



Highlights of [GAO-03-281](#), a report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on Technology and Procurement Policy, House Committee on Government Reform

ACQUISITION MANAGEMENT

Agencies Can Improve Training on New Initiatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The federal government is dramatically changing the way it purchases goods and services by relying more on judgment and initiative versus rigid rules for making purchasing decisions. Congress has enacted a series of reforms to help the government adapt to this environment.

GAO was asked to assess strategies agencies are using to ensure that their acquisition workforces are receiving the training needed to operate in a changing business environment. In doing so, GAO looked at the General Services Administration (GSA), the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), and the Department of Defense (DOD). GAO also looked at the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) because it is exempt from federal acquisition laws, giving it greater flexibility and discretion.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is recommending that the Office of Federal Procurement Policy develop a policy that calls on agencies to adopt the elements of the approach used by leading organizations; establish a focal point that can reach beyond the contracting community to set training requirements; and integrate training into planning for policy implementation.

In response to a draft of this report, the Office of Federal Procurement Policy said that it would assess the current policy framework.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-281.

To view the full report, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Dave Cooper at (202) 512-4841 or cooperd@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

Industry and government experts alike recognize that training is a critical tool in successfully implementing change. To deliver training effectively, leading organizations typically prioritize initiatives that are most important to them, identify those needing training and set requirements, and ensure that their training reaches the right people. Top leadership supports these efforts by working to overcome resistance, marshalling resources, and building commitment to new ways of doing business. This approach, which incorporates the six elements that have been identified as key to training success, helps to ensure that training is well planned rather than left to chance.

This approach was not consistently evident at the agencies GAO reviewed. While agencies had efforts underway to make training available and raise awareness of major acquisition initiatives, they often did not have an identifiable process for assuring that training reached all those who played a role in successful implementation. For example, DOD and the Army employed most elements of the approach in implementing training on one acquisition initiative—performance-based contracting. In particular, they set training as a high priority and defined who would be targeted for training. But their use of the elements was not evident on another initiative GAO examined. Similarly, the approach taken by GSA and NASA did not fully incorporate the key elements GAO identified.

The approach taken by FAA was somewhat different. It created an organizational focal point to define a process and facilitate the management of its acquisition workforce, and it employed many of the key elements in its approach. For example, it created a special council of agency executives to establish priorities.

Overall, GAO found that certain conditions tended to facilitate or hinder implementation of the key elements. For example, having a focal point that could reach beyond the contracting community helped to ensure that training was delivered to the right staff. Civilian agencies have not been supported by an agency that coordinates training on governmentwide initiatives. Procurement executives expressed the view that the Federal Acquisition Institute should fulfill this role for civilian agencies.

Key Elements for Acquisition Initiative Training

Prioritize initiatives so that the agency is focused on training that is most relevant to its mission	Tailor training so that staff get the training that is most appropriate to them
Demonstrate top level commitment and provide resources	Track training to ensure it reaches the right people at the right time
Identify those needing training and set requirements so that training reaches the right staff	Measure the effectiveness of training so that further improvements can be made

Source: GAO.