

Why GAO Did This Study

Following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the FBI established counterterrorism as its top investigative priority. Since 2001, the FBI has hired thousands of additional staff, increasing its total onboard workforce by 38 percent. In particular, the FBI has increased both the size and the role of its headquarters CTD that is located in Washington, D.C. In 2005, the FBI reported that nearly 40 percent of staff positions in certain parts of CTD were vacant, raising concerns about the FBI's ability to fulfill its most important mission. As requested, GAO reviewed FBI CTD vacancies. Specifically, this report discusses (1) the extent to which counterterrorism vacancies existed at FBI HQ since 2005 and the reasons for the vacancies and (2) the impact of the strategies implemented by the FBI to address these vacancies. GAO obtained data on CTD vacancies from fiscal years 2005 through 2011 as well as strategies the FBI used to address vacancies and their associated costs. GAO also interviewed FBI human resources and counterterrorism officials regarding vacancies and the FBI's steps to address them. This report is an unclassified version of a classified report GAO issued in February 2012.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends the FBI establish criteria, time frames, and other factors for its evaluation of the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of HSI to determine whether it is the most effective strategy for reducing vacancies. The FBI concurred with this recommendation.

View [GAO-12-533](#) or key components. For more information, contact David C. Maurer at (202) 512-9627 or maurerd@gao.gov.

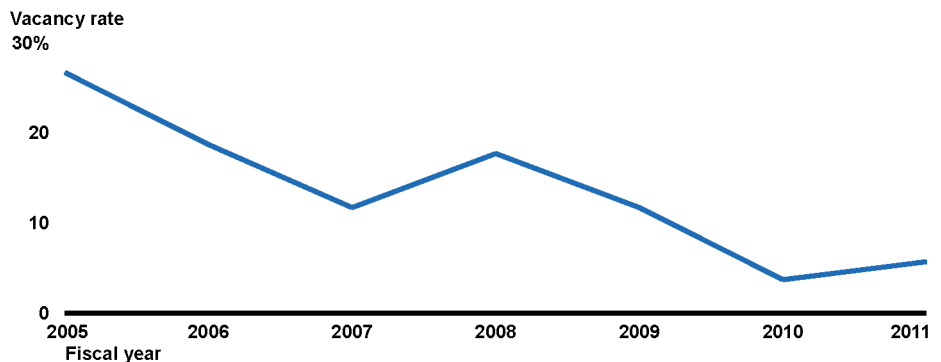
FBI COUNTERTERRORISM

Vacancies Have Declined, but FBI Has Not Assessed the Long-Term Sustainability of Its Strategy for Addressing Vacancies

What GAO Found

From fiscal years 2005 through 2011, the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) human capital strategies contributed to reductions in the vacancy rate for all positions in the Counterterrorism Division (CTD) from 26 percent to 6 percent (shown in figure below). Most vacancies were caused by transfers to other parts of the FBI. While overall vacancies declined, trends in vacancies varied by position. For example, vacancies for special agents and professional staff generally decreased each year while vacancies for intelligence analysts varied during the same time period.

Vacancy Rate for All CTD Positions from Fiscal Years 2005 through 2011



Source: GAO analysis of FBI data.

The FBI developed the Headquarters Staffing Initiative (HSI) in 2005 to reduce special agent vacancies in CTD and other headquarters (HQ) divisions, and primarily used workforce flexibilities, such as recruitment incentives, and targeted recruitment to reduce vacancies for intelligence analysts and professional staff. Overall, FBI officials reported that these strategies have been effective in reducing vacancies. Specifically, HSI included two primary strategies to reduce vacancies: (1) allowing special agents to come to HQ on 18-month temporary duty assignments instead of permanent transfers and (2) providing relocation incentives to special agents to permanently transfer to HQ. Since 2006, GAO estimates that the FBI has spent \$50 million to staff CTD with special agents under HSI. According to the FBI, HSI is the primary reason agent vacancies in CTD were reduced. In addition, FBI officials said HSI yielded other benefits. For example, officials from all sections within CTD stated that HSI helped to build a cadre of experienced counterterrorism agents both within CTD and in field offices. HSI has reduced vacancies, but a 2005 FBI working group report noted that while HSI may be effective in the short term, a long-term solution would require a more thorough analysis. FBI officials reported that they are planning an evaluation of HSI; however, they have not established criteria, time frames, and other factors of the evaluation. By defining these elements, the FBI could better ensure that the evaluation of HSI will produce accurate and relevant findings that can inform the long-term staffing strategy for agents in CTD and other HQ programs.