

## Why GAO Did This Study

With \$5.6 billion in procurement spending in fiscal year 2011, DOT relies on its acquisition workforce—including contracting and program management staff—to negotiate and administer contracts and manage large-scale acquisition programs. Having sufficient numbers of adequately trained acquisition professionals is critical to ensuring maximum value and benefit to the department.

In a fiscal year 2012 Senate appropriations bill report, GAO was directed to assess (1) DOT's efforts to identify acquisition workforce needs, and (2) the Office of the Secretary of Transportation's role in providing oversight and support for acquisition workforce planning and management. GAO reviewed DOT's acquisition workforce plans for 2010, 2011, and 2012 along with supporting documentation, and interviewed agency officials on how the data were collected and used. The primary focus was on five OAs that accounted for 92 percent of DOT procurement spending in fiscal year 2011.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Secretary of Transportation take steps to improve DOT's ability to address workforce needs, such as improving internal controls for acquisition workforce data and providing guidance to ensure that the OAs collect and report workforce data consistently. DOT acknowledged past data and coordination challenges and generally concurred with our recommendations. DOT also stated it now has the management framework needed to effectively monitor and develop the acquisition workforce.

View [GAO-13-117](#). For more information, contact Belva Martin at (202) 512-4841 or [martinb@gao.gov](mailto:martinb@gao.gov).

## ACQUISITION WORKFORCE

### DOT Lacks Data, Oversight, and Strategic Focus Needed to Address Significant Workforce Challenges

## What GAO Found

The Department of Transportation (DOT) lacks sufficient and reliable data to fully identify its acquisition workforce needs and assess progress in addressing shortfalls over time. Over the last 3 years, the Office of the Senior Procurement Executive—the office within the Office of the Secretary of Transportation responsible for department-wide acquisition workforce management—has submitted acquisition workforce plans that reported progress in increasing the size of the workforce and the number of personnel certified to meet education, training, and experience requirements. However, GAO identified data limitations due to a lack of internal controls to maintain, compare, and reconcile the data compiled from DOT's 11 operating administrations (OA), and determined that the department-level data were not sufficient to assess progress over time. For example, DOT did not maintain the data it used to prepare the 2010 and 2011 plans and in some cases the data were also not available from the OAs. By contrast, GAO obtained the data DOT used to prepare the 2012 plan, compared it with data from the OAs, and interviewed OA officials about the sources and methods they used to report the data. GAO found inconsistencies in how the OAs reported their data that affect the reliability of the department's aggregate data, but determined that the OA-level data were sufficiently reliable to make observations about staffing challenges and certification shortfalls at the individual OAs. Specifically, GAO found that 4 of the 11 OAs would need to replace 50 percent or more of their contract specialists by the end of fiscal year 2013 to meet staffing targets. In addition, some OAs reported low certification rates for program/project managers and contracting officer's representatives, which increases the risk of DOT programs not receiving appropriate oversight.

DOT lacks the strategic focus and oversight needed to ensure that the department can meet its acquisition workforce goals. Federal policy requires agencies to conduct strategic planning to identify short- and long-term needs and plans to address them. The Office of the Senior Procurement Executive relies on the OAs to conduct acquisition workforce planning, but has not provided oversight or support to help ensure that they collect and maintain consistent data or use it to develop strategies to address workforce goals. Officials from the Senior Procurement Executive's office stated that they do not monitor the OAs' acquisition workforce data throughout the year and that their capacity to direct planning efforts is limited in part because they do not have the staff needed to perform oversight. Instead, officials stated that the office provides a focal point for coordination among the OAs, approves certifications, and provides information on training opportunities. According to leading practices identified in prior GAO work, agencies should link workforce goals to budget formulation to ensure that requests are adequate to implement workforce strategies. The Office of the Senior Procurement Executive has taken steps to align workforce plans with its strategic goals and budget, but given the challenges with maintaining reliable data, lacks a sound baseline for assessing progress or for making a business case for directing resources or management attention to OAs that may face the greatest workforce risks. Until DOT addresses these issues, the department faces substantial risk that the workforce will not have the capacity or skills needed to effectively manage the department's acquisitions.