



Highlights of [GAO-04-400](#), a report to the Subcommittee on Legislative Branch, Committee on Appropriations, U.S. Senate and Subcommittee on Legislative, Committee on Appropriations, U.S. House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The Consolidated Appropriations Resolution of 2003 Conference Report mandated that GAO review the Office of Compliance (OOC), an independent legislative branch agency created by the Congressional Accountability Act of 1995 (CAA). OOC, a 15-person office with about \$2 million in expenditures during fiscal year 2003, administers and enforces various CAA provisions related to fair employment and occupational safety and health among certain legislative branch agencies. OOC's current Executive Director has been in place since April 2001 and its General Counsel joined the Office in June 2003. The mandate directed GAO to assess OOC's overall effectiveness and efficiency and to make recommendations, as appropriate.

What GAO Recommends

GAO makes several recommendations to strengthen OOC's strategic planning process, facilitate communication between OOC and its congressional and legislative branch stakeholders, and build an enhanced control management environment within OOC. This report also contains matters for congressional consideration regarding statutory changes to the CAA to help maintain institutional continuity for OOC.

In a joint response, OOC's Board of Directors, Executive Director, and General Counsel all generally agreed with our recommendations and stated that OOC is making progress toward their adoption and implementation.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-400.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact J. Christopher Mihm at (202) 512-6806 or mihmj@gao.gov.

OFFICE OF COMPLIANCE

Status of Management Control Efforts To Improve Effectiveness

What GAO Found

OOC is in the early stages of a concerted and vitally needed effort to improve and strengthen management control across the Office and to carry out its mission more effectively and efficiently while safeguarding its institutional independence. OOC's success in completing this important effort depends upon making significant progress on a number of key management control areas:

Sharpen focus on results. OOC's current strategic planning initiative is beginning to address the more fundamental question of the Office's effectiveness rather than the Office's traditional focus on activities and outputs, such as the number of cases processed and inspections conducted. OOC's planning initiative can also provide a vehicle for engaging and consulting with key congressional and other stakeholders on OOC's purposes, how those purposes will be achieved, how progress will be assessed, and for sustaining feedback on what progress is being made and what additional improvement opportunities exist. The planning initiative is still very much a work in progress and continued efforts are needed in a number of key areas including developing results-oriented performance measures.

Ensuring an effective program structure. As OOC shifts its focus from outputs and activities to results, it must put in place a more effective program structure that includes new ways of doing business. OOC has taken a number of actions to administer the CAA, such as managing a dispute resolution process and conducting investigations and inspections to ensure compliance with safety and health standards. However, OOC is not fully in compliance with the CAA's requirement concerning biennial safety and health inspections of legislative branch agency facilities. OOC also needs to expand on recent efforts to develop programs that are based on collaboration with legislative branch agencies.

Building effective communication emphasizing outreach and coordination. OOC's congressional and other stakeholders whom we interviewed said that OOC recently has used a more collaborative approach rather than the "gotcha" approach of the past. On the other hand, several agency officials said that current interactions with OOC could be improved. To facilitate more effective communication, OOC should establish congressional and agency protocols to document agreements between the Congress, legislative branch agencies, and OOC on what can be expected as OOC carries out its work.

Creating and sustaining an enhanced management control environment.

Since its creation, OOC has operated without having any formal performance management system for its Executive Director and General Counsel. OOC should establish an enhanced management control environment and strengthen accountability by requiring performance agreements between the Board and both the Executive Director and General Counsel, as well as expanding and improving on OOC's performance management system for all staff. Another important challenge concerns the lack of institutional continuity that may occur due to statutory term limits on OOC's leadership positions. To prevent the loss of critical organizational knowledge, the Congress should consider changing the term limits contained in the CAA.