



Highlights of [GAO-07-216](#), a report to congressional committees

# INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

## Status and Challenges of Employee Exchange Program

### Why GAO Did This Study

Recognizing the importance of human capital to information technology (IT) and the need to improve the skills of federal IT workers, Congress created the Information Technology Exchange Program (ITEP) as part of the E-Government Act of 2002. ITEP aims to improve federal IT skills through exchanges of staff between the government and the private sector. The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) was required to issue implementing regulations, which it did in September 2005, and to report semiannually to the Congress. OPM's regulations require that each participating agency develop an ITEP plan before proceeding with exchanges. Agencies' opportunity to begin exchanges ends in December 2007.

GAO is required to evaluate the program by December 2006. As agreed, GAO's objectives were to determine (1) the status of the program and (2) challenges facing agencies. To address these objectives, GAO analyzed key documents and interviewed OPM, participating agencies, and others.

### What GAO Recommends

GAO is recommending that the Director of OPM include in its upcoming semiannual reports the number of exchanges that have occurred and the status of efforts to address challenges facing agencies in implementing ITEP. In comments on a draft of the report, OPM agreed to report on exchanges but not on challenges.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-216](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-216).

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact David A. Powner at (202) 512-9286 or [pownerd@gao.gov](mailto:pownerd@gao.gov).

### What GAO Found

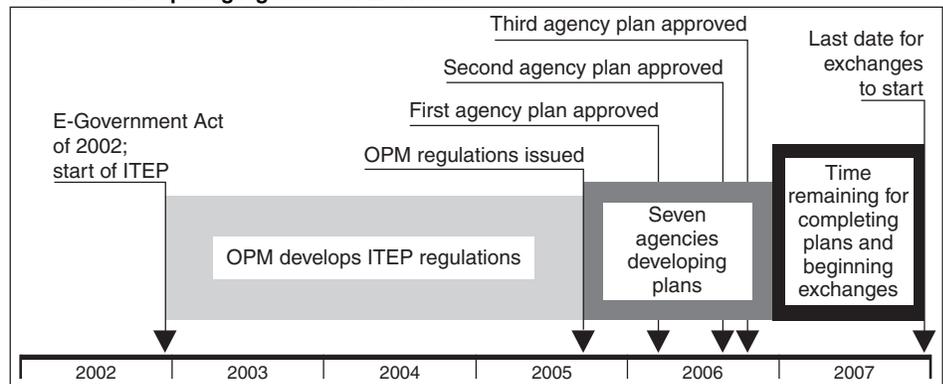
With only 1 year remaining to begin exchanges under the ITEP program, the seven agencies that volunteered to participate are still initiating their programs, and no exchanges have taken place. All participating agencies have drafted plans, but only three—Department of Homeland Security, Department of Defense, and Department of Commerce—have finalized them. Further, only Homeland Security has attempted to negotiate an exchange, but it was unsuccessful. In its last two semiannual reports, OPM has reported on the status of agency plans, but has not reported that no exchanges have taken place to date.

OPM, agencies, and others have identified key challenges that will confront agencies as they finish their plans and begin to implement ITEP programs:

- Employees with desired skills are in short supply in both the federal government and the private sector, particularly in enterprise architecture, project management, and information security, according to industry representatives.
- Companies are concerned that employee exchanges could hinder future business, since a company with an employee at an agency might be seen as having an unfair advantage in bidding on agency procurements.
- Federal ethics requirements, especially financial disclosure, could discourage private-sector employees from participating.
- Federal agencies' current marketing through a Web site has not been productive, according to participating agencies; suggested improvements include using the media and making personal contacts with companies.

OPM and the participating agencies are aware of the challenges and acknowledge that they need to be addressed. However, given the short time remaining before authority to begin new exchanges ends (see figure), it will be essential to expeditiously address the challenges to enable a significant number of successful exchanges.

**OPM and Participating Agencies' ITEP Actions**



Source: GAO analysis of agency data.