



Highlights of [GAO-04-544](#), a report to congressional requesters

TRANSPORTATION SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

High-Level Attention Needed to Strengthen Acquisition Function

Why GAO Did This Study

The Transportation Security Administration (TSA), within the Department of Homeland Security, was established to secure the nation's transportation systems, beginning with commercial airports. To meet its mission, TSA has awarded over \$8.5 billion in contracts since its creation in 2001. Spending on contracts accounted for 48 percent of TSA's fiscal year 2003 budget.

Because of TSA's reliance on contracts to carry out its mission, its acquisition infrastructure—including oversight, policies and processes, acquisition workforce, and information about its acquisitions—is critical. GAO was asked to review TSA's acquisition infrastructure to assess how well TSA is positioned to carry out its acquisition function.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is recommending that the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security direct the Administrator of TSA to elevate the Office of Acquisition, develop adequate internal controls and performance measures to ensure effective policies and processes, and assess its current acquisition workforce and proposed knowledge management systems.

In commenting on a draft of this report, the Department of Homeland Security generally concurred with this report and its recommendations and provided additional information.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-544.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact William T. Woods, (202) 512-8214, woodsw@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

Since its inception, TSA has been focused on meeting an urgent mandate to deploy more than 55,000 airport passenger and baggage screening personnel and equipment to secure the nation's airways. To do so, it created basic organizational and acquisition infrastructures. However, our review of TSA's acquisition function and inspector general reports identified a number of challenges in each of the four areas we assessed.

- *Organizational alignment and leadership:* TSA's Office of Acquisition is at an organizational level too low to oversee the acquisition process, coordinate acquisition activities, and enforce acquisition policies effectively. The position of the office hinders its ability to help ensure that TSA follows acquisition processes that enable the agency to get the best value on goods and services.
- *Policies and processes:* TSA's acquisition policies and processes emphasize personal accountability, good judgment, justifiable business decisions, and integrated acquisition teams. However, effective implementation of TSA's policies and processes has been hindered by several factors. For example, TSA has not effectively communicated its acquisition policies throughout the agency. TSA also lacks internal controls to identify and address implementation issues and performance measures to determine whether acquisition policies are achieving desired results.
- *Human capital:* TSA risks an imbalance in the size and capabilities of its acquisition workforce that could diminish the performance of the acquisition function throughout the agency. TSA's Office of Acquisition worked closely with the Department of Homeland Security to develop and begin implementing an acquisition workforce plan. However, TSA's Human Resource Office, which is responsible for recruiting and hiring the acquisition workforce agencywide, did not participate in developing the acquisition workforce plan. Without input from the Human Resources Office, it is not clear that the workforce plan can be effectively implemented throughout the agency. In addition, the Office of Acquisition reports that it is having difficulty attracting, developing, and retaining a workforce with the acquisition knowledge and skills required to accomplish TSA's mission.
- *Knowledge and information management:* While TSA is participating in the Department of Homeland Security's efforts to develop requirements for an enterprisewide solution, TSA does not currently have the strategic information needed to support effective acquisition management decisions. To manage on a day-to-day basis, program and acquisition managers are relying on data derived from informal, ad-hoc systems. TSA is in the process of adopting the Coast Guard's procurement and financial systems as interim solutions until the Department of Homeland Security implements a departmentwide system. However, near-term improvement in acquisition outcomes will be difficult because TSA does not have the data needed to analyze and improve its acquisition processes.