

## Actions Needed to Address IT Acquisition Workforce Challenges

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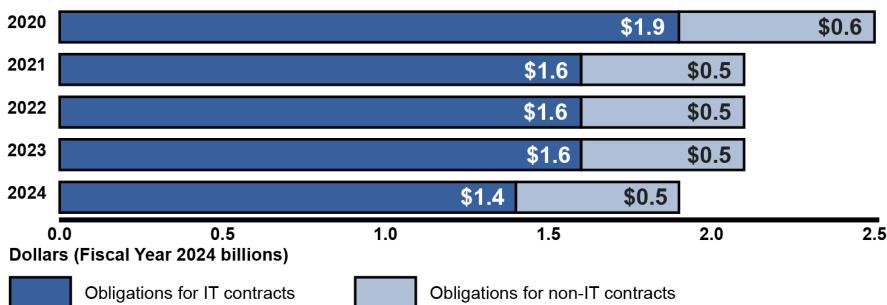
A report to congressional committees.

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### What GAO Found

The Social Security Administration (SSA) relies on IT hardware and software to deliver services that touch the lives of virtually every American. From fiscal years 2020 through 2024, SSA obligated \$1.4 billion or more annually on IT acquisitions.

#### Social Security Administration Contract Obligations, Fiscal Years 2020-2024



Source: GAO analysis of Federal Procurement Data System data on Social Security Administration contract obligations. | GAO-25-107437

SSA's IT acquisition staff include contracting officers, who award and manage contracts, and contracting officer's representatives, who assist contracting officers with contract administration functions. These staff reside in the Office of Acquisition and Grants and the Office of the Chief Information Officer, respectively, which face staffing and training challenges.

- Staffing.** The Office of Acquisition and Grants has limited data on contracting officer workloads to inform staffing assessments. Similarly, the Office of the Chief Information Officer completed workload assessments for contracting officer's representatives who support software contracts, but it has conducted limited assessments for those supporting hardware and service contracts. Executive orders and related guidance from early 2025 direct executive agencies, including SSA, to reduce their workforces and consolidate certain procurements at the General Services Administration. SSA is in the process of identifying changes to its IT acquisition workforce as of May 2025. To operate effectively in this changing environment, SSA needs quality workload information that accounts for complexity to ensure it can accurately assess and document its IT acquisition staffing needs to accomplish its future goals.
- Training.** An SSA assessment found that senior-level contracting officers had deficiencies in acquisitions-related competencies. SSA officials said they are seeking trainings to address these deficiencies; however, SSA's existing training plan has not been updated since 2019. Given the time since the last training plan update and ongoing organizational changes, it is not clear if SSA will prioritize implementing training to address these gaps. A training plan that addresses the acquisitions-related competency gaps identified for contracting officers, including those who support IT contracts, remains vital as it would help ensure that contracting officers have the skills to support SSA's current and future IT contracting needs.

### Why GAO Did This Study

SSA's IT acquisition staff oversee how the agency buys and maintains technology resources. SSA, however, has experienced long-standing human capital and IT modernization planning challenges. These challenges preceded SSA's efforts to reduce the size of its workforce and contractor and IT spending.

GAO was asked to review SSA's workforce planning practices for staff who support IT contracts. This report examines SSA's obligations for IT products and services from fiscal years 2020 to 2024; and the extent to which the Office of Acquisition and Grants and the Office of the Chief Information Officer assessed and addressed their IT acquisition workforce needs.

To conduct this work, GAO analyzed SSA's contract obligation data for fiscal years 2020 to 2024 (the latest available information for a full fiscal year) and determined that the data were reliable. GAO also reviewed SSA guidance, data on contracting officer and contracting officer representative assignments, and a competency assessment report for contracting officers.

### What GAO Recommends

GAO is making three recommendations to inform SSA's decisions as the current reorganization unfolds, including that SSA assesses and documents contracting officer and contracting officer's representative staffing needs based on quality workload information; and that it develops and implements a training plan to address identified acquisitions-related competency gaps for IT contracting officers. SSA concurred with the recommendations.