

**STATEMENT OF**

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**BEFORE THE**

**COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY**  
**AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS**

**SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT OF GOVERNMENT**  
**MANAGEMENT, THE FEDERAL WORKFORCE, AND**  
**THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

**UNITED STATES SENATE**

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Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Voinovich, and Members of the Subcommittee. My name is Karen Pica and I am the Director of the Federal Acquisition Institute (FAI) at the U.S. General Services Administration (GSA). I am pleased to appear before you today to discuss the activities of the FAI. Created in 1976, FAI has a long and proud history of promoting the development of a strong and agile workforce, the foundation for an effective acquisition system. Under the leadership of the Office of Federal Procurement Policy (OFPP), the Chief Acquisition Officers Council (CAO Council) and a Board of Directors, FAI builds coalitions and partnerships to coalesce the resources agencies need to support a professional acquisition workforce. We leverage expertise in such key organizations as the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) for strategic human capital issues and the Defense Acquisition University (DAU) for training. We lead an interagency working group of Acquisition Career Managers to ensure solutions are shaped by the needs of the Federal community at large.

Our activities to foster a professional acquisition workforce are wide and varied. While comprehensive training is one of our critical functions, we do much more, including the development of competency and skills standards for acquisition personnel and the implementation of career management programs to help agencies recruit and retain top talent.

The Federal acquisition workforce, much like the national and global workforce, is facing challenges associated with demographic shifts, philosophical changes toward work, and expectations of organizations and employees. The disparities among different workforce segments along these lines combined with the want of information available about careers in Federal acquisition bring us together here today.

Statistics regarding the pending retirement of Federal acquisition employees are well known, what is not known is how many of the expected 50 percent actually plan on retiring. OFPP and Federal agencies now have this information based on the recently completed contracting competency survey. For the past few years, the Government has successfully brought in more contracting professionals than we have lost. As a result of the competency survey, we can now analyze in more detail how well we are doing at replacing key skills not just people. Creating more awareness about contracting and acquisition as careers and structured development programs will help attract and retain more talent.

The Acquisition Advisory Panel made some key recommendations regarding acquisition human capital issues such as focus, planning, data management, definition and certification. Legislation recently passed or being considered provides more focus and resources to help the Government meet these challenges.

OFPP leadership has developed a vision and strategic objectives that mature current acquisition workforce efforts and activities aligned with the AAP recommendations.

Today, I would like to highlight a number of our key initiatives and explain how we are making the vision outlined by OFPP Administrator Paul Denett a reality.

**1. Workforce Shaping** – Developing a structured approach using common processes and tools across the Federal acquisition community focused on developing the characteristics of the workforce which are important for meeting current and future needs. Workforce shaping includes developing and managing competencies, strategic human capital planning, collecting and managing appropriate workforce data, and recognizing skill and experience achievements through a standard certification.

a. Developing and Managing Competencies – The foundation of successful recruiting, training, and performance in acquisition depends on identifying the right skills needed for the job, providing training and development opportunities for those skills and hiring and retaining professionals with those skills. FAI has partnered with the Government's leading expert in competency management, the Office of Personnel Management, to develop, update, and assess the competencies of acquisition professionals. Since FAI developed the first set of contracting competencies through an interagency working group in 1985, we have aligned competency management with the recommendations and best practices of the OPM. Recently, FAI and DAU have partnered in developing, managing, and updating competencies for acquisition professionals, with each organization alternating as the lead entity for interagency re-validation of competencies so there is one set of baseline competencies across the Government that can be specialized by agencies as needed.

Currently, standard competencies exist for acquisition workforce professionals in multiple areas, including contracting, acquisition program and project management, contracting officer technical representatives, and architect and engineering professionals. In line with OPM's best practices, FAI will be revalidating the Contracting Officer's Technical Representatives (COTR) competencies in 2008. The contracting competencies were revalidated in 2003 through an FAI- led effort and again in 2007 through a DAU-led effort.

In Spring 2007, OFPP launched a contracting workforce competency survey that achieved a 50 percent response rate from the target audience. To support this initiative, FAI collaborated with the CIO IT workforce committee, adapting their existing IT survey tool to meet the needs of the contracting community. The IT workforce tool had been successfully administered to over 80,000 IT professionals Government-wide on three separate occasions. Starting with this existing tool, we have saved resources, avoided redundancy, and expedited the process.

FAI collaborated with OPM and private sector partners in modifying the tool and developed a communication strategy for reaching acquisition professionals that reduced work requirements for agency management. Fifty agencies ended up using the tool for their acquisition workforces. As a result of this collaboration, OFPP now has a tool that can be easily modified for use in other acquisition career fields. FAI is in the process of modifying the tool to allow agencies to add agency or community specific competencies and also a supervisor endorsement if they so choose. This will provide agencies a more robust competency management capability. More information about this is available at [www.fai.gov](http://www.fai.gov).

Over one million data points were collected via the contracting workforce competency survey. As agencies analyze this data, FAI continues to provide support and forums for sharing information that reduce redundant efforts and share best practices among agencies. The survey also provides details on areas for improvement Government-wide, and FAI is currently analyzing existing core training for contracting professionals against the required competencies to ensure coverage and develop solutions for identified gaps.

b. Strategic Human Capital Planning – Strategic planning is essential for building and retaining a workforce capable of supporting an agency’s mission. Successful planning is needed to ensure adequate personnel resources are in place, training is available, and organizational structures match agency needs. FAI supports agency human capital planning in a variety of ways including development of templates that agencies can use, leading workforce forums to share best practices, supporting OFPP in representing the needs of the acquisition workforce community with OPM and key partners, and answering the call when agencies need help, advice, or recommendations in particular aspects of acquisition workforce planning.

Drawing from OPM’s best practices, and input from multiple agencies, in spring 2007 FAI provided the agencies with a template for an acquisition workforce strategic human capital plan. The template contains information for designing a broadly defined plan as well as a very detailed, operational plan depending on the agency’s needs and resources. The appendices for the document were developed in support of the OPM skill gap reporting requirements.

The contracting workforce competency survey and the annual demographic report work in concert to provide agencies multiple data points that can be used in building strategic plans for the acquisition workforce. These data points will not provide all the information an agency needs, but they are a good start and can be matured as we receive more information from agencies on what they need. For example, the demographic report provides agencies with information on the workforce eligible for retirement, and the contracting results provide information on when that workforce actually plans on taking retirement and the skills resident in that portion of the workforce. Agencies can now target specific skills for expediting knowledge capture or for recruiting and career

development purposes. FAI is also using this information to support the OFPP initiatives on recruiting and retention Government-wide and for identifying solutions to capture essential knowledge or develop mentoring programs across agencies.

c. Workforce Data Management – Another key to successful planning efforts is accurate data. OFPP Policy Letter 97-01 required agencies to collect and maintain specific data elements on acquisition workforce professionals. In support of the requirement and to avoid redundancy across agencies, FAI developed the Acquisition Career Management Information System (ACMIS) in 1999. FAI has adapted the system to continue to meet the needs of the acquisition workforce as OFPP has matured the vision and requirements for professionals. Currently ACMIS contains information on over 25,000 acquisition professionals across the civilian agencies including 10,000 contract specialists, 7,000 contracting officers (not all GS-1102), 900 program managers, and 11,000 contracting officer technical representatives.

Information in ACMIS is currently used to build future FAI training plans, report education waivers for GS-1102s to OFPP and track the number of certified professionals in accordance with OFPP certification policies. Currently for the contract specialists (GS-1102), 50 percent of agency users are current with three agencies in the process of migrating existing data into ACMIS. When these new migrations are complete by summer 2008, the rate of verified data will reach at least 60 percent. FAI is working with agencies to identify challenges in verifying data and has corrected ACMIS deficiencies to facilitate data verification. We will continue to work with agencies so we can achieve a 95 percent verification rate in 2008.

To reduce redundancy and work load for the acquisition career managers and acquisition professionals, FAI is partnering with OPM to integrate the ACMIS data into the OPM Enterprises Human Resource Integration effort. Under this arrangement, OFPP will retain the flexibility needed to include new data elements and agencies will have the ability to obtain all workforce information, including information specific to each agency's acquisition workforce, from one source. FAI and OPM are working towards a fall 2009 deadline for this effort.

d. Certification Programs – Structured programs to recognize essential skills and knowledge obtained through training, work experience and education are necessary for a Government-wide acquisition system and beneficial to both Government agencies and professionals, as these programs eliminate the need for duplicate training by recognizing a unique standard. Since 2005, OFPP has identified certification requirements for three sets of acquisition professionals, and FAI has supported implementation through developing competency standards, deploying training, supplying standard templates, and creating a mechanism (ACMIS) to capture information.

OFPP aligned the Federal Acquisition Certification in Contracting (FAC-C) of January 2006 with the Defense Acquisition Workforce Improvement Act standards for contracting professionals. FAI has supported implementation through design and dissemination of templates and application materials agencies can use to implement the program for all new warrant holders after January 2007. In January 2008, ACMIS data reports 560 FAC-C holders.

To help agencies increase the number of certified contracting professionals, in addition to providing training classes, FAI will implement a data analysis and consulting process to assist agencies in identifying and certifying eligible professionals in 2008. FAI has also dedicated resources to an automated certification tool that will allow electronic processing of applications once applicable training and experience criteria have been met. This tool will reduce agency workload by linking available electronic information to facilitate the certification process. This tool is modeled after a similar one developed and used by the United States Navy. FAI will be enhancing the tool in the future to align the automated certification process with information obtained from future competency efforts so supervisors can consider application of knowledge gained through training when approving certification.

In developing Federal Acquisition Certification programs for program managers and COTRs, OFPP directed FAI to review existing standards and provide recommendations. FAI led an interagency working group with professionals from 15 agencies, including DoD, through a two-year effort to determine the appropriate program elements, competencies, training, and experience standards that would facilitate a baseline standard for program and project managers across the Government. The group achieved consensus with all participating agencies concurring on the final report and recommendations as forwarded to OFPP.

In April 2007 Mr. Paul Denett, Administrator for the Office of Federal Procurement Policy signed out the Federal Acquisition Certification for Program and Project Managers. As of January 2008, 900 program managers have been identified in ACMIS with 35 currently certified. OFPP also introduced the Federal Acquisition Certification for COTRs in November 2007. Currently there are over 11,000 COTRs identified through ACMIS and as agencies implement the newest certification, ACMIS is ready to capture these data for use in workforce analysis as well.

**2. Talent Supply** – To retain essential knowledge and skills necessary for successful acquisition management, an organized process is needed for attracting new employees at all levels through recruiting and retention strategies, education and diversity alliances, and incentives. FAI is partnering with OPM, Federal agencies, and key non-Government organizations such as the Partnership for Public Service to gather existing resources under one umbrella and create a facilitated environment for increasing awareness and interest in Government contracting as a career of choice and reduce redundant and competing efforts across agencies. This environment respects the unique nature and needs of individual agencies while building a collaborative space that can serve as a unique entry point for those seeking Government careers in acquisition.

OFPP and OPM launched the first phase of the Federal Acquisition Intern Coalition on January 30, 2008. Through an interagency working group that included all agencies with existing intern programs as well as agencies desiring programs, FAI collected information and suggestions on what would constitute an ideal program for acquisition workforce recruitment and retention. FAI presented the recommendations to OFPP and the CAO Council and received funding to initiate the activities in phases.

The first phase includes an Internet presence ([www.fai.gov/careers](http://www.fai.gov/careers)) that serves as the focal point for job seekers, explains what a career in contracting is, what to expect from Federal employment, and what jobs are currently open. The information in this effort was gathered through best practices at OPM, the Partnership for Public Service and focus groups of age appropriate individuals. This one-stop-contracting career shop includes information and points of contact for all agencies having contracting intern programs, a questionnaire to see if a career in contracting is of interest, information on salary and benefits and written testimonials and video clips from current contracting professionals sharing information on how they support their agencies.

The information provided to agencies includes a listing of potential recruiting events, outreach points of contact for understanding hiring authorities, special program for veterans, and information on diversity organizations. FAI maintains an electronic brochure and fact sheet agencies can tailor with their agency logo or agency specific information. FAI will be developing additional materials and talking points agencies or individuals can use when talking about careers in contracting. One of the goals is to make contracting professionals comfortable sharing their story so each professional can become a recruiter.

The next phases of the program include a shopping list for rotation assignments, workshops on relevant acquisition and career development topics, and certification training through FAI classroom courses.

**3. Career Management** - To facilitate career planning and retention in the Federal acquisition environment, professionals need a structure providing opportunities for interaction with other professionals and tools which allow management of one's career.

FAI supports career management by gathering information from the workforce through interagency working groups, analysis of customer service calls for assistance, discussions on communities or practices, and feedback at FAI events.

Every two months FAI hosts an interagency meeting where acquisition career managers gather to express concerns about what isn't working, what they'd like to see happen, or what is working well. FAI collects this information, provides recommendations to OFPP and the CAO Council and takes action to make improvements. FAI also conducts outreach to education partners and non-Government organizations to leverage existing education, training, and certification programs for the benefit of the Federal acquisition professionals. For example, the OFPP contracting certification is aligned with elements

of the National Contract Management Association certification program and the program management certification is aligned with elements of the Project Management Institute certification.

FAI is leveraging the career path research done by OPM to update current information available to acquisition professionals on career paths and develop new material as needed based on needs existing across multiple generations.

**4. Corporate University** – A Government-wide approach to integrate training and development, capability tracking and mapping, experiential assignments and knowledge transfer is an optimal solution to make resources and information available to support OFPP initiatives in workforce shaping, talent supply, and career management. FAI facilitates relationships and partnerships across existing organizations, providing training to acquisition professionals on a variety of topics, from building 508 compliant requirements to green procurements. The FAI outreach and partnering efforts include experts such as GSA's Center for Acquisition Excellence and 508 Universe, the Defense Acquisition University, and the Treasury Acquisition Institute. As well as the green procurement resources of the Environmental Protection Agency, the Department of Energy, and the Department of Agriculture..

Through the Acquisition Workforce Training Fund provided for under the Services Acquisition Reform Act of 2003 and reauthorized in the National Defense Authorization Act of 2008, FAI provides training opportunities to Federal acquisition professionals through a web of partnerships that include private sector vendors.

FAI uses workforce data, competency analysis information, feedback from agencies, and reviews of audits and reports to identify potential needs for training. Once the need is identified, FAI reviews existing resources available across the Federal spectrum and then determines if partnering on an existing resource is possible or if new opportunities need to be developed. For example, the recent contracting competency survey identified performance-based acquisition, negotiation, and project management as areas in which the workforce both needed and desired training. FAI is providing opportunity for agencies to meet this need through classroom training, workshops and seminars delivered at upcoming conferences, and online material.

In 2007, FAI managed 40,000 training completions through classroom training, online training, conference sessions, and seminars. FAI continues a strong partnership with the Small Business Administration by being the lead organization providing small business training to the Federal Government requirements and contracting community. Currently over 75 percent of those taking FAI small business training are in the DoD, which demonstrates the benefits of the current partnership between FAI and DAU. FAI currently has seven training modules available in small business and will be adding two more in 2008. The new modules are focused on the requirements community and will provide information and tools for designing small business-friendly procurements.



FAI is supporting the CAO Council emergency contracting cadre through a dedicated training class designed to meet the needs of emergency response and recovery professionals under the CAO Council umbrella. This class is a capstone course and supplements training through the Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency. The pilot course was based on an existing DAU course, and the new training will be available next month, March 2008.

**Conclusion:**

FAI continuously analyzes workforce data and reports, agency feedback, and information from our customer to remain current on challenges in the acquisition workforce and how we can provide better support and recommendations to senior leadership. FAI has additional work to do in the areas of recruitment and retention, capturing and sharing existing knowledge in ways that more members of the workforce will be able to access, and supporting agencies' human capital planning.

Under the leadership of OFPP, the Chief Acquisition Officer Council, and GSA, FAI receives input and feedback from all corners of the Federal Government's acquisition community as well as key private and public sector partners. I believe the challenges facing the acquisition workforce are not unique, but mirror larger national and global workforce challenges. The dedicated focus that OFPP, GSA, and the CAO Council are directing to the acquisition workforce and the coalition of Government and private sector organizations with which FAI has built partnerships will benefit the acquisition community. I am optimistic the leadership direction provided to FAI and the partnerships built in support of our mission will provide the recruiting edge we need as a community.