



Highlights of [GAO-08-596](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

With a workforce of about 35,000, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (the Corps) provides engineering services for civil works and military programs in the United States and overseas. Recently, the Corps' focus has shifted to also support contingency operations, such as responding to natural disasters. To meet its mission and emerging priorities, the Corps must have effective human capital planning processes to ensure that it can maintain its workforce. In this context, GAO was asked to examine the (1) extent to which the Corps has aligned its human capital plan with its strategic plan, (2) extent to which the Corps has the information necessary to identify and meet current and future workforce needs, and (3) challenges the Corps faces in meeting its workforce needs. To address these issues, GAO reviewed agency human capital and strategic planning documents, conducted structured interviews with eight Corps divisions and a purposeful sample of 14 of its districts, and interviewed other Corps officials.

What GAO Recommends

To help the Corps better manage its workforce planning efforts, GAO recommends that it (1) draft a human capital plan that is directly linked to its strategic plan and (2) develop and implement a process for evaluating the effectiveness of its human capital tools. In commenting on a draft of the report, the Department of Defense generally agreed with our recommendations.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-596](#). For more information, contact Anu K. Mittal at (202) 512-3841 or mittala@gao.gov.

HUMAN CAPITAL

Corps of Engineers Needs to Update Its Workforce Planning Process to More Effectively Address Its Current and Future Workforce Needs

What GAO Found

The Corps' strategic human capital plan is outdated; is not aligned with the agency's most recent strategic plan, which was developed in 2005; and is inconsistently used across the agency. Specifically, the human capital plan has not been revised since it was developed in 2002, and it is therefore not aligned with the Corps' current strategic plan. Headquarters officials told GAO they "abandoned" the use of the plan and replaced it with the human capital updates required under a presidential initiative. While these updates list the Corps' human capital activities and milestones for completing them, they do not contain key components of an effective human capital plan, such as goals, strategies, and a system for measuring performance. Moreover, the outdated human capital plan is being used inconsistently across the agency. Some divisions and districts are still using the 2002 plan to guide their human capital efforts, while others are relying on guidance from headquarters or the Office of Personnel Management or developing their own guidance. Without a current, consistently implemented human capital plan that is aligned with its strategic plan, the Corps' ability to effectively manage its workforce is limited.

The Corps lacks the necessary agencywide information on critical skills to identify and assess current and future workforce needs and therefore cannot effectively perform its workforce planning activities. Effective workforce planning depends on consistent agencywide data on the critical skills needed to achieve the agency's mission. However, the Corps does not have a process for collecting consistent agencywide data, and headquarters has not provided guidance to the divisions and districts on how to gather this information systematically. Without guidance, some divisions and districts have collected this information independently, using varying methods, leaving the Corps with inconsistent and incomplete data with which to assess the agency's overall workforce needs. As a result, the Corps' ability to determine effective approaches to recruiting, developing, and retaining personnel is limited. Realizing the need for consistent information on critical skills, the Corps recently began an effort to systematically collect these data. However, it is too early to assess the Corps' progress on this effort.

The Corps faces several challenges to its workforce planning efforts, such as competition from the private sector and others to hire qualified staff. To address these challenges, the Corps uses human capital tools such as recruitment and retention incentives. However, the Corps' use of some tools has sharply decreased recently. For example, in fiscal year 2002 the Corps awarded \$750,000 in recruitment bonuses, but in 2006 this dropped to \$24,000. One official told GAO he has had to hire less qualified staff because he has been unable to offer sufficient incentives. Moreover, the Corps lacks a process for assessing the effectiveness of the tools it uses. Consequently, the Corps can neither determine the overall costs and benefits of using these tools nor decide whether additional methods are needed to recruit, develop, and retain its current and future workforce.