

Highlights of [GAO-11-601](#), a report to the Ranking Member, Committee on Homeland Security, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The Federal Protective Service (FPS) within the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) provides security and law enforcement services to over 9,000 federal facilities through its federal and contract security workforce. Over the years, GAO has made numerous recommendations to address significant weaknesses in FPS's oversight and management of its security workforce. Legislation has been introduced that would, among other things, have FPS examine the effectiveness of relying more on federal employees for security.

As requested, this report examines: (1) nine federal agencies' approaches for staffing their security workforces; (2) federal and private sector representatives' views on the benefits and challenges of using contract and in-house security staff; and (3) lessons that FPS can learn from federal agencies that have changed their security staffing approaches. GAO reviewed agency documents and conducted interviews with representatives from federal agencies and private sector firms selected based on the use of security guards and experience in changing a security workforce, among other criteria. The selected agencies and private sector firms are a nonprobability sample, and the information we obtained is not generalizable.

GAO provided the nine agencies with a draft of this report for comment. In response, agencies provided technical comments that were incorporated where appropriate.

View [GAO-11-601](#) or key components. For more information, contact Mark L. Goldstein at (202) 512-2834 or goldsteinm@gao.gov.

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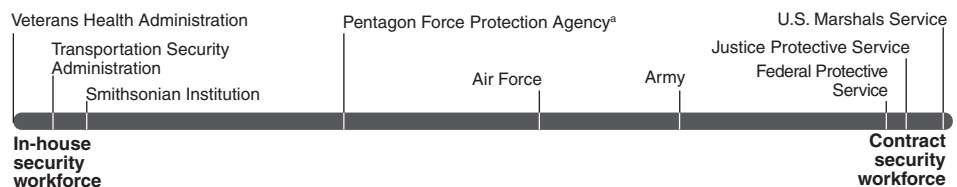
FEDERAL FACILITY SECURITY

Staffing Approaches Used by Selected Agencies

What GAO Found

Eight of the nine selected federal agencies reported using a combination of contract and in-house facility security positions, and the distribution of their security staff varies significantly (see figure below). Contract security staff are primarily used for routine access control functions, while in-house staff, such as federal security guards and inspectors, tend to perform a variety of security functions, such as patrol and risk assessment. Selected agency officials cited facility risk level and cost, among others, as factors considered when staffing a security workforce. Federal agencies used various types of security staff—even at high-risk facilities—for protection. As a high-profile law enforcement agency, the Department of Justice uses armed contract security guards with prior law enforcement experience to protect its high-risk facilities.

Selected Agencies' Distribution of In-House and Contract Security Workforce



Source: GAO analysis of agency data.

Note: To determine an agency's in-house to contract security workforce ratio for Fiscal Year 2010, GAO used 1,760 work hours per year to convert contract service hours into one full-time equivalent.

^aThe Pentagon Force Protection Agency did not provide in-house and contract workforce data, but provided estimates of the number of in-house and contract security staff for Fiscal Year 2010.

Federal and private sector representatives reported that contract and in-house security staff offer benefits and challenges for agencies to weigh when making staffing decisions. The two primary reported benefits of contract security staff were (1) potential cost savings and (2) flexibility to increase or reduce staff size. Conversely, these two issues were commonly cited as challenges in using in-house security staff. The reported benefits for in-house security staff were greater control to select qualified security staff and develop them to meet organizational needs.

Early planning to determine security staffing needs and sufficient oversight were cited as key lessons learned when changing staffing approaches. For example, Smithsonian Institution had time to conduct risk-based assessments, which helped it decide to use contract staff only at lower-risk posts. Other agencies' experiences, as well as FPS's experience in transitioning to an inspector-based workforce, suggest that changing FPS's staffing approach could prove challenging. Early planning could help FPS address some of those challenges in the event a transition is desired or mandated, and sufficient oversight and management of its workforce will be critical to providing effective security.