

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-14-41](#), a report to the Chairman, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

## Why GAO Did This Study

New technologies and the adoption of alternative work arrangements have increasingly enabled employees to perform some aspects of their work outside of the traditional office environment. As requested, GAO examined how aspects of mobility have affected agencies' space needs. This report identifies (1) actions selected agencies have taken as a result of increased workforce mobility to reduce their space needs; (2) the assistance GSA provides federal agencies that are exploring reducing their space needs, at least partly in response to increased workforce mobility; and (3) factors selected agencies and private sector organizations viewed as important to achieving space efficiencies in an environment of increased workforce mobility. GAO focused its review on five agencies: GSA, the Department of Agriculture, the Internal Revenue Service, the Department of Commerce's USPTO, and the Department of Justice's Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives. Altogether, these five agencies reported holding or leasing more than 400-million square feet of office space in fiscal year 2011. GAO reviewed agency-specific guidance and other documents related to space planning and conducted interviews with key officials from the selected agencies. GAO also interviewed representatives from five private sector organizations to obtain their perspectives on how the private sector plans for its future space needs.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO makes no recommendations in this report. USPTO commented on the estimated cost savings of its hoteling programs, as discussed in this report.

View [GAO-14-41](#). For more information, contact David J. Wise at (202) 512-5731 or [wised@gao.gov](mailto:wised@gao.gov).

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### Selected Agencies Plan to Use Workforce Mobility to Reduce Space, but Most Efforts Are Too New to Have Realized Savings

## What GAO Found

The five selected agencies GAO reviewed are either exploring or taking actions such as increasing "telework" participation and implementing a "hoteling" program—which means that employees give up their individual, permanent space and use shared, nonpermanent workspaces when they are in the office—to reduce their space needs. For example, as part of its headquarters renovation, the General Services Administration (GSA) is making use of open, collaborative work environments and implementing a hoteling program for all employees. In addition, the Department of Agriculture set agency-wide goals for increasing the number of its employees with approved telework agreements as well as its overall telework participation rates for fiscal year 2013. The U.S. Patent and Trademark Office (USPTO) has taken steps to reduce its space needs as a result of increased workforce mobility for more than a decade, and there are indications that USPTO has avoided real estate costs as a result of its efforts. However, GAO was unable to obtain sufficient information to determine the accuracy and validity of USPTO's estimated cost savings. Beyond USPTO, the agencies GAO reviewed have not yet realized space reductions or cost savings because their efforts are too new. In addition, officials at the selected agencies pointed out that increasing telework participation or implementing a hoteling program may not be appropriate in all instances, such as for employees who work with sensitive or classified documents or who interact with members of the public.

GSA offers general guidance as well as customized programs to help guide agencies' space-planning efforts in an environment of increased workforce mobility. In this guidance, GSA has shown that agencies can achieve space efficiencies by reconfiguring the layout of existing workstations and implementing various alternative work arrangements. While agencies may take steps on their own to address their changing space needs, GSA has offered two customized programs since 2011 to assist agencies. These programs are designed to help agencies explore mobility and achieve space efficiencies; however, GSA's client agencies determine whether to act on GSA's recommendations, and it may take years to realize savings due to factors such as the timing of leases and the cost of reconfiguration.

GAO's discussions with officials from the selected agencies and private sector organizations identified two factors—acquiring information about the current utilization of office space, and gaining the support of management and employees—that were frequently viewed as important for an organization to achieve space efficiencies in an environment of increased workforce mobility. By measuring how existing space is being used, organizations are better positioned to determine their future space needs. Similarly, by taking steps to obtain the support of leadership and employees, organizations can help facilitate the acceptance of mobility initiatives. Officials described the loss of dedicated workspace resulting from increased mobility as a significant change in the workplace and indicated that organizations that try to impose such changes are less likely to succeed than those that build organizational support.