



Report to the Ranking Member,
Committee on Homeland Security and
Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

October 2015

FEDERAL REAL PROPERTY

Additional Authorities and Accountability Would Enhance the Implementation of the Federal Buildings Personnel Training Act of 2010

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-16-39](#), a report to the Ranking Member, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

The federal government's management of its real property holdings costs billions of dollars and has been on GAO's High Risk List since 2003. Some agencies lack the staff expertise needed to oversee building management activities. GAO was asked to report on the status of the implementation of the Act, which directed GSA to, among other things, consult with the training industry to identify core competencies for federal buildings personnel and required these personnel to demonstrate proficiency in these competencies.

This report examines (1) the progress GSA has made in implementing the Act's requirements, (2) the actions selected agencies have taken to respond to the Act, and (3) the factors that have affected implementation of the Act. To conduct this study, GAO reviewed the Act and agency documentation and studies. GAO also interviewed officials from GSA as well as DOD, DOE, DOI, DOJ, and VA. Together with GSA, the agencies GAO interviewed occupy about 90 percent of federal real property gross square footage.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that GSA develop a legislative proposal to establish agency authorities and reporting responsibilities—as well as an interagency group—to enhance accountability for implementation of the Act. GSA stated that it agreed with the report's findings and would work with the appropriate agencies to address them.

View [GAO-16-39](#). For more information, contact David Wise at (202) 512-2834 or wised@gao.gov.

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FEDERAL REAL PROPERTY

Additional Authorities and Accountability Would Enhance the Implementation of the Federal Buildings Personnel Training Act of 2010

What GAO Found

The General Services Administration (GSA) has largely met its lead-agency responsibilities for implementing the Federal Buildings Personnel Training Act of 2010 (the Act) government-wide. For example, it has identified core competencies and a recommended curriculum for federal buildings personnel. While not required by the Act, GSA has also drafted a charter for an interagency advisory board to help coordinate government-wide implementation and has developed software tools to assist agencies with compliance efforts. GSA is in the process of implementing the requirements for its own employees. GSA has identified affected personnel, directed them to inventory their qualifications, and assessed their skills. GSA must still align job descriptions and performance reviews with the Act's requirements and implement contractor compliance efforts.

Of the five selected agencies GAO reviewed, the Departments of Defense (DOD) and Energy (DOE) have taken some actions to respond to the Act, while the Departments of Justice (DOJ), Interior (DOI), and Veterans Affairs (VA) have not yet determined how to respond. For example, DOD is conducting a pilot program through its Defense Health Agency to align five positions with the core competency model GSA developed, while DOI's National Park Service has only discussed potential responses to the Act. As a result, little is known about the numbers of federal and contractor employees at these agencies covered by the Act or the status of their compliance with the Act.

The pace of implementation of the Act has been limited by at least four factors that make compliance essentially voluntary. First, the Act does not provide any agency with the authority to enforce compliance government-wide. According to GSA, it is not authorized to issue official government-wide guidance on implementation, and it has come to see its role as advisory. In addition, the Act does not provide an implementation role for the Office of Personnel Management, the agency generally responsible for government-wide personnel related issues. Second, agencies are not required to report the status of their employees' compliance with the Act, a circumstance that leaves agencies with little incentive to determine how many employees are affected or complying. Third, the Act did not provide funding for additional training, and according to agency officials, many other priorities compete for limited training resources. Fourth, no interagency group has been established that ensures consistent implementation of the Act government-wide. This gap has resulted in a lack of coordinated implementation policy and guidance. While GSA has taken steps to create such a group, this process is still in the development stage. Federal internal control standards emphasize that establishing good human capital policies and practices, including ensuring that personnel are properly trained, is critical for achieving results and improving organizational accountability. These standards also call for assessing the quality of performance over time. Such an assessment would include monitoring training practices. Further, prior GAO work has found that agencies can benefit from considering government-wide reforms when planning training programs and that the coordinated efforts of several agencies through interagency groups can help develop policy, guide program implementation, and conduct oversight and monitoring.

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Abbreviations

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| the Act | Federal Buildings Personnel Training Act of 2010 |
| BOP | Bureau of Prisons |
| DHA | Defense Health Agency |
| DOD | Department of Defense |
| DOE | Department of Energy |
| DOI | Department of the Interior |
| DOJ | Department of Justice |
| GSA | General Services Administration |
| NPS | National Park Service |
| OPM | Office of Personnel Management |
| PBS | Public Buildings Service |
| VA | Department of Veterans Affairs |
| VHA | Veterans Health Administration |

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October 20, 2015

The Honorable Thomas R. Carper
Ranking Member
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
United States Senate

Dear Senator Carper:

The federal government's management of its real property holdings—comprising hundreds of thousands of buildings and permanent structures across the country, and costing billions of dollars annually to operate and maintain—has been on the Government Accountability Office's (GAO) High Risk List since 2003.¹ The federal government has made advances in real property management but continues to face long-standing challenges. We have previously reported that some agencies lack the staff expertise needed to oversee building management activities. For example, some agencies lack dedicated, skilled energy managers as well as trained staff capable of overseeing and managing energy savings performance contracts.² Ensuring that energy management staffs are well trained is one of three effective energy management practices we identified.³

The Federal Buildings Personnel Training Act of 2010 (the Act)⁴ was enacted in December 2010. Congressional committee reports accompanying the Act state that it was enacted to help ensure that federal buildings are operated to maximize their performance and retain their values while protecting and leveraging taxpayer investment through

¹GAO, *High Risk Series: An Update*, [GAO-15-290](#) (Washington, D.C.: February 2015).

²An energy savings performance contract is a type of share-in-savings contract under which agencies use private funds to finance energy conservation measures. For more see GAO, *Energy Savings Performance Contracts: Additional Actions Needed to Improve Federal Oversight*, [GAO-15-432](#) (Washington, D.C.: June 2015).

³GAO, *Federal Energy Management: Agencies Are Taking Steps to Meet High-Performance Federal Building Requirements, but Face Challenges*, [GAO-10-22](#) (Washington, D.C.: October 2009).

⁴Pub. L. No. 111-308, 124 Stat. 3283 (Dec. 14, 2010).

efficient building operations and management,⁵ as well as to help support energy efficiency goals for federal buildings.⁶ The Act directed the General Services Administration (GSA), in consultation with representatives of professional societies, industry associations, and apprenticeship training providers, to take the following actions government-wide:

1. Identify the core competencies necessary for federal personnel to perform building operations and maintenance, energy management, and safety and design functions not later than 18 months after enactment of the Act, and update them annually thereafter;
2. Identify a course, certification, degree, license, or registration that can be used to demonstrate proficiency in each core competency. Also identify ongoing training with respect to each core competency; and
3. Develop or identify comprehensive continuing education courses to ensure the operation of federal buildings is in accordance with industry best practices and standards.

In addition, the Act requires GSA, along with the Department of Energy (DOE), in consultation with the heads of other appropriate federal departments and agencies and representatives of professional societies, industry associations, and apprenticeship training providers, to develop a recommended curriculum relating to facility management and the operation of high-performance buildings not later than 18 months after the date of the Act, and update the curriculum annually thereafter.⁷

The requirements outlined in the Act apply to federal and contractor employees. Individuals are to demonstrate proficiency in each core competency related to their position not later than 1 year after each is identified. If hired after the date of such identification, the employee has 1 year to demonstrate proficiency. You asked us to report on the status of implementation of the Act. We reviewed (1) progress GSA has made in

⁵S. Rep. No. 111-212, at 2 (2010).

⁶H.R. Rep. No. 111-662, at 2 (2010).

⁷According to Section 401(12) of the Energy Independence and Security Act of 2007, a high-performance building is a building that integrates and optimizes on a life-cycle basis all major high-performance attributes, including energy conservation, environment, safety, security, durability, accessibility, cost-benefit, productivity, sustainability, functionality, and operational considerations.

implementing the requirements of the Act, (2) actions selected federal agencies have taken in response to the Act, and (3) factors that have affected implementation of the Act.

To determine the progress GSA and other federal agencies have made in responding to the provisions of the Act since its passage in 2010 as well as the factors affecting that progress, we reviewed the Act, congressional committee and Congressional Budget Office reports, and agency documentation and reports. We also interviewed officials from GSA and five selected federal agencies—the Departments of Defense (DOD), Energy (DOE), the Interior (DOI), Justice (DOJ), and Veterans Affairs (VA)—and representatives of industry groups. We selected the five agencies on the basis of the gross square footage of federal real property they occupy, according to 2014 Federal Real Property Profile data, and because they were included in initial meetings about the Act that GSA held in 2011. Together with GSA, the agencies we interviewed occupy about 90 percent of federal real property gross square footage. We did not evaluate the effectiveness of the core competencies GSA established or assess the effectiveness or results of selected agencies' use of the core competencies. We also discussed with the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) OPM's role in implementing the Act government-wide. We conducted this performance audit from February 2015 to October 2015 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

**GSA Has Largely Met
Its Lead-Agency
Responsibilities and
Has Begun
Implementing the Act
for Its Own
Employees**

GSA Has Completed Most of Its Requirements for Government-wide Implementation and Is Drafting an Interagency Framework for Collaboration

GSA has identified the core competencies—knowledge, skills, and abilities—and related training to meet the government-wide requirements of the Act for federal and contract employees and has begun implementing the requirements for its own personnel but has not yet finalized compliance methods for contractors. In 2011, GSA began working to create an approach for federal buildings personnel to use to satisfy the Act's requirements by demonstrating proficiency in the core competencies. To develop the core competencies, GSA contacted more than 20 federal agencies and subagencies that hold and operate buildings and coordinated meetings with officials as well as with representatives from professional societies, industry associations, non-profit organizations, and private training groups. GSA held follow-on consultations with agencies it identified as holding large amounts of federal real property, since those agencies cover the vast amount of federal real property holdings.




























































In June 2012, GSA published a set of core competencies for federal buildings personnel, began creating software tools for demonstrating and documenting proficiency in the core competencies, and announced a list of GSA-recommended training courses linked to the core competencies and covering the topics of facility management and the operation of high-performance buildings.⁸ Although 7 core-competency areas are called for in the Act, in developing them, GSA expanded them to 12. In addition to the 7 categories of building operations, building maintenance, energy management, sustainability, water efficiency, safety, and building performance measures, GSA identified 5 more: technology; design; project management; business, budget and contracting; and leadership and innovation as core competency areas. Under these 12 areas, GSA identified 43 core competencies and 232 specific demonstrations of each core competency that GSA called "performances." Employees demonstrate proficiency in the core competencies relevant to their positions by completing performances that show they have gained skills and knowledge through experience and training. GSA laid out all these elements in what it calls a competency model. Under GSA's approach, the individual agency defines what actual compliance means for its own particular employees. GSA envisions employees working with their

⁸The original course list contained 12 free government courses. GSA published the core competencies and related training on a website, www.fmi.gov, which GSA established in 2012 as an implementation resource for agencies. This website is also used to provide Act-related guidance and clarification to agencies and to announce policy changes.

supervisors to document the tasks and training. In addition, GSA developed—along with DOE officials and in consultation with representatives of other federal departments and agencies, industry, and academia—a recommended curriculum related specifically to the fields of facility management and the operation of high-performance buildings.

To help agencies prioritize training efforts, GSA has since streamlined this approach by designating as high-priority 9 competency areas, 21 core competencies, and 88 performances that could potentially have the most impact on building operating efficiency and cost. GSA—working with an informal body of facility representatives from various landholding agencies—identified 3 career areas of responsibility most closely aligned with the core competencies: facility management, energy management, and facilities operations and maintenance. GSA did this to develop consistent guidance that could help agencies whose employees may have similar titles but perform different functions assign the appropriate performances to the appropriate personnel. See figure 1 for a visual representation of GSA's competency model.

Figure 1: The General Services Administration's (GSA) Federal Buildings Personnel Training Act of 2010 Competency Model

| Career area of responsibility | Competency areas | Core competencies | Performance examples |
|--|---|--|---|
| Facility management  |  1. Management of facilities operations and maintenance  |  1.1 Building systems  1.2 Building interior  1.3 Building exterior 1.4 Other facility systems |  1.1.1 Demonstrate familiarity with building systems and knowledge of how they affect energy use. |
| |  2. Performance of facilities operations and maintenance  |  2.1 HVAC  2.2 Electrical / mechanical systems 2.3 Life safety systems 2.4 General building maintenance  2.5 Best practices and innovation |  2.1.1 Demonstrate ability to collect building systems' operating and performance data. |
| |  3. Technology  |  3.1 Technology solutions  3.2 Building automation systems  3.3 Maintenance management system |  3.1.1 Demonstrate ability to monitor information and trends related to facility management and information technology solutions. |
| |  4. Energy management  |  4.1 Systems and demand reduction  4.2 Assess initial conditions  4.3 Commissioning and energy savings performance contracts  4.4 Coordinate with public utilities  4.5 Planning, project, and program management |  4.1.3 Demonstrate knowledge of demand response strategies such as thermal energy storage systems. |
| Operations & maintenance  | 5. Safety  | 5.1 Basic requirements 5.2 Infrastructure 5.3 Contractor program oversight 5.4 Occupant interface | 5.1.2 Complete electrical safety course and be familiar with electrical codes and regulations and best practices. |
| | 6. Design  | 6.1 Planning 6.2 Infrastructure systems |  6.1.5 Demonstrate knowledge of green building certification systems used by the federal government and industry. |
| |  7. Sustainability  | 7.1 Background 7.2 Regulations and requirements  7.3 Implementation |  7.2.1 Demonstrate knowledge of the guiding principles for federal high performance and sustainable buildings, and federal mandates. |
| Energy management  |  8. Water efficiency  | 8.1 Regulations, goals, and best practices  8.2 Water audit |  8.1.2 Demonstrate knowledge of federal water policy and goals found in laws and executive orders. |
| |  9. Project management  | 9.1 Initiate 9.2 Execute 9.3 Closeout 9.4 Training | 9.1.2 Demonstrate knowledge and ability to follow project management processes and procedures per your organization's preferred methodology. |
| |  10. Business, budget and contracting  |  10.1 Total cost of ownership  10.2 Life cycle assessment 10.3 Contracting 10.4 Budget formulation and execution |  10.3.5 Demonstrate knowledge of and ability to effectively govern/oversee a contract to ensure compliance and full value of the service or product being provided. |
| |  11. Leadership and innovation  | 11.1 Communication and administration 11.2 Personnel  11.3 Innovation  11.4 Enterprise knowledge and strategic decision-making |  11.3.7 Demonstrate ability to translate innovative ideas into actionable tasks. |
| |  12. Performance measurement  |  12.1 Federal Buildings Personnel Training Act  12.2 Acquiring data  12.3 Establishment and implementation |  12.2.2 Demonstrate knowledge of key building performance measures, where and how to read them, and reporting requirements. |
|  High priority | | | |

Source: GAO illustration of General Services Administration information. | GAO-16-39

As required by the Act, GSA made annual updates to the core competencies and recommended curriculum in 2013 and 2014. In the 2014 update, GSA created a new, more rigorous process requiring independent subject matter experts to review potential private and government training offerings and assess how well they aligned with the core competencies.⁹ This effort resulted in an increase of courses in the recommended curriculum from 12 no-cost government courses to 135 government and private courses. Currently, 107 of 135 courses—almost 80 percent—are provided by private training organizations, and 28 are provided by or in collaboration with government agencies.

Also in the 2014 update, GSA announced recommended methods for buildings personnel who are federal employees to both demonstrate proficiency in the core competencies and take steps to improve professional development. To assist in this approach, GSA has launched two software tools, which were described and partially demonstrated for us by the GSA official responsible for leading GSA's implementation efforts. The first is a basic assessment tool agencies can use to determine whether buildings personnel have demonstrated the core competencies related to their positions, and are therefore in compliance with the Act. Through an online exam format, the official said the tool allows workers to demonstrate knowledge by answering a series of questions about the 88 high-priority performances related to their positions. The tool was designed to take into account any existing certificates or advanced training the employee may have already earned. According to the official, the other tool is a professional development system that moves beyond basic compliance by allowing employees to plan and accomplish advanced training related to the core competencies through creating individual training plans linked to GSA-approved government and private training options.

According to the official responsible for leading GSA's implementation efforts, to potentially help coordinate government-wide implementation, GSA has drafted a charter for an interagency advisory board composed of facilities operations and maintenance personnel and human capital executives at federal landholding agencies. The official said that to date no such group has championed the implementation of the Act's

⁹Under the Act, core competencies can be demonstrated through a course, certification, degree, license, or registration.

requirements across the federal government. While GSA shares internal guidance and procedures informally on its www.fmi.gov website and through presentations to industry associations, the Federal Facilities Council, and individual agencies, GSA could expand its advisory role through such a group and, according to the official, provide examples of best practices and guidelines for implementation, and seek consensus on them. However, according to GSA officials, previous experience suggests that without being formally established in law or by executive order, participation by other agencies would likely be too low to be effective. There is no planned GSA completion date for creating this interagency advisory board.

GSA Has Begun Implementation of the Act for Its Own Employees

GSA has taken steps to implement the requirements of the Act for its employees using its core competency approach but has yet to complete all its planned work. In 2014, GSA directed its Public Buildings Service (PBS) personnel in occupational series covered by the Act to take a web-based inventory of their completed training. GSA then assessed their training against the high-priority performances for their occupational series and identified areas where the employees needed improvement. Specifically, GSA found that collectively, the 1,142 employees who participated in the inventory had completed 36 percent of the required performances for their positions. In a July 2014 report on the assessment effort, GSA specified seven methods for PBS workers to voluntarily improve their proficiency levels in the core competencies. For example, GSA encouraged workers to use individual development plans to guide their training and identified free online training for energy management and water efficiency, which the official responsible for leading GSA's implementation efforts indicated were two competency areas revealed in the PBS assessment as areas in which employees needed additional training. In addition, GSA developed a formal on-the-job training program that includes a guide, mentoring activities, and checklists to help reinforce knowledge gained. GSA also updated PBS's building manager job descriptions for existing and new staff by (1) rewriting them to include high-priority performances related to the core competencies and (2) including the high-priority performances in each employee's performance review criteria.

GSA has started—but has yet to complete—the following tasks to continue its implementation of the Act for its own employees:

- Although GSA has rewritten job descriptions and performance assessment criteria for approximately 640 PBS employees to include

high-priority performances, GSA has yet to determine whether the agency is ready to transfer the employees to the new job descriptions and performance assessment criteria. GSA plans to update previously identified gaps in Act-related training for PBS employees by requiring them to complete a new inventory of their training, which GSA's official in charge of implementation estimated will be completed after September 2015. GSA will then assess their training against the high-priority performances for their positions.

- According to the official responsible for leading GSA's implementation efforts, GSA is still exploring a way for PBS employees participating in structured on-the-job training to have the training verified in person by GSA's subject matter experts. However, according to this official, while the technical content for the training is complete, GSA is still finalizing its process to select, vet, and monitor the performance of subject matter experts, and GSA has not specified a completion date.

GSA Is Still Planning Its Implementation Approach for Contractors

GSA has not yet determined how many GSA contract staff are subject to the Act and is still in the planning stages for implementing potential methods for contractor compliance. GSA officials said they have discussed—but have not yet begun—a number of tasks related to contractor training. GSA has drafted standard contract language requiring companies bidding for facility operations and maintenance work to provide documentation. The companies would be required to describe how certain contract employees subject to the Act who could work in GSA-held buildings have either demonstrated the core competencies relevant to their positions or are currently participating in continuing education related to them. According to the GSA official responsible for leading GSA's implementation efforts, GSA plans to conduct a pilot project to test the proposed language and approach using a GSA contract, and if successful, the language could be applied later to Federal Supply Schedule contracts¹⁰ and incorporated by other agencies into their own internal operations and maintenance contracts for buildings personnel. In addition, the official noted that GSA is committed to implementing this approach but has not determined a target completion date. Similarly, he said GSA has considered using contract language

¹⁰Federal agencies can procure goods and services directly from vendors through Federal Supply Schedule contracts, which are long-term government-wide contracts with commercial firms established to streamline government purchasing of commercial products and services and to leverage the buying power of the federal government.

related to the core competencies as a compliance mechanism for contract workers in federally leased buildings, but added that GSA has focused on buildings personnel who are federal and contract employees working in federally owned facilities because the agency considers those employees a higher priority than contractors working in leased federal facilities.

Selected Agencies Have Taken Some Action, but Overall Response to the Act Has Been Limited

Of the five agencies we reviewed—two, the Departments of Defense (DOD) and Energy (DOE)—have taken some actions to respond to the Act while three—the Departments of Justice (DOJ), the Interior (DOI), and Veterans Affairs (VA)—have not yet determined how to respond. While all five agencies encourage or provide training for their facilities management staffs¹¹ and participated in GSA's early planning sessions on government-wide implementation, three have not taken additional action. For example, they have issued no written plans or guidance memorandums, and none of them has moved beyond the initial discussion phase into the planning or execution phase. As a result, at this time little is known about the numbers of federal and contractor employees covered by the Act at these agencies or the status of their compliance with the Act. According to the official responsible for leading GSA's implementation efforts, while agencies are in charge of defining what individual compliance means for their own employees, to fully respond, they should be engaging in a continual process of assessing employees' training levels, determining where there are gaps in training, and outlining ways to improve training for employees.

DOD is the largest holder of federal real property and because of its ongoing efforts to comply with earlier workforce realignment mandates and to ensure that implementation of the Act is consistent across DOD, officials decided to embark on a pilot program with the Defense Health Agency (DHA).¹² For the pilot, a DOD contractor surveyed DHA employees in five positions that had the most significant impact on the finances and operations of facilities—central utility plant supervisor; energy manager; facility manager; heating, ventilation, and air-

¹¹For example, VA provides some training through its Veterans Health Administration Employee Education System and its VA Facilities Management School, and DOI provides some training through its DOI University.

¹²DHA was created in 2013 and is a joint, integrated combat support agency for the Army, Navy, and Air Force medical services. DHA also supports the delivery of health services to beneficiaries of the military health system.

conditioning (HVAC) controls technician; and project engineer—to determine how well the competencies for those positions aligned with GSA’s core competencies and job performances and whether there are gaps in training. DOD completed the initial pilot at two installations in June 2015 and published a final report of its results in July 2015. Next, according to DOD’s program analyst for implementation of the Act, DOD plans to integrate the applicable competencies and related training opportunities for DHA’s employees in the five key positions into GSA’s professional development tool. Beyond DOD’s DHA effort, the official said DOD plans to conduct pilots for facility management positions at several Army, Navy, and Air Force installations, and he stated that DOD has not made any changes to position descriptions. According to officials representing the three military services, they are waiting for the results of these pilots before embarking on any implementation actions of their own.

DOE has identified approximately 5,500 federal and contractor employees who are subject to the Act’s requirements and has taken steps to assess their proficiency in the 12 competency areas.¹³ In 2013, DOE directed program offices to report and track employees’ compliance, identify gaps in training, and assign supervisors to document employees’ compliance. DOE surveyed these federal and contractor employees to determine their existing training, assessed their training against the 12 competency areas, identified gaps in proficiencies, and identified training opportunities for them. DOE provided us with the results of its summary assessments for 41 sites, and according to the assessments, most sites employed at least one person proficient in each competency area. However, because DOE defined a site-level demonstration of proficiency in a competency area to mean that at least one individual representing that site is proficient in the competency area, the results of DOE’s summary assessments did not provide us enough detail to determine how many individuals were proficient in each of the 12 competency areas.

Three of our selected agencies—DOI, DOJ, and VA—have not yet determined how to respond to the Act as none of them has moved beyond the initial discussion phase into the planning or execution phase.

¹³Although DOE focused on competency areas, GSA designed its competency model for individuals to demonstrate proficiency at the performance level. See figure 1.

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- DOI delegates management of DOI's real property to six bureaus, the largest of which is the National Park Service (NPS). While senior DOI officials in Facilities and Property Management and Human Resources were generally unaware of any departmental response to the Act, a senior NPS official told us that NPS has had internal discussions about the Act and was trying to determine how to achieve compliance.
 - Senior DOJ officials in the Justice Management Division noted that most of the department's buildings are correctional institutions that are held by the Bureau of Prisons (BOP) and that the officials had not yet determined how many staff would be subject to the Act. These DOJ officials were awaiting a briefing and further clarification from GSA, and senior BOP officials indicated that they were just becoming aware of the Act.
 - VA holds and operates 167 medical centers through its Veterans Health Administration (VHA). VHA officials said they participated in a pilot project with GSA to develop competencies for professional and trade staff in three positions at VA medical centers. The goal was to use GSA's competencies to help VHA develop standardized competencies for each position and then determine if staff met them. However, VHA officials indicated they were not able to complete this effort before the pilot project ended. In part because officials said they are awaiting more formal guidance or direction from GSA, VA at the departmental level is not currently planning or executing specific responses to the Act. However, GSA officials stated that the Act does not provide GSA a role in providing more formal government-wide guidance.

Although we found limited progress at the five agencies we reviewed, officials from four of the five agencies recognized the potential benefits from implementation of the Act. For example, DOD officials shared a DOD memorandum that noted that DOD's components could benefit from an expanded training catalog, more affordable training, and stronger justification of the need for more training funds. Officials from DOD and VA agreed that identifying additional training and strengthening employee competency could benefit facility operations. In addition, officials from VA said that the Act could produce a stronger workforce and attract more competent staff.

Various Factors Have Contributed to Limited Implementation of the Act

We found that the pace of implementation has been limited by four factors that make federal buildings personnel compliance with the Act's requirements essentially voluntary.

- **No agency has the authority to enforce government-wide compliance.** Because the Act does not give any agency the authority to enforce compliance of the Act government-wide, GSA sees its role as advisory. For example, an official from GSA's Office of Government-wide Policy said that while GSA shares its internal guidance and procedures informally with other agencies, GSA is not authorized to issue official government-wide guidance on implementation. In addition, no agency monitors government-wide compliance with the Act's requirements. We asked officials from the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) why the agency has not been involved in implementing the Act, and were given two reasons: (1) the Act did not direct OPM to do so and (2) GSA did not request OPM's implementation assistance for any changes that would affect policies administered under OPM's authorities, such as the management of government-wide position classifications. Federal internal control standards emphasize that a good control environment requires clearly defining key areas of authority and responsibility and establishing appropriate lines of reporting.¹⁴
- **Agencies are not required to report progress.** The Act does not require federal agencies to submit specific buildings personnel training improvement plans or progress reports to GSA, or to Congress, as has been mandated in other workforce improvement legislation. For example, legislation enacted in 2009 included a provision aimed at improving DOD's civilian workforce and also included a list of specific reporting requirements for DOD, such as assessments of the current and future critical skills and competencies of its civilian workforce.¹⁵ A U.S. Army official said that without a similar reporting requirement, there is no "trigger" to prompt compliance with the Act's requirements. Furthermore, since the language in the Act directs individuals—not agencies—to comply with the requirements, there is no clear mandate for agencies on exactly

¹⁴GAO, *Internal Control: Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, GAO/AIMD-00-21.3.1 (Washington, D.C.: November 1999).

¹⁵The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2010, Pub. L. No. 111-84, div. A., title XI, § 1108 (Oct. 28, 2009), codified as amended at 10 U.S.C. § 115b.

how to achieve individual compliance. Without a requirement for federal agencies to report on their efforts related to the Act, there is little incentive for them to account for how many of their employees are subject to the Act and whether those covered employees are complying. Federal internal control standards state that an agency's ongoing monitoring of its internal controls should assess the quality of its performance over time.¹⁶ This assessment would include monitoring the progress of initiatives to establish appropriate practices for training and evaluating personnel.

- **Agencies report having limited training and implementation funds.** Officials generally agreed that implementation has been limited by the current fiscal environment—including mandatory spending cuts required by the sequestration. This fiscally constrained environment has impacted agency training budgets, an impact that has resulted in increased internal competition for limited training resources. A VA official said the Act's lack of dedicated funding has limited large-scale implementation and resulted in an uncoordinated, inconsistent approach. VA officials responsible for facilities operations guidance and policies requested \$15 million in additional funding for fiscal year 2013 to fund VA's response to the Act but were unable to secure the funds. The VA official said that in contrast, an earlier VA facilities workforce improvement effort included dedicated funding targeted for specific training and education, allowing the agency to place energy managers in field facilities and improve the knowledge and skills of employees in leadership positions, such as maintenance and operations supervisors and chief engineers. While there are free training options available, the GSA official responsible for leading the agency's implementation efforts agreed that the Act's lack of dedicated funding acts as a "braking" mechanism as some agencies may be delaying assessing employee skill levels for fear of not having sufficient funding to provide the required training identified as a result of these assessments. However, according to federal internal control standards, the management of an agency's human capital is essential to achieving results and is an important part of internal control.¹⁷ This management includes continually assessing employee skill levels and providing training opportunities that allow employees to develop and maintain required skills.

¹⁶ [GAO/AIMD-00-21.3.1.](#)

¹⁷ [GAO/AIMD-00-21.3.1.](#)

-
- **No interagency mechanism exists for guiding implementation.** No interagency group has been created to ensure consistent implementation of the Act across the government, a situation that has resulted in a lack of coordinated implementation policy and guidance. This lack has also hindered the development of a potential formal collaboration mechanism for sharing leading practices. We have previously found that agencies can benefit from considering government-wide reforms when planning their training and development programs.¹⁸ In addition, our past work has shown that one attribute of effective training and development programs is the extent to which an agency compares its training methods with those of other organizations, and we found that agencies benefit when they continuously look to others to identify innovative approaches that may relate to training and development efforts as well as lessons learned.¹⁹ Furthermore, we have previously reported that many of the meaningful results that the federal government seeks to achieve require the coordinated efforts of more than one federal agency.²⁰ Our past work found that interagency groups are mechanisms that can be used to develop policy, guide program implementation, and conduct oversight and monitoring.²¹ GSA has taken steps to create such a group, but this process is still in the development stage.

Conclusions

Since passage of the Act in 2010, GSA has largely met its lead-agency responsibilities, which were designed to strengthen government-wide training for federal buildings personnel so they can operate federal buildings more efficiently and effectively. In consulting with others, identifying core competencies, and supplying approved training opportunities and a recommended method for employees to demonstrate their proficiency levels, GSA has provided a road map for implementation government-wide. In addition, by seeking an interagency mechanism to further government-wide collaboration, GSA has shown a willingness to

¹⁸GAO, *Human Capital: A Guide for Assessing Strategic Training and Development Efforts in the Federal Government*, [GAO-04-546G](#) (Washington, D.C.: March 2004).

¹⁹[GAO-04-546G](#).

²⁰GAO, *Managing for Results: Implementation Approaches Used to Enhance Collaboration in Interagency Groups*, [GAO-14-220](#) (Washington, D.C.: February 2014).

²¹GAO, *Managing for Results: Key Considerations for Implementing Interagency Collaborative Mechanisms*, [GAO-12-1022](#) (Washington, D.C.: September 2012).

actively encourage further federal agency participation, which is essential to the successful implementation of the Act.

Nevertheless, the pace of implementation government-wide remains slow because, among other things, no agency monitors or enforces compliance of the Act government-wide, and the Act does not effectively place responsibility for action directly on federal agencies. GSA has already conducted extensive outreach and created a core competency approach that agencies could use. Further steps could be taken to: (1) provide one agency with the authority to enforce compliance of the Act and monitor the actions agencies take to comply; (2) place responsibility directly on agencies to report progress on implementing the Act, including how they assess employees' skills and improve their training; and (3) provide agencies with a mechanism for collaboration. Such measures could provide effective incentives for agencies to take the proactive steps necessary to attain individual employee compliance. Until such steps are taken, Congress cannot know the basic measures of the Act's effectiveness, including how many employees are subject to the Act, the progress of its implementation, and the extent to which covered employees are complying.

Recommendation for Executive Action

We recommend that the Administrator of the General Services Administration develop a legislative proposal to enhance accountability for government-wide implementation of the Act. GSA should consider including the following in its proposal:

- establishing authorities for a single agency to monitor and enforce implementation of the Act;
- establishing agency responsibilities for reporting progress on implementation of the Act;
- establishing agency responsibilities for assessing employee skill levels related to the Act and identifying training that allows employees to develop and retain skills required by the Act; and
- establishing an interagency group to further government-wide collaboration on implementation of the Act.

Agency Comments

We provided a draft of this report for review and comment to GSA, OPM, and the Departments of Defense, Energy, the Interior, Justice, and Veterans Affairs. GSA stated it agreed with the report's findings and that it

would work with the appropriate agencies to address these findings (see app. II). OPM and the Departments of Defense, Energy, the Interior, and Justice had no comments. The Department of Veterans Affairs provided technical comments which we incorporated as appropriate.

As agreed with your office, unless you publicly announce the contents of this report earlier, we plan no further distribution until 14 days from the report date. At that time, we will send copies to the Administrator of GSA, the Acting Director of OPM, the Attorney General, and the Secretaries of Defense, Energy, the Interior, and Veterans Affairs. In addition, the report will be available at no charge on the GAO website at <http://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-2834 or wised@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made key contributions to this report are listed in appendix III.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "David J. Wise". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

David Wise
Director, Physical Infrastructure Issues

Appendix I: Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

Our objective was to review the status of the implementation of the Federal Buildings Personnel Training Act of 2010 (the Act). To do so, we addressed the following questions:

1. What progress has GSA made in implementing the requirements of the Act?
2. What actions have selected federal agencies taken in response to the Act?
3. What factors have affected implementation of the Act?

To determine the progress GSA has made in responding to the provisions of the Act, we reviewed the Act, congressional committee and Congressional Budget Office reports, and GSA's web sites and documents—including GSA's required annual update of its core competencies and recommended curriculum, its www.fmi.gov web site, and a report on the implementation of the Act by GSA's Public Buildings Service. We did not evaluate the effectiveness of the core competencies and recommended curriculum that GSA developed. In addition, we interviewed officials in GSA's Office of Government-wide Policy, Office of Federal High-Performance Green Buildings, Office of Human Resources Management, and Public Buildings Service as well as representatives of several industry groups. (See table 1.)

To determine what actions agencies have taken in response to the Act, we selected five federal agencies—the Departments of Defense (DOD), Energy (DOE), the Interior (DOI), Justice (DOJ), and Veterans Affairs (VA)—on the basis of the gross square footage of federal real property they occupy, according to 2014 Federal Real Property Profile data, and because they were included in initial meetings about the Act that GSA held in 2011. Together with GSA, the agencies we selected occupy about 90 percent of federal real property gross square footage, according to the 2014 Federal Real Property Profile. Our determination of agency actions in response to the Act included interviews of agency program and human capital officials (see table 1) and reviews of agency documentation and reports. For example, we reviewed DOD's report from the first phase of its Act-related pilot at the Defense Health Agency and DOE's report documenting its assessment of staff's compliance with the core competencies. We did not assess the effectiveness or results of selected agencies' use of the core competencies.

To determine the factors that have affected implementation of the Act, we reviewed the Act and agency studies and reports, including DOD's phase

1 pilot report and DOE's summary analysis of the proficiency of its workforce in the 12 competency areas. We also reviewed prior GAO work on internal controls and human capital related to enhancing agency accountability and planning and developing training programs and interviewed agency officials and representatives from professional societies, industry associations, non-profit organizations, and private and government training groups. We also discussed with the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) OPM's role in implementing the Act government-wide. For the agency interviews, we used standardized data collection instruments to maintain consistency across the interviews.

Table 1: Agency and Other Interviewees

| Agency | Interviewee |
|--------------|--|
| DOD | Office of the Secretary of Defense |
| | Defense Health Agency |
| | Department of the Air Force |
| | Department of the Army |
| | Department of the Navy |
| DOE | Federal Energy Management Program |
| | Office of Property Management |
| DOI | Office of Facilities and Property Management |
| | Office of Human Resources |
| | National Park Service |
| DOJ | Justice Management Division |
| | Office of Human Resources |
| GSA | Office of Government-wide Policy |
| | Office of Federal High-Performance Green Buildings |
| | Public Buildings Service |
| | Office of Human Resources Management |
| OPM | Workforce and Succession Planning |
| VA | Office of Management |
| | Human Resources and Administration |
| | Veterans Health Administration |
| | Facilities Management School |
| Other Groups | |
| | BOMI International |
| | International Association of Plumbing and Mechanical Officials (IAPMO) |
| | International Facility Management Association (IFMA) |

**Appendix I: Objectives, Scope, and
Methodology**

| Agency | Interviewee |
|---------------|--|
| | Northwest Energy Efficiency Council (NEEC) |
| | National Institute of Building Sciences (NIBS) |

Source: GAO. | GAO-16-39

Appendix II: Comments from the U.S. General Services Administration



The Administrator

September 30, 2015

The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro
Comptroller General of the United States
U.S. Government Accountability Office
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

The U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) appreciates the opportunity to review and comment on the U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) draft report entitled, *Federal Real Property: Additional Authorities and Accountability Would Enhance the Implementation of the Federal Buildings Personnel Training Act of 2010* (GAO-16-39). We have reviewed this report in depth and agree with the findings in the Report, and will work with the appropriate agencies to address the findings.

Thank you for the clarity and thoroughness of this Report. If you have any questions, please contact me at the number below, or Ms. Lisa A. Austin, Associate Administrator, Office of Congressional and Intergovernmental Affairs, at (202) 501-0563.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Denise T. Roth".

Denise Turner Roth
Administrator

cc: Mr. David Wise, Director, Physical Infrastructure Issues, GAO

U.S. General Services Administration
1800 F Street NW
Washington, DC 20405
Telephone: (202) 501-0800
Fax: (202) 219-1243
www.gsa.gov

Appendix III: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

David Wise, (202) 512-2834 or wised@gao.gov

Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, Steve Cohen, Assistant director; Gary Guggolz, Analyst-in-Charge; Hannah Laufe; Malika Rice; Kelly Rubin; Pamela Vines; and Michelle Weathers made key contributions to this report.

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