



Highlights of [GAO-12-374T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Contracting Oversight, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

Arlington National Cemetery (Arlington) contains the remains of more than 330,000 military servicemembers, their family members, and others. In June 2010, the Army Inspector General identified problems at the cemetery, including deficiencies in contracting and management, burial errors, and a failure to notify next of kin of errors. In response, the Secretary of the Army issued guidance creating the position of the Executive Director of the Army National Cemeteries Program (ANCP) to manage Arlington and requiring changes to address the deficiencies and improve cemetery operations. In response to Public Law 111-339, GAO assessed several areas, including (1) actions taken to improve contract management and oversight, (2) the Army's efforts to address identified management deficiencies and provide information and assistance to families regarding efforts to detect and correct burial errors, and (3) factors affecting the feasibility and advisability of transferring jurisdiction for the Army's national cemeteries to the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). The information in this testimony summarizes GAO's recent reports on Arlington contracting ([GAO-12-99](#)) and management ([GAO-12-105](#)). These reports are based on, among other things, analyzing guidance, policies, plans, contract files, and other documentation from the Army, Arlington, and other organizations and interviews with Army and VA officials.

What GAO Recommends

In the reports, GAO made several recommendations to help Arlington sustain progress made to date.

View [GAO-12-374T](#). For more information, contact Brian Lepore at (202) 512-4523 or leporeb@gao.gov and Belva Martin at (202) 512-4841 or martinb@gao.gov.

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ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY

Actions Taken and Steps Remaining to Address Contracting and Management Challenges

What GAO Found

GAO identified 56 contracts and task orders that were active during fiscal year 2010 and the first three quarters of fiscal year 2011 under which contracting offices obligated roughly \$35.2 million on Arlington's behalf. These contracts supported cemetery operations, construction and facility maintenance, and new efforts to enhance information technology systems for the automation of burial operations. The Army has taken a number of steps since June 2010 at different levels to provide for more effective management and oversight of contracts, establishing new support relationships, formalizing policies and procedures, and increasing the use of dedicated contracting staff to manage and improve its acquisition processes. However, GAO found that ANCP does not maintain complete data on its contracts, responsibilities for contracting support are not yet fully defined, and dedicated contract staffing arrangements still need to be determined. The success of Arlington's acquisition outcomes will depend on continued management focus from ANCP and its contracting partners to ensure sustained attention to contract management and institutionalize progress made to date. GAO made three recommendations to continue improvements in contract management. The Department of Defense (DOD) partially concurred and noted actions in progress to address these areas.

The Army has taken positive steps and implemented improvements to address other management deficiencies and to provide information and assistance to families. It has implemented improvements across a broad range of areas at Arlington, including developing procedures for ensuring accountability over remains and improving its capability to respond to the public and to families' inquiries. Nevertheless, the Army has remaining management challenges in several areas—managing information technology investments, updating workforce plans, developing an organizational assessment program, coordinating with key partners, developing a strategic plan, and developing guidance for providing assistance to families. GAO made six recommendations to help address these areas. DOD concurred or partially concurred and has begun to take some corrective actions.

A transfer of jurisdiction for the Army's two national cemeteries to VA is feasible based on historical precedent for the national cemeteries and examples of other reorganization efforts in the federal government. However, several factors may affect the advisability of making such a change, including the potential costs and benefits, potential transition challenges, and the potential effect on Arlington's unique characteristics. In addition, given that the Army has taken steps to address deficiencies at Arlington and has improved its management, it may be premature to move forward with a change in jurisdiction, particularly if other options for improvement exist that entail less disruption. GAO identified opportunities for enhancing collaboration between the Army and VA that could leverage their strengths and potentially lead to improvements at all national cemeteries. GAO recommended that the Army and VA develop a mechanism to formalize collaboration between these organizations. DOD and VA concurred with this recommendation.