

GAO@100 Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-22-104297](#), a report to congressional addressees

Why GAO Did This Study

The COVID-19 pandemic has had far-reaching effects on federal programs and operations. To address this public health crisis, Congress and the administration made several hiring authorities available to agencies to hire staff with the needed skills to effectively respond to the pandemic.

The CARES Act includes a provision for GAO to report on ongoing monitoring and oversight efforts related to the COVID-19 pandemic. This report examines: (1) the new hiring authorities provided to federal agencies for COVID-19 response and the extent to which selected agencies have used them; (2) selected agencies' experiences using those hiring authorities, including lessons learned; and (3) OPM's efforts to assess agencies' use of the COVID-19 related hiring authorities.

GAO reviewed documents and interviewed officials from OPM and the 10 agencies that were provided hiring authorities in the CARES Act or DHA for the public health emergency from OPM between March 1 and September 30, 2020. The documents reviewed included data on the agencies' hiring and OPM policies and guidance for its oversight of agencies' use of hiring authorities.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making one recommendation to OPM to develop and implement a process for collecting and sharing government-wide lessons learned associated with agencies' use of different hiring authorities in response to COVID-19. OPM concurred with the recommendation made in this report.

View [GAO-22-104297](#). For more information, contact Michelle B. Rosenberg, (202) 512-6806, rosenbergm@gao.gov.

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FEDERAL HIRING

OPM Should Collect and Share COVID-19 Lessons Learned to Inform Hiring during Future Emergencies

What GAO Found

The CARES Act provided temporary hiring authorities to six agencies with responsibilities for responding to the public health and economic crisis caused by COVID-19. A hiring authority is the law, executive order, or regulation that allows an agency to hire a person into the federal civil service. In addition, as of September 30, 2020, five agencies received direct hiring authority (DHA) from the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) in response to the pandemic. DHAs allow agencies to expedite hiring by eliminating competitive rating and ranking procedures and veterans' preference for specific positions. Also, in March 2020, OPM authorized the use of COVID-19 Schedule A hiring authority, which allows agencies to fill positions for up to 1 year as needed in response to, or as a result of, COVID-19. GAO found that the number of staff hired by 10 selected agencies using these three temporary COVID-19 hiring authorities varied.

Figure 1: Availability of COVID-19 Hiring Authorities and Total Number of Hires Made at Selected Agencies, March through December 2020

Agency	CARES Act	COVID-19 Direct Hire Authority	COVID-19 Schedule A ^a
Veterans Affairs	N/A	4,215	913
Health and Human Services	≤10	985	461
Small Business Administration	N/A	0	449
Agriculture	N/A	^b	112
Smithsonian Institution	N/A	0	≤10
Commerce ^c	74	N/A	0
Housing and Urban Development	48	N/A	0
Treasury	0	N/A	≤10
Commodity Futures Trading Commission	0	N/A	0
Securities and Exchange Commission	0	N/A	0

Source: GAO analysis of CARES Act and agency information. | GAO-22-104297

^aCOVID-19 Schedule A hiring authority allows agencies to fill positions for up to 1 year as needed in response to, or as a result of, COVID-19.

^bAgency received approval to amend an existing authority so hires were not all related to COVID-19.

^cCommerce's CARES Act hiring authority is limited to the Economic Development Administration.

The selected agencies described a few lessons learned that could help other agencies improve the use of hiring authorities in future emergencies including: (1) collaborating with internal stakeholders to maximize information sharing across the agency; and (2) creating an inventory of hiring needs and available authorities to assist in addressing agency workforce needs.

OPM intends to conduct reviews in fiscal year 2022 that may provide insight into agencies' use of hiring authorities in response to the pandemic. However, according to OPM officials, the agency has not yet developed plans to collect and share lessons learned on the use of COVID-19 related hiring authorities. Collecting and sharing lessons learned would help OPM understand how the various hiring authorities could be used during future emergencies and identify opportunities to improve the hiring process.