

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-13-611](#), a report to congressional committees

## Why GAO Did This Study

The NTSB plays a vital role in transportation safety. It is charged with investigating all civil aviation accidents in the United States and selected accidents in other transportation modes, determining the probable cause of these accidents, and making appropriate recommendations, as well as performing safety studies.

In 2006, NTSB's reauthorization legislation mandated GAO to annually evaluate its programs. From 2006 to 2008, GAO made 21 recommendations to NTSB aimed at improving management and operations across several areas. Since that time, NTSB has taken action to address all 21 recommendations. Some of these were completed by requiring only a single action, whereas others required continuing effort to achieve operational improvement. For this review, GAO examined the extent to which desired outcomes are being achieved in five areas where continuing effort was necessary. GAO analyzed workforce, financial, and program data, and interviewed agency officials about actions NTSB has taken.

## What GAO Recommends

In each of the five areas NTSB needs to continue its improvement efforts. Further, GAO recommends that NTSB senior managers develop a strategy for maximizing the utility of NTSB's cost accounting system. GAO provided a draft of this report to officials at NTSB. NTSB officials concurred with the recommendation and provided technical comments, which GAO incorporated as appropriate.

View [GAO-13-611](#). For more information, contact Gerald L. Dillingham, Ph.D at (202) 512-3834 or [dillinghamg@gao.gov](mailto:dillinghamg@gao.gov)

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## NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION SAFETY BOARD

### Management and Operational Improvements Found, but Strategy Needed to Utilize Cost Accounting System

## What GAO Found

GAO's analysis found varying degrees of improvement associated with the National Transportation Safety Board's (NTSB) actions in areas selected for review.

- *Training Center utilization.* NTSB increased utilization of its Training Center—both non-classroom and classroom space—since 2006. NTSB has also set and achieved its cost recovery goal at the Training Center in the last 2 fiscal years, allowing NTSB to recover half of its operating costs.
- *Recommendation close-out process.* By automating the recommendation follow-up process, NTSB has reduced by about 3 months the amount of time it takes to respond to agencies on whether planned actions to implement NTSB recommendations are acceptable; this allows agencies to move forward with approved actions sooner than under NTSB's former paper-driven process.
- *Communication.* NTSB employees' responses on federal employee surveys from 2004 to 2012 indicated an increase from 49 to 57 percent in employees' positive responses regarding managers' communication about agency goals, and from 44 to 49 percent regarding the amount of information received. We compared NTSB employees' responses to those of employees from a group of small agencies and found that NTSB employees' satisfaction level was about the same or more positive depending on the question. NTSB officials continue to monitor employees' views about communication to address any remaining concerns.
- *Diversity management.* NTSB employees' positive responses to the federal employee survey questions about managers' commitment to diversity and NTSB's diversity policies and programs increased from about 54 percent to over 70 percent from 2004 to 2012. However, employees' positive responses to the question about managers' ability to work well with employees with different backgrounds declined 6 percentage points over the same period. In addition, the proportion of minority and women employees in NTSB's workforce, including in its investigator staff, showed little appreciable change over the period 2008 to 2012. NTSB's workforce had a smaller proportion of some minority groups than the civilian labor force. NTSB officials are using results from their recent diversity survey to identify gaps in their diversity management efforts and to benchmark future progress. It is too soon to tell whether NTSB's actions will lead to additional changes in its workforce diversity profile.
- *Financial management.* To improve operational effectiveness, NTSB has implemented a cost accounting system that includes a time and attendance program to track staff hours and costs related to accident investigations. NTSB is currently focused on ensuring the quality of the time and attendance data, but has not yet developed a strategy to maximize the utility of its cost accounting system for making resource and operational decisions. Thus, NTSB has not yet fully achieved its vision of using the data to improve labor productivity and mission effectiveness.