

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-22-105182](#), a report to the Chairman, Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate

## Why GAO Did This Study

State leaders have highlighted the importance of fostering an inclusive workforce that reflects the diversity of the U.S. State has made efforts to increase DEIA. However, in January 2020, GAO found that State continued to face longstanding diversity issues. These included underrepresentation of historically disadvantaged racial or ethnic groups and women in the senior ranks. Federal guidance requires State to systematically identify, assess, and remove barriers to equal participation in its workforce and to report on such barriers annually.

GAO was asked to review issues related to State's DEIA efforts. This report examines (1) the extent to which State's actions address leading practices for managing diversity and inclusion in the workplace, and (2) the extent to which State has taken steps to identify, investigate, and eliminate barriers to workforce diversity since January 2020. GAO reviewed State documents, surveyed 20 employee organizations, and interviewed State officials. GAO compared State's actions to leading practices, and analyzed State's methodologies for identifying potential barriers.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is recommending that State establish performance measures, enhance accountability for workplace DEIA goals, create a plan to improve its barrier analysis process, and improve its statistical methodology. State concurred with these recommendations.

View [GAO-22-105182](#). For more information, contact Jason Bair at (202) 512-6881 or [bairj@gao.gov](mailto:bairj@gao.gov).

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## STATE DEPARTMENT

### Additional Actions Needed to Improve Workplace Diversity and Inclusion

## What GAO Found

The Department of State's actions address five of seven leading practices GAO identified for managing diversity and inclusion in the workplace; however, gaps remain in measurement and accountability (see table). State is addressing employee involvement and diversity training and has plans to help address gaps in leadership commitment, recruitment, and succession planning. GAO's survey of State employee organizations reinforced these findings, with the majority of respondents having favorable views of senior leadership commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA). However, State does not have performance measures and has not taken sufficient actions to enhance accountability for its workplace DEIA goals. Moreover, around 70 percent of the organizations GAO surveyed indicated that State does not hold managers and supervisors accountable for their progress toward achieving diversity and inclusion goals. Without ways to measure progress and enhance accountability, State may not achieve its goal of fostering a diverse and inclusive workplace.

GAO's Assessment of Department of State's Actions Compared to Leading Practices for Diversity and Inclusion Management	
Leading Practice	GAO Rating
Employee Involvement	●
Diversity Training	●
Leadership Commitment	⦿
Recruitment	⦿
Succession Planning	⦿
Measurement	○
Accountability	○

Legend: ●—Address. ⦿—Generally address. ○—Partially address. ○—Do not address.

Source: GAO analysis of Department of State actions and GAO leading practices for diversity and inclusion management. | GAO-22-105182

State has taken steps to identify, investigate, and eliminate barriers to workforce diversity, though its analyses vary in depth and have methodological weaknesses. Since January 2020, State has identified four indicators of potential barriers to diversity, including lower promotion rates above the GS-13 level for historically disadvantaged racial or ethnic groups compared to Whites. State has taken some steps to investigate and eliminate barriers, but GAO found that State's analyses vary in depth. For example, State did not assess why fewer women take the Foreign Service Officer test before implementing measures designed to improve recruitment of women. Having not investigated the cause of the disparity, State cannot be sure its response addresses the underlying barrier. In addition, GAO found weaknesses in State's statistical methodology. For example, State's analysis only allowed it to identify extreme disparities as indicators of potential barriers in Foreign Service promotions. If State does not create a plan to improve its barrier analysis process and improve its methodology for identifying potential barriers, it risks using resources on solutions that do not address the root causes of disparities and risks leaving barriers unaddressed.