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Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-06-167](#), a report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

The Office of the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR) has a unique role in coordinating trade policy, resolving disagreements, and framing issues for presidential decision through an interagency trade policy process. In recent years, USTR's increased workload from numerous new regional and bilateral free trade agreement negotiations and a new round of multilateral negotiations at the World Trade Organization has raised concerns about its human capital strategy.

GAO examined whether USTR is pursuing an effective human capital strategy that supports the ability of its workforce to accomplish its mission. Specifically, GAO (1) reviewed USTR's commitment to strategic human capital leadership and planning and (2) analyzed to what extent USTR has used human capital tools to address its workforce challenges.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the U.S. Trade Representative develop a strategic human capital management system addressing the areas of strategic human capital leadership, planning, recruitment and retention, and performance management. USTR said it shared our general observations and recommendations regarding the critical importance of human capital planning, but believes it is sufficiently performing these functions. Other agencies did not provide comments.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-167.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Loren Yager, 202-512-4347, yagerl@gao.gov.

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

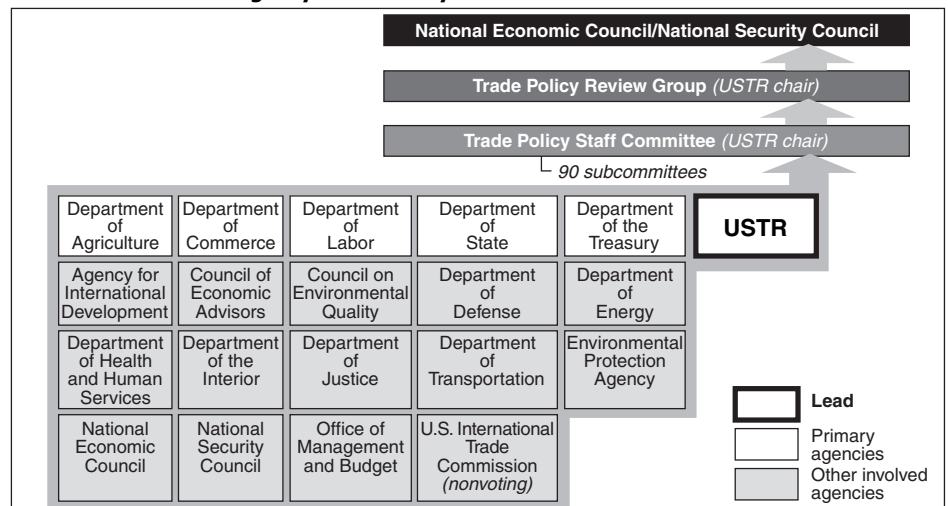
USTR Would Benefit from Greater Use of Strategic Human Capital Management Principles

What GAO Found

USTR could benefit from greater use of strategic human capital management principles in leadership and planning, considering that its small size and interagency trade leadership and coordination role give it a unique responsibility to lead the trade agenda. First, USTR has not sustained the leadership resources for human capital; for example, the top human capital management post has not been filled for over 1½ years. Second, USTR has not undertaken formal strategic human capital planning to mitigate the risks inherent in its dependency—as a “networked organization”—on interagency resources to achieve its mission. Therefore, it does not have a method to account for changes in other agencies’ resources that might impact its ability to achieve its mission. Third, USTR has focused its human capital planning efforts primarily on short-term responses to trade negotiating needs identified in its 2-year budget planning process; it has not conducted ongoing parallel efforts to analyze longer-term workforce needs.

USTR's efforts to address its specific workforce challenges could benefit from greater use of human capital tools. First, USTR could use more of the existing federal human capital flexibilities to better tailor its human capital approaches to organizational needs. Although the agency has used and benefited from some special hiring and pay authorities, such as the use of higher-than-minimum salary offers, it has yet to take advantage of others, such as retention bonuses. Second, while USTR prides itself on being a results-oriented agency, most USTR staff are not subject to agencywide performance expectations linked to organizational goals. While managers have stressed the importance of certain individual skills needed to advance USTR's mission, most staff are held accountable to a range of expectations that vary among offices.

USTR Leads the Interagency Trade Policy Process



Source: GAO, based on USTR information.