

GAO@100 Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-22-103854](#), a report to the Committee on Armed Services, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

DOE's federal acquisition workforce is responsible for managing risks throughout the contracting, or acquisition, process. GAO designated DOE contract and project management as a high-risk area because of DOE's record of inadequate contract management.

Senate Report No. 116-48 accompanying the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020 includes a provision for GAO to review issues affecting DOE's acquisition workforce. This report examines (1) the positions included in DOE's acquisition workforce and the extent to which this workforce receives acquisition-related training and (2) the extent to which DOE has implemented leading practices for effective strategic planning for its acquisition workforce.

GAO's review included the Office of Science, EM, and NNSA, which represented over 75 percent of DOE obligations for contracts in fiscal year 2019. GAO reviewed regulations, policies, and workforce planning documents; interviewed officials; and compared information to leading practices on workforce planning.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making four recommendations, including that DOE review criteria for inclusion in the Acquisition Career Management Program and identify gaps in skills and competencies for staff with acquisition responsibilities.

DOE concurred with the four recommendations.

View [GAO-22-103854](#). For more information, contact Allison B. Bawden at (202) 512-3841 or bawdena@gao.gov.

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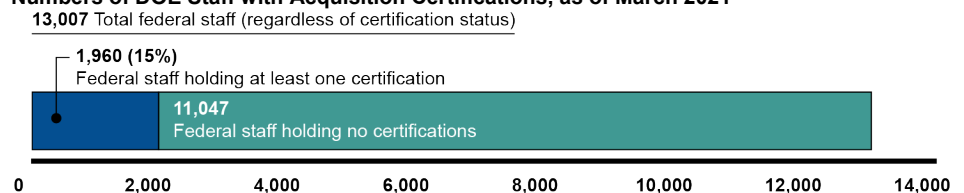
DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY

Improvements Needed to Strengthen Strategic Planning for the Acquisition Workforce

What GAO Found

The Department of Energy (DOE) is one of the largest civilian contracting agencies in the federal government, with about 80 percent of its annual obligations for contracts. Staff in most federal positions in DOE are involved in the acquisition process, according to officials from offices included in GAO's review—the Office of Science, the Office of Environmental Management (EM), and the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA). Some of these staff, such as contracting officers, hold federal or DOE acquisition certifications. DOE generally requires acquisition-related training only for certified staff—which represent about 15 percent of DOE's workforce (see figure)—and maintains training requirements for only these staff through the agency's Acquisition Career Management Program.

Numbers of DOE Staff with Acquisition Certifications, as of March 2021



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Energy (DOE) data. | [GAO-22-103854](#)

DOE generally does not require acquisition-related training for noncertified staff, many of whom may play a critical role in DOE's acquisition process. Office of Federal Procurement Policy guidance states that agencies should consider the functions performed by staff members, such as requirements development by a technical expert, and include any significant acquisition-related positions in their acquisition training programs. By reviewing the criteria for inclusion in its Acquisition Career Management Program and developing training requirements for noncertified staff that meet these criteria, DOE can better ensure it has the capacity to oversee its contracts.

The three DOE offices included in GAO's review have each implemented two of the five leading practices for effective strategic planning for their acquisition workforces, and have partially implemented the remaining three practices. For example, these offices have taken some steps to identify workforce need, but have not fully identified skill and competency gaps—including types and numbers of positions required to close gaps—for their acquisition workforces, as recommended by leading practices.

Further, senior DOE and NNSA officials have raised concerns that they do not have enough staff or staff with the right skills in the acquisition workforce to properly oversee contracts. However, NNSA has conducted limited evaluations of gaps in skills and competencies for some positions in its acquisition workforce, and the other offices in GAO's review have not conducted such analyses. With a more complete and thorough understanding of skill and competency gaps for its acquisition workforce, DOE can improve the information it has available to develop its budget and other strategies to build a workforce with the right skills and of the right size to address the agency's long-standing issues with contract management.