

Highlights of [GAO-12-568](#), a report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

## Why GAO Did This Study

In July 2010, the president signed Executive Order 13548 committing the federal government to become a model employer of individuals with disabilities and assigned primary oversight responsibilities to OPM and Labor. According to OPM, the federal government is not on track to meet the goals of the executive order, which committed the federal government to hire 100,000 workers with disabilities over the next 5 years. GAO was asked to examine the efforts that (1) OPM and Labor have made in overseeing federal efforts to implement the executive order; and (2) selected agencies have taken to implement the executive order and to adopt leading practices for hiring and retaining employees with disabilities. To conduct this work, GAO reviewed relevant agency documents and interviewed appropriate agency officials. GAO conducted case studies at Education, SSA, VA, and OMB.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that OPM:

- (1) incorporate information about plan deficiencies into its required regular reporting to the president on implementing the executive order and inform agencies about this process;
- (2) expedite the development of the mandatory training programs required by the executive order; and
- (3) assess the accuracy of the data used to measure progress toward the executive order's goals and, if needed, explore options for improving its ability to measure the population of federal employees with disabilities, including strategies for encouraging employees to voluntarily disclose disability status.

OPM agreed with GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-12-568](#). For more information, contact Yvonne D. Jones at (202) 512-2717 or [JonesY@gao.gov](mailto:JonesY@gao.gov); or Daniel Bertoni at (202) 512-7215 or [BertoniD@gao.gov](mailto:BertoniD@gao.gov).

## DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT

### Further Action Needed to Oversee Efforts to Meet Federal Government Hiring Goals

## What GAO Found

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) and the Department of Labor (Labor) have taken steps to implement the executive order and help agencies recruit, hire, and retain more employees with disabilities. OPM provided guidance to help agencies develop disability hiring plans and reviewed the 66 plans submitted. OPM identified deficiencies in most of the plans. For example, though 40 of 66 agencies included a process for increasing the use of a special hiring authority to increase the hiring of people with disabilities, 59 agencies did not meet all of OPM's review criteria, and 32 agencies had not addressed plan deficiencies as of April 2012. In response to executive order reporting requirements, OPM officials said they had briefed the White House on issues related to implementation, but they did not provide information on deficiencies in all plans. While the order does not specify what information these reports should include beyond addressing progress, providing information on deficiencies would enable the White House to hold agencies accountable. OPM is still developing the mandatory training programs for officials on the employment of individuals with disabilities, as required by the executive order. Several elective training efforts exist to help agencies hire and retain employees with disabilities, but agency officials said that more information would help them better use available tools. To track and measure progress towards meeting the executive order's goals, OPM relies on employees to voluntarily disclose a disability. Yet, agency officials, including OPM's, are concerned about the quality of the data. For example, agency officials noted that people may not disclose their disability due to concerns about how the information may be used. Without quality data, agencies may be challenged to effectively implement and assess the impact of their disability hiring plans.

The Department of Education (Education), Social Security Administration (SSA), Office of Management and Budget (OMB), and Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) submitted disability hiring plans, and have taken steps to implement leading practices for increasing employment of individuals with disabilities, such as demonstrating top leadership commitment. The executive order provided SSA, VA, and Education an opportunity to further develop existing written plans. However, officials at these agencies cited funding constraints as a potential obstacle to hiring more employees with disabilities. In terms of leading practices, all four agencies have communicated their commitment to hiring and retaining individuals with disabilities and coordinated within or across other agencies to improve their recruitment and retention efforts. For example, each agency has a single point of contact to help ensure that employees with disabilities have access to information that is comparable to that provided to those without disabilities, and for overseeing activities related to hiring and retaining employees with disabilities. In addition, VA holds senior managers accountable for meeting hiring goals by including targets in their contracts. Each agency requires training for managers and supervisors on procedures for hiring individuals with disabilities, and VA further requires that all employees receive training on the legal rights of individuals with disabilities. Education, SSA, and VA rely on centralized funding accounts to pay for reasonable accommodations.