

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-25-107075](#), a report to congressional requesters

## Why GAO Did This Study

Each year, DHS obligates billions of dollars to acquire a wide range of goods and services. Since its inception in 2003, DHS has confronted numerous challenges related to recruiting, retaining, and managing its acquisition workforce.

GAO was asked to review DHS's management of its acquisition workforce. This report examines, among other things, (1) what challenges, if any, the acquisition workforce reported facing, and the extent to which leadership is mitigating these challenges; and (2) the extent to which DHS and selected components have comprehensive data on this workforce to inform decision-making.

GAO selected four DHS components based in part on the high value of contract obligations and the number of contracts awarded in fiscal year 2023. These components accounted for about 63 percent of DHS's obligations. GAO randomly selected a nongeneralizable sample of 55 key acquisition staff to interview from these components, and reviewed DHS acquisition program staffing plans and certification data.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is making four recommendations to DHS, including that it assesses whether its mitigation efforts effectively address challenges facing the acquisition workforce, establishes a methodology for identifying personnel in acquisition disciplines, and collects comprehensive data on its acquisition workforce. DHS agreed with one of the recommendations and did not agree with three of them. GAO continues to believe the recommendations are valid, as discussed in the report.

View [GAO-25-107075](#). For more information, contact Travis J. Masters at (202) 512-4841 or [masterst@gao.gov](mailto:masterst@gao.gov).

December 2024

## HOMELAND SECURITY

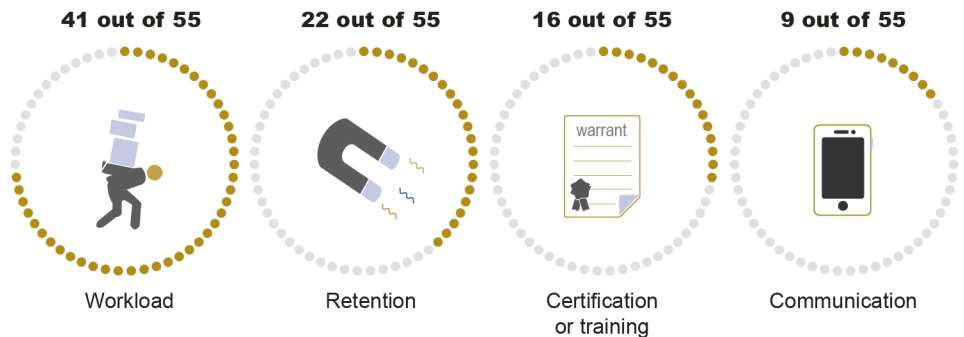
### Actions Needed to Address Acquisition Workforce Challenges and Data

## What GAO Found

The Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) acquisition workforce includes government personnel who oversee procurement and related acquisition functions and activities. This workforce includes three key acquisition positions identified in government-wide policy—program managers, contracting officers, and contracting officer's representatives—in addition to eight other DHS-identified disciplines that support acquisitions.

In interviews with GAO, acquisition staff from four selected DHS components identified various challenges facing the acquisition workforce. GAO found that 41 of the 55 program managers, contracting officers, and contracting officer's representatives that it interviewed identified heavy workload as their most considerable challenge.

### Primary Workforce Challenges Identified by 55 Personnel in Key DHS Acquisition Positions



Source: GAO analysis of interviews with selected Department of Homeland Security officials; icons. | [GAO-25-107075](#)

Among acquisition program managers, GAO found that lengthy hiring time frames were also a considerable challenge. Twelve of the 17 program managers that GAO interviewed cited this as a challenge. For context, a fiscal year 2023 DHS report noted that acquisition hiring time frames ranged from 3 to 18 months.

DHS has not evaluated whether it is effectively addressing the challenges that staff identified, such as those related to workload or the lengthy hiring process. GAO found that DHS and its components have implemented a variety of general efforts to mitigate workforce challenges related to hiring, training, and certification. These efforts included programs for career development, mentoring, and training for acquisition leaders. Without evaluating these efforts, DHS lacks reasonable assurance that it is using the most appropriate methods to support its acquisition workforce.

Furthermore, DHS does not have comprehensive data on the size or demographics of its acquisition workforce. DHS entities responsible for the workforce only collect data on certain segments of the acquisition workforce, but have not established a methodology for identifying personnel in the eight other disciplines supporting acquisitions. Without establishing a methodology to identify these personnel and collecting comprehensive data on them, DHS lacks reasonable assurance that its decisions about current and future workforce requirements are based on complete information.