



Highlights of [GAO-08-762T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

## Why GAO Did This Study

To address the challenges that the nation faces, it will be important for federal agencies to change their cultures and create the institutional capacity to become high-performing organizations. This includes recruiting and retaining a federal workforce able to create, sustain, and thrive in organizations that are flatter, results-oriented, and externally focused.

In 2001, GAO identified strategic human capital management as a governmentwide high-risk area because federal agencies lacked a strategic approach to human capital management that integrated human capital efforts with their missions and program goals. Although progress has been made since that time, strategic human capital management still remains a high-risk area.

This testimony, based on a large body of completed work issued from January 2001 through April 2008, focuses on (1) challenges that federal agencies have faced in recruiting and hiring talented employees, (2) progress in addressing these challenges, and (3) additional actions that are needed to strengthen recruiting and hiring efforts. In its prior reports, GAO has made a range of recommendations to the Office of Personnel Management (OPM)—the government's personnel agency—and to agencies in such areas as hiring, workforce planning, and diversity management; a number of these recommendations have since been implemented. GAO is making no new recommendations at this time.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-762T](#). For more information, contact Robert Goldenkoff at (202) 512-6806 or [goldenkoffr@gao.gov](mailto:goldenkoffr@gao.gov).

## HUMAN CAPITAL

### Transforming Federal Recruiting and Hiring Efforts

#### What GAO Found

Numerous studies over the years have identified a range of problems and challenges with recruitment and hiring in the federal government. Some of these problems and challenges include passive recruitment strategies, unclear job vacancy announcements, and manual processes that are time consuming and paperwork intensive. In recent years, Congress, OPM, and agencies have made important strides in improving federal recruitment and hiring. For example, Congress has provided agencies with hiring flexibilities that could help to streamline the hiring process. OPM has sponsored job fairs and developed automated tools. Individual agencies have developed targeted recruitment strategies to identify and help build a talented workforce.

Building on the progress that has been made, additional efforts are needed in the following areas.

**Human capital planning:** Federal agencies will have to bolster their efforts in strategic human capital planning to ensure that they are prepared to meet their current and emerging hiring needs. Agencies must determine the critical skills and competencies necessary to achieve programmatic goals and develop strategies that are tailored to address any identified gaps.

**Diversity management:** Developing and maintaining workforces that reflect all segments of society and our nation's diversity is another significant aspect of agencies' recruitment challenges. Recruitment is a key first step toward establishing a diverse workforce. Agencies must consider active recruitment strategies, such as building formal relationships with targeted schools and colleges, and partnering with multicultural professional organizations.

**Use of existing flexibilities:** Agencies need to reexamine the flexibilities provided to them under current authorities, including monetary recruitment and retention incentives, special hiring authorities, and work-life programs. Agencies can then identify those existing flexibilities that could be used more extensively or more effectively to meet their workforce needs.

**OPM leadership:** OPM has taken significant steps in fostering and guiding improvements in recruiting and hiring in the executive branch. For example, OPM, working with and through the Chief Human Capital Officers Council, has moved forward in compiling information on effective and innovative practices and sharing this information with agencies. Still, OPM must continue to work to ensure that agencies take action on this information. Also, OPM needs to make certain that it has the internal capacity to guide agencies' readiness to implement change and achieve desired outcomes.

OPM and agencies should be held accountable for the ongoing monitoring and refinement of human capital approaches to recruit and hire a capable and committed federal workforce. With continued commitment and strong leadership, the federal government can indeed be an employer of choice.