

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-19-181](#), a report to congressional requesters.

Why GAO Did This Study

Much has changed since the federal government's employment policies were designed generations ago. Without careful attention to strategic human capital management, the federal government may continue to struggle to compete for workers with the skills needed to address the nation's social, economic, and security challenges.

GAO was asked to review issues related to the future of federal work and the workforce. This report identifies: (1) key trends affecting federal work and workers, and (2) key talent management strategies for achieving a high-performing workforce, given those trends.

GAO analyzed data from OPM and the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and reviewed reports from GAO, OPM, and selected think tanks. GAO also held group interviews with agency Chief Human Capital Officers, and interviewed human capital experts and representatives of federal labor unions, managers, and executives. Additionally, GAO spoke with private consulting firms and foreign governments regarding human capital strategies that officials said were helpful to improving their organizations.

What GAO Recommends

GAO has open recommendations to OPM related to key talent management strategies, including developing a core set of metrics that agencies should use to close mission-critical skills gaps. OPM agreed with most of these recommendations and has made some progress, but additional actions are needed. OPM provided technical comments, which GAO incorporated as appropriate.

View [GAO-19-181](#). For more information, contact Robert Goldenkoff, at (202) 512-2757, or GoldenkoffR@gao.gov.

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FEDERAL WORKFORCE

Key Talent Management Strategies for Agencies to Better Meet Their Missions

What GAO Found

Federal work is changing amid demographic and technological trends (see figure below).

Key Trends Affecting Federal Work



Technological advances will change the way work is done.



An increased reliance on nonfederal partners (e.g., contractors or grantees) to achieve policy goals will require new skills and competencies for which agencies will need to identify, recruit, and hire.



Fiscal constraints require agencies to reexamine and reprioritize what the federal government does, how it does business, and as appropriate, who conducts its business.



Evolving mission requirements challenge agencies to adapt their work and workforces.



Changing demographics and shifting attitudes toward work may require new skills to manage a diverse workforce that seeks purpose, autonomy, and career mobility.

Source: GAO analysis. | GAO-19-181

Given these trends, key talent management strategies can help agencies better manage the current and future workforce. These strategies are all within agencies' existing authorities:

Align human capital strategy with current and future mission requirements.

With shifting attitudes toward work, technological advances, and increased reliance on nonfederal partners, agencies need to identify the knowledge and skills necessary to respond to current and future demands. Key practices include identifying and assessing existing skills, competencies, and skills gaps.

Acquire and assign talent. To ensure agencies have the talent capacity to address evolving mission requirements and negative perceptions of federal work (e.g., that it is too bureaucratic), agencies can cultivate a diverse talent pipeline, highlight their respective missions, recruit early in the school year, support rotations, and assign talent where needed.

Incentivize and compensate employees. While federal agencies may struggle to offer competitive pay in certain labor markets, they can leverage existing incentives that appeal to workers' desire to set a schedule and to work in locations that provide work-life balance.

Engage employees. Engaged employees are more productive and less likely to leave, according to the Office of Personnel Management (OPM). Agencies can better ensure their workforces are engaged by managing employee performance, involving employees in decisions, and developing employees.