

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-22-105316](#), a report to congressional requesters

## Why GAO Did This Study

IGs play an important role in ensuring accountability of organizations to their employees. That accountability is especially important when it comes to IG administrative investigations of complaints related to discrimination, favoritism, health and safety of the workforce, and whistleblower reprisal. Military service IG offices and command IG offices provide oversight and assistance through inspections, investigations, and evaluations within DOD. These IGs do not have the statutory independence that other federal IGs have.

GAO was asked to review the processes for administrative investigations in these IG offices. This report (1) assesses the extent to which the administrative investigation policies and procedures in selected military service and command IG offices comply with applicable standards and (2) describes the hiring practices and evaluates requirements for training at military service IG offices. GAO conducted 21 site visits to service and command IG offices, discussed and documented IG policies and practices, and compared policies and practices to applicable IG standards.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is making seven recommendations to revise established policies to support the independence of command IGs and improve training for IG personnel. The selected IG offices generally agreed with the recommendations and discussed planned implementation steps.

View [GAO-22-105316](#). For more information, contact Kristen Kocielek at (202) 512-2989 or [kociolek@gao.gov](mailto:kociolek@gao.gov) or Elizabeth Field at (202) 512-2775 or [fielde1@gao.gov](mailto:fielde1@gao.gov).

September 2022

## MILITARY INSPECTORS GENERAL

### Opportunities Exist to Strengthen Processes for Administrative Investigations and Training

## What GAO Found

The Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force each have a service-level Inspector General (IG) and subordinate command-level IG offices. Within these four military services, there are over 390 command-level IGs along with 11 combatant command IGs. GAO found that the selected military service and command-level IG offices' policies and procedures for administrative investigations generally comply with applicable standards, including those for whistleblower reprisal complaints. Specifically, these IG offices designed and developed tools to implement policies and procedures for receiving a complaint, determining a course of action, performing investigations if deemed applicable, and ensuring the quality of investigations through management and legal reviews. Whistleblower reprisal investigations have additional protections requiring that the Department of Defense (DOD) IG perform an independent review.

However, three out of the four military service IG offices and one combatant command IG office GAO selected for review lack policies that support command IG independence in opening investigations. Specifically, policies of the Army, Air Force, Marine Corps, and U.S. Indo-Pacific Command IG offices require that command IGs receive approval from the directing authority, which at times is the IG's commanding officer, prior to initiating an IG investigation. Requiring such approval could affect the ability of an IG to perform independent, objective administrative investigations.

Officials from the military service IG offices stated that to mitigate this independence concern, a command IG has the option of elevating the complaint to the military service IG. However, this option is not explicitly addressed in military service IG policies. Without clear policies on the processes for initiating investigations, command IGs may not have the authority to independently initiate IG-appropriate investigations, increasing the risk that DOD personnel do not have access to fair and impartial investigations.

Selected military service IG offices followed standard hiring practices and had policies and procedures in place to provide initial training to IG staff, but some lacked requirements for recurring training and mechanisms to monitor completion of such training. Each military service IG office had an initial training program ranging from 1 to 3 weeks that is required for each new employee. These training programs address key aspects of administrative investigations. However, the IG offices within the Army, Navy, and Air Force have not established requirements for recurring training in their respective policies for all of their personnel who conduct administrative investigations, and do not have mechanisms to track recurring training.

GAO found that many of the selected command IGs do not regularly conduct administrative investigations and thus may not be able to maintain proficiencies through regular conduct of investigations. Without establishing requirements for recurring training and developing a mechanism to verify compliance, the military service IGs and command IGs are not able to provide reasonable assurance that their personnel are maintaining professional proficiencies.