EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY

DHS Could Better Address Challenges to Ensuring EEO in Its Workforce

What GAO Found

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) uses multiple information sources to identify potential barriers to equal employment opportunity (EEO), but lacks performance metrics for tracking its progress towards eliminating identified barriers. DHS generally uses the information sources that the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) guidance recommends, such as employee survey results, to help identify potential barriers. While DHS reports some improvements in employee engagement and representation of minorities and women from fiscal years 2014 through 2018, it does not have complete performance metrics, such as the retention rate of women in law enforcement positions. Using performance metrics could help DHS assess its progress in eliminating barriers.

DHS and its components have identified various deficiencies in their EEO programs, but lack policies and procedures for developing action plans and formal staffing models to address deficiencies. For example, in each of the fiscal years 2015 through 2018, DHS reported that senior managers at DHS components did not successfully implement EEO action plans and incorporate EEO action plan objectives into agency strategic plans. Further, DHS components lacked action plans to address nearly half (179 out of 369) of the deficiencies self-reported by all components from fiscal years 2014 through 2017. For example, in fiscal year 2017, four DHS components did not have action plans to ensure that their EEO directors report directly to their agency heads, as required by EEOC guidance. Developing policies and procedures to help ensure components’ EEO programs have action plans for addressing deficiencies could help DHS components better comply with EEOC requirements.

In addition, developing and using formal staffing models—a tool to determine the number of staff required—for their EEO programs could help DHS and its components to identify, request, and obtain the staff they need. For example, DHS and its components reported that staffing challenges contributed to some of their program deficiencies, and acknowledged they did not have formal staffing models for their EEO programs.

DHS has plans to address nine areas of noncompliance in its EEO program identified by EEOC. In its July 2017 review of DHS compliance with EEOC requirements, EEOC found that DHS did not provide complete demographic data on new hires and promotions in its fiscal year 2016 report to EEOC. DHS reported to EEOC that it had collected and analyzed such demographic data beginning in fiscal year 2019.

DHS’s EEO and human capital offices assist and support DHS components in identifying and addressing EEO barriers. However, DHS’s EEO office lacks policies and procedures to ensure components respond timely and completely to areas of noncompliance identified in EEOC feedback letters. Additionally, DHS EEO officials said they lack authority to ensure components’ compliance with EEOC requirements. Without addressing these issues, DHS may not be effectively positioned to manage its EEO program.