INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Training Can Be Enhanced by Greater Use of Leading Practices

Why GAO Did This Study

Effective training of information technology (IT) staff, as called for in the E-Government (E-Gov) Act of 2002, is essential to developing and retaining a qualified workforce. In an earlier report (GAO-03-390), we identified 22 leading practices, grouped into 5 key training management processes, used by private-sector companies to implement effective IT training. These practices suggest approaches that government agencies could consider.

To assess IT training in the federal government, including its use of leading practices, we were asked to determine, among other things, to what extent federal agencies use our leading practices, the major obstacles in providing effective IT training and how agencies address them, and the progress the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) is making in issuing policies and performing evaluations to encourage agencies to provide effective IT training.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making recommendations to OPM, including that it issue IT training policies and evaluate implementation of the training provisions of the E-Gov Act.

In response to a draft of this report, OPM disagreed with the conclusions on its role and efforts with respect to federal IT training. Most other agencies generally agreed with the report or had no comment.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-791.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Dave Powner at (202) 512-9286 or pownerd@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

Although federal agencies differ widely in how much IT training they provide, their use of the 22 leading IT training practices that we identified was generally not extensive. Of these practices, only 5 were in use to a great or very great extent in a majority of agencies (see figure below). In particular, of the three practices we identified in the area of evaluating training, none was widely used. For example, for the practice of collecting information on how job performance is affected by training, only three agencies reported use to a great or very great extent.

The most commonly cited obstacles to effective IT training were funding and the time training takes away from work. To address these obstacles, agencies are looking at ways to reduce training time and costs—for example, by greater use of e-learning.

OPM has made limited progress in issuing policies or performing evaluations regarding IT training. The E-Gov Act sets requirements for agency IT training programs. To provide oversight, it requires OPM to issue policies to promote the development of performance standards for training, and to evaluate agency implementation of the act's IT training provisions. These policies are particularly important in view of the lack of extensive agency use of the evaluation practices we identified. OPM has begun drafting guidance, but it has not issued policies or evaluated agency implementation of the act. Until policies are issued and progress is measured, oversight of federal IT training will continue to fall short of what the act calls for.

Percentage of Agencies Using Leading Practices Extensively
Percent
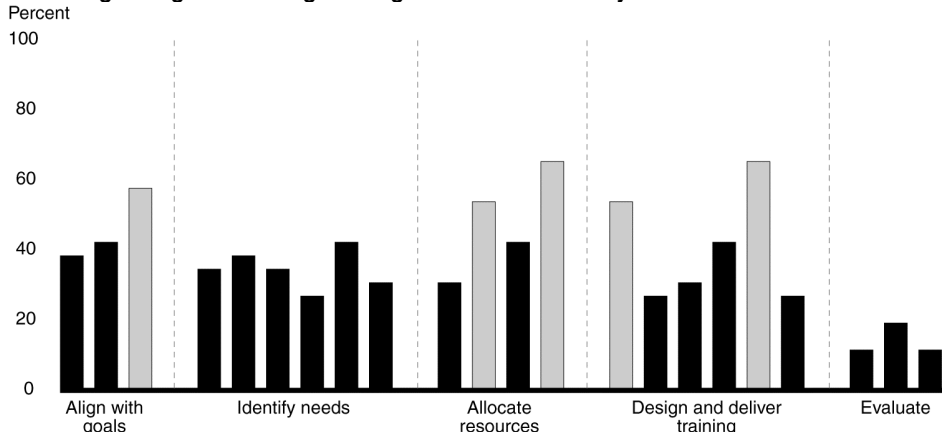
Source: GAO.

Practices not used to a great extent by a majority of agencies

Practices used to a great or very great extent by a majority of agencies