

Why GAO Did This Study

Since its creation, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has faced scrutiny from Congress and others concerning DHS's ability to hire and retain senior executives. GAO was requested to review senior leadership vacancies at DHS, including efforts to address vacancies. This report addresses: (1) vacancy rates in DHS senior leadership positions from fiscal years 2006 through 2011 and how these rates compared with other federal agencies; (2) attrition in DHS senior leadership positions, how attrition compares with other federal agencies, and actions DHS has taken to identify causes of senior leadership attrition; and (3) programs to help address senior-leadership hiring and recruitment.

GAO calculated vacancy and attrition rates using Office of Personnel Management (OPM) data. GAO also used National Finance Center (NFC) payroll data obtained from DHS in vacancy rate calculations. There is no generally agreed upon standard for vacancy rates. However, to provide perspective, using OPM data, GAO calculated vacancy rates for other agencies subject to the Chief Financial Officers (CFO) Act of 1990 and compared them with DHS. GAO found the OPM and NFC data sufficiently reliable to calculate vacancy and attrition rates. To determine actions taken to identify attrition causes and efforts to enhance recruitment and retention, GAO reviewed agency documents, interviewed DHS human capital officials, and considered human capital practices GAO has previously recommended.

View [GAO-12-264](#). For more information, contact David C. Maurer at (202) 512-9627 or maurerd@gao.gov.

February 2012

DHS HUMAN CAPITAL

Senior Leadership Vacancy Rates Generally Declined, but Components' Rates Varied

What GAO Found

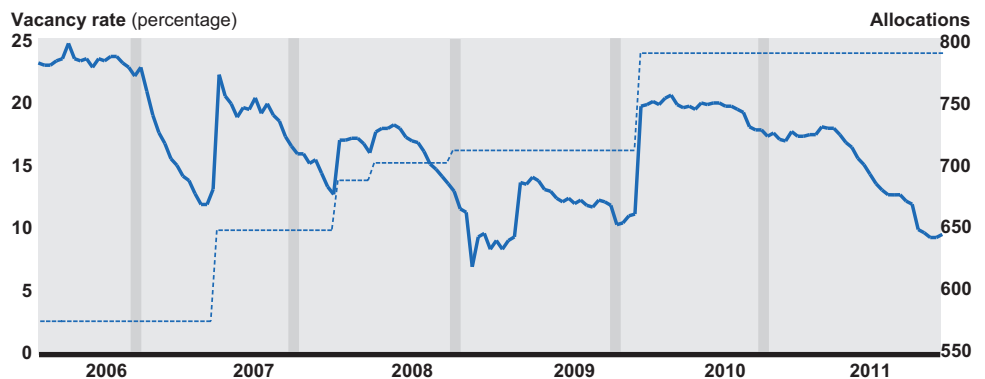
The Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) senior leadership vacancy rates, while reaching a peak of 25 percent in 2006, have generally declined since that time—from 25 percent in fiscal year 2006 to 10 percent at the end of fiscal year 2011. From fiscal years 2006 through 2010—the most recent year for which governmentwide vacancy and attrition data were available—DHS vacancy rates in 2006, 2007, and 2010 were statistically higher than the average of other agencies subject to the Chief Financial Officers (CFO) Act but were not statistically different in 2008 and 2009. DHS's components'—such as the Transportation Security Administration and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement—vacancy rates varied. Many had vacancy rates above 20 percent—one as high as 57 percent—in fiscal year 2006, but generally had lower rates at the end of fiscal year 2011.

At the end of fiscal year 2010, DHS's senior leadership attrition rate was 11.4 percent. For fiscal years 2006 through 2010, the most frequent separation types were retirements and resignations. DHS's attrition rates were statistically higher than the average of other CFO agencies in 2006, 2007, and 2009 but not statistically different in 2008 and 2010. In January 2010, DHS deployed an exit survey to be sent to all separating employees. DHS analyzed survey responses from 17 self-identified senior executives. The top three survey choices selected regarding reasons for leaving were 1) supervisor/management, 2) personal or family-related reasons, and 3) salary/pay.

DHS officials implemented two programs to enhance senior leadership hiring and recruitment. In fiscal year 2010, DHS implemented a simplified pilot hiring process aiming to attract additional qualified applicants. According to DHS officials, the pilot was successful, and they now plan to use the method for all Senior Executive Service hiring. DHS also implemented a centralized candidate-development program aimed at providing a consistent approach to leadership training.

GAO provided a draft of this report to DHS. DHS reiterated the actions it is taking to enhance senior leadership recruitment and hiring.

DHS Senior Executive Service Vacancies Fiscal Years 2006 through 2011



On-board data for October-December 2005 were not available. Fiscal year 2006 vacancy calculation is for January-September 2006.

Fiscal year (biweekly pay periods)

--- Allocations of SES positions to DHS.

— Vacancy rate by pay period.

Sources: GAO analysis of NFC and OPM data.