

Why GAO Did This Study

The acquisition workforce manages and oversees billions of dollars in acquisition programs and contracts to help federal agencies get what they need, at the right time, and at a reasonable price; therefore, it is important that agencies provide adequate training to this workforce. In this review, GAO identified (1) the role of OFPP and the FAI in assisting agencies in meeting certification requirements; (2) agencies' approaches to providing training; and (3) the extent to which agencies collect information on the costs and benefits of their acquisition training. To determine OFPP and the FAI roles, GAO analyzed relevant legislation. GAO obtained information from 23 federal agencies on their training approaches through a questionnaire, and selected 4 agencies—the Departments of Education and the Treasury, DHS, and VA—to provide illustrative examples. GAO used its questionnaire and a subsequent data call to obtain information on how agencies collect information on the costs and benefits of their training.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that OFPP help ensure that agencies collect and report comparable cost data and assess the benefits of acquisition training by (1) providing further guidance on the cost data agencies are to report annually, and (2) requiring agencies to analyze course evaluations, at a minimum, to help assess the benefits of training investments. OFPP concurred with the recommendations and indicated it has started to take actions to provide additional guidance.

ACQUISITION WORKFORCE

Federal Agencies Obtain Training to Meet Requirements, but Have Limited Insight into Costs and Benefits of Training Investment

What GAO Found

The Office of Federal Procurement Policy (OFPP) sets standards and policies for the federal acquisition workforce, and has established certification requirements, including minimal training, for the three main acquisition roles—contracting staff, Contracting Officer's Representatives, and Program/Project Managers—to promote the development of government-wide core acquisition competencies and facilitate mobility across agencies. DOD follows separate certification standards. The Federal Acquisition Institute (FAI), which is responsible for fostering and promoting the training and development of the acquisition workforce, works closely with OFPP and has initiatives underway to improve the collection and management of training information, including cost data and course evaluations; streamline communication of acquisition training guidance; and coordinate efforts to leverage acquisition workforce training resources throughout the government.

To support efforts for the acquisition workforce to attain and maintain federal certification requirements, most agencies (17 of 23) provide the majority of their acquisition training using external sources—vendors, FAI, the Defense Acquisition University, or other agencies. The Departments of Homeland Security (DHS), the Treasury, and Veterans Affairs (VA) operate their own permanent centers with dedicated resources that train the agency's acquisition workforce. Education reported using a different approach to providing acquisition training—it gets most of its training from other government entities. Federal agencies face similar challenges in providing training to their acquisition workforce. The top challenges reported by agencies in obtaining training for their acquisition workforce involved having sufficient resources. Twenty of 23 agencies identified obtaining adequate funding and 19 of 23 identified obtaining sufficient staff to manage training as challenging. In addition, almost half of the agencies reported that the fundamental step of identifying the acquisition workforce is a challenge especially when members of the workforce are involved in acquisitions as a secondary and not primary duty.

The training cost data that agencies collect is not comparable and agencies have limited information on the benefits of their acquisition workforce training investments. Although almost all agencies provided some cost data in response to GAO's questionnaire and subsequent data call, the agencies' cost data did not allow for government-wide assessment of their training investment. To date, FAI's efforts to collect training cost data has also met with limited success. Cost data collected in 2012 by GAO and FAI included different cost components—such as facilities, travel, and instructors—which do not allow for government-wide analysis. Having comparable training cost data are important to inform FAI efforts to establish government-wide contracts for training. As for determining benefits of training, 7 of 23 federal agencies reported having no metrics, not even basic end-of-course evaluations. Without basic data, agencies do not have insight into the benefits of their acquisition workforce training efforts.