



Highlights of [GAO-03-55](#), a report to Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs

## Why GAO Did This Study

The federal government is dramatically changing the way it purchases goods and services—by relying more on judgment and initiative versus rigid rules to make purchasing decisions. At the same time, agencies are dealing with reductions in the civilian acquisition workforce. GAO was asked to determine what efforts federal civilian agencies are making to address their future acquisition workforce needs

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is recommending that the Office of Federal Procurement Policy (OFPP) work with procurement executives to ensure that the lessons learned from agencies' efforts to address future acquisition workforce needs are shared with all federal agencies. All the agencies that reviewed a draft of the report generally agreed with GAO's findings and recommendations.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-55](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-55).

To view the full report, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact David Cooper at (202) 512-4125 or [cooperd@gao.gov](mailto:cooperd@gao.gov).

# ACQUISITION WORKFORCE

## Status of Agency Efforts to Address Future Needs

### What GAO Found

GAO looked at the efforts six civilian agencies are undertaking to address their future acquisition workforce needs. Together, these agencies account for about 72 percent of civilian agency contracting dollars. All of these agencies are taking steps to address their future acquisition workforce needs. Three—the Departments of Energy and Veterans Affairs (VA) and the General Services Administration—are developing specific plans to strengthen their acquisition workforces, and three others—the Departments of Treasury and Health and Human Services and the National Aeronautics Space Administration (NASA)—are including their acquisition workforces in their overall plans to strengthen human capital. All are implementing new or strengthening existing career development and training programs. NASA and VA are also developing new information management systems.

The agencies, however, are facing considerable challenges to making their human capital strategic plans and training programs a success. Principally:

- Most acquisition professionals will need to acquire a new set of skills focusing on business management. Because of a more sophisticated acquisition environment, they can no longer be merely purchasers or process managers. Instead, they will also need to be adept at analyzing business problems and assisting with developing strategies in the early stages of the acquisition.
- Beyond this immediate transformation, it is difficult for agencies to forecast what will be needed in terms of numbers of workers, skills, and expertise in the years to come. Rules, regulations, and agency missions are always changing, and budgets are constantly shifting.
- Many agencies simply lack good data on their workforces, including information on workforce size and location, knowledge and skills, attrition rates, and retirement rates. This data is critical to mapping out the current condition of the workforce and deciding what needs to be done to ensure that the agency has the right mix of skills and talent for the future.

In overcoming these challenges, agencies can learn from the Department of Defense (DOD), which has made progress in acquisition workforce strategic planning and has addressed some of the same issues. DOD officials learned that the strategic planning effort was going to take a long time and that effective leadership and guidance, along with technology and sound methodology, were required to accurately forecast workforce needs.