Additional Actions Needed to Address IT Workforce Challenges

What GAO Found
Implementing leading workforce practices is essential to successfully recruiting and retaining IT staff. Of 15 recruitment and retention practices GAO evaluated, the Department of State (State) has fully implemented one, partially implemented 11, and not implemented three. For example, State has collected training performance data, but has not recruited continuously year-round for most of its IT positions or regularly assessed staffing needs. If State increases its focus on recruitment and retention practices, the department can better compete with other employers for critical IT staff with key skills and abilities.

GAO identified 10 challenges related to State recruiting and retaining its IT workforce. GAO did not include three challenges in this report due to State’s sensitivity concerns. The recruitment and retention challenges in State’s IT workforce included a narrow marketing and recruiting focus, low pay and a limited number of incentives and promotions, a lengthy hiring and clearance process, and inaccurate position descriptions and insufficiently detailed announcements (see figure). For example, IT staff said State’s marketing and recruitment strategies focused on reaching a small portion of the population. Further, IT staff noted the general public did not have an awareness of State’s mission and the IT employment opportunities that were available.

GAO analyzed recruitment and retention processes and leading practices, and documentation on IT workforce challenges and actions taken by State. GAO also interviewed officials at State headquarters and six overseas posts, which it selected based on factors such as the number of IT staff.

This is a public version of a sensitive report that was distributed on a limited basis. In response to State officials’ request, GAO excluded from this public report (1) its evaluation of IT workforce vacancies and the impact of such vacancies, and (2) selected recruiting and retention challenges.

What GAO Recommends
GAO is making 16 recommendations to improve State’s IT workforce management. State concurred with 15 but did not concur with one on expanding the number of Foreign Service IT positions available to external applicants year-round. As discussed in the report, GAO believes the recommendation is still warranted.

View GAO-22-105932. For more information, contact David Hinchman at (214) 777-5719 or HinchmanD@gao.gov; or Jason Bair at (202) 512-6881 or BairJ@gao.gov.