

Highlights of [GAO-12-386](#), a report to congressional requesters

## Why GAO Did This Study

Federal government personnel must be able to collaborate across agencies to meet complex 21st century national security challenges. GAO found in a prior report that interagency rotations are a type of professional development activity that can help improve interagency collaboration. However, government officials, policy researchers, human capital experts, and others cite many challenges to successful rotation programs.

To understand how interagency rotation programs can be designed to address these challenges, GAO was asked to (1) identify desirable collaboration-related program results; (2) identify policies and practices that help rotation programs achieve those results; and (3) determine the extent to which three rotation programs were viewed as effective and incorporated those policies and practices.

To address these objectives, GAO reviewed the literature; reviewed rotation program documents; surveyed program participants and their supervisors; and interviewed human resources experts, agency human resources practitioners, and program officials.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is making recommendations to the Secretaries of State and Defense to direct State and Army Command and General Staff College officials to build on successful efforts by establishing program evaluation processes, among other actions. Officials from both agencies reviewed a draft of this report and generally agreed with our recommendations.

View [GAO-12-386](#). To view the e-supplement online, click [GAO-12-387SP](#). For more information, contact J. Christopher Mihm at (202) 512-6806 or [mihmj@gao.gov](mailto:mihmj@gao.gov).

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# INTERAGENCY COLLABORATION

## State and Army Personnel Rotation Programs Can Build on Positive Results with Additional Preparation and Evaluation

### What GAO Found

Effective interagency rotational assignments can achieve collaboration-related results—such as developing participants' collaboration skills and building interagency networks—but programs must be a “win-win” for the individuals and organizations involved in order to be effective.

GAO found policies and practices that help interagency rotation programs achieve collaboration-related results as indicated in the figure below. The policies and practices addressed challenges to participation, and included incentives, preparation, and feedback.

Most participants and host supervisors of State's Foreign Policy Advisor (POLAD) program, State's other interagency rotations, and the Army Command and General Staff College (CGSC) Interagency Fellowship reported that their programs were effective in contributing to improved collaboration among agencies with national security responsibilities. The figure below also shows the extent to which these programs incorporated the policies and practices GAO identified.

**Extent to Which State and Army Rotation Programs Incorporated Policies and Practices That Can Achieve Collaboration Results**

Policies and practices	State POLAD	Other State rotations	CGSC Interagency Fellowship
Design the program to achieve overarching or shared strategic goals	●	◐	●
Provide individuals with incentives to participate	●	◐	●
Provide management—at the host and home agencies—with incentives to participate	●	◐	●
Optimize the match between the participant and the assignment	●	●	●
Prepare participants and their host supervisors for the rotation	●	◐	◐
Plan for participant's next assignment to maximize benefits to participant and home agency	NA <sup>a</sup>	○ <sup>b</sup>	●
Create a program feedback and evaluation process that includes participants and all participating organizations	◐	○	◐

- Mostly/ fully in place
- ◐ Partially in place
- Not in place
- NA Not applicable

Source: GAO analysis.

<sup>a</sup>State's POLAD program is managed according to Foreign Service career development and staffing processes, which are based, in part, on individual initiative and preferences for subsequent assignments. Because these processes were beyond the scope of this report, GAO did not evaluate the effectiveness of how State planned for its Foreign Service participants' next assignments.

<sup>b</sup>GAO's finding associated with this practice is limited to the few civil service personnel that participated in other State rotations.