

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-19-573](#), a report to the Chairman, Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

EEOC's Management Directive 715 requires that, to attract and retain top talent, federal agencies are to identify EEO barriers in their workforces and deficiencies in their EEO programs, execute plans to address them, and report annually to EEOC. In 2009, GAO reported that DHS had opportunities to better identify and address barriers to EEO in its workforce, and made recommendations which DHS has taken action to address.

GAO was asked to provide an update on DHS's efforts to identify and address barriers to EEO in its workforce. This report examines the steps DHS has taken to (1) identify and address barriers to EEO in its workforce, (2) identify and address EEO program deficiencies, (3) address areas of noncompliance in its EEO program identified by EEOC, and (4) oversee and support component EEO programs. GAO reviewed DHS's and its components' policies, procedures, practices, and reports for their EEO programs for fiscal years 2014 through 2018, interviewed DHS and its component EEO officials, and assessed DHS employee survey results. GAO also reviewed EEOC's feedback on DHS's and its components' EEO programs, and interviewed EEOC officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making six recommendations, including: develop performance metrics for the department's EEO program; develop DHS and component formal staffing models; and analyze options for granting additional authorities to the most senior official for EEO and Diversity. DHS concurred with our six recommendations and described actions the department plans to take to address them.

View [GAO-19-573](#). For more information, contact Yvonne D. Jones at (202) 512-6806 or jonesy@gao.gov, or Christopher P. Currie at (404) 679-1875 or currie@gao.gov.

July 2019

EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY

DHS Could Better Address Challenges to Ensuring EEO in Its Workforce

What GAO Found

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has identified barriers to equal employment opportunity (EEO) and has plans to address them, but lacks performance metrics for tracking its progress towards eliminating these barriers. DHS identified three barriers from fiscal years 2014 through 2017: (1) problems with supervision/management, lack of advancement opportunities, and lack of alternate work schedules, among other things, causing higher-than-expected nonretirement separations for white females and several ethnic and racial groups; (2) the geographic location of jobs, which has contributed to low hiring rates of racial groups in certain major occupations; and (3) the medical and physical requirements of various law enforcement positions, such as the ability to engage in moderate to arduous physical exertion, which limit the eligibility of some applicants with targeted disabilities. While DHS reports some improvements in employee engagement and representation of minorities and women, it does not have complete performance metrics, such as the retention rate of women in law enforcement positions. Implementing performance metrics could help DHS better assess its progress in eliminating barriers.

DHS and its components have identified various deficiencies in their EEO programs, but lack policies and procedures for developing action plans and formal staffing models to address some deficiencies. DHS components did not have action plans to address nearly half (179 out of 369) of the deficiencies self-reported by all components from fiscal years 2014 through 2017. For example, in fiscal year 2017, four DHS components did not have action plans to ensure that their EEO directors report directly to their agency heads. Developing policies and procedures to help ensure components' EEO programs have action plans for addressing deficiencies could help DHS components better comply with Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) requirements. Developing and utilizing formal staffing models for their EEO programs could help DHS and its components to better identify, request, and obtain the staff they need. For example, DHS and its components reported that staffing challenges contributed to some of their EEO program deficiencies, and acknowledged they lack formal models to use their existing staffing to address the deficiencies.

DHS has plans to address the nine areas of noncompliance in its EEO program identified by EEOC. For example, in its most recent review of DHS compliance with EEOC requirements, EEOC identified that DHS did not provide complete demographic data on new hires and promotions in its report to EEOC in fiscal year 2016. DHS officials told us that the department plans to report the data by collecting complete data from DHS components in fiscal year 2019.

DHS's EEO and human capital offices assist and support DHS components in identifying and addressing EEO barriers. However, the EEO office lacks policies and procedures to ensure components respond timely and completely to areas of noncompliance identified in EEOC feedback letters. Additionally, DHS EEO officials said they lack authority to ensure components' compliance with EEOC requirements. Without addressing these issues, DHS may not be effectively positioned to manage its EEO program.