

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-21-238T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Regulatory Affairs and Federal Management, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

Telework offers benefits to federal agencies as well as to the federal workforce. These include improving recruitment and retention of employees, reducing the need for costly office space, and an opportunity to better balance work and family demands. In addition, telework is a tool that agencies can use to help accomplish their missions during periods of disruption, including during the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Congress has encouraged federal agencies to expand staff participation in telework, most recently by passing the Telework Enhancement Act of 2010 (the act). The act established requirements for executive agencies' telework policies and programs, among other things.

This statement provides key practices to help ensure the success of telework programs. The statement is based on GAO's body of work on federal telework issued from July 2003 through February 2017.

GAO has recently initiated two reviews related to federal telework. One is examining the extent to which agencies have used telework during the COVID-19 pandemic, including the successes and challenges agencies experienced. The second is reviewing agencies' telework information technology infrastructure.

View [GAO-21-238T](#). For more information, contact Michelle B. Rosenberg at (202) 512-6806 or rosenbergm@gao.gov.

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FEDERAL TELEWORK

Key Practices That Can Help Ensure the Success of Telework Programs

What GAO Found

The Telework Enhancement Act of 2010 (the act) defines telework as a work flexibility arrangement under which an employee performs the duties and responsibilities of their position and other authorized activities from an approved worksite other than the location from which the employee would otherwise work. GAO previously identified key practices in telework-related literature and guidelines that federal agencies should implement in ensuring successful telework programs. These key practices may be grouped under seven categories.

- **Program planning.** Consistent with a key practice GAO identified, agencies are required to have a telework managing officer. Other key practices related to planning for a telework program include establishing measurable telework program goals, and providing funding to meet the needs of the telework program.
- **Telework policies.** Agencies can help ensure their workforces are telework ready by establishing telework policies and guidance. To ensure that teleworkers are approved on an equitable basis, agencies should establish eligibility criteria, such as suitability of tasks and employee performance. Agencies should also have telework agreements for use between teleworkers and their managers.
- **Performance management.** Agencies should ensure that the same performance standards are used to evaluate both teleworkers and nonteleworkers. Agencies should also establish guidelines to minimize adverse impacts that telework can have on nonteleworkers.
- **Managerial support.** For telework programs to be successful agencies need support from top management. They also need to address managerial resistance to telework.
- **Training and publicizing.** Telework training helps agencies ensure a common understanding of the program. The act requires agencies to provide telework training to employees eligible to telework and to managers of teleworkers. Keeping the workforce informed about the program also helps.
- **Technology.** Agencies need to make sure teleworkers have the right technology to successfully perform their duties. To that end, agencies should assess teleworker and organization technology needs, provide technical support to teleworkers, and address access and security issues.
- **Program evaluation.** Agencies should develop program evaluation tools and use such tools from the very inception of the program to identify problems or issues. Agencies can then use this information to make any needed adjustments to their programs.

GAO has previously reported instances where selected agencies faced challenges implementing telework programs that aligned with key practices. For example, three of four selected agencies did not require review or document their review of ongoing telework agreements. These reviews are important to provide assurance that the agreements reflect and support their current business needs. GAO also previously reported that managers at three of four selected agencies were not required to complete telework training before approving staff's telework agreements. The training is important to ensure managers fully understood agency telework policy and goals before approving or denying requests to telework.