

## Why GAO Did This Study

The Department of Defense (DOD) relies heavily on its civilian workforce to perform duties usually performed by military personnel—including combat support functions such as logistics. Civilian senior leaders—some of whom occupy positions that might be cut during DOD’s latest attempts to reduce overhead costs—are among those who manage DOD’s civilians. In 2007, Congress mandated that DOD assess requirements for its civilian senior leader workforce in light of recent trends. DOD reported its recent reply to this requirement in its 2009 update to the Civilian Human Capital Strategic Plan, which used information from a 2008 baseline review to validate its senior leader requirements. GAO was asked to review DOD’s approach for (1) assessing its civilian senior leader workforce requirements, (2) identifying and communicating the need for additional senior leaders, and (3) developing and managing this workforce. GAO reviewed submissions for DOD’s baseline review and requests for additional senior leaders, including DOD’s intelligence agencies. GAO also interviewed DOD and Office of Personnel Management officials.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOD (1) document analyses and clarify assessment criteria for determining certain senior leader requirements and (2) create clearly defined metrics for its executive education program. DOD generally concurred with GAO’s recommendations.

View [GAO-11-136](#) or key components. For more information, contact Brenda S. Farrell at (202) 512-3604 or [farrellb@gao.gov](mailto:farrellb@gao.gov).

## HUMAN CAPITAL

### Opportunities Exist for DOD to Enhance Its Approach for Determining Civilian Senior Leader Workforce Needs

## What GAO Found

DOD conducted a baseline review to assess and validate its civilian senior leader requirements but did not document its analysis or summarize the results of the review. Standards for internal controls call for significant events to be documented and summarized to facilitate tracing transactions and related information. Specifically, in April 2008, DOD issued guidance for components outside its intelligence community to conduct a baseline review of its senior leader needs. While DOD reported to Congress that this was a rigorous analysis, GAO found that some of the components’ information was incomplete and DOD was unable to provide documentation of an analysis summarizing its results. DOD officials said that they did not summarize the analysis because the information was only intended to support a number of human capital management efforts, including a report to Congress on DOD’s Civilian Human Capital Plan. Similarly, DOD’s intelligence community, in 2007, issued guidance for assessing its workforce needs but also did not summarize its analysis. DOD officials stated that while the analysis was not summarized, it resulted in a number of key decisions—for example, a reduction in one agency’s senior leader needs. However, without documenting and summarizing information in an analysis that could be traced to component submissions, DOD may not be able to provide Congress and stakeholders in its chain of command insight into how it assessed its senior leader needs.

While most DOD entities used a consistent, clearly documented approach to identify and communicate needs for additional civilian senior leaders, the defense intelligence community’s approach lacked similar consistency. Outside of the defense intelligence community, DOD used common criteria to identify its most urgent needs for additional senior leaders and communicated those needs and justifications through the chain of command. The defense intelligence community, however, assessed its needs for additional personnel using various sets of criteria and communicated those needs as one aggregate number without providing specific justifications to stakeholders and, ultimately, to Congress. GAO’s prior work has shown that establishing common criteria and clear communication strategies strengthens agency processes. Without such criteria and a well-defined set of communication expectations, requests to increase senior leaders in the defense intelligence community will not appear to be supported and justified.

DOD’s approach for managing and developing civilian leaders includes policies and an executive education program but has some limitations. For example, the executive education program—which, according to program officials, costs an average of \$6.5 million per year—was created to address problems of a predecessor program, including the lack of a plan for how graduates would be used in the future. The new program, however, does not have clearly defined metrics to measure the progress or success of the program. GAO previously reported that high-performing organizations recognize the importance of measuring how programs meet their goals.