



Highlights of [GAO-05-585](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

As the federal government confronts an array of challenges in the 21st century, it must employ strategic human capital management, including succession planning, to help meet those challenges. Leading organizations go beyond a succession planning approach that focuses on replacing individuals and engage in broad, integrated succession planning and management efforts that focus on strengthening current and future organizational capacity.

GAO reviewed how the Census Bureau, Department of Labor (DOL), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) are implementing succession planning and management efforts.

What GAO Recommends

GAO made specific recommendations to enhance agencies' succession efforts. The Department of Veterans Affairs agreed with our recommendations. The Census Bureau agreed with two recommendations and in response to a third, stated that its existing monitoring approach is effective. However, without strengthened monitoring, the Bureau is at increased risk that it will not have the skills it needs for the 2010 Census. DOL did not take issue with our findings and will consider our recommendations. EPA did not comment on our recommendations. DOL and EPA provided technical comments.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-585.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Eileen Larence at (202) 512-6806 or larencee@gao.gov.

HUMAN CAPITAL

Selected Agencies Have Opportunities to Enhance Existing Succession Planning and Management Efforts

What GAO Found

The Census Bureau, DOL, EPA, and VHA have all implemented succession planning and management efforts that collectively are intended to strengthen organizational capacity. However, in light of governmentwide fiscal challenges, the agencies have opportunities to enhance some of their succession efforts.

- While all of the agencies have assigned responsibility for their succession planning and management efforts to councils or boards, VHA has established a subcommittee and high-level positions that are directly responsible for its succession efforts. Also, VHA and the Census Bureau specifically mention succession planning and management as performance expectations in their executives' performance plans.
- The four agencies have begun to link succession efforts to strategic planning. For example, DOL plans to shift from a historical enforcement role to a compliance assistance and consulting role, requiring stronger skills in communication and analysis. To attract and retain employees with such skills, DOL launched the Masters in Business Administration Fellows program in 2002, which it considers one of its major succession training and development programs.
- Monitoring mission-critical workforce needs helps make informed planning decisions. DOL, EPA, and VHA have identified gaps in occupations or competencies, have undertaken strategies to address these gaps, and are planning or are taking steps to monitor their progress in closing these gaps. The Census Bureau could strengthen the monitoring of its mission-critical occupations more closely and at a higher level to ensure it is prepared for the 2010 Decennial Census.
- Effective training and development programs can enhance the federal government's ability to achieve results. All of the agencies' succession efforts include training and development programs at all organizational levels. However, in the current budget environment, there are opportunities to coordinate and share these programs and create synergies through benchmarking with others, achieving economies of scale, limiting duplication of efforts, and enhancing the effectiveness of programs, among other things. Performance measures for these programs can also help agencies evaluate these programs' effects on organizational capacity and justify their value.
- Finally, agencies have recognized the importance of diversity to a successful workforce and use succession planning and management to enhance their workforce diversity.