OM and Agencies Could Better Leverage Data to Help Improve Veteran Retention Rates

What GAO Found

From fiscal years 2014 through 2018, veterans left federal government jobs at a higher rate than non-veterans, according to GAO analysis of Office of Personnel Management (OPM) data. After controlling for key demographic and employment factors, GAO estimated that on average, 6.7 percent of veterans left the federal government compared to 5 percent of similar non-veterans. While veterans primarily left to retire, veterans resigned from federal service at 1.6 times the rate of similar non-veterans. GAO also estimated that 18.7 percent of veterans resigned within their first 5 years of federal service compared to 11.1 percent of similar non-veterans. Each of the 24 Chief Financial Officer Act agencies experienced higher rates of attrition among veteran employees than similar non-veteran employees.

GAO identified six workplace factors associated with veterans’ intentions to leave federal service. These factors—or drivers of retention—are based on an analysis of data from the OPM Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey (OPM FEVS), a tool for collecting employees’ perceptions of their federal work experiences.

Key Workplace Factors Associated with Veterans Considering Leaving Federal Service

- **Satisfaction with Pay**
- **Meaningfulness of Work**
- **Confidence in Leaders**
- **Opportunities for Advancement**
- **Training and Skills Development**
- **Relationship with Supervisor**

More than half of both veterans and non-veterans reported being satisfied with five of the six factors. More than half of both veterans and non-veterans reported not being satisfied with opportunities for advancement at their agencies. Overall, we found that veterans were slightly less satisfied with these factors than non-veterans, which could in part explain the higher attrition rates for veterans. Improvements in employee satisfaction in these areas may lead to higher retention rates.

Performing analyses similar to those in this report could help agencies identify and strengthen strategies for improving veteran retention. However, challenges exist for agencies using OPM FEVS data on their own to identify drivers of retention among their workforces. OPM could help agencies with these analyses so they could use data to address veteran retention issues and other workforce challenges.