

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-24-106052](#), a report to Subcommittee on Government Operations and Border Management, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

TSA employs almost 50,000 TSOs who screen passengers and their baggage at U.S. airports. TSA employees' engagement has historically ranked among the lowest within the Department of Homeland Security and across the federal government.

GAO was asked to review the factors that affect TSO engagement and TSA's actions to improve it. This report examines (1) the key drivers that affect engagement and (2) the extent to which TSA has taken actions to address them.

GAO analyzed the Office of Personnel Management's Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey results from 2020 through 2023, reviewed agency guidance and documentation on TSA's actions to improve engagement, and interviewed human capital officials. GAO interviewed a nongeneralizable sample of TSOs, their supervisors, and senior leaders at five airports selected to capture variation in levels of employee engagement. GAO also interviewed five employee groups, including the union that represents TSOs.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making nine recommendations, including that TSA analyze the root causes of key drivers of low TSO engagement, such as opportunities for career development and work-life balance, and identify and implement actions to address them. DHS concurred with the recommendations.

View [GAO-24-106052](#). For more information, contact Tina Won Sherman at (202) 512-8461 or Shermant@gao.gov.

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AVIATION SECURITY

Transportation Security Administration Could Further Improve Officer Engagement

What GAO Found

Leadership of the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) has identified the need to improve employee engagement—their sense of purpose in their job—as central to the agency's security mission. According to the Office of Personnel Management, engaged employees are more innovative, productive, and committed in their jobs, and thus less likely to leave. GAO found that five key drivers affect the engagement of TSA's Transportation Security Officers (TSO), who comprise the majority of TSA employees.



Source: GAO analysis of Transportation Security Administration and Office of Personnel Management information; Icons-Studio/stock.adobe.com. | GAO-24-106052

TSA has taken actions to address all five key drivers. However, challenges related to each persist. For example, to address TSO concerns with managing and recognizing performance, TSA began requiring supervisors to take a 1-hour performance management course in 2018. In 2021, it set up two programs to reward top performance. However, these actions did not fully address the root causes of TSO dissatisfaction—namely, inconsistent management of TSOs' performance. By identifying and implementing actions that fully address the root causes of the driver, TSA will be better able to improve engagement. Further, TSA has not identified root causes of TSO dissatisfaction for three other drivers—career development, work-life balance, and communication. Without doing so, TSA will have difficulty implementing effective corrective actions that address the specific challenges for each of the drivers.

Transportation Security Officers Gather for a Shift Briefing



Source: GAO. | GAO-24-106052

For the final driver—demonstrating responsiveness to input—TSA has solicited TSO input on the root causes of low engagement at airports through a survey and other initiatives. However, TSA has not tracked follow-through on these initiatives. By tracking and monitoring follow-through on planned steps, TSA would be better able to ensure implementation and realize the desired effect of improving TSO engagement.