

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-24-107162](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, Committee on Natural Resources, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Federal agencies use telework to help accomplish their missions and maintain operations. In March 2020, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) instructed agencies to maximize the use of telework to allow federal employees to remain safe while working from alternative locations and maintaining mission critical workforce needs. Agencies have continued to adapt their operating postures since the onset of the pandemic. These adaptations vary widely in response to federal agency mission areas.

In April 2023, OMB instructed federal agencies, including Interior, to increase meaningful in-person work—particularly at agency headquarters—while still using flexible operational policies such as telework. As Interior and other agencies continue to adapt to the changing work environment, it is important to understand agencies' plans and the extent to which they leverage key practices for telework.

This statement discusses several previously issued reports that have highlighted (1) the potential benefits of telework, (2) the challenges of telework, and (3) leading telework practices agencies should follow as they continue to adapt their operating postures. GAO reviewed previously issued reports and testimony on federal telework at Interior and other federal agencies as well as reports and recommendations on Interior.

GAO has ongoing work reviewing the implications of telework use at federal agencies. This statement reflects some of the recent policies and guidance issued by OMB and the Office of Personnel Management reviewed as part of that work.

View [GAO-24-107162](#). For more information, contact Dawn G. Locke at (202) 512-6806 or LockeD@gao.gov.

January 18, 2024

FEDERAL TELEWORK

Interior Can Benefit from Strategic Workforce Planning and Following Key Practices

What GAO Found

Telework offers benefits to federal agencies as well as to the federal workforce. These benefits include improving recruitment and retention of employees, reducing the need for costly office space, and an opportunity to better balance work and family demands. In addition, telework is a tool that agencies can use to help accomplish their missions during periods of disruption. Federal human capital officers have also identified telework as a workforce flexibility tool that can help address skills gaps by helping attract, recruit, and retain the best possible workforce.

GAO initially designated [strategic human capital management](#) as a government-wide high-risk area in 2001. The Department of the Interior (Interior) faces challenges in meeting its mission due to skills gaps identified in GAO's previous work. GAO's recommendations to Interior include the need for strategic workforce planning.

Telework-related challenges identified in GAO's prior work include measuring and shedding underutilized federal space; addressing information technology issues such as equipment shortages and limited network capacity; and obtaining reliable telework data. Federal agencies have long struggled to determine how much office space they need to fulfill their missions. Retaining excess and underutilized space is one of the main reasons that [federal real property management](#) has remained on GAO's High-Risk List since 2003. GAO found that agency officials continue to identify challenges to increasing space utilization, including a lack of benchmarks for full utilization that accounts for increased telework.

GAO previously identified key practices federal agencies should implement to help ensure successful telework programs.

- **Program planning.** Agencies are required to have a telework managing officer. They also need to establish measurable telework program goals.
- **Telework policies.** Agencies can help ensure their workforces are telework ready by establishing telework policies and guidance. To ensure that teleworkers are approved on an equitable basis, agencies should establish eligibility criteria, such as suitability of tasks and employee performance. Agencies should also have telework agreements for use between teleworkers and their managers.
- **Performance management.** Agencies should ensure that the same performance standards are used to evaluate both teleworkers and nonteleworkers. Agencies should also establish guidelines to minimize adverse impacts that telework can have on nonteleworkers.
- **Managerial support.** For telework programs to be successful, agencies need support from top management. They also need to address managerial resistance to telework.
- **Training and publicizing.** Telework training helps agencies ensure a common understanding of the program.
- **Technology.** Agencies need to make sure teleworkers have the right technology to successfully perform their duties. To that end, agencies should assess teleworker and organization technology needs, provide technical support to teleworkers, and address access and security issues.
- **Program evaluation.** Agencies should develop program evaluation tools and use such tools to identify problems or issues. Agencies can then use this information to make any needed adjustments to their programs.