total Losses, Fiscal Years 2013–2017	74
Accessible Data for Figure 11: Onboard and Authorized Staffing Levels for Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Officer Positions by Selected Field Offices, Fiscal Years (FY) 2015–2017	75

Abbreviations

AMO	Air and Marine Operations
BOP	Federal Bureau of Prisons
CBP	U.S. Customs and Border Protection
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
FAA	Federal Aviation Administration
GS	General Schedule
HRM	CBP's Office of Human Resources Management
ICE	U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement
NFRC	National Frontline Recruitment Command
OFO	Office of Field Operations
OIG	Office of Inspector General
OPM	Office of Personnel Management
SF-86	Standard Form 86

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



June 27, 2018

Congressional Requesters

The Department of Homeland Security’s (DHS) U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) is responsible for, among other things, securing U.S. borders to prevent acts of terrorism and stopping the unlawful movement of people, illegal drugs, and other contraband across U.S. borders. To carry out these objectives, CBP employs nearly 45,000 law enforcement personnel across its three operational components—the Office of Field Operations (OFO), U.S. Border Patrol (Border Patrol), and Air and Marine Operations (AMO)—at and between U.S. ports of entry, at certain overseas locations, and in the U.S. air and maritime environment.¹ However, in recent years, CBP has not been able to attain its statutorily-established minimum staffing levels for its Border Patrol agent positions or its staffing goals for other law enforcement officer positions, citing high attrition rates in some locations, a protracted hiring process, and competition from other federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies. Additionally, Executive Order 13767, issued in January 2017, called for CBP to hire 5,000 additional Border Patrol agents, subject to available appropriations.² Consistent with this directive, Border Patrol is

¹See 6 U.S.C. § 211(a) (establishing CBP within DHS), (c) (enumerating CBP’s duties), (e), (f), (g) (establishing and listing duties of U.S. Border Patrol, Air and Marine Operations, and Office of Field Operations within CBP). For the purposes of this report we use the term “law enforcement officer” in reference to OFO’s CBP officers, Border Patrol agents, and AMO agents. In general, ports of entry are facilities that provide for the controlled entry into or departure from the United States.

²Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvements, Exec. Order No. 13767, § 8, 82 Fed. Reg. 8793, 8795 (January 30, 2017) (issued Jan. 25). The memorandum implementing this executive order also calls for the hiring of an additional 500 law enforcement officers in CBP’s AMO office.

aiming to attain a staffing level of 26,370 Border Patrol agents (5,000 agents above the fiscal year 2016 statutorily-established level).³

We have previously reported on human capital and workforce planning issues across the federal government and particularly at DHS. For example, in September 2013, we reported on department-wide recruitment and hiring efforts.⁴ Specifically, while we found that DHS components were generally filling mission-critical positions, we also recommended that the department take steps to better track the costs of its coordinated recruiting efforts. In response to this recommendation, DHS began collecting quarterly data on each of its components' recruitment expenditures, including the cost of recruitment events with multiple DHS attendees, and we closed the recommendation as implemented in August 2015. Further, in 2003, we designated strengthening DHS's human capital management functions as a high-risk area. In our 2017 high-risk update, we found that DHS had made progress improving human capital management by, for example, linking its workforce planning efforts to strategic and program planning efforts. However, we also found that DHS had more work ahead to improve employee morale, among other things.⁵ In November 2017, we reported on Border Patrol's agent deployment strategy and, among other things, found that Border Patrol faced challenges in optimally deploying agents due to staffing shortages.⁶ We also reported on CBP's trade enforcement activities in June 2017 and found that CBP had not met the authorized

³At the time the President's directive to hire and onboard 5,000 Border Patrol agents was issued, the government was operating under a continuing resolution extending fiscal year 2016 funding, and related provisos such as the 21,370 Border Patrol agent workforce floor, into fiscal year 2017, while Congress worked to pass a consolidated appropriations bill. See Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2017, Pub. L. No. 114-254, div. A, 130 Stat. 1005, 1005-22 (2016); and Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2016, Pub. L. No. 114-113, div. F, tit. II, 129 Stat. 2242, 2495 (2015). Border Patrol's fiscal year 2017 appropriation did not mandate a workforce floor for agents. See Explanatory Statement (163 Cong. Rec. H3327, H3809-10 (daily ed. May 3, 2017)) accompanying Pub. L. No. 115-31, 131 Stat. 135. The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2018 (Pub. L. No. 115-141, 132 Stat. 348), also did not mandate an overall Border Patrol agent workforce floor.

⁴GAO, *DHS Recruiting and Hiring: DHS Is Generally Filling Mission-Critical Positions, but Could Better Track Costs of Coordinated Recruiting Efforts*, [GAO-13-742](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 17, 2013).

⁵GAO, *High-Risk Series: Progress on Many High-Risk Areas, While Substantial Efforts Needed on Others*, [GAO-17-317](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 15, 2017).

⁶GAO, *Border Patrol: Issues Related to Agent Deployment Strategy and Immigration Checkpoints*, [GAO-18-50](#) (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 8, 2017).

staffing levels for its trade positions.⁷ We recommended that CBP develop a long-term hiring plan outlining how the agency will meet its staffing targets for these positions. CBP concurred with this recommendation and, as of January 2018, had taken steps toward addressing hiring gaps for its trade positions, such as evaluating approaches for assessing and selecting candidates, but has not yet developed a long-term hiring plan.

Additionally, the DHS Office of Inspector General (OIG) has reported on CBP recruitment and hiring challenges. Specifically, the DHS OIG found that CBP faced significant challenges in meeting its hiring goals and expressed concern about CBP's ability to hire law enforcement personnel in a timely manner, citing the agency's lengthy hiring process and its need for additional human resources personnel.⁸ Further, in August 2017, the DHS OIG recommended improving certain aspects of CBP's polygraph examination for law enforcement officers, including developing procedures to ensure that active polygraph examinations are immediately stopped if an applicant makes a disqualifying statement, such as admitting to certain instances of illegal drug use.⁹

You asked us to review CBP's efforts to recruit, hire, and retain law enforcement personnel. This report examines the extent to which CBP has (1) developed and implemented an approach to recruit qualified law enforcement officers, (2) revised its hiring process and made efforts to more efficiently hire law enforcement applicants, and (3) developed and implemented an approach to retain law enforcement officers.

To determine the extent to which CBP has developed and implemented an approach to recruit qualified law enforcement officers, we reviewed pertinent recruitment strategy documents, such as DHS's Coordinated Recruiting and Outreach Strategy and CBP's National Frontline Recruitment Command Strategy, and assessed CBP's recent and planned recruitment activities. We analyzed data on CBP's recruitment efforts for the last 5 fiscal years—2013 through 2017—including

⁷GAO, *Customs and Border Protection: Improved Planning Needed to Strengthen Trade Enforcement*, [GAO-17-618](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 12, 2017).

⁸DHS OIG, *Special Report: Challenges Facing DHS in Its Attempt to Hire 15,000 Border Patrol Agents and Immigration Officers*, OIG-17-98-SR (Washington, D.C.: July 27, 2017); and *DHS Is Slow to Hire Law Enforcement Personnel*, OIG-17-05 (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 31, 2016).

⁹DHS OIG, *CBP Spends Millions Conducting Polygraph Examinations on Unsuitable Applicants*, OIG-17-99-MA (Washington, D.C.: Aug. 4, 2017).

application numbers, recruitment budgets, financial recruitment incentives, and the number and type of agency recruitment events, to identify trends over time and assess how CBP uses these data to inform its recruitment efforts. We also analyzed selected information from fiscal year 2018, such as recruitment events, to help identify possible trends. We interviewed CBP officials from all three operational components as well as CBP's Office of Human Resources Management (HRM) and the National Frontline Recruitment Command (NFRC) to identify and discuss the challenges CBP faces in recruiting for law enforcement positions.¹⁰ We assessed the key efforts and initiatives CBP has undertaken to address these challenges to determine the extent to which CBP's efforts have had an effect on its ability to recruit qualified applicants.

To determine the extent to which CBP has revised its hiring process and made efforts to more efficiently hire law enforcement applicants, we reviewed CBP's step-by-step hiring process for all law enforcement positions across its three operational components. We also reviewed key hiring documents such as the Office of Personnel Management's (OPM) End-to-End Hiring Roadmap and CBP's draft *Frontline Hiring and Recruiting FY 18 to FY 24 Strategy & Implementation Plan*. We also analyzed key hiring data from fiscal years 2015 through 2017, including CBP's time-to-hire—the average number of calendar days that elapsed between the closing date of a job announcement and an applicant's entry-on-duty date—and overall applicant pass rate—the estimated percentage of applicants who successfully completed the hiring process and entered on duty—to identify trends. We also analyzed data on each individual hiring process step, including the pass rate and average duration—the average amount of time it took applicants to complete a given step—to identify specific aspects of CBP's process that posed challenges. As these data were not systematically tracked in fiscal years 2013 and 2014, we selected fiscal years 2015 through 2017, the 3 most recent fiscal years for which complete data were available at the time of our review. Further, we reviewed CBP documentation and interviewed officials in HRM, the three operational components, and the Office of Professional Responsibility—which manages the background investigation and polygraph examination portions of the hiring process. We used this information to identify and assess revisions to the hiring process as well as key hiring initiatives to determine the extent to which these efforts have had an effect on the agency's time-to-hire and overall applicant pass

¹⁰In February 2016, CBP established the NFRC, a formal task force housed within HRM.

rates. We also reviewed the November 2017 contract CBP awarded to Accenture Federal Services, LLC, to help meet the staffing requirements outlined in Executive Order 13767 (issued in January 2017) and interviewed CBP officials responsible for managing the contract.

To determine the extent to which CBP has developed and implemented an approach to retain law enforcement personnel, we analyzed CBP data on attrition rates and law enforcement officer losses by component, position, and location for the last 5 fiscal years—2013 through 2017—as well as selected data from fiscal year 2018, such as the number of law enforcement officers that departed the agency. We assessed documentation and data on CBP’s use of relocation programs and human capital flexibilities, including financial retention incentives and special salary rates, to determine the extent to which CBP has made efforts to retain qualified law enforcement officers. We interviewed officials in HRM and all three CBP operational components as well as officials from the National Border Patrol Council union and National Treasury Employees Union—which represent CBP officers—to gain insights into the challenges the agency faces in retaining law enforcement personnel and assess the key efforts and initiatives CBP has pursued to address these challenges. Additionally, we assessed CBP’s retention efforts against federal internal control standards related to using quality information to inform management decision making.¹¹

We assessed the reliability of CBP data on recruitment, hiring, and retention that we used for our analysis for all three objectives. We obtained and analyzed documentation on CBP’s systems capabilities and data controls, interviewed data users and managers responsible for these systems, and, to the extent possible, cross-checked data across disparate sources to ensure consistency. We found these data to be sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this report. Further, we reviewed our work on federal human capital issues and conducted a literature search to identify leading practices that may be applicable to federal law

¹¹GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, [GAO-14-704G](#) (Washington, D.C.: September 2014).

enforcement agencies in recruiting, hiring, and retaining officers.¹² We assessed the extent to which CBP's processes and key activities aligned with leading practices in areas such as identifying recruitment responsibilities, processing applicants, and determining pay and compensation.¹³ We also reviewed documentation and data and interviewed officials from three other selected federal law enforcement agencies—U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), the U.S. Secret Service, and the federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP)—to identify their efforts and activities in recruiting, hiring, and retaining qualified law enforcement personnel. We included these other selected law enforcement agencies in our review to help provide context for understanding CBP's efforts and outcomes in recruiting, hiring, and retaining law enforcement personnel relative to these agencies. We selected ICE because it is a DHS component that also has an immigration-related mission and because CBP data indicate that ICE is the top destination for departing CBP law enforcement personnel.¹⁴ We selected the Secret Service because it is also a DHS component and its application process—like CBP's—includes a polygraph examination.¹⁵ Last, we selected BOP as a non-DHS comparison agency because it has

¹²GAO, *Human Capital: Key Principles for Effective Strategic Workforce Planning*, [GAO-04-39](#) (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 11, 2003); GAO, *Federal Workforce: Sustained Attention to Human Capital Leading Practices Can Help Improve Agency Performance*, [GAO-17-627T](#) (Washington, D.C.: May 18, 2017); GAO, *Federal Pay: Opportunities Exist to Enhance Strategic Use of Special Payments*, [GAO-18-91](#) (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 7, 2017); GAO, *Federal Workforce: Additional Analysis and Sharing of Promising Practices Could Improve Employee Engagement and Performance*, [GAO-15-585](#) (Washington, D.C.: July 14, 2015); GAO, *Bureau of Prisons: Better Planning and Evaluation Could Help Ensure Effective Use of Retention Incentives*, [GAO-18-147](#) (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 7, 2017).

¹³For the purposes of this report, we indicate instances where CBP's efforts are generally consistent with leading practices we identified through our literature search in recruiting, hiring, and retaining law enforcement personnel.

¹⁴Law enforcement officer positions at ICE include Deportation Officer, Detention and Deportation Officer, Criminal Investigator, and Technical Enforcement Officer.

¹⁵Law enforcement officer positions at the Secret Service include Special Agent and Uniformed Division Officer.

also faced challenges in recruiting and retaining law enforcement personnel in hard-to-fill locations.¹⁶

We conducted this performance audit from August 2017 to June 2018 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.

Background

CBP's Law Enforcement Positions

Within CBP's three operational components—OFO, Border Patrol, and AMO—there are five categories of law enforcement officer positions, each with different job requirements and responsibilities. First, OFO's CBP officers conduct immigration and customs inspections at ports of entry to prevent the illicit entry of travelers, cargo, merchandise, and other items.¹⁷ Second, Border Patrol agents are responsible for securing the U.S. border between ports of entry and responding to cross-border threats. Third, AMO has three categories of law enforcement officers—Air Interdiction Agents, Aviation Enforcement Agents, and Marine Interdiction Agents—who interdict and disrupt threats to the United States in the air and maritime environments at and beyond the border. For more information on CBP's law enforcement officer positions, see figure 1.

¹⁶For the purposes of this report, we limited our scope of BOP law enforcement personnel to Correctional Officer positions at the Series 0007, Grades 5 and 6 levels. According to BOP officials, these positions represent the standard law enforcement officer position at BOP's federal institutions. We previously reported on retention challenges at BOP. See [GAO-18-147](#).

¹⁷See 8 U.S.C. §§ 1185 (U.S. travel controls), 1225 (immigration inspections of applicants for admission); 19 U.S.C. §§ 1461, 1467 (customs inspections of persons, merchandise and baggage). A port of entry is any officially designated location (seaport, airport, or land border location) where DHS officers or employees are assigned to clear passengers and merchandise, collect duties, and enforce customs laws, and where DHS officers inspect persons entering or applying for admission into, or departing, the United States pursuant to U.S. immigration law and travel controls. OFO is responsible for providing border security while facilitating lawful trade and travel at U.S. ports of entry. For the purpose of this report, we focus specifically on the CBP officer position, which is tasked with conducting a wide range of activities to help fulfill these responsibilities.

Figure 1: Overview of U.S. Customs and Border Protection’s Operational Components and Law Enforcement Officer Positions

		Number of onboard law enforcement personnel at end of fiscal year 2017	Mission	Job requirements
Office of Field Operations 		23,079 Customs and Border Protection officers	To protect U.S. borders at ports of entry; conduct overseas operations to ensure homeland security; and enforce customs law, immigration law, trade law, criminal statutes, and agricultural policies.	Entry-level positions require 3 years of general experience or a 4-year degree, or a combination of education and experience.
U.S. Border Patrol 		19,437 Border Patrol agents	To secure international land borders and coastal waters between ports of entry and enforce immigration law and criminal statutes.	Entry-level positions require 1 year of general experience or a bachelor's degree, or a combination of post-high-school education and experience.
Air and Marine Operations 		606 Air Interdiction Agents, 201 Aviation Enforcement Agents, and 337 Marine Interdiction Agents	To secure the air and maritime environment at and beyond the U.S. border.	Air and Marine Operations law enforcement officer positions require specific certifications and licensing, among other requirements, because of the technical competencies required for these positions. ^a

Source: GAO analysis of Customs and Border Protection (CBP) data; CBP (photos). | GAO-18-487

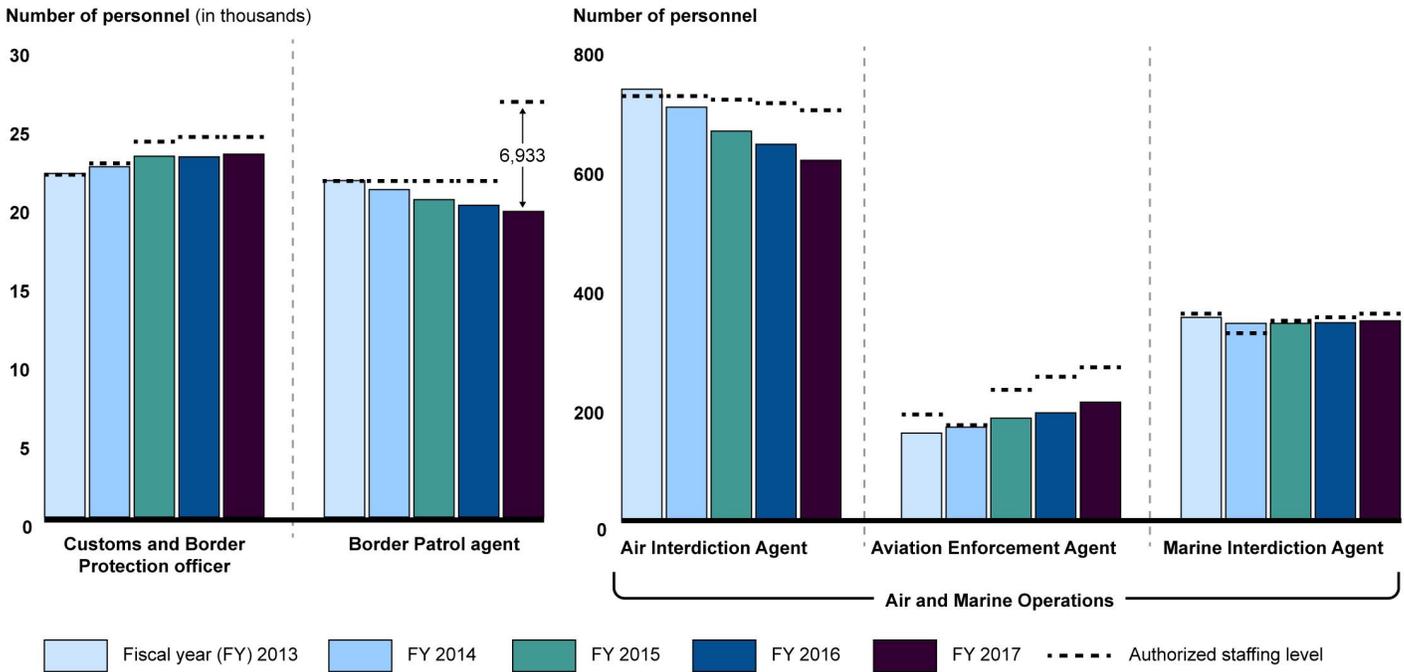
^aAir Interdiction Agent positions require a Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) commercial or Airline Transport Pilot Certificate and at least 1,500 total flight hours, with at least 100 of those in the last 12 months. Air Interdiction Agent positions require a current FAA Class I Medical Certificate while Aviation Enforcement Agent positions require a current FAA Class II Medical Certificate. Marine Interdiction Agent positions require a qualifying U.S. Coast Guard Merchant Mariner Credential and 1 year of specialized law enforcement experience to be hired at the General Schedule (GS) Grade 9 level.

CBP Staffing Levels for Law Enforcement Officer Positions

In recent years, CBP has not been able to attain statutorily-established minimum staffing levels for its Border Patrol agent positions or meet its staffing targets for other law enforcement officer positions.¹⁸ Figure 2 shows the difference between CBP's onboard staffing levels and its authorized staffing levels from fiscal years 2013 through 2017.

¹⁸Border Patrol's authorized staffing levels take into account the statutorily-established minimum of 21,370 full-time equivalent Border Patrol agent positions included in DHS's fiscal years 2013–2016 appropriations. See Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act, 2013, Pub. L. No. 113-6, div. D, tit. II, 127 Stat. 198, 345; Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2014, Pub. L. No. 113-76, div. F, tit. II, 128 Stat. 5, 249; Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act, 2015, Pub. L. No. 114-4, tit. II, 129 Stat. 39, 41; Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2016, Pub. L. No. 114-113, div. F, tit. II, 129 Stat. 2242, 2495 (2015). The authorized staffing level for these positions in fiscal year 2017 reflects Border Patrol's goal of having 26,370 agents, which includes the fiscal year 2016 workforce floor plus the additional 5,000 agents called for in Executive Order 13767. OFO and AMO develop annual authorized staffing level targets for law enforcement officer positions based on operational needs and available funding.

Figure 2: U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Onboard versus Authorized Staffing Levels for Law Enforcement Officer Positions, Fiscal Years 2013–2017



Source: GAO analysis of CBP data. | GAO-18-487

Note: Authorized staffing levels through fiscal year 2016 for Border Patrol agents represent statutorily-established workforce floors while authorized staffing levels for CBP officers, Air Interdiction Agents, Aviation Enforcement Agents, and Marine Interdiction Agents represent authorized staffing ceilings determined at the component level. The fiscal year 2017 authorized staffing level for Border Patrol represents the component's goal of having 26,370 Border Patrol agents, which includes the Executive Order 13767 directive to hire and onboard 5,000 additional agents.

CBP's Hiring Process for Law Enforcement Officer Positions

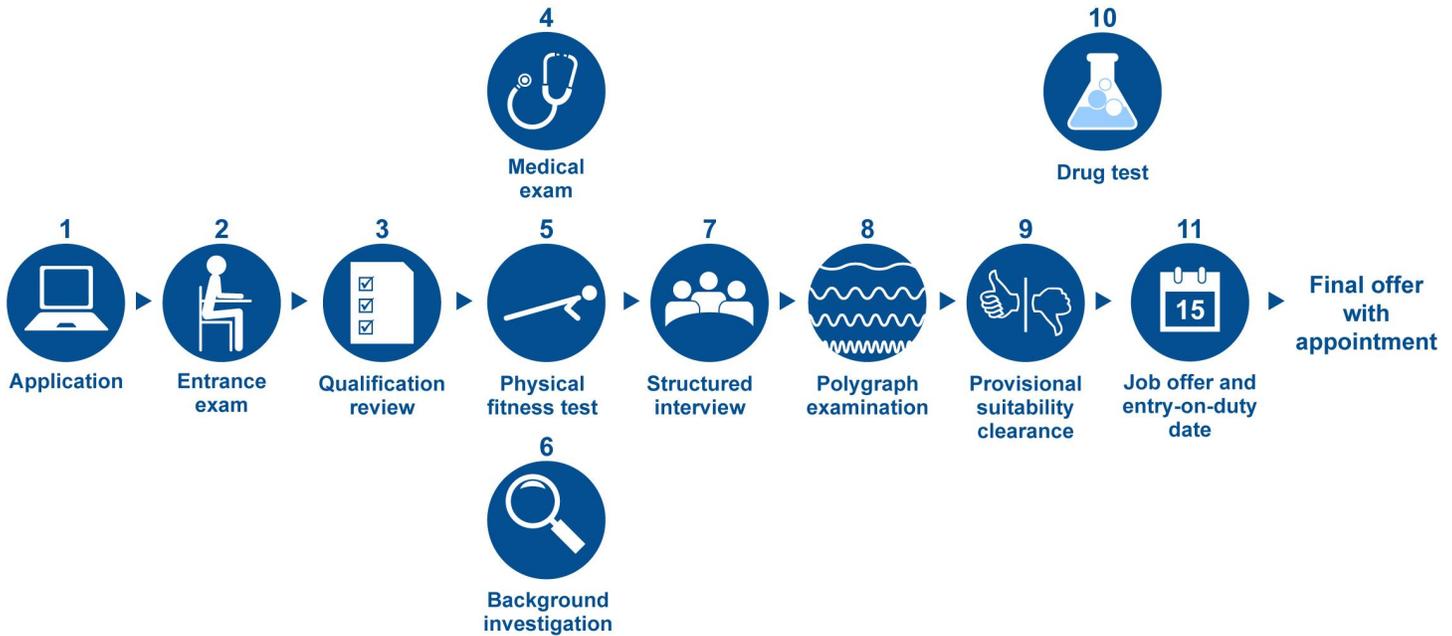
CBP's law enforcement applicants undergo a lengthy and rigorous hiring process that includes nearly a dozen steps, including a background investigation, medical examination, physical fitness test, and polygraph

examination.¹⁹ Several of these steps can be done concurrently—for example, CBP can begin the background investigation while the candidate completes the physical fitness test and medical examination process steps. Figure 3 depicts the hiring process for Border Patrol agent and CBP officer positions.²⁰

¹⁹The Anti-Border Corruption Act of 2010 requires all applicants for CBP law enforcement officer positions to receive a polygraph examination before being hired. Pub. L. No. 111-376, § 3, 124 Stat. 4104, 4104-05 (2011). The polygraph allows CBP to evaluate an applicant's suitability for a law enforcement position more thoroughly and accurately by uncovering instances of past criminal behavior or misconduct that otherwise might not have been revealed.

²⁰While the hiring process steps for AMO's law enforcement officer positions are similar to those for Border Patrol agents and CBP officers, there are some key differences. First, AMO does not require applicants to take an in-person entrance exam but does require applicants for Air and Marine Interdiction Agent positions to take a three-part written, oral, and practical assessment. Second, applicants must submit the required certifications and credentials to demonstrate they possess the technical competencies for the job. Specifically, Air Interdiction Agent applicants must have an FAA commercial or Transport Pilot Certificate and at least 1,500 total flight hours—including at least 100 of those in the last 12 months. Air Interdiction Agent applicants require a current FAA Class I Medical Certificate while Aviation Enforcement Agent applicants require a current FAA Class II Medical Certificate. Marine Interdiction Agent applicants require a qualifying U.S. Coast Guard Merchant Mariner Credential and 1 year of specialized law enforcement experience to be hired at the GS-9 level. In addition, as of November 2016, applicants for Border Patrol agent and CBP officer positions at the Law Enforcement Officer GS-9 level are no longer required to take the entrance examination.

Figure 3: U.S. Customs and Border Protection’s (CBP) Hiring Process for Border Patrol Agent and CBP Officer Positions



- | | | | | | |
|--|---|--|--|---|--|
| <p>1</p> <p>Applications are submitted through the USAJOBS.gov website. The Office of Personnel Management sends viable applicants to U.S. Customs and Border Protection’s (CBP) Office of Human Resources Management (HRM) for review.</p> | <p>2</p> <p>An in-person entrance exam assesses the applicant for the critical competencies necessary to successfully perform in the position.</p> | <p>3</p> <p>HRM reviews resumes to ensure minimum qualifications are met and, if so, provides a tentative offer letter to the applicant.</p> | <p>4</p> <p>A medical exam assesses the applicant’s overall health. The exam includes a medical history review, physician exam, and vision and hearing tests.</p> | <p>5</p> <p>The physical fitness test assesses the applicant’s ability to execute job duties. The test includes push-ups, sit-ups, and step tests.</p> | <p>6</p> <p>A background investigation is initiated when an applicant submits a completed Standard Form 86, an extensive electronic questionnaire about the applicant’s background.</p> |
| <p>Concurrent</p> | | | | | |
| <p>7</p> <p>An in-person interview assesses the applicant for competencies necessary to perform in the position, such as judgment, decision-making, emotional maturity, and interpersonal skills.</p> | <p>8</p> <p>The polygraph measures an applicant’s physiological response to a series of background and national security questions.</p> | <p>9</p> <p>Following completion of the polygraph examination and background investigation, an adjudicator in CBP’s Office of Professional Responsibility determines whether to grant a provisional suitability clearance to the applicant.^a</p> | <p>10</p> <p>Applicants complete a drug screening to support suitability for the position. The drug test can occur at any point in the hiring process.</p> | <p>11</p> <p>HRM provides a job offer to the applicant and an entry-on-duty date is determined.</p> | |

Source: GAO analysis of CBP documentation; Art Explosion (clip art). | GAO-18-487

Note: As of November 2016, applicants for Border Patrol agent and CBP officer positions at the Law Enforcement Officer GS-9 level are no longer required to take the entrance examination. Further, in fiscal year 2017, CBP eliminated the second physical fitness test—which had been the last process step in CBP’s hiring process—for CBP officer and Border Patrol agent applicants. In addition to shortening the overall process, CBP officials told us this change provided the small percentage of applicants that passed every other hiring process step with an opportunity to demonstrate they meet CBP’s physical ability standards during basic training.

^aCBP must still complete a final suitability review after the granting of a provisional suitability clearance once all steps of the background investigation process are complete.

Financial Incentives and Other Human Capital Flexibilities Available to CBP

CBP is able to use financial incentives and other compensation-based human capital flexibilities to help recruit and retain qualified law enforcement personnel.²¹ According to OPM, federal agencies have broad discretionary authority to provide additional compensation in certain circumstances to support workforce needs and address human capital challenges, including through the use of financial incentives such as recruitment, relocation, and retention incentives. Table 1 below provides an overview of these incentives.²²

²¹The explanatory statement accompanying the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2017, directed CBP to work with OPM as necessary to identify and utilize incentives to improve retention in hard-to-fill locations and evaluate the potential effect of offering additional career path enhancements to personnel who choose these locations. 163 Cong. Rec. H3327, H3810 (daily ed. May 3, 2017). The explanatory statement accompanying the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2018, directed CBP to brief Congress within 90 days on a comprehensive, multiyear recruitment and retention strategy—including, among other elements, current and planned hiring and retention initiatives, use of incentives available through OPM, and potential new career path enhancements—to recruit, relocate, and retain employees assigned to remote locations. 164 Cong. Rec. H2045, H2548 (daily ed. March 22, 2018).

²²Financial incentives are calculated as a percentage of an employee's basic pay. Section 208 of the Federal Employees Pay Comparability Act of 1990 first authorized OPM to allow federal agencies to give incentives, including recruitment, relocation, and retention incentives, to employees. Pub. L. No. 101-509, tit. V, § 529, 104 Stat. 1389, 1458-60 (adding 5 U.S.C. §§ 5753-54 related to recruitment, relocation, and retention payments). The Federal Workforce Flexibility Act of 2004 provided federal agencies increased flexibilities regarding these incentives. Pub. L. No. 108-411, § 101, 118 Stat. 2305, 2305-2311 (striking and replacing 5 U.S.C. §§ 5753-54).

Table 1: Overview of Recruitment, Relocation, and Retention Incentives Available to Federal Agencies

Authority	Description	Payment ranges	Approval authority
Recruitment Incentives (5 U.S.C. § 5753; 5 C.F.R. part 575, subpart A)	May be paid to a newly-appointed employee if the agency determines that the position is likely to be difficult to fill in the absence of such incentive.	Up to 25 or 50, but in no event exceeding 100, percent of the employee’s annual rate of basic pay. ^a	Agency may authorize a recruitment incentive of up to 25 percent of the employee’s beginning annual rate of basic pay. ^b The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) may authorize an agency to pay a recruitment incentive of up to 50, but not to exceed 100, percent. ^c
Relocation Incentives (5 U.S.C. § 5753; 5 C.F.R. part 575, subpart B)	May be paid to a current employee who moves to a new position in the same geographic area under certain circumstances, or must relocate to accept a position in a different geographic area, if in either case, the agency determines that the position is likely to be difficult to fill in the absence of such incentive.	Up to 25 or 50, but in no event exceeding 100, percent of the employee’s annual rate of basic pay. ^a	Agency may authorize a relocation incentive of up to 25 percent of the employee’s beginning annual rate of basic pay. ^b OPM may authorize an agency to pay a relocation incentive of up to 50, but not to exceed 100, percent. ^c
Retention Incentives (5 U.S.C. § 5754; 5 C.F.R. part 575, subpart C)	May be paid to a current employee (or group or category of employees) if the agency determines that the unusually high or unique qualifications of the employee or a special need of the agency for the employee’s services makes it essential to retain the employee and the employee is likely to leave federal service, or for a different federal position under certain conditions, in the absence of such incentive.	Up to 25 for an individual or 10 for a group, but not to exceed 50, percent of the employee’s or category’s rate of basic pay.	Agency may authorize a retention incentive of up to 10 or 25 percent of the rate of basic pay for a group or individual, respectively. OPM may, at agency request, authorize a retention incentive of up to 50 percent.

Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Code of Federal Regulations and OPM documentation. | GAO-18-487

^aThe employee’s annual rate of basic pay at the beginning of the service period.

^bMultiplied by the number of years in the service period (not to exceed 4 years).

^cMultiplied by the number of years in the service period (up to 100 percent of basic pay).

In addition to these incentives, CBP can also offer other compensation-based human capital flexibilities to employees.²³ For example, with OPM approval, CBP may establish a special salary rate, or a higher rate of pay for employees, either nationwide or in a specific geographic area where

²³There are also a number of non-compensation-based flexibilities CBP may provide its employees such as work arrangements and work-life flexibilities, which include telework; health and wellness programs; and subsidized transportation; among others.

CBP's recruitment or retention efforts are, or would likely become, significantly handicapped without those higher rates.²⁴

CBP Has Enhanced Its Recruitment Efforts and Applications for Law Enforcement Officer Positions Have Increased

CBP Established a Centralized Recruitment Office to Manage Recruitment Efforts across Components

CBP officials stated they established the National Frontline Recruitment Command (NFRC)—a formal task force housed within CBP's Office of Human Resources Management (HRM)—in February 2016. The NFRC is charged with, among other things, developing recruitment strategies, providing strategic guidance, and managing recruitment efforts across all three operational components. CBP officials stated that, prior to the creation of the NFRC, the recruitment and hiring of law enforcement officers was done at the component level and there was no integrated CBP-wide approach to coordinate efforts and address challenges. Based on our literature search, we identified leading practices that may be applicable to federal law enforcement agencies in recruiting, hiring, and retaining law enforcement personnel. Having a centralized entity or office in charge of developing recruitment strategies and overseeing recruitment activities is consistent with leading practices we identified for recruiting for law enforcement positions specifically. All three other selected law enforcement agencies we reviewed also had recruitment strategies that outlined their respective agencies' recruitment roles and responsibilities, while two had a centralized entity in charge of recruitment. In particular, officials from both ICE and the Secret Service stated they have a central office in charge of recruitment efforts while BOP officials told us that recruitment for Correctional Officers is mainly handled at the local prison level.

²⁴OPM may establish special rates to address staffing problems caused by (1) significantly higher non-Federal pay rates than those payable by the federal government within the area, location, or occupational group involved; (2) the remoteness of the area or location involved; (3) the undesirability of the working conditions or nature of the work involved; or (4) any other circumstances OPM considers appropriate.

The NFRC is responsible for setting CBP's strategic recruitment goals and overseeing agency-wide recruitment initiatives. For example, CBP officials are finalizing the *Frontline Hiring and Recruiting FY 18 to FY 24 Strategy & Implementation Plan*, which outlines specific initiatives designed to increase the number and quality of applicants applying for law enforcement officer positions. The strategy describes ways CBP can target its recruitment efforts more effectively and develop brand identities for each component to provide the foundation for a comprehensive marketing strategy.

In addition to setting strategic initiatives, the NFRC manages the recruitment budget and allocates recruitment funding for CBP and the operational components. For example, NFRC officials stated that the NFRC funds CBP-wide recruitment initiatives such as Special Emphasis Recruitment Teams—teams of specially trained recruiters from each component who attend events specific to different demographic groups such as females or veterans. The NFRC also funds other initiatives such as strategic partnerships with major businesses, which allow CBP to advertise and recruit at their events. For example, CBP previously participated in strategic partnerships with the Big 10 and Big XII athletic conferences, and in 2016 and 2017, the NFRC spent \$500,000 for a strategic partnership with the Spartan Race program, which allowed CBP and its components to advertise, set up recruitment booths, and sign up applicants at events.²⁵ NFRC officials told us they ended their partnership with the Spartan Race in December 2017 and are evaluating options for future strategic partnerships.

The NFRC also allocates funding for both joint recruitment events—those attended by two or three components—and single-component events attended by one operational component. For example, NFRC officials stated that career and job fairs provide opportunities for CBP to leverage its resources and attract potential applicants to all three components. At these events, applicants can talk to uniformed recruiters to learn more about their respective career paths. NFRC officials stated that in addition to CBP-wide efforts, the NFRC manages and allocates recruitment funding for each operational component to cover the cost of recruitment events or other initiatives that meet the specific needs of that

²⁵Spartan Races are a series of obstacle races of varying distance and difficulty ranging from 3 miles to half-marathon distances.

component.²⁶ For example, AMO officials stated that they use NFRC funding to attend events such as helicopter shows where there is a higher potential to attract qualified pilots.

As shown in table 2, CBP’s recruitment budget allocated by the NFRC almost doubled from approximately \$6.4 million in fiscal year 2015 to more than \$12.7 million in fiscal year 2017.²⁷ The budget allocated by the NFRC specific to the operational components—while a small percentage of CBP’s overall recruitment budget—increased during this time frame as well. For example, Border Patrol’s recruitment budget increased from approximately \$433,000 in fiscal year 2015 to more than \$1 million in fiscal year 2017, while OFO’s budget increased from approximately \$116,000 to nearly \$525,000.

Table 2: U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Recruitment Budget by Component, Fiscal Years (FY) 2015–2017

CBP component	FY 2015	FY 2016	FY 2017
Office of Human Resources Management	\$5,808,735	\$12,206,292	\$10,974,201
Office of Field Operations	\$116,146	\$749,691	\$524,826
U.S. Border Patrol	\$432,775	\$1,109,182	\$1,019,940
Air and Marine Operations	\$0	\$77,000	\$185,796
Total	\$6,357,656	\$14,142,165	\$12,704,763

Source: CBP data. | GAO-18-487

Note: CBP’s National Frontline Recruitment Command (NFRC), a formal task force within CBP’s Office of Human Resources Management (HRM), allocates recruitment funding to HRM and the operational components. In addition to the money allocated by the NFRC, each operational component may use additional funding from their own budget to fund recruitment initiatives. This additional funding is not included in the table above.

²⁶To receive funding, operational components submit information about a potential recruitment event to the NFRC for approval, including the date, location, and cost. The NFRC reviews the event information to determine if the event is appropriate and whether there is enough funding. If approved, the NFRC allocates funding to the component to pay for the event.

²⁷According to an HRM official, prior to the establishment of the NFRC in February 2016, a recruitment branch within HRM allocated recruitment funding.

In addition to recruitment funding managed by the NFRC, components may use additional funding from their own budgets that is not allocated or managed by the NFRC to fund recruitment initiatives. For example, two of the three components funded their own strategic partnerships. Border Patrol officials stated they spent \$1.5 million on a strategic partnership with the Professional Bull Riders Association which allowed them to target specific applicants who fit Border Patrol's applicant profile. This partnership provided Border Patrol with the opportunity to advertise and recruit at more than 70 events over the course of 18 months.²⁸ Likewise, OFO officials told us they spent \$15,000 to be the sole sponsor of the 2018 National Police Week race in Washington, D.C., which includes a recruitment booth, a logo on the official T-shirt, and a prominent speaker at the start of the race. AMO officials stated that while they generally do not use their own funding to pay for strategic partnerships, they do partner with the University of North Dakota, which has a large flight school, where they give presentations in classrooms and recruit on campus.

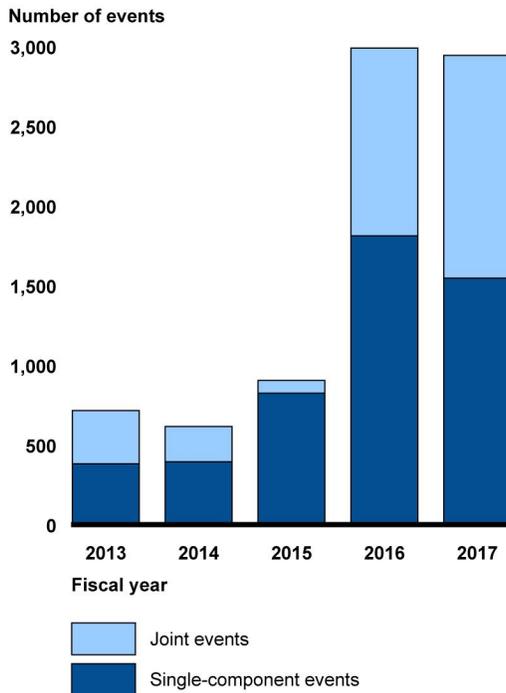
CBP Has Increased Its Participation in Recruitment Events and Standardized Its Recruiter Training

CBP has increased its emphasis on recruitment and increased the number of recruitment events it has participated in since fiscal year 2015.²⁹ Specifically, CBP more than tripled the total number of recruitment events it participated in, from 905 events in fiscal year 2015 to roughly 3,000 in both fiscal years 2016 and 2017 (see fig. 4).

²⁸According to Border Patrol officials, although this contract terminated in February 2018, Border Patrol anticipates resuming a similar partnership in the near future.

²⁹CBP data on the number of recruitment events from fiscal years 2013 through 2016 included traditional recruitment events such as career fairs as well as e-recruitment events such as mass e-mails and social media advertisements. CBP officials told us that they stopped including e-recruitment events in these data starting in fiscal year 2017 to more accurately capture CBP's participation in recruitment events. Therefore, we removed all e-recruitment events for all years for the purposes of our analysis.

Figure 4: U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Recruitment Events, Fiscal Years 2013–2017



Source: GAO analysis of CBP data. | GAO-18-487

Note: Joint events are recruitment events attended by two or three components and single-component events are attended by only one component. CBP data on the number of recruitment events from fiscal years 2013 through 2016 included traditional recruitment events such as career fairs as well as e-recruitment events such as mass e-mails and social media advertisements. CBP officials told us that they stopped including e-recruitment events in these data starting in fiscal year 2017 to more accurately capture CBP’s participation in recruitment events. Therefore, we removed all e-recruitment events for all years for the purposes of our analysis.

CBP components generally attend two different types of recruitment events—outreach events designed to promote CBP’s brand and events such as job and career fairs designed to actively cultivate potential applicants. For example, AMO officials stated their attendance at the 2018 Border Security Expo technology trade fair was an outreach event designed to promote the component at a high-visibility event despite the low likelihood of directly reaching qualified applicants, such as pilots. AMO officials also stated they participate in the HELISUCCESS career fair at the annual Heli-Expo trade show where individuals from across the helicopter industry gather to attend seminars and interact with recruiters. They noted that this event provides a great opportunity to recruit qualified applicants who have a license to fly helicopters.

While CBP increased its participation in recruitment events from fiscal years 2015 through 2017, officials across all three components told us the NFRC canceled a number of events during the first half of fiscal year 2018 because of a lack of certainty regarding the agency's budget while functioning under continuing resolutions, which extended fiscal year 2017 funding until the enactment of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2018, in March 2018.³⁰ Additionally, CBP officials stated that the agency was responsible for providing humanitarian support for multiple hurricanes during this time frame which put a strain on CBP's resources. Overall, these officials explained that the NFRC canceled 36 percent of all recruitment events during the first half of fiscal year 2018 until the enactment of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2018. They stated that during this period, they focused on attending free local events and online events such as webinars, but noted that the lack of consistent year-to-year funding for recruitment activities directly affected their ability to attend recruitment events and thus to recruit qualified personnel.

To attend recruitment events and promote their brand, CBP components utilize their own law enforcement personnel to act as recruiters. As shown in table 3, as of March 2018, CBP had 1,663 recruiters across the three components, which included 57 full-time and 1,606 part-time recruiters.³¹ CBP officials stated that most recruiters do not conduct recruitment activities on a full-time basis and recruitment is considered a collateral responsibility in addition to regular duties. In addition, officials stated these recruiters must be approved by their component leadership and funding for their positions comes from the components' budgets.

³⁰Continuing appropriations acts (i.e., continuing resolutions) extend prior year funding until current year appropriations are enacted; therefore, under a continuing appropriation, funding is generally kept at the same levels as the previous fiscal year, subject to any exceptions, until Congress passes, and the President signs, a full-year appropriations bill into law. While operating under a continuing resolution, agencies are not allowed to begin new programs unless specifically authorized in the continuing appropriations act.

³¹In addition to using recruiters, all three components have a recruitment manager position or are in the process of requesting one. Specifically, AMO officials told us the component has a recruitment manager position overseeing the component's recruitment efforts and Border Patrol officials stated they have had a recruitment manager in place since July 2016. Further, OFO submitted a proposal to HRM for a new recruitment manager position responsible for overseeing the component's recruitment efforts and staff.

Table 3: Total Number of U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Recruiters by Component as of March 2018

CBP component	Part-time	Full-time	Total
Office of Field Operations	968	27	995
U.S. Border Patrol	587	28	615
Air and Marine Operations	51	2	53
Total	1,606	57	1,663

Source: CBP. | GAO-18-487

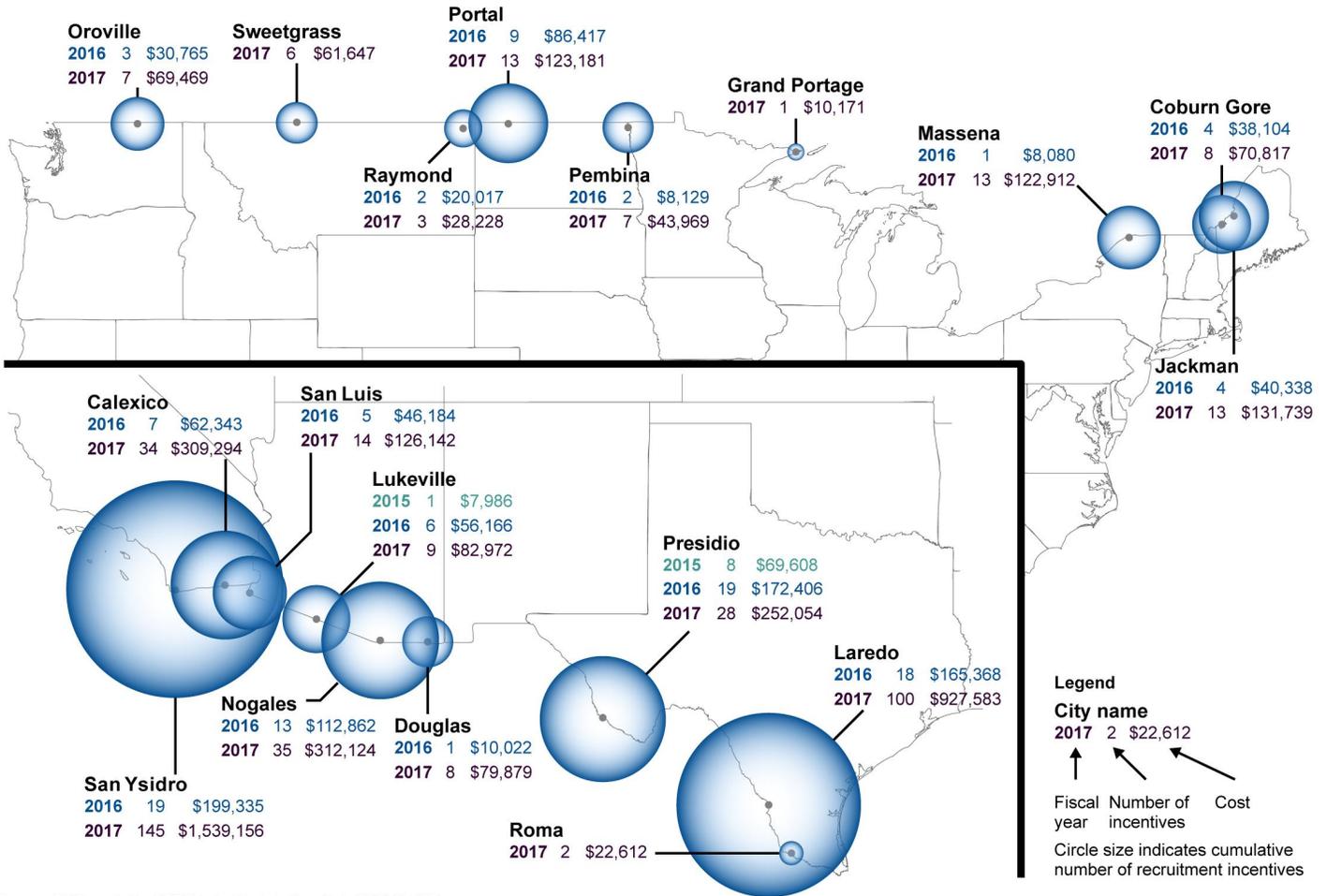
In July 2017, CBP implemented a 5-day standardized training program for all component recruiters focused on effective public speaking and engagement tactics as well as specific, in-depth information on each operational component and the CBP hiring process. CBP officials stated that a goal of this training, among other things, is to ensure that recruiters provide standardized, accurate information to all potential applicants. As of April 2018, 636 recruiters had completed the training, according to CBP officials, and the agency plans to train 1,300 recruiters by the end of fiscal year 2018.

CBP Increased Its Use of Recruitment Incentives, Although Use by Components Varied

In addition to establishing the NFRC and increasing participation in recruitment events, CBP has increased its use of recruitment incentives from fiscal years 2015 through 2017 to help staff hard-to-fill locations.³² A recruitment incentive may be paid to a newly-appointed employee if an agency determines that a position is likely to be difficult to fill in the absence of such an incentive. From fiscal years 2015 through 2017, OFO increased the number of recruitment incentives it paid to CBP officers from 9 incentives in 2 locations at a total cost of about \$77,600 to 446 incentives across 18 locations at a cost of approximately \$4.3 million. AMO and Border Patrol did not use recruitment incentives from fiscal years 2015 through 2017 (see fig. 5).

³²From fiscal years 2015 through 2017, CBP used recruitment incentives at remote ports-of-entry along the U.S. borders with Canada and Mexico, such as Portal, North Dakota; Coburn Gore, Maine; and Roma, Texas; among other locations.

Figure 5: U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Recruitment Incentive Use by Location for CBP Officers, Fiscal Years 2015–2017



Source: GAO analysis of CBP data; MapInfo (map). | GAO-18-487

Note: This figure presents the annual number and total costs of recruitment incentives paid to CBP officers at specific locations. According to Office of Field Operations officials, recruitment incentives can be paid to the same CBP officer for up to 3 years. Therefore, data on the number of recruitment incentives for each fiscal year may include CBP officers that have been paid recruitment incentives in prior fiscal years.

OFO officials told us that recruitment incentives have been effective in filling staffing shortages at hard-to-fill locations. For example, they noted that since they began offering recruitment incentives in fiscal year 2015, 14 of the 18 locations where these incentives are used have not experienced a decrease in staffing levels as of February 2018. Additionally, OFO officials told us that in larger ports-of-entry—such as San Ysidro, California, where staffing levels have consistently remained

below authorized targets—staffing levels have increased by up to 15 percent. AMO officials stated while they did not use recruitment incentives from fiscal years 2015 through 2017, as of April 2018 they are using them to fill remote locations in the Caribbean.³³ Specifically, AMO paid two recruitment incentives for Air Interdiction Agents and two for Marine Interdiction Agents at locations in Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands. AMO officials stated that they began using these incentives to staff hard-to-fill locations because of a nationwide shortage of pilots as well as increased competition with commercial airlines. However, as AMO has only recently started using these incentives, it is too early to gauge whether it will be effective in increasing staffing levels at these hard-to-fill locations. Border Patrol officials stated the main reason they do not use recruitment incentives is that in the past these incentives created resentment among current employees that did not receive extra pay to do the same job in the same location. Additionally, these officials told us that job announcements for Border Patrol agent positions do not specify particular duty locations, but represent a general announcement that can be used to fill numerous duty locations, as necessary.

Applications for Law Enforcement Positions Have Tripled since Fiscal Year 2013

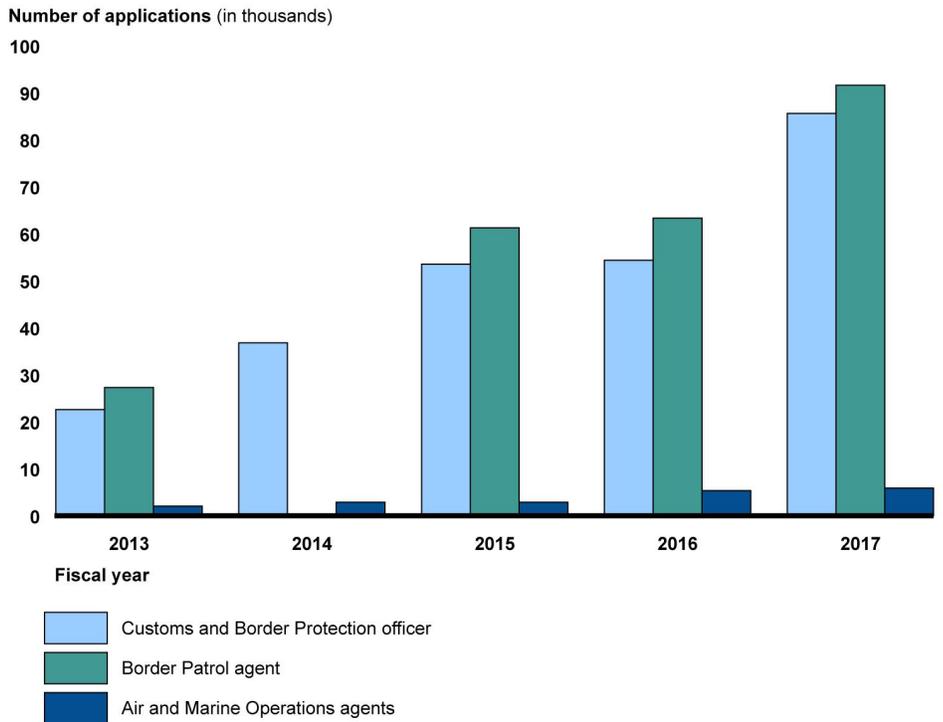
As a result of its efforts, CBP has experienced an increase in the number of applications it received for law enforcement officer positions across all three operational components from fiscal years 2013 through 2017. For example, with the exception of fiscal year 2014, applications for Border Patrol agent positions increased every year from roughly 27,000 applications in fiscal year 2013 to more than 91,000 applications in fiscal year 2017.³⁴ Further, during the same period, applications for CBP officer positions increased from approximately 22,500 to more than 85,000, and applications for AMO's law enforcement officer positions increased from roughly 2,000 to more than 5,800 (see fig. 6).³⁵

³³AMO officials stated they received approval to offer recruitment incentives in April 2016 and began promoting the incentives in May 2017. Recruitment incentives were not paid out until the beginning of fiscal year 2018.

³⁴Border Patrol officials stated they did not have any open announcements for Border Patrol agent positions in fiscal year 2014.

³⁵The number of AMO applications includes all three categories of law enforcement officers at AMO—Air Interdiction Agent, Aviation Enforcement Agent, and Marine Interdiction Agent.

Figure 6: U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Applications for Law Enforcement Officer Positions by Fiscal Year



Source: GAO analysis of CBP data. | GAO-18-487

Note: Border Patrol officials stated they did not have any open announcements for Border Patrol agent positions in fiscal year 2014.

CBP’s Accenture Contract Is Intended to Further Enhance CBP’s Recruitment Efforts

In November 2017, CBP signed a contract with a total potential period of 5 years at a not-to-exceed value of \$297 million with Accenture Federal Services, LLC, to help the agency recruit and hire the 5,000 Border Patrol agents called for in Executive Order 13767 as well as an additional 2,000 CBP officers and 500 AMO personnel. Under this performance-based contract, Accenture will be responsible for enhancing CBP’s recruitment efforts and managing the hiring process for those applicants it recruits. The contract includes a base year and four 1-year option periods which CBP may exercise at its discretion for a total potential period of 5 years. The \$297 million represents the maximum amount CBP may obligate on the contract during the potential 5-year period. CBP obligated \$43 million

on the Accenture contract in November 2017 for startup costs, security-related services, and for the hiring of 440 CBP officers, 150 Border Patrol agents, and 23 AMO law enforcement officers.³⁶ Under the terms of the contract, CBP will pay the contractor a set dollar amount for each law enforcement officer hired. For example, in the first year of the contract, CBP has agreed to pay Accenture approximately \$40,000 for each Border Patrol agent hired with 80 percent paid when a candidate receives an official job offer and the remaining 20 percent paid upon the candidate's entry-on-duty date.³⁷

The Accenture contract is intended to enhance CBP's recruitment efforts by improving its marketing strategy and utilizing new ways to capture and analyze data to better inform recruitment efforts, according to CBP officials. For example, HRM officials stated that, in February 2018, Accenture began its digital marketing campaign and started posting electronic ads to target potential applicants for CBP's law enforcement positions. In addition, Accenture is using advertisements, e-mail blasts, and other strategic marketing tools to specifically target various categories of potential applicants, such as women, veterans, minorities, and current law enforcement officers. CBP officials told us that they are not concerned about Accenture's recruiting efforts encroaching on the agency's current applicant pool as Accenture's activities will largely target populations that CBP has not historically pursued. They also stated that for populations that CBP does target (e.g., veterans and women), the agency expects to benefit from Accenture's recruitment efforts by increasing the number of applicants from these populations to all job announcements for CBP positions. Further, they noted that if Accenture's tactics are successful, there is nothing prohibiting the agency from replicating such tactics to garner more applicants.

CBP officials also stated that Accenture plans to provide opportunities to better enhance the agency's data analytics on its recruitment efforts. For example, Accenture is using recruitment data and software to identify potential candidates and increase traffic to websites where these individuals can submit applications. CBP officials told us they would benefit from these and other insights that Accenture's data analytics will

³⁶Although CBP obligated funding to Accenture in fiscal year 2017, the funding for this activity was held up in contract protest until November 2017.

³⁷According to the contract, the price per hire paid to Accenture decreases over the course of the contract period.

provide as CBP can evaluate the contractor's recruitment efforts and initiatives and, based upon Accenture's success, incorporate them into CBP's own efforts. While these efforts seem promising, it is too early to determine whether these initiatives will help increase the number and quality of applicants for CBP's law enforcement officer positions.

CBP Has Taken Steps to Improve Its Hiring Process, but the Process Remains Lengthy

CBP Has Improved Its Performance in Two Key Hiring Metrics

Since fiscal year 2015, CBP's performance in two key metrics that it uses to assess the efficiency and effectiveness of its hiring process for law enforcement officer positions has generally improved. Specifically, CBP reduced its time-to-hire and increased its overall applicant pass rates for all three components.

Time-to-Hire. CBP's average time-to-hire metric calculates the average number of calendar days that elapsed between the closing date of a job announcement and an applicant's entry-on-duty date. CBP's time-to-hire for all law enforcement officer positions decreased from fiscal years 2015 through 2017.³⁸ Specifically, during this period, the time-to-hire for CBP officers decreased by 78 days (20 percent) to an average of 318 days for fiscal year 2017. For AMO Air and Marine Interdiction Agents, CBP's time-to-hire decreased by 103 days (28 percent) to an average of 262 days for fiscal year 2017.³⁹ The agency's time-to-hire for Border Patrol agents was the longest at 628 days in fiscal year 2015. As discussed earlier, Border Patrol officials stated that there were no job announcements for Border Patrol agent positions in fiscal year 2014; therefore, many of the agents hired in fiscal year 2015 had applied in fiscal year 2013, accounting for this protracted time-to-hire. Even so, from

³⁸According to CBP officials, the agency did not systematically collect data to calculate the time-to-hire for law enforcement officer positions prior to fiscal year 2015 when CBP implemented a more systematic, accurate method for calculating this metric. We assessed the reliability of CBP's time-to-hire data for fiscal years 2015 through 2017 and determined these data were sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this report.

³⁹AMO data do not include the Aviation Enforcement Agent position as CBP does not systematically collect time-to-hire data for this position.

fiscal year 2016 to 2017, CBP’s time-to-hire for Border Patrol agents decreased by 32 days (11 percent) to an average of 274 days for fiscal year 2017 (see table 4).

Table 4: U.S. Customs and Border Protection’s (CBP) Time-to-Hire for Law Enforcement Officer Positions, Fiscal Years (FY) 2015–2017

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

Source: GAO analysis of CBP data. | GAO-18-487

^aAir and Marine Interdiction Agents data do not include the Aviation Enforcement Agent position as CBP does not systematically collect time-to-hire data for this position.

We also compared CBP’s time-to-hire with that of the Secret Service because its hiring process for law enforcement officers is the most similar to CBP’s.⁴⁰ Specifically, the Secret Service’s hiring process comprises roughly the same number of hiring steps and also includes a polygraph examination—one of the more challenging and time-consuming steps in the process—as well as a written assessment, background investigation, medical examination, and interview.⁴¹ We found that CBP’s time-to-hire for its law enforcement positions was shorter than the Secret Service’s in fiscal years 2016 and 2017.⁴² For example, in fiscal year 2017, CBP’s time-to-hire for CBP officers and Border Patrol agents was 73 days and 117 days shorter, respectively, than the Secret Service’s. Further, CBP’s time-to-hire for AMO’s law enforcement positions was shorter than the Secret Service’s in every fiscal year from 2015 through 2017.

⁴⁰There are key differences between ICE’s and BOP’s hiring processes for law enforcement officers and CBP’s, including that ICE and BOP do not conduct polygraph examinations. Further, ICE officials told us that its methodology for calculating its average time-to-hire was different from CBP’s.

⁴¹According to Secret Service officials, Special Agents conduct all background investigation functions for the agency. As a result, the amount of time it takes the Secret Service to complete background investigations can be affected by the operational needs of the agency.

⁴²According to Secret Service officials, the agency uses the same methodology as CBP to calculate its time-to-hire for law enforcement positions. Specifically, the Secret Service calculates the average number of calendar days that elapsed between the closing date of a job announcement and an applicant’s entry-on-duty date.

Overall Applicant Pass Rates. CBP’s overall applicant pass rate metric calculates the estimated percentage of applicants who successfully complete the hiring process and enter on duty.⁴³ CBP data indicate that overall applicant pass rates more than doubled for CBP officer and Border Patrol agent positions from fiscal years 2016 to 2017 (see table 5).⁴⁴

Table 5: Overall Applicant Pass Rates for U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Law Enforcement Officer Positions, Fiscal Years (FY) 2015–2017

Law enforcement officer position	Overall applicant pass rates (in percent)		
	FY 2015	FY 2016	FY 2017
n/a			
CBP officer	1.21	0.97	2.41
Border Patrol agent	0.42	0.57	1.36
Air and Marine Interdiction Agents ^a	-	-	1.33

Source: CBP data. | GAO-18-487

Note: CBP’s overall applicant pass rates calculate the estimated percentage of applicants who successfully complete the hiring process and enter on duty.

^aCBP did not systematically collect these data for Air and Marine Interdiction Agent positions prior to fiscal year 2017, or for any fiscal year in our review period for Aviation Enforcement Agent positions.

CBP officials told us that higher overall applicant pass rates paired with recent increases in the number of applications received by the agency are starting to result in an increase in the number of law enforcement officers hired as applicants complete CBP’s hiring process and officially enter on duty. As shown in table 6, CBP data indicate that more law enforcement officers entered on duty in the first half of fiscal year 2018 than entered on

⁴³To determine the overall applicant pass rates for CBP officer and Border Patrol agent positions, CBP calculated the discrete pass rate for each hiring process step by dividing the total number of applicants that passed a process step in a given fiscal year by the total number of applicants that completed that process step in that same year. CBP then multiplied the discrete pass rates for every step in its hiring process to determine the overall applicant pass rate. CBP started using this methodology to calculate overall applicant pass rates in fiscal year 2015 and therefore does not have similar data for fiscal years 2013 and 2014. The overall applicant pass rate for Air and Marine Interdiction Agents was calculated by dividing the total number of law enforcement officers that entered on duty in fiscal year 2017 by the total number of applications received in that same year. According to CBP officials, this methodology is used because of the smaller universe of applicants and hires for these positions.

⁴⁴CBP did not systematically collect these data for Air and Marine Interdiction Agent positions prior to fiscal year 2017, or for any fiscal year in our review period for Aviation Enforcement Agent positions.

duty in the first half of fiscal year 2017.⁴⁵ Specifically, the total number of CBP officers and Border Patrol agents that entered on duty in the first half of fiscal year 2018 increased by roughly 50 percent and 83 percent, respectively, when compared to the same period of the prior fiscal year. Further, the total number of AMO law enforcement officers that entered on duty in the first half of fiscal year 2018 more than doubled from the same period of fiscal year 2017.

Table 6: Total Number of U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Law Enforcement Officers that Entered on Duty in the First Half of Fiscal Years (FY) 2017 and 2018

Law enforcement officer position	FY 2017 ^a	FY 2018 ^b
CBP officer	299	449
Border Patrol agent	179	328
Air and Marine Operations agents	24	51
Total	502	828

Source: GAO analysis of CBP data. | GAO-18-487

^aCBP data for the first half of fiscal year 2017 represent the total number of law enforcement officers that entered on duty between October 1, 2016, and March 31, 2017.

^bCBP data for the first half of fiscal year 2018 represent the total number of law enforcement officers that entered on duty between October 1, 2017, and March 31, 2018.

CBP officials noted that they hope to consistently maintain this trend of increased hires to offset attrition and attain target staffing levels. For example, although 328 Border Patrol agents entered on duty in the first half of fiscal year 2018, 404 agents departed Border Patrol during this same period, resulting in a net loss of 76 agents. Likewise, in the first half of fiscal year 2018, a total of 449 CBP officers entered on duty while 488 officers departed OFO, resulting in a net loss of 39 officers. These data indicate that CBP continues to face challenges in retaining qualified law enforcement personnel and attaining target staffing levels for these positions. We discuss this issue later in this report.

⁴⁵CBP data for the first half of fiscal year 2017 represent the total number of law enforcement officers that entered on duty between October 1, 2016, and March 31, 2017. CBP data for the first half of fiscal year 2018 represent the total number of law enforcement officers that entered on duty between October 1, 2017, and March 31, 2018.

CBP Has Taken Steps to Improve Its Hiring Process for Law Enforcement Officers

CBP has made efforts to improve its hiring process by revising certain aspects of the process and piloting two key hiring initiatives—Hiring Hub events and the Applicant Care program. According to agency officials, these efforts to streamline and improve CBP’s overall hiring process have collectively resulted in the decreased time-to-hire and increased overall applicant pass rates discussed above. In addition to these efforts, CBP’s contract with Accenture is designed to provide surge hiring capacity to help supplement the agency’s efforts to meet its staffing goals, according to agency officials.

Hiring Process Revisions. CBP has implemented changes aimed at streamlining its hiring process for law enforcement officers and made adjustments to specific hiring steps. For example, among other changes, CBP took the following steps:

- In fiscal year 2015, CBP replaced its paper-based fingerprinting process with an electronic format, reducing the costs and effort required to physically process and mail paper fingerprinting cards.
- In fiscal year 2016, CBP increased the frequency of its job announcements on USAJOBS.gov to solicit applications on a continuous basis instead of only posting announcements for set periods of time. In addition, DHS was directed by statute to enhance its efforts to recruit members of the Armed Forces to serve as CBP officers through identifying shared activities and opportunities for reciprocity related to steps in hiring so as to minimize the time required to hire qualified applicants.⁴⁶
- In March 2017, CBP was granted the authority to waive the polygraph examination for veterans who meet certain criteria, including those

⁴⁶The Border Jobs for Veterans Act of 2015 included a provision to enhance DHS efforts to recruit members of the Armed Forces who are separating from military service to serve as CBP officers, and the act listed specific elements of such enhanced recruiting efforts, such as ensuring the streamlined interagency transfer of relevant background investigations and security clearances. Pub. L. No. 114-68, § 4, 129 Stat. 555, 556.

who hold a current, active top-secret/sensitive-compartmented-information clearance.⁴⁷

- In April 2017, CBP received OPM approval to use direct-hire authority for law enforcement positions, which allows CBP to expedite the typical hiring process by eliminating competitive rating and ranking procedures and veterans' preference.⁴⁸ As of March 31, 2018, 77 CBP officers and 107 Border Patrol agents had entered on duty through this authority, but HRM officials told us that more applicants continue to progress through CBP's hiring pipeline.

CBP has also made revisions to specific steps in its hiring process, including the application, entrance examination, physical fitness test, and polygraph examination, among others. For example, in May 2014, CBP incorporated questions into its electronic application that are designed to automatically disqualify applicants who, based on their responses, could not pass CBP's background investigation. Specifically, applicants that provide a disqualifying response to any of these questions would not be able to submit an application, thereby saving CBP the effort and resources associated with processing nonviable applicants. Further, in fiscal year 2016, CBP reordered its hiring process to place the entrance examination as the first step directly after an applicant submitted an application. Prior to this change, CBP conducted qualification reviews on applicants to ensure they met position requirements before inviting them to take the entrance exam. According to CBP officials, this updated process provided applicants with the opportunity to obtain a realistic preview of the job they were applying for earlier in the hiring process. These officials explained that this helps to ensure that only those applicants who are committed to completing the hiring process and

⁴⁷The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2017 permitted the Commissioner of CBP to waive the polygraph examination requirement for any veteran applicant deemed suitable for employment who holds a current, active Top-Secret clearance and is able to access sensitive compartmented information; has a current single-scope background investigation; and was not granted any waivers to obtain the clearance. Pub. L. No. 114-328, div. A, tit. X, subtit. E, § 1049, 130 Stat. 2000, 2396 (2016) (classified at 6 U.S.C. § 221 note).

⁴⁸OPM can grant direct-hire authority to federal agencies to help fill existing vacancies when a critical hiring need or severe shortage of candidates exists. This authority allows federal agencies to expedite certain elements of the hiring process such as not requiring agencies to rank order all qualified candidates. See 5 U.S.C. § 3304(a)(3). In its April 2017 memorandum granting direct-hire authority to CBP, OPM cited the President's January 25, 2017, executive orders entitled, "Border Security and Immigration Enforcement Improvements" and "Enhancing Public Safety in the Interior of the United States" as creating a critical hiring need at DHS.

entering on duty at CBP continue through the hiring pipeline, which may help to address high applicant discontinuation rates (e.g., roughly half of all eligible applicants in fiscal year 2015 did not take the exam).⁴⁹ According to CBP documentation, this revision also created efficiencies as the agency no longer has to spend time and resources on completing qualification reviews for applicants who either did not show up to take the exam or failed the exam itself.

CBP data show recent improvements in both the pass rates for the entrance examination process step as well as its average duration—the average amount of time it took applicants to complete this step. Specifically, from fiscal years 2016 to 2017, pass rates increased by about 40 percent for both CBP officer and Border Patrol agent candidates, and the average duration shortened from 17 days to 13 days for CBP officer candidates and from 19 days to 12 days for Border Patrol agent applicants. CBP officials told us they are also exploring options to allow applicants to complete the entrance examination remotely—eliminating the need for candidates to travel to physical testing sites and potentially further reducing the amount of time spent completing this step.

In fiscal year 2016, the physical fitness test process step was amended for all law enforcement officer applicants to provide those who fail another chance to complete this requirement, according to CBP officials. Further, in fiscal year 2017, CBP eliminated the second physical fitness test—which had been the last process step in CBP’s hiring process—for CBP officer, Border Patrol agent, and AMO applicants. In addition to shortening the overall process, officials told us this change provided the small percentage of applicants that passed every other hiring process step with an opportunity to demonstrate they meet CBP’s physical ability standards during basic training.⁵⁰

CBP has also made several changes to its polygraph examination process step, which has consistently had the lowest pass rate of any step in its hiring process. For example, among other things, CBP has increased the number of polygraph examiners available to administer the

⁴⁹These data represent CBP officer and Border Patrol agent applicants only as AMO’s hiring process does not include an entrance examination. Instead, applicants for Air and Marine Interdiction Agent positions are required to take a three-part written, oral, and practical assessment.

⁵⁰After entering on duty with CBP, all new law enforcement personnel must complete training in basic law enforcement skills.

test, according to agency officials, and is piloting a new type of polygraph exam—the Test for Espionage, Sabotage, and Corruption. According to CBP officials, the new examination focuses on identifying serious crimes and is sufficiently rigorous to ensure that only qualified applicants are able to pass. Preliminary data from CBP’s pilot show that this new exam has demonstrated higher pass rates when compared with CBP’s traditional polygraph exam while also taking less time, on average, per test to complete.⁵¹ In addition, in response to recommendations made by the DHS OIG in August 2017, CBP implemented a policy requiring polygraph examiners to take steps to terminate an ongoing examination if disqualifying information is obtained from an applicant during the exam.⁵² Further, CBP officials told us they are continuing to work on developing and deploying a presecurity interview to identify unsuitable applicants prior to spending resources on conducting the polygraph examination. While it remains too early to tell if these efforts will result in improvements to the polygraph examination step, available CBP data indicate mixed results. Specifically, while the average duration to complete this step decreased for all law enforcement officer positions from fiscal years 2015 through 2017, pass rates also declined slightly over this same period (see table 7).

⁵¹CBP officials stated that the agency has traditionally used the Law Enforcement Pre-employment Test polygraph examination on its law enforcement officer applicants. Both the Test for Espionage, Sabotage, and Corruption and the Law Enforcement Pre-employment Test formats are approved by the National Center for Credibility Assessment, the federal entity responsible for credibility assessment education, oversight, research, and development.

⁵²OIG-17-99-MA.

Table 7: Average Durations and Pass Rates for U.S. Customs and Border Protection’s (CBP) Polygraph Examination by Law Enforcement Officer Position, Fiscal Years (FY) 2015–2017

n/a	CBP officers		Border Patrol agents		Air and Marine Operations agents	
FY	Average duration (in days)	Pass rate (in percent)	Average duration (in days)	Pass rate (in percent)	Average duration (in days)	Pass rate (in percent)
2015	153	32	113	28	86	32
2016	115	21	109	22	54	28
2017	74	25	94	26	59	26

Source: CBP data. | GAO-18-487

Note: CBP’s average duration metric for the polygraph examination hiring process step captures the average number of days it took CBP law enforcement officer applicants to complete the step in a given fiscal year. CBP’s pass rate metric for the polygraph examination process step captures the percentage of CBP law enforcement officer applicants who passed the polygraph examination step in a given fiscal year. CBP data on polygraph examination pass rates for Air and Marine Operations (AMO) personnel include Air Interdiction Agents, Aviation Enforcement Agents, and Marine Interdiction Agents. However, CBP data on the average duration of the polygraph examination for AMO personnel include only Air and Marine Interdiction Agent positions as CBP did not systematically track these data for Aviation Enforcement Agent positions.

Hiring Hub Events. In August 2015, CBP piloted its first Hiring Hub event where applicants could complete the structured interview and polygraph examination in one location over the course of several days. In fiscal year 2016, CBP expanded its use of these events, holding additional Hiring Hubs in New York, New York; San Diego, California; and Laredo, Texas; among other locations. The use of consolidated hiring events is consistent with a leading practice we identified in hiring for law enforcement officer positions, and officials at both ICE and the Secret Service stated their agencies are using similar events to process applicants. Although CBP could not provide specific data on its Hiring Hub events, CBP officials stated that the use of these events reduced the agency’s time-to-hire by consolidating hiring process steps that traditionally took applicants weeks to complete into just a few days—effectively enhancing the applicant experience and helping to reduce the number of individuals that drop out of the hiring process.

Despite attributing a reduction in the agency’s time-to-hire to the Hiring Hubs, CBP discontinued their use in fiscal year 2017 because of their high costs, according to CBP officials. Specifically, CBP officials told us the agency spent \$878,000 and \$426,000 in fiscal years 2016 and 2017, respectively, which included renting physical space for the Hiring Hub events and funding the travel expenses of CBP employees sent to staff them. However, CBP officials told us that the best practices and process improvements CBP learned from these events have been incorporated into the agency’s new expedited hiring model, which has been used to

process all CBP law enforcement applicants since April 2017. According to CBP officials, this model utilizes existing CBP facilities where applicants can complete the structured interview and polygraph examination near where they live while also providing CBP with cost savings by avoiding the need to rent physical office space.

Applicant Care. In fiscal year 2017, CBP supplemented its traditional applicant outreach efforts by piloting the Applicant Care program across all three components. This program is intended to pair viable applicants with a trained recruiter who can answer questions and provide individuals with guidance and support throughout the lengthy hiring process.⁵³ Formally pairing trained recruiters with applicants is a leading practice we identified in hiring for law enforcement positions, and of the three other selected agencies we reviewed, the Secret Service also had a similar program, according to Secret Service officials. According to CBP data, 806 applicants across all three operational components have participated in the Applicant Care pilot program and, as of May 2018, 28 of these have entered on duty at CBP.⁵⁴ CBP officials in OFO, AMO, and HRM told us that the Applicant Care program had been useful in providing an effective way to communicate with applicants. According to a senior AMO official, AMO has fully incorporated the program into its hiring efforts and has paired every applicant since June 2017 with an AMO recruiter.⁵⁵ Specifically, this official told us the program has been beneficial by keeping candidates engaged and steadily progressing through the process. HRM officials concurred, stating that the Applicant Care program has been successful in reducing the number of individuals that fail to complete CBP's lengthy hiring process. According to CBP officials, the Applicant Care program also helps to reduce CBP's time-to-hire since recruiters can actively encourage candidates to promptly progress

⁵³CBP officials consider individuals that have applied to a job announcement and meet all the initial requirements for the position as "viable."

⁵⁴According to CBP data, as of May 2018, 21 CBP officers, 6 Air Interdiction Agents, and 1 Marine Interdiction Agent that participated in the Applicant Care pilot had entered on duty at CBP while 253 participating applicants continue to progress through the hiring pipeline. According to these data, Border Patrol only began participating in the pilot in September 2017 and, as of May 2018, no participating applicants for Border Patrol agent positions had entered on duty at CBP.

⁵⁵Border Patrol officials told us that the Applicant Care pilot has not yet concluded as some participating applicants are still progressing through CBP's hiring pipeline. OFO officials told us that they are waiting for the necessary technology to be in place before expanding the program.

through aspects of the hiring process that applicants are responsible for completing, such as the submission of OPM's Standard Form 86 (SF-86).⁵⁶

CBP officials told us that the agency is collecting data to evaluate the effectiveness of the Applicant Care pilot, including the average time-to-hire and overall pass rates of participating applicants. However, since the pilot is ongoing and some applicants continue to progress through CBP's hiring pipeline, information on the program's effectiveness remains preliminary. CBP officials also told us that scaling the Applicant Care initiative to include all applicants may present a challenge, especially given the recent increase in the number of law enforcement applications CBP has received. For example, a senior AMO official noted that, as of January 2018, 10 AMO recruiters were managing a total of about 200 applicants as part of the program, and that more recruiters would be needed to reduce employee workload to a more manageable level. Further, Border Patrol officials said that scaling the initiative to include the tens of thousands of individuals that annually apply for Border Patrol agent positions will be challenging as recruiters do not have the capacity to directly communicate with each one.

Accenture Contract. According to CBP officials, the Accenture contract is intended to enhance the agency's ability to achieve its primary goal—hiring law enforcement officers to meet target staffing levels—by augmenting CBP's current hiring infrastructure and pursuing new and innovative hiring initiatives.

HRM officials told us that Accenture will establish its own hiring infrastructure where Accenture personnel will administer most of the hiring process steps to those applicants it recruits.⁵⁷ Specifically, the contractor is responsible for implementing the same hiring process steps and maintaining CBP's standards to ensure that all applicants recruited

⁵⁶Applicants must submit various background and biographical information through the SF-86 to initiate their background investigation. While the average duration to complete this step has decreased since fiscal year 2015, it nonetheless remains one of the most time-consuming steps in CBP's hiring process. For example, in fiscal year 2017, it took CBP officer applicants 55 days on average to submit a completed SF-86.

⁵⁷CBP will continue to conduct the entrance examination and structured interview steps for candidates recruited by Accenture as well as those aspects of the hiring process that represent inherently governmental functions. For example, CBP officials will be responsible for adjudicating polygraph examination and background investigation results for all applicants as these processes represent an inherently governmental function.

by Accenture meet those standards. According to HRM officials, Accenture's efforts are expected to provide CBP with surge hiring capacity without affecting CBP's current hiring infrastructure, which will continue to function throughout the contract's duration. According to CBP officials, Accenture began processing an initial trial group of random applicants in May 2018 to ensure that the contractor is able to process candidates through its hiring pipeline as required by the contract.⁵⁸

CBP officials also told us that Accenture has the flexibility to pursue novel hiring tactics and pilot initiatives that CBP may not have considered or been able to undertake. For example, Accenture plans to pilot innovative ways to reduce the time-to-hire, including by streamlining steps in the hiring process, which could help to improve CBP's overall process and generate increased hires for law enforcement positions. Further, because the contractor will only be paid for individuals that receive final job offers and enter on duty—and not for implementing these new methods and initiatives—CBP does not bear the financial risk if such initiatives prove not to be cost-effective. On the other hand, if hiring methods piloted by Accenture are successful in reducing CBP's time-to-hire and generating increased law enforcement officer hires, CBP can incorporate these methods into its own process.

As of March 2018, some key issues were still being negotiated between CBP and the contractor. For example, while HRM officials told us that the main metric used to assess Accenture's effectiveness will be the total number of hires the contractor produces, they were still working to finalize other key metrics for evaluating the contractor's effectiveness as well as an oversight plan to ensure the contractor operates according to agency

⁵⁸In fiscal year 2018, CBP provided funding for Accenture to hire a total of 613 positions—440 CBP officers, 150 Border Patrol agents, and 23 Air and Marine Interdiction Agents. HRM officials told us that applicants will not know whether they are being processed by Accenture or CBP personnel as the minor differences between the contractor's and CBP's hiring processes will be indistinguishable to applicants. Further, they noted that personnel staffed at every stage of the process, including the medical examination, background investigation, and polygraph examination, among others, will have the same qualifications and training regardless of whether they work for Accenture or CBP. However, these same officials told us that certain Accenture initiatives will only be available to candidates recruited and processed by Accenture. For example, only Accenture candidates will have access to the contractor's Applicant Support Center, which is designed to provide candidates with pertinent information in real time and access to direct support through phone and e-mail. However, in May 2018, CBP officials told us they are designing a contract modification to provide all CBP applicants with access to Accenture's Applicant Support Center.

requirements. In addition, a senior HRM official told us that the costs associated with hiring a law enforcement officer are generally the same regardless of whether an applicant is processed by Accenture or CBP. Specifically, CBP officials explained that the requirements to hire a law enforcement officer are rigorous and include administering entrance examinations, background investigations, physical fitness and medical tests, and polygraph examinations, among other process steps. CBP officials stated that the costs associated with conducting these process steps for all applicants—and not just the small percentage who successfully complete the hiring process and enter on duty at CBP—are incurred whether the process is administered by Accenture or CBP. As a result, these officials explained that CBP is most focused on processing as many qualified candidates as possible to increase law enforcement officer staffing levels. As Accenture’s hiring infrastructure will not become fully operational until June 2018, it is too early to evaluate whether the contractor will be able to efficiently and effectively provide the surge hiring capacity CBP needs to achieve its staffing goals.

Certain Factors Affect CBP’s Hiring Process for Law Enforcement Positions

While CBP has reduced its time-to-hire and made efforts to improve its hiring process for law enforcement officers, CBP officials have noted that the hiring process remains lengthy, which they said directly affected the agency’s ability to recruit and hire for law enforcement positions. CBP officials also stated that their ability to further improve CBP’s time-to-hire and increase law enforcement hires is affected by hiring process steps that can be challenging and time-consuming for applicants to complete as well as CBP’s reliance on applicants to promptly complete certain aspects of the process.

As noted above, in fiscal year 2017, it took an average of 274 days for Border Patrol agent applicants and more than 300 days for CBP officer applicants to complete all hiring steps and enter on duty. According to a leading practice we identified in hiring for such positions, agencies should ensure that the hiring process is not protracted or onerous for applicants. While OPM’s time-to-hire target for federal agencies is 80 days, officials at CBP, ICE, and the Secret Service told us that such a target is not feasible for law enforcement positions given the rigor and complexity of

the hiring process.⁵⁹ Further, according to CBP officials, the agency's multistep hiring process for its law enforcement officer positions is intentionally rigorous and involves extensive applicant screening to ensure that only qualified candidates meet the technical, physical, and suitability requirements for employment at CBP. Even so, CBP officials across several components told us that the agency's time-to-hire was too long and directly affected the component's ability to recruit and hire for law enforcement positions. For example, OFO officials told us that the longer the hiring process takes to complete, the more likely it is that an applicant will drop out. Further, qualified applicants may also decide to apply for employment at a competing law enforcement agency such as ICE that may have a less rigorous process than CBP's, according to CBP officials.

One factor that affects CBP's ability to efficiently process and onboard law enforcement officers are specific hiring process steps that are time-consuming and challenging for candidates to complete. For example, CBP officials across all three operational components and HRM cited the polygraph examination as a significant bottleneck within CBP's hiring process. In addition to having the lowest pass rate of any step in CBP's process, as noted above, the polygraph examination also took CBP officer and Border Patrol agent applicants, on average, the longest amount of time to complete in fiscal year 2017—74 days and 94 days, respectively.⁶⁰ Further, Border Patrol and HRM officials both told us that these already lengthy time frames may increase further because of the growing number of applicants for CBP's law enforcement positions. In addition, CBP's background investigation and medical examination process steps as well as the SF-86 submission and preemployment complete hiring phases had the five longest average durations for law

⁵⁹In addition, OPM's calculation to determine an agency's time-to-hire differs from CBP's and those of the other selected agencies we reviewed in that it uses the average number of days that elapsed from the date an agency validated its need to fill a new position to the date an applicant entered on duty. Further, the DHS Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer established a fiscal year 2018 time-to-hire performance measure target stating that 60 percent of DHS law enforcement officer applicants should enter on duty within 192 days.

⁶⁰According to CBP officials, the average duration for CBP's polygraph examination may be affected by difficulties in scheduling the in-person examination as well as the number of polygraph examiners available to conduct the test.

enforcement applicants in fiscal year 2017.⁶¹ For example, on average, it took CBP law enforcement officer applicants across all three components 55 days or more to complete the medical examination and more than 60 days to complete the background investigation. For more information on the average durations of these selected aspects of CBP's hiring process, see table 8.

⁶¹While the polygraph examination, background investigation, and medical examination are official process steps in CBP's hiring process, the SF-86 submission and preemployment complete also represent key phases that are necessary in processing applicants. Applicants are responsible for submitting various background and biographical information through the SF-86 to initiate their background investigation. CBP data on the average duration of the SF-86 submission phase captures the average amount of time it took law enforcement applicants to submit a completed SF-86, which is required to begin the background investigation and, according to CBP officials, to schedule a structured interview. CBP data on the preemployment complete phase captures the average amount of time that elapsed between the date an applicant has officially completed all hiring process steps and the date the applicant entered on duty. During this phase, HRM officials confirm that an applicant has successfully passed all aspects of CBP's hiring process and work with the applicant to determine an entry-on-duty date that meets the applicant's needs.

Table 8: U.S. Customs and Border Protection’s (CBP) Average Durations for Selected Phases of the Hiring Process, Fiscal Year 2017

n/a Law enforcement officer positions	Average durations for hiring phases (in days)				
	Polygraph examination	Submission of Standard Form 86 (SF-86) ^a	Background investigation ^b	Medical examination	Preemployment complete ^c
CBP officers	74	55	63	57	42
Border Patrol agents	94	47	75	57	30
Air and Marine Interdiction Agents	59	63	69	55	42

Source: CBP data. | GAO-18-487

Note: CBP’s average duration metric captures the average number of days it took CBP law enforcement officer applicants to complete a hiring process step or key phase of the hiring process. These categories represent the five hiring process steps and key phases with the longest total average durations for Border Patrol agent, CBP officer, and Air and Marine Interdiction Agent applicants during fiscal year 2017. CBP did not systematically track these data for Aviation Enforcement Agent applicants.

^aApplicants are responsible for submitting various background and biographical information through the SF-86, which is required to initiate their background investigation. CBP data on the average duration of the SF-86 submission phase captures the average amount of time it took law enforcement applicants to submit a completed SF-86.

^bAn applicant’s background investigation is initiated when a completed SF-86 is submitted. According to officials in CBP’s Office of Professional Responsibility—which conducts CBP’s background investigations—these investigations must be completed by the time an applicant completes basic training. Therefore, an applicant can enter on duty and begin basic training before his or her background investigation is complete and a final suitability and eligibility determination on that individual has been adjudicated.

^cCBP data on the preemployment complete phase captures the average amount of time that elapsed between the date an applicant has officially completed all hiring process steps and the date the applicant entered on duty. During this phase, CBP officials confirm that an applicant has successfully passed all aspects of CBP’s hiring process and work with the applicant to determine an entry-on-duty date that meets the applicant’s needs.

Another factor that affects CBP’s ability to reduce its time-to-hire is CBP’s reliance on applicants to complete certain aspects of the hiring process in a timely manner. While the agency has taken steps to mitigate this issue—most notably through its Applicant Care program and the Accenture contract—its ability to ensure that applicants quickly complete those aspects of the hiring process they are responsible for remains limited. For example, as discussed above, applicants are responsible for completing their own SF-86, and CBP officials noted that applicants often take weeks to accurately complete and submit this form. Further, one senior HRM official told us that each time a mistake is identified in this paperwork, applicants receive an additional 5 days to fix the error, which adds up over time. CBP data indicate that while the average duration for this process step has decreased since fiscal year 2015, it continues to take more than 45 days for the average applicant to complete, as noted in table 8 above. As this completed paperwork is required to begin the

background investigation and, according to CBP officials, schedule a structured interview, this inherently affects CBP's ability to reduce its time-to-hire. Further, for the medical examination process step, applicants are responsible for, among other things, scheduling the examination itself and providing pertinent documentation, such as any medical waivers required to pass the exam. According to a senior HRM official, as of February 2018, CBP had to conduct follow-up outreach to roughly 65 percent of applicants during this process step to obtain the information required to complete this step.

CBP Has Enhanced Its Retention Efforts, but Does Not Systematically Collect and Analyze Data on Departing Law Enforcement Personnel

CBP's Retention of Law Enforcement Officers Varies by Position

From fiscal years 2013 through 2017, CBP's annual rates of attrition varied across its five law enforcement officer positions. Specifically, OFO's annual attrition rates for the CBP officer position were consistent at roughly 3 percent, while rates for Border Patrol agent and AMO's Marine Interdiction Agent positions were below 5 percent in 4 out of the 5 fiscal years we reviewed. When we compared CBP's annual attrition rates for these positions to those of the other selected law enforcement agencies, we found that CBP's attrition rates were similar to ICE's annual attrition rates for its law enforcement positions and generally lower than those of the Secret Service and BOP. Annual attrition rates for AMO's aviation positions were higher, ranging from 5.0 percent to 9.2 percent for the Air Interdiction Agent position and 7.8 percent to 11.1 percent for the Aviation Enforcement Agent position. Even so, in the last 3 fiscal years, attrition rates for these positions have generally remained lower than those of the Secret Service and BOP (see table 9).⁶²

⁶²Since AMO's law enforcement officer staffing levels are significantly lower than OFO's and Border Patrol's, attrition rates for these positions are more volatile as even a small number of departures can have a significant effect on overall rates.

Table 9: Annual Attrition Rates for Law Enforcement Officer Positions at U.S. Customs and Border Protection and Other Selected Law Enforcement Agencies, Fiscal Years (FY) 2013–2017

n/a Agency	n/a Law enforcement officer position	Annual attrition rate by FY (percent)				
		2013	2014	2015	2016	2017
U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP)	CBP officer	2.9	2.8	2.7	3.2	3.0
	Border Patrol agent	3.0	4.6	5.4	4.2	4.6
	Air and Marine Operations Air Interdiction Agent ^a	9.2	9.0	7.0	5.0	7.3
	Air and Marine Operations Aviation Enforcement Agent ^a	7.8	11.1	9.6	8.4	8.3
	Air and Marine Operations Marine Interdiction Agent ^a	4.1	5.3	3.3	4.5	4.8
U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE)	Deportation Officer, Detention and Deportation Officer, Criminal Investigator, and Technical Enforcement Officer	3.3	3.7	3.7	4.4	4.4
U.S. Secret Service	Special Agent	4.0	4.2	7.1	7.9	7.3
	Uniformed Division Officer	6.9	8.1	12.4	16.0	15.0
Federal Bureau of Prisons (BOP)	Correctional Officer	9.7	11.1	10.0	11.3	17.0

Source: CBP, ICE, Secret Service, and BOP data. | GAO-18-487

Note: Annual attrition rates for CBP positions are calculated by dividing the total number of law enforcement officers that departed their position for any reason during a given fiscal year by the average number of officers staffed to the position in that same year. Annual attrition rates for ICE positions are calculated by dividing the total number of law enforcement officers that departed their position for any reason during a given fiscal year by the total number of officers staffed to the position at the end of that same fiscal year. Annual attrition rates for Secret Service positions are calculated by dividing the total number of law enforcement officers that departed their positions for any reason during a given fiscal year by the total number of officers staffed to the position at the beginning of that same fiscal year. Annual attrition rates for BOP positions are calculated by dividing the total number of Correctional Officers that separated from BOP for any reason during a given fiscal year by the total number of officers staffed to the position at the end of that same fiscal year. BOP's Correctional Officer position was defined as occupational Series 0007 staff in Grades 5 or 6.

^aSince AMO's law enforcement officer staffing levels are significantly lower than OFO's and Border Patrol's, attrition rates for these positions are more volatile as even a small number of departures can have a significant impact on overall rates.

In addition, from fiscal years 2013 through 2017, CBP's ability to hire more law enforcement officers than it lost varied across positions. Specifically, CBP consistently hired more CBP officers and Aviation Enforcement Agents than it lost. Further, while CBP generally maintained its staffing levels for Marine Interdiction Agents, the agency consistently lost more Border Patrol agents and Air Interdiction Agents than it hired. Even so, onboard staffing levels for all five of CBP's law enforcement

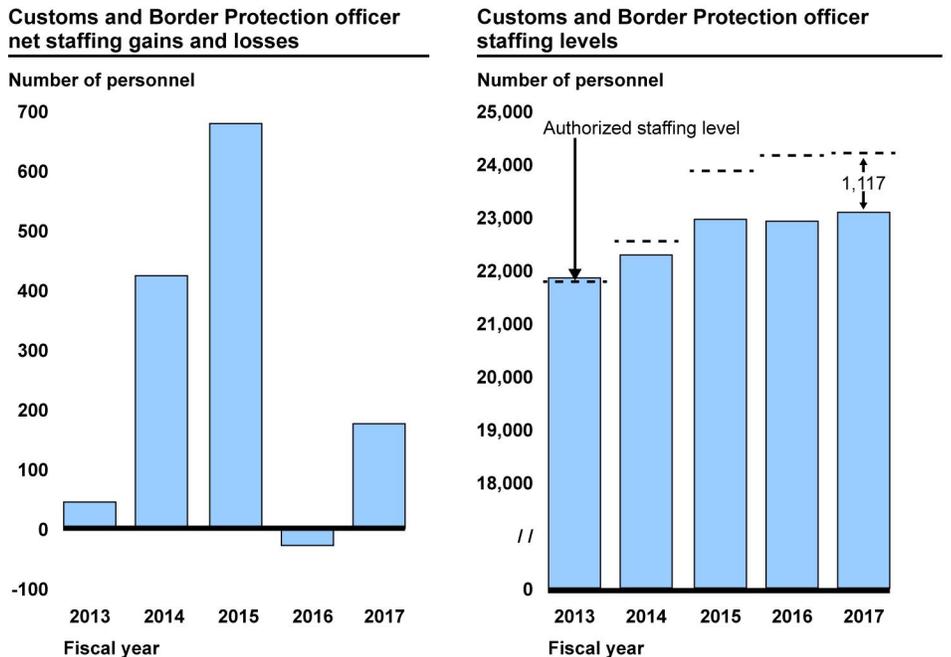
officer positions have consistently remained below authorized staffing levels.⁶³

OFO. With the exception of fiscal year 2016, CBP hired more CBP officers than it lost each fiscal year. Specifically, from fiscal years 2013 through 2017, CBP hired an average of 978 CBP officers and lost an average of 719 officers each year, resulting in an average annual gain of 258 CBP officers and an increase in its overall staffing level of nearly 1,300 officers over this 5-year period.⁶⁴ However, as OFO's staffing targets for CBP officers also increased each year during this period, OFO remained below its authorized levels from fiscal years 2014 through 2017. In fact, OFO ended fiscal year 2017 more than 1,100 CBP officers below its annual staffing target (see fig. 7).

⁶³OFO and AMO develop annual authorized staffing level targets for law enforcement officer positions based on operational needs and available funding. Border Patrol's authorized staffing levels through fiscal year 2016 represent statutorily-established workforce floors while the fiscal year 2017 authorized staffing level for Border Patrol agents represents the office-wide goal of having 26,370 Border Patrol agents, which includes the Executive Order 13767 directive to hire and onboard 5,000 additional agents.

⁶⁴Data on staffing gains and losses for CBP officer positions are calculated from the beginning of fiscal year 2013 through the end of fiscal year 2017. Staffing level totals may not sum due to rounding.

Figure 7: Office of Field Operations Net Staffing Gains and Losses and Overall Staffing Levels for Customs and Border Protection Officer Positions, Fiscal Years 2013–2017

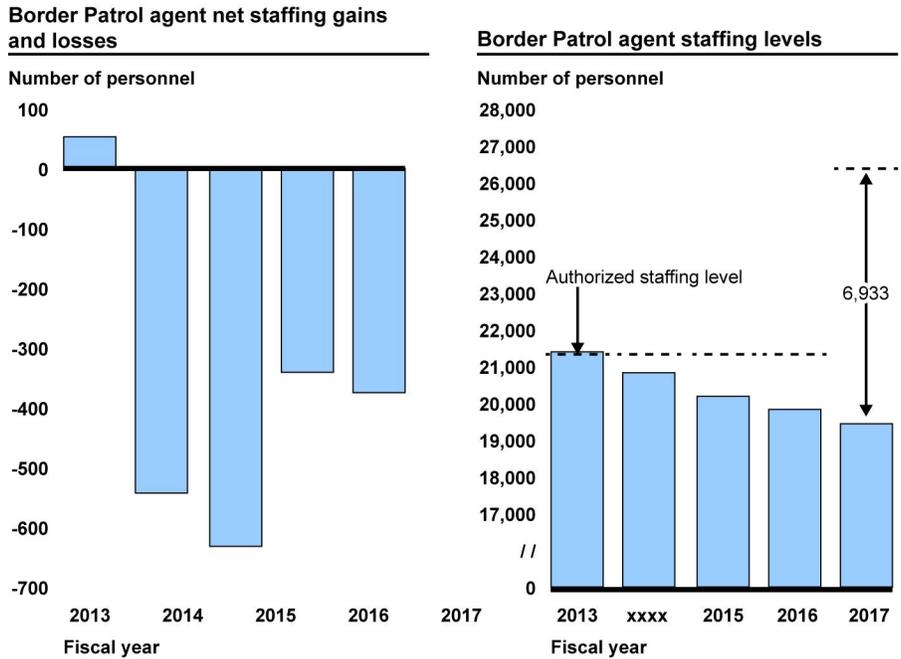


Source: GAO analysis of CBP data. | GAO-18-487

Note: Authorized staffing levels for Customs and Border Protection officer positions from fiscal years 2013 through 2017 represent staffing targets determined by the Office of Field Operations.

Border Patrol. From fiscal years 2013 through 2017, CBP hired an average of 522 Border Patrol agents and lost an average of 890 agents each year, resulting in an average annual loss of 368 Border Patrol agents over this 5-year period. Therefore, despite having an annual attrition rate that mostly remained below 5 percent, Border Patrol was not able to replace departing Border Patrol agents with new hires from fiscal years 2014 through 2017. As a result, staffing levels for Border Patrol agents decreased by 1,838 total agents over our review period and the gap between Border Patrol's onboard staffing levels and its congressionally-mandated minimum staffing floor has expanded each year from fiscal years 2014 through 2017. Border Patrol ended fiscal year 2017 with 19,437 agents—nearly 2,000 agents below its fiscal year 2016 statutorily-established minimum and 7,000 below the staffing target established in response to Executive Order 13767 (see fig. 8).

Figure 8: Border Patrol Net Staffing Gains and Losses and Overall Staffing Levels for Border Patrol Agent Positions, Fiscal Years 2013–2017



Source: GAO analysis of CBP data. | GAO-18-487

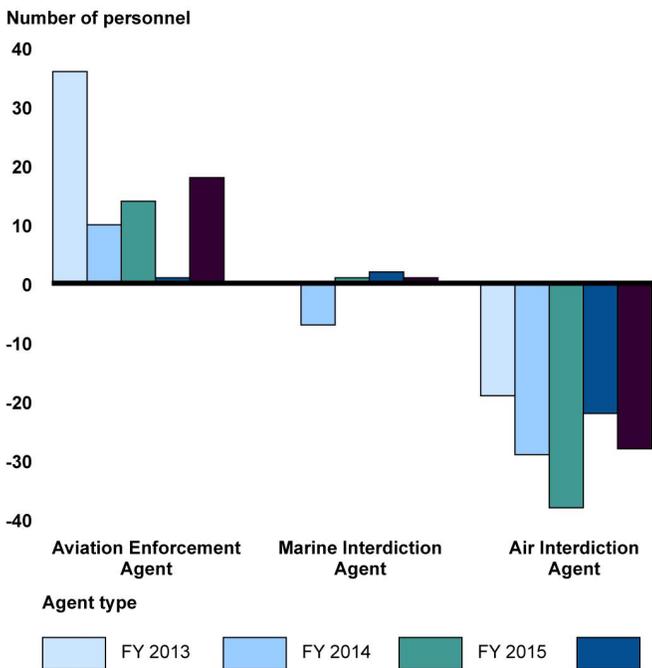
Note: Authorized staffing levels for Border Patrol agent positions from fiscal years 2013 through 2016 represent the statutorily-established minimum staffing floor of 21,370 agents set by Congress. The authorized staffing level for these positions in fiscal year 2017 reflect this minimum staffing floor plus the additional 5,000 agents called for in Executive Order 13767.

AMO. From fiscal years 2013 through 2017, CBP (1) gained Aviation Enforcement Agent staff, (2) generally maintained staffing levels for its Marine Interdiction Agent position, and (3) consistently lost Air Interdiction Agent staff. First, despite the Aviation Enforcement Agent position generally having CBP’s highest annual attrition rates, CBP hired more Aviation Enforcement Agents than it lost each fiscal year and increased its overall staffing level by 79 positions during our review period. Even so, AMO staffing levels for these positions remained below its authorized targets in 4 out of the 5 fiscal years we reviewed. Second, AMO staffing levels for the Marine Interdiction Agent position remained level as AMO lost a net total of 3 Marine Interdiction Agents from fiscal years 2013 through 2017. Nevertheless, onboard staffing levels for these positions remained below the annual authorized levels in 4 of the 5 fiscal years we reviewed. Third, on average, CBP hired 25 Air Interdiction Agents and lost 52 agents each fiscal year, resulting in an average annual loss of 27 agents and a net decrease of 136 positions between fiscal years 2013

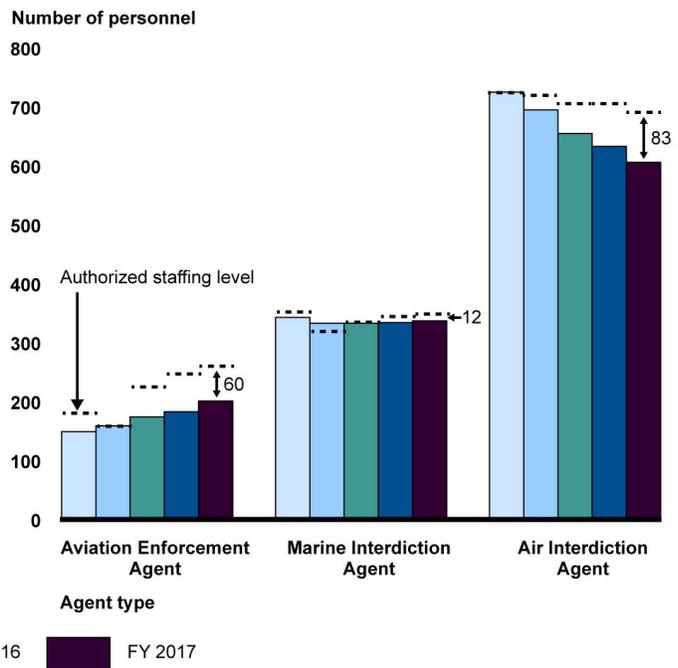
and 2017. Further, even though the authorized staffing targets for these positions decreased every year since fiscal year 2013, AMO's onboard Air Interdiction Agent staffing levels remained below authorized levels in 4 of the 5 fiscal years we reviewed (see fig. 9).

Figure 9: Air and Marine Operations Net Staffing Gains and Losses and Overall Staffing Levels for Law Enforcement Officer Positions, Fiscal Years (FY) 2013–2017

Air and Marine Operations law enforcement officer position net staffing gains and losses



Air and Marine Operations law enforcement officer position staffing levels



Source: GAO analysis of CBP data. | GAO-18-487

Note: Authorized staffing levels for Air Interdiction Agent, Marine Interdiction Agent, and Aviation Enforcement Agent positions from fiscal years 2013 through 2017 represent staffing goals determined by Air and Marine Operations.

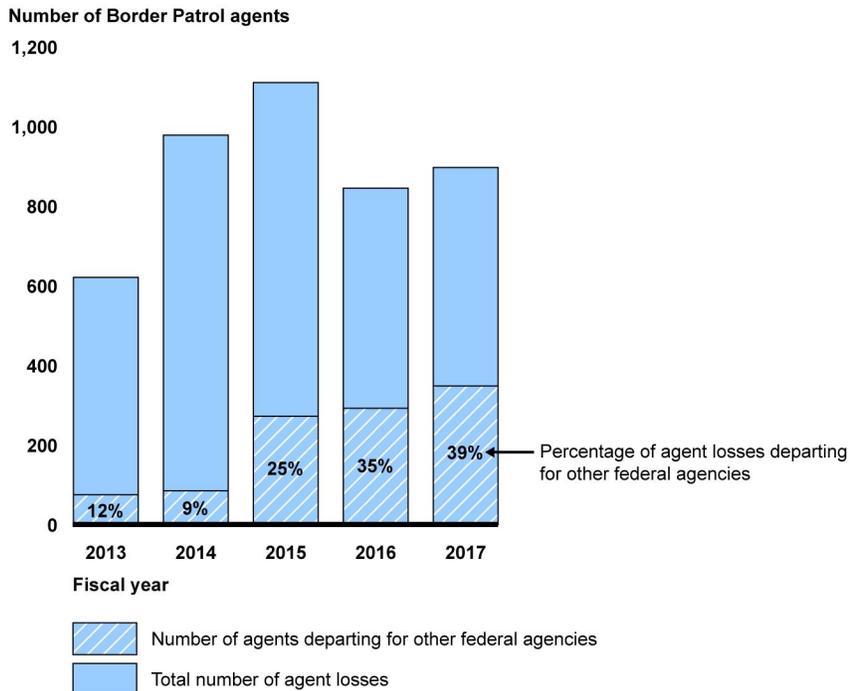
Retaining Law Enforcement Officers in Hard-to-Fill Locations Has Been Challenging for CBP

CBP has acknowledged that improving its retention of qualified law enforcement personnel is critical in addressing staffing shortfalls, but officials identified difficulties in retaining key law enforcement staff as a result of geographically remote and hard-to-fill duty locations. CBP officials across all three operational components and HRM cited location—and specifically employees’ inability to relocate to posts in more desirable locations—as a primary challenge facing the agency in retaining qualified personnel.

Border Patrol officials explained that duty stations in certain remote locations present retention challenges due to quality-of-life factors—for

example, agents may not want to live with their families in an area without a hospital, with low-performing schools, or with relatively long commutes from their homes to their duty station. Border Patrol's difficulty in retaining law enforcement staff in such locations is exacerbated by competition with other federal, state, and local law enforcement organizations for qualified personnel. According to Border Patrol officials, other agencies are often able to offer more desirable duty locations—such as major cities—and, in some cases, higher compensation. CBP data indicate that Border Patrol agents consistently leave the component for employment with other law enforcement agencies, including OFO as well as other DHS components such as ICE. For example, while retirements accounted for more than half of annual CBP officer losses from fiscal years 2013 through 2017, they accounted for less than a quarter of annual Border Patrol agent losses, indicating that the majority of these agents are not retiring but are generally leaving to pursue other employment. Further, according to CBP data, the number of Border Patrol agents departing for employment at other federal agencies increased steadily from 75 agents in fiscal year 2013 to 348 agents in fiscal year 2017—or nearly 40 percent of all Border Patrol agent losses in that fiscal year (see fig. 10).

Figure 10: Border Patrol Agent Losses to Other Federal Agencies and Total Losses, Fiscal Years 2013–2017



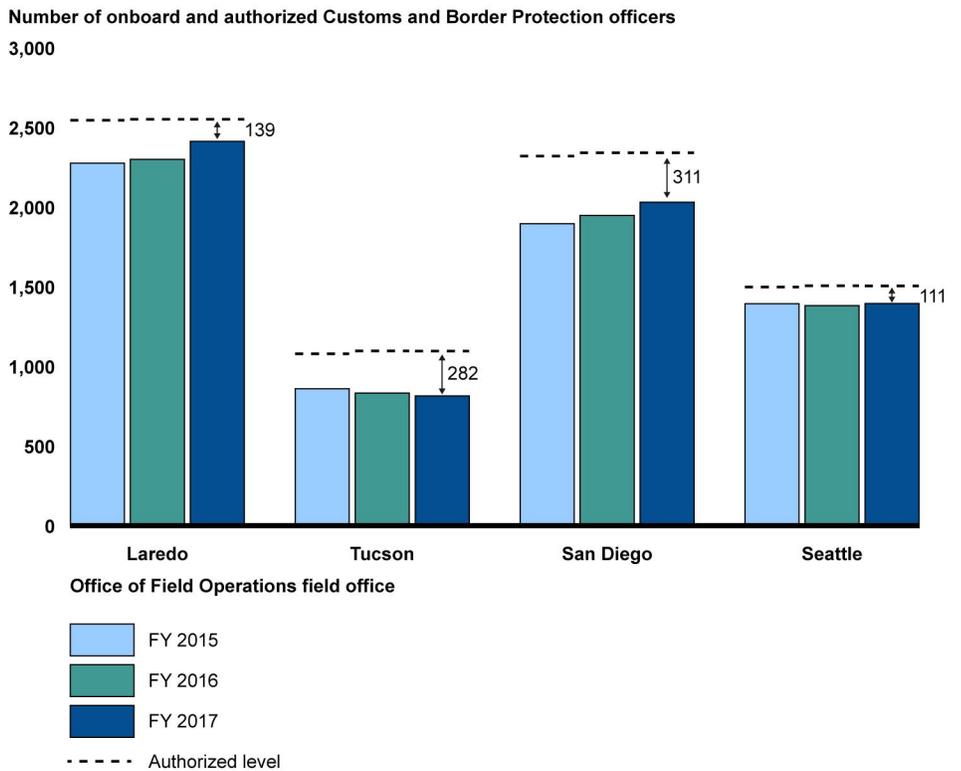
Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Customs and Border Protection data. | GAO-18-487

Further, of the 113 Border Patrol agents who departed CBP for other federal agencies during the first half of fiscal year 2018, 72 agents (64 percent) went to ICE. Border Patrol officials told us that working a standard day shift at ICE in a controlled indoor environment located in a major metropolitan area for similar or even lower salaries presents an attractive career alternative for Border Patrol agents who often work night shifts in extreme weather in geographically remote locations. The President of the National Border Patrol Council also cited this challenge, stating that unless Border Patrol agents have a strong incentive to remain in remote, undesirable locations—such as higher compensation when compared with other law enforcement agencies—they are likely to leave the agency for similar positions located in more desirable locations.⁶⁵

⁶⁵The National Border Patrol Council is the union representing Border Patrol agents that are bargaining unit members. In addition to the inability of Border Patrol agents to relocate to more desirable locations, the union President cited shifting schedules as an additional cause of employee dissatisfaction.

While OFO officials told us the component did not face an across-the-board challenge in retaining CBP officers, they have had difficulty retaining officers in certain hard-to-fill locations that may be geographically remote or unattractive for families, such as Nogales, Arizona, and San Ysidro, California. As a result, CBP officer staffing levels in these locations have consistently remained below authorized targets. For example, OFO ended fiscal year 2017 approximately 300 positions below its authorized staffing level in both its Tucson, Arizona, field office, which includes the port of Nogales, and its San Diego, California, field office, which includes the port of San Ysidro. See figure 11 for more information on the OFO field offices with the four largest gaps between onboard and authorized staffing levels for CBP officer positions from fiscal years 2015 through 2017.

Figure 11: Onboard and Authorized Staffing Levels for Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Officer Positions by Selected Field Offices, Fiscal Years (FY) 2015–2017



Source: GAO analysis of CBP data. | GAO-18-487

Note: Authorized staffing levels for CBP officer positions from fiscal years 2015 through 2017 represent staffing targets determined by the Office of Field Operations (OFO) for each OFO field

office. These four field offices had the largest gaps between onboard CBP officer staffing levels and authorized staffing targets from fiscal year 2015 through 2017.

OFO officials stated that CBP officers regularly leave posts in remote or hard-to-fill locations to transfer to similar positions in more desirable locations, both internally within OFO as well as at other law enforcement agencies. In addition, officials from the National Treasury Employees Union, which represents CBP officers, told us that excessive overtime and stressful employment conditions—including forced temporary duty travel—also contributed to CBP officers leaving the agency for positions at other law enforcement entities.⁶⁶ CBP data indicate that the number of CBP officers who left CBP for employment at other federal agencies increased from 33 in fiscal year 2013 to 108 in fiscal year 2017—or 15 percent of all CBP officer losses in that fiscal year. Likewise, of the 66 CBP officers who departed CBP for other federal agencies during the first half of fiscal year 2018, 34 officers (52 percent) went to ICE.

AMO has also had difficulty retaining its law enforcement personnel—and particularly its Air Interdiction Agent staff—in hard-to-fill locations, such as Aguadilla, Puerto Rico, and Laredo, Texas. However, given the unique qualifications and competencies required for the Air Interdiction Agent position, AMO does not compete with other law enforcement organizations. Instead, AMO officials told us they compete with the commercial airline industry for qualified pilots. Specifically, they stated that this competition is exacerbated by a nationwide shortage of pilots. In addition, AMO officials explained that there is a perception among applicants that commercial airlines are able to offer pilots more desirable locations and higher compensation. However, they told us that AMO generally provided pilots with higher starting salaries than many regional airlines as well as most career options available to helicopter pilots.

CBP Has Taken Steps to Address Retention Challenges

All three CBP operational components have taken steps to retain qualified law enforcement personnel by offering opportunities for employees to relocate to more desirable locations and pursuing the use of financial incentives, special salary rates, and other payments and allowances.

Relocation Opportunities. Border Patrol, OFO, and AMO have formal programs providing law enforcement officers with opportunities to

⁶⁶The National Treasury Employees Union represents CBP officers who are bargaining unit members.

relocate. For example, in fiscal year 2017, Border Patrol implemented its Operational Mobility Program and received initial funding to relocate about 500 Border Patrol agents to new locations based on the component's staffing needs. According to Border Patrol officials, retaining current employees is a top focus for leadership at the component and this program provides Border Patrol agents with opportunities for a paid relocation to a more desirable location at a lower cost to CBP than an official permanent change of station transfer. As of April 2018, Border Patrol officials told us that 322 Border Patrol agents had accepted reassignment opportunities through the program so far and the component hopes to continue receiving funding to provide these opportunities.

Likewise, OFO's National Reassignment Opportunity Bulletin provides CBP officers with opportunities to voluntarily relocate to new ports of entry at their own expense. CBP officers are able to submit reassignment requests multiple times throughout the year and selections are made based on OFO's staffing needs as well as employees' seniority and other eligibility requirements. According to OFO officials, the program has been in place since February 2012, and OFO data indicate a recent increase in reassignments from 122 participating CBP officers in calendar year 2016 to 202 officers in 2017. Further, these officials noted that CBP officers are also able to relocate to new duty stations through partner swaps—when two employees assigned to different duty locations agree to switch—and hardship reassignments—for example, when a CBP officer must relocate because a spouse has been transferred to a new location for work.

Also, AMO personnel who are non-bargaining unit employees and have served for at least 3 years in their current location are eligible for noncompetitive paid relocations. AMO officials told us that opportunities for relocations are posted every few months in which eligible personnel can apply for transfers to specific duty locations based on the needs of the operational component.

Financial Incentives and Other Payments and Allowances. CBP's three operational components have also recently taken steps to supplement employees' salaries through the use of human capital flexibilities—such as retention and relocation incentives and special salary rates—as well as other payments and allowances. CBP's goal in pursuing these human capital flexibilities is to retain current employees—especially in remote or hard-to-fill locations—who are likely to internally relocate within CBP to more desirable duty locations or depart the agency for similar positions at other law enforcement organizations or commercial

airlines. Supplementing the salaries of its employees is consistent with a leading practice we identified in retaining qualified law enforcement personnel—specifically, agencies should ensure they are offering pay and compensation comparable with other law enforcement agencies. Further, two of the three other selected law enforcement agencies we reviewed regularly used retention incentives and other human capital flexibilities to help retain qualified law enforcement personnel in cases where filling the position would be difficult or recruitment costs would be high.⁶⁷ However, we found that from fiscal years 2013 through 2017, CBP's use of such financial incentives and other payments was limited as the agency paid a total of 4 retention incentives and 13 relocation incentives, and implemented 1 special salary rate for all positions during this 5-year period.

From fiscal year 2013 through 2017, Border Patrol did not offer retention incentives to agents and paid 2 relocation incentives to transfer Border Patrol agents to Artesia, New Mexico, and Washington, D.C., at a cost of roughly \$78,000. However, in fiscal year 2018, Border Patrol increased its use of relocation incentives to facilitate the transfer of agents to duty stations along the southwest border that are less desirable due to the remoteness of the location and lack of basic amenities and infrastructure. Specifically, as of April 2018, 67 Border Patrol agents had received such incentives to relocate to duty stations in Ajo, Arizona; Calexico, California; and the Big Bend region in Texas; among others.

While Border Patrol did not offer retention incentives during our review period, it submitted a formal request to CBP leadership in February 2018 for a 10 percent across-the-board retention incentive for all Border Patrol agents at the GS-13 level and below, which represents the majority of the component's frontline workforce. According to Border Patrol

⁶⁷ Specifically, BOP regularly used retention incentives for Correctional Officers staffed in locations with high attrition rates. For example, according to BOP data, the agency paid retention incentives to 146 Correctional Officers at a cost of about \$2.2 million in fiscal year 2013 and 178 Correctional Officers at a cost of about \$3.8 million in fiscal year 2017. Further, the Secret Service expanded its use of retention incentives during our review period, paying out 78 incentives at a cost of about \$292,000 in fiscal year 2013 and 350 incentives at a cost of about \$2.8 million in fiscal year 2017. The Secret Service also began offering a group retention incentive in January 2018 to roughly 1,200 Uniformed Division Officers. In addition, the agency utilizes several additional programs to help retain its law enforcement personnel, including offering employees tuition assistance, student loan repayment programs, and bonuses for regularly using foreign languages as part of their jobs. ICE officials told us they did not use retention incentives or other human capital flexibilities to retain law enforcement officers.

documentation, these incentives, if implemented, could help reduce Border Patrol's attrition rate—which has consistently outpaced its hiring rate—by helping retain agents who may have otherwise left Border Patrol for similar positions in OFO, ICE, or other law enforcement agencies. According to HRM officials, as of April 2018, CBP leadership was evaluating Border Patrol's group retention incentive request, including the costs associated with implementing this 10 percent across-the-board incentive. In addition, as the incentive would benefit Border Patrol agents in all of the component's duty locations, the extent to which this effort would be effective in targeting agent attrition in the remote locations that represent CBP's largest staffing challenges remains to be seen.

In addition, as of May 2018, CBP was planning to submit a request to OPM for a \$10 per day remote duty location allowance for Border Patrol agents staffed to 17 geographically remote stations. These stations meet OPM's definition of "remote worksites" and have quality-of-life conditions that are substantially below the standard at most other CBP duty locations.⁶⁸ According to the agency, this allowance could help to address the attrition of Border Patrol agents at these duty stations. However, like its group retention incentive request, it is not yet known whether this proposal will be approved.

From fiscal years 2013 through 2017, OFO paid a total of 4 retention incentives at a cost of \$149,000 to retain CBP officers in Tucson, Arizona; Detroit, Michigan; Carbury, North Dakota; and Laredo, Texas. Further, OFO paid 7 relocation incentives at a cost of approximately \$160,000 to relocate personnel to the hard-to-fill ports of Alcan and Nome, Alaska; Coburn Gore, Maine; and Detroit, Michigan. One OFO official told us OFO did not regularly use retention incentives because its relatively low annual attrition rates make it difficult to propose a persuasive business case to CBP leadership that such incentives are necessary. Further, another OFO official explained that OFO's strategy is focused on using recruitment incentives to staff hard-to-fill locations with new employees. As discussed above, OFO officials told us this strategy has been effective

⁶⁸According to Border Patrol officials, this allowance would total roughly \$3,000 per year for the average Border Patrol agent staffed to one of the 17 geographically remote stations covered by the request. These 17 duty locations meet the statutory remoteness requirement in being so remote from the nearest established communities or suitable places of residence as to require an appreciable degree of expense, hardship, and inconvenience, beyond that normally encountered in metropolitan commuting.

in retaining CBP officers in most of the hard-to-fill locations where recruitment incentives have been used since fiscal year 2015.⁶⁹

In addition to relocation and retention incentives, OFO received OPM approval in fiscal year 2017 to implement a special salary rate for CBP officers staffed to the hard-to-fill location of Portal, North Dakota—a port that consistently experienced CBP officer losses of more than 10 percent each year. Specifically, this special salary rate supplements CBP officers' base salaries up to 40 percent and, according to OFO officials as of February 2018, there had not been any CBP officer departures from the port since this rate was implemented in June 2017. OFO officials stated that while recruitment incentives can bring applicants to hard-to-fill locations, special salary rates may be able to retain them for longer periods. However, while OFO officials have cited the effectiveness of this special salary rate in retaining personnel, this rate only applies to one hard-to-fill location and does not address OFO's ongoing staffing challenges in other chronically understaffed locations. According to OFO officials, the component is considering requesting additional special salary rates for such locations where attaining authorized staffing levels has proved difficult, but these officials noted that such discussions are in the preliminary stage due to the extensive effort and amount of time required to pursue this option. Specifically, these officials told us that requesting OPM approval for a special salary rate in Portal, North Dakota, was an onerous and extensive process that took CBP and OPM more than 2 years to complete from start to finish.

From fiscal years 2013 through 2017, AMO did not offer retention incentives to law enforcement personnel and paid a total of 4 relocation incentives to transfer three Air Interdiction Agents and one Marine Interdiction Agent to Puerto Rico at a cost of approximately \$84,000. However, AMO has taken steps to pursue additional human capital flexibilities to address its difficulty in retaining Air Interdiction Agents, including a group retention incentive and a special salary rate. Specifically, in September 2017, AMO submitted an official request to HRM for a 10 percent group retention incentive for Air Interdiction Agents staffed to duty locations in Yuma and Sierra Vista, Arizona; Grand Forks, North Dakota; Laredo, Alpine, and McAllen, Texas; and Aguadilla, Puerto

⁶⁹OFO also offered foreign language bonuses to CBP officers who regularly use a foreign language as part of their job. According to National Treasury Employees Union officials, these bonuses are very popular at OFO and are an important tool in retaining personnel.

Rico.⁷⁰ According to the request, the incentive is intended to help AMO retain qualified pilots in these hard-to-fill locations by raising their salaries to be more competitive with commercial airlines. HRM officials told us in March 2018 they were working with AMO and CBP's Office of Finance to assess the proposal's cost.

In addition, as of April 2018, AMO was in the process of drafting a special salary rate request for all Air Interdiction Agents from GS-11 through GS-13 at all AMO locations. HRM officials confirmed they were working with AMO officials on this request, including evaluating whether AMO meets OPM's criteria. HRM officials told us that OPM's criteria for approving the use of special salary rates represent a high bar and AMO will have to present a strong business case that demonstrates a regular pattern of component-wide Air Interdiction Agent losses.

CBP Does Not Have a Systematic Process to Capture and Analyze Data on Departing Law Enforcement Officers

CBP does not have a systematic process for capturing and analyzing information on law enforcement officers who are leaving, such as an exit interview or survey. As a result, the agency does not have important information it could use to help inform future retention efforts. CBP officials across all three components confirmed that they do not systematically conduct formal exit interviews to collect data on departing employees. Officials from OFO and AMO told us that departing law enforcement officers receive the DHS exit survey and therefore have the option to provide these data. However, while CBP officials explained that DHS provides the survey response data to CBP on a quarterly basis, AMO officials told us that this information was of limited value due to low response rates. Further, when we requested these data, CBP was unable to provide the survey response data—or the percentage of departing employees who had completed the survey—citing a technical reporting error in DHS's system. In addition, according to CBP officials, in August 2017, DHS communicated that it no longer required CBP (or DHS's other components) to use the DHS exit survey.

⁷⁰According to AMO's request, the retention incentives offered in Sierra Vista and Grand Forks, Arizona, will be specifically for Air Interdiction Agents tasked with piloting unmanned aerial systems.

In the third quarter of fiscal year 2017, Border Patrol implemented its own exit survey, which includes questions gauging departing employees' reasons for leaving, length of service, and, if applicable, what organization they are departing for, among other questions. While such questions should provide CBP with useful data on the factors affecting Border Patrol agent departures, Border Patrol officials told us that the response rate was 9 percent as of January 2018. When we asked these officials about the steps they were taking to improve this response rate, they replied that individual Border Patrol sectors were responsible for disseminating these surveys and the headquarters officials were unsure of the extent to which sector-level officials were sending the surveys to departing employees. To ensure the surveys were being sent, a senior Border Patrol headquarters official explained that sector-level officials have been told to copy him on all e-mails disseminating the survey.

According to CBP officials, in April 2018, the agency launched an initiative to develop a CBP-wide exit survey. The agency plans to develop customized questions for the survey, conduct a pilot of the survey in July 2018, and integrate the survey into CBP's off-boarding process by the beginning of fiscal year 2019. While CBP provided us with these project milestone dates, the agency did not provide any documentation describing key aspects of the initiative, such as whether CBP will develop a strategy focused on encouraging departing employees to complete the survey to foster higher response rates. Further, CBP did not provide any information on how the agency planned to analyze and use data collected by the exit survey to inform its efforts to retain qualified law enforcement personnel.

Two of the other selected law enforcement agencies we reviewed—BOP and the Secret Service—use exit surveys to collect a wide range of information on departing employees, while ICE is currently developing its own survey. For example, similar to Border Patrol's exit survey, BOP's uses a mix of multiple-choice and open-ended questions to assess reasons for departures as well as employee attitudes toward compensation, work-life balance and other working conditions, and supervisors. Further, both BOP's and the Secret Service's surveys inquire about actions the agencies could have taken that would have prevented the employee's departure.

CBP officials said that management is generally aware of the factors that influence law enforcement officer departures, including the main reason—they want to relocate to more desirable locations. Specifically, Border Patrol officials stated that managers have anecdotal knowledge through

informal conversations or meetings at the local level with departing Border Patrol agents, and OFO officials stated that when a CBP officer leaves, there is a general understanding among their colleagues as to the reasons for their departure. In contrast to OFO and Border Patrol officials, AMO officials stated that because of the low participation rates on the DHS survey, the component does not have enough data to understand and address the factors that influence employees' decisions to leave. *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government* state that management should obtain relevant data from reliable sources and process these data into quality information to make informed decisions in achieving key objectives.⁷¹ Taking steps to ensure that the agency's operational components are systematically collecting and analyzing complete and accurate information on all departing law enforcement officers—including the factors that influenced their decision to separate—would better position CBP to understand its retention challenges and take appropriate action to address them.

Conclusions

CBP has made progress in improving its recruitment, hiring, and retention of law enforcement officers, including increasing the total number of applications it receives for these positions and reducing the amount of time it takes to hire applicants. Further, CBP has taken steps to address its primary challenge in retaining qualified law enforcement officers by offering opportunities for these personnel to relocate and pursuing the use of financial incentives and other payments to supplement employee salaries. Even so, retaining law enforcement officers in hard-to-fill locations continues to be challenging for CBP.

Although CBP management may be aware of the primary reason law enforcement personnel leave the agency, CBP does not have a systematic process in place across its three operational components to capture and analyze information on these departures, such as an exit interview or survey. Taking steps to ensure that the agency's operational components are systematically capturing and analyzing a wide range of information on all departing law enforcement officers and the factors that influenced their decisions to leave would better position CBP to

⁷¹[GAO-14-704G](#).

understand its retention challenges and take appropriate action to address them.

Recommendation for Executive Action

The Commissioner of CBP should ensure that its operational components systematically collect and analyze data on departing law enforcement officers and use this information to inform retention efforts. (Recommendation 1)

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

We provided a draft of this product to DHS for review and comment. DHS provided written comments, which are noted below and reproduced in full in appendix I, and technical comments, which we incorporated as appropriate. We also provided the draft report to the Federal Bureau of Prisons for review and comment, which indicated via e-mail that it did not have any comments on the draft report.

DHS concurred with our recommendation and described the actions it plans to take in response. Specifically, DHS stated that CBP is taking steps to develop an agency-wide exit survey to collect information on departing law enforcement officers for implementation in fiscal year 2019. DHS also stated that CBP is working to develop a mass communications plan to facilitate the completion of the survey by exiting employees to ensure an effective response rate. Systematically capturing and analyzing quality information on departing law enforcement officers will help CBP to understand its retention challenges. To fully address the intent of our recommendation, CBP will also need to use this information to address its retention challenges and inform its overall retention efforts.

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees, the Secretary of Homeland Security, and other interested parties. In addition, the report is available at no charge on the GAO website at <http://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-8777 or gablerr@gao.gov. 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 key contributions to this report are listed in appendix II.

Rebecca Gambler

Rebecca Gambler
Director, Homeland Security and Justice

List of Requesters

The Honorable Ron Johnson
Chairman
The Honorable Claire McCaskill
Ranking Member
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
United States Senate

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

The Honorable Martha McSally
Chairwoman
The Honorable Filemon Vela
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Border and Maritime Security
Committee on Homeland Security
House of Representatives

The Honorable J. Luis Correa
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Oversight and Management Efficiency
Committee on Homeland Security
House of Representatives

Appendix I: Comments from the Department of Homeland Security

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



June 12, 2018

Rebecca Gambler
Director, Homeland Security and Justice
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, NW
Washington, DC 20548

Re: Management Response to Draft Report GAO-18-487, "U.S. Customs and Border Protection: Progress and Challenges in Recruiting, Hiring, and Retaining Law Enforcement Personnel"

Dear Ms. Gambler:

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on this draft report. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) appreciates the U.S. Government Accountability Office's (GAO) work in planning and conducting its review and issuing this report.

The Department is pleased to note GAO's positive recognition of the progress U.S. Customs and Border Protection's (CBP) has made in improving its recruiting, hiring, and retaining processes. CBP is constantly working to strengthen its hiring capabilities to secure staffing for critical frontline operations and the sophisticated network of personnel who support these operations. For example, CBP has undertaken a comprehensive effort to look across all of its hiring process areas has established precise, data-driven improvements and process changes that resulted in efficiency gains. CBP will continue to review its staffing and hiring practices as part of an ongoing cycle of analysis and refinement.

In addition to the many outreach and process efficiency efforts GAO has recognized, CBP is also exploring innovative practices regarding incentives and mobility options. These practices should not only enhance recruitment prospects, but also improve workforce attrition rates. While several modifications to CBP's pre-employment process are being considered, CBP is carefully weighing all risks and mitigation measures, ensuring the agency's high standards of integrity are not compromised while further improvements are made to address hiring, recruitment, and retention challenges.

The draft report contained one recommendation, with which DHS concurs. Attached find our detailed response to the recommendation. Technical comments were provided under separate cover.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on this draft report. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions. We look forward to working with you again in the future.

Sincerely,



JIM H. CRUMPACKER, CIA, CFE
Director
Departmental GAO-OIG Liaison Office

Attachment

**Attachment: Management Response to Recommendation
Contained in GAO-18-487**

GAO recommended that the Commissioner of CBP:

Recommendation: Ensure that its operational components systematically collect and analyze data on departing law enforcement officers and use this information to inform retention efforts.

Response: Concur. CBP agrees that high quality exit survey data is essential to support and inform retention efforts. In May 2018, CBP Human Resources Management (HRM) formed a workgroup tasked with development of custom questions for a CBP-wide exit survey. The workgroup is comprised of representatives from across the agency, including representatives from the Commissioner's Office, the Office of Field Operations, the United States Border Patrol (USBP), Air and Marine Operations, the Office of Trade, Operations Support, Enterprise Services, Congressional Affairs, the Office of Professional Responsibility, and the Office of Public Affairs.

USBP currently employs an exit survey specific to attrition, which was developed in collaboration with HRM. The USBP survey includes questions gauging departing employees' reasons for leaving, length of service, and, if applicable, what organization they are departing for, among other questions that could be customized for other CBP program offices. The workgroup will initially review and base their efforts on the USBP-specific survey to develop the CBP-wide exit survey. The workgroup will develop a draft set of questions for the exit survey, with the goal of having the survey ready to launch on October 1, 2018.

The workgroup will also develop a mass communications plan to be implemented prior to the launch of the exit survey. The goal is for all employees, supervisors, and managers to be aware of the exit survey and ensure an effective response rate. The communications plan will include an email announcement of the exit survey launch, and a module will be added to the leadership training conducted by the Advanced Training Center that will advise supervisors of their responsibility to encourage exiting employees to complete the survey. Additionally, points of contact will be established across CBP at the offices listed above and in offices led by Assistant Commissioners within Enterprise Services and Operations Support to answer questions from exiting employees about the survey. Finally, there will be a link to the exit survey on the Separations and Clearance Form (CBP Form 241) to facilitate completion of the exit survey by exiting employees. Additional avenues for automation of the off-boarding process are currently being

researched, and if appropriate, more automation of the exit survey notifications to exiting employees will be included.

The major milestones for the CBP Exit Survey development and implementation are shown below

Milestone:	Status/Date:
Project Initiation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project Planning • Project approval 	Completed
Project Kickoff	Completed
Develop Survey Content <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research and development • Review and approval 	June 30, 2018
Automate Survey and Pilot Test	July 2018
Complete Privacy Compliance Review and Union Notification	August 2018
Develop and Document Reporting and Action Planning Strategy and Owners	September 2018
Conduct Communications <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Email • Muster minute • CBP Postmaster • Module for Advanced Leadership Trainings • Program office POCs 	September 2018
Integrate Exit Survey into Off-boarding Process	October 1, 2018
Analysis of survey results (data captured from the exit survey will be routinely analyzed to direct future action planning).	January 2019
Initial brief to CBP's Operations Support Council (OSC) and Agency Leadership Council (ALC) on survey results.	February 2019

Estimated Completion Date: February 28, 2019

Appendix II: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

Rebecca Gambler, 202-512-8777, gablerr@gao.gov

Staff Acknowledgements

In addition to the contact named above, Adam Hoffman (Assistant Director), Bryan Bourgault, Eric Hauswirth, Tyler Kent, Amanda Miller, Sasan J. “Jon” Najmi, Leslie Sarapu, Michael Steinberg, and Adam Vogt made key contributions to this report.

Appendix III: Accessible Data

Data Tables

Accessible Data for Figure 1: Overview of U.S. Customs and Border Protection’s Operational Components and Law Enforcement Officer Positions

Organization	Number of onboard law enforcement personnel at end of fiscal year 2017	Mission	Job requirements
U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Office of Field Operations	23,079 Customs and Border Protection officers	To protect U.S. borders at ports of entry; conduct overseas operations to ensure homeland security; and enforce customs law, immigration law, trade law, criminal statutes, and agricultural policies.	Entry-level positions require 3 years of general experience or a 4-year degree, or a combination of education and experience.
U.S. Border Patrol	19,437 Border Patrol agents	To secure international land borders and coastal waters between ports of entry and enforce immigration law and criminal statutes.	Entry-level positions require 1 year of general experience or a bachelor’s degree, or a combination of post-high-school education and experience.
U.S. Customs and Border Protection, Air and Marine Operations	606 Air Interdiction Agents, 201 Aviation Enforcement Agents, and 337 Marine Interdiction Agents	To secure the air and maritime environment at and beyond the U.S. border.	Air and Marine Operations law enforcement officer positions require specific certifications and licensing, among other requirements, because of the technical competencies required for these positions. ^a

Accessible Data for Figure 2: U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Onboard versus Authorized Staffing Levels for Law Enforcement Officer Positions, Fiscal Years 2013–2017

n/a	n/a	fiscal year									
		2013	2014	2015	2016	2017					
Organization	Law enforcement officer position	Authorized staffing level	Actual								
n/a	Customs and Border Protection officer	21775	21843	22536	22274	23861	22947	24153	22910	24196	23079
n/a	Border Patrol agent	21370	21391	21370	20824	21370	20183	21370	19828	26370	19437
Air and Marine Operations	Air Interdiction Agent	720	725	718	695	707	655	703	633	689	606
	Air Enforcement Agent	180	149	158	159	224	174	246	183	261	201
	Marine Interdiction Agent	351	343	318	333	334	333	345	334	349	337

Accessible Data for Figure 4: U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Recruitment Events, Fiscal Years 2013–2017

Fiscal year	Single component events	Joint events
2013	382	334
2014	395	221
2015	825	80
2016	1812	1178
2017	1547	1397

Accessible Data for Figure 5: U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Recruitment Incentive Use by Location for CBP Officers, Fiscal Years 2015–2017

n/a	n/a	Fiscal year		
n/a	n/a	2015	2016	2017

Appendix III: Accessible Data

City	State	Number of incentives	Cost (dollars)	Number of incentives	Cost (dollars)	Number of incentives	Cost (dollars)
Douglas	Arizona	0	n/a	1	10,022	8	79,879
Lukeville	Arizona	1	7,986	6	56,166	9	82,972
Nogales	Arizona	0	n/a	13	112,862	35	312,124
San Luis	Arizona	0	n/a	5	46,184	14	126,142
Calexico	California	0	n/a	7	62,343	34	309,294
San Ysidro	California	0	n/a	19	199,335	145	1,539,156
Coburn Gore	Maine	0	n/a	4	38,104	8	70,817
Jackman	Maine	0	n/a	4	40,338	13	131,739
Grand Portage	Minnesota	0	n/a	0	n/a	1	10,171
Raymond	Montana	0	n/a	2	20,017	3	28,228
Sweetgrass	Montana	0	n/a	0	n/a	6	61,647
Massena	New York	0	n/a	1	8,080	13	122,912
Pembina	North Dakota	0	n/a	2	8,129	7	43,969
Portal	North Dakota	0	n/a	9	86,417	13	123,181
Laredo	Texas	0	n/a	18	165,368	100	927,583
Presidio	Texas	8	69,608	19	172,406	28	252,054
Roma	Texas	0	n/a	0	n/a	2	22,612
Oroville	Washington	0	n/a	3	30,765	7	69,469

Accessible Data for Figure 6: U.S. Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Applications for Law Enforcement Officer Positions by Fiscal Year

Fiscal year	Customs and Border Protection officer	Border Patrol agent	Air and Marine Operations agents
2013	22,576	27,269	2,037
2014	36,791	14	2,881
2015	53,503	61,263	2,884
2016	54,337	63,317	5,366
2017	85,570	91,583	5,884

Accessible Data for Figure 7: Office of Field Operations Net Staffing Gains and Losses and Overall Staffing Levels for Customs and Border Protection Officer Positions, Fiscal Years 2013–2017

Customs and Border Protection officer net staffing gains and losses

Fiscal year	Customs and Border Protection Officer
2013	44
2014	423
2015	678
2016	-29
2017	175

Customs and Border Protection office staffing levels

Fiscal year	Authorized staffing level	Actual staffing level
2013	21,775	21,843
2014	22,536	22,274
2015	23,861	22,947
2016	24,153	22,910
2017	24,196	23,079

Accessible Data for Figure 8: Border Patrol Net Staffing Gains and Losses and Overall Staffing Levels for Border Patrol Agent Positions, Fiscal Years 2013–2017

Border Patrol agent net staffing gains and losses

Fiscal year	Border Patrol agent
2013	53
2014	-543
2015	-632
2016	-341
2017	-375

Border Patrol agent staffing levels

Fiscal year	Authorized staffing level	Actual staffing level
2013	21,370	21,391
2014	21,370	20,824
2015	21,370	20,183
2016	21,370	19,828
2017	26,370	19,437

Accessible Data for Figure 9: Air and Marine Operations Net Staffing Gains and Losses and Overall Staffing Levels for Law Enforcement Officer Positions, Fiscal Years (FY) 2013–2017

Air and Marine Operations law enforcement officer position net staffing gains and losses

Fiscal year	Aviation Enforcement agent	Marine Interdiction agent	Air Interdiction agent
2013	36	0	-19
2014	10	-7	-29
2015	14	1	-38
2016	1	2	-22
2017	18	1	-28

Air and Marine Operations law enforcement officer position staffing levels

n/a	Aviation Enforcement agent		Marine Interdiction agent		Air Interdiction agent	
Fiscal year	Authorized staffing level	Actual staffing level	Authorized staffing level	Actual staffing level	Authorized staffing level	Actual staffing level
2013	180	149	351	343	720	725
2014	158	159	318	333	718	695
2015	224	174	334	333	707	655
2016	246	183	345	334	703	633
2017	261	201	349	337	689	606

Accessible Data for Figure 10: Border Patrol Agent Losses to Other Federal Agencies and Total Losses, Fiscal Years 2013–2017

Fiscal year	Total number of agent losses	Number of agents departing for other federal agencies	Percentage of agent losses departing for other federal agencies
2013	621	75	12
2014	978	85	9
2015	1110	272	25
2016	845	292	35
2017	897	348	39

Accessible Data for Figure 11: Onboard and Authorized Staffing Levels for Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Officer Positions by Selected Field Offices, Fiscal Years (FY) 2015–2017

Fiscal year	Laredo	Tucson	San Diego	Seattle				
n/a	Authoriz ed	Onboa rd						
2015	2546	2276	1080	860	2321	1896	1499	1394
2016	2552	2300	1098	833	2342	1948	1507	1382
2017	2552	2413	1097	815	2342	2031	1506	1395

Agency Comment Letter

Accessible Text for Appendix I: Comments from the Department of Homeland Security

Page 1

June 12, 2018

Rebecca Gambler

Director, Homeland Security and Justice

U.S. Government Accountability Office 441 G Street, NW

Washington, DC 20548

Re: Management Response to Draft Report GAO-18-487, “U.S. Customs and Border Protection: Progress and Challenges in Recruiting, Hiring, and Retaining Law Enforcement Personnel”

Dear Ms. Gambler:

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on this draft report. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) appreciates the U.S. Government Accountability Office's (GAO) work in planning and conducting its review and issuing this report.

The Department is pleased to note GAO's positive recognition of the progress U.S. Customs and Border Protection's (CBP) has made in improving its recruiting, hiring, and retaining processes. CBP is constantly working to strengthen its hiring capabilities to secure staffing for critical frontline operations and the sophisticated network of personnel who support these operations. For example, CBP has undertaken a comprehensive effort to look across all of its hiring process areas has established precise, data-driven improvements and process changes that resulted in efficiency gains. CBP will continue to review its staffing and hiring practices as part of an ongoing cycle of analysis and refinement.

In addition to the many outreach and process efficiency efforts GAO has recognized, CBP is also exploring innovative practices regarding incentives and mobility options. These practices should not only enhance recruitment prospects, but also improve workforce attrition rates. While several modifications to CBP's pre-employment process are being considered, CBP is carefully weighing all risks and mitigation measures, ensuring the agency's high standards of integrity are not compromised while further improvements are made to address hiring, recruitment, and retention challenges.

Page 2

The draft report contained one recommendation, with which DHS concurs. Attached find our detailed response to the recommendation. Technical comments were provided under separate cover.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on this draft report. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions. We look forward to working with you again in the future.

Sincerely,

JIM H. CRUMPACKER, CIA, CFE

Director

Departmental GAO-OIG Liaison Office

Attachment

Page 3

Attachment: Management Response to Recommendation Contained in GAO-18-487

GAO recommended that the Commissioner of CBP:

Recommendation: Ensure that its operational components systematically collect and analyze data on departing law enforcement officers and use this information to inform retention efforts.

Response: Concur. CBP agrees that high quality exit survey data is essential to support and inform retention efforts. In May 2018, CBP Human Resources Management (HRM) formed a workgroup tasked with development of custom questions for a CBP-wide exit survey. The workgroup is comprised of representatives from across the agency, including representatives from the Commissioner's Office, the Office of Field Operations, the United States Border Patrol (USBP), Air and Marine Operations, the Office of Trade, Operations Support, Enterprise Services, Congressional Affairs, the Office of Professional Responsibility, and the Office of Public Affairs.

USBP currently employs an exit survey specific to attrition, which was developed in collaboration with HRM. The USBP survey includes questions gauging departing employees' reasons for leaving, length of service, and, if applicable, what organization they are departing for, among other questions that could be customized for other CBP program offices. The workgroup will initially review and base their efforts on the USBP-specific survey to develop the CBP-wide exit survey. The workgroup will develop a draft set of questions for the exit survey, with the goal of having the survey ready to launch on October 1, 2018.

The workgroup will also develop a mass communications plan to be implemented prior to the launch of the exit survey. The goal is for all employees, supervisors, and managers to be aware of the exit survey and ensure an effective response rate. The communications plan will include an email announcement of the exit survey launch, and a module will be added to the leadership training conducted by the Advanced Training Center that will advise supervisors of their responsibility to encourage exiting employees to complete the survey. Additionally, points of contact will be established across CBP at the offices listed above and in offices led by Assistant Commissioners within Enterprise Services and Operations Support to answer questions from exiting employees about

the survey. Finally, there will be a link to the exit survey on the Separations and Clearance Form (CBP Form 241) to facilitate completion of the exit survey by exiting employees. Additional avenues for automation of the off-boarding process are currently being

Page 4

researched, and if appropriate, more automation of the exit survey notifications to exiting employees will be included.

The major milestones for the CBP Exit Survey development and implementation are shown below

Milestone:	Status/Date:
Project Initiation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Project Planning • Project approval 	Completed
Project Kickoff	Completed
Develop Survey Content	June 30, 2018
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research and development • Review and approval 	
Automate Survey and Pilot Test	July 2018
Complete Privacy Compliance Review and Union Notification	August 2018
Develop and Document Reporting and Action Planning Strategy and Owners	September 2018
Conduct Communications	September 2018
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Email • Muster minute • CBP Postmaster • Module for Advanced Leadership Trainings • Program office POCs 	
Integrate Exit Survey into Off-boarding Process	October 1, 2018
Analysis of survey results (data captured from the exit survey will be routinely analyzed to direct future action planning).	January 2019
Initial brief to CBP's Operations Support Council (OSC) and Agency Leadership Council (ALC) on survey results.	February 2019

Estimated Completion Date: February 28, 2019

GAO's Mission

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

Obtaining Copies of GAO Reports and Testimony

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

Order by Phone

The price of each GAO publication reflects GAO's actual cost of production and distribution and depends on the number of pages in the publication and whether the publication is printed in color or black and white. Pricing and ordering information is posted on GAO's website, <https://www.gao.gov/ordering.htm>.

Place orders by calling (202) 512-6000, toll free (866) 801-7077, or TDD (202) 512-2537.

Orders may be paid for using American Express, Discover Card, MasterCard, Visa, check, or money order. Call for additional information.

Connect with GAO

Connect with GAO on [Facebook](#), [Flickr](#), [Twitter](#), and [YouTube](#).
Subscribe to our [RSS Feeds](#) or [E-mail Updates](#). Listen to our [Podcasts](#).
Visit GAO on the web at <https://www.gao.gov>.

To Report Fraud, Waste, and Abuse in Federal Programs

Contact:

Website: <https://www.gao.gov/fraudnet/fraudnet.htm>

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

Congressional Relations

Orice Williams Brown, Managing Director, WilliamsO@gao.gov, (202) 512-4400,
U.S. Government Accountability Office, 441 G Street NW, Room 7125,
Washington, DC 20548

Public Affairs

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

Strategic Planning and External Liaison

James-Christian Blockwood, Managing Director, spel@gao.gov, (202) 512-4707
U.S. Government Accountability Office, 441 G Street NW, Room 7814,
Washington, DC 20548