



Highlights of [GAO-09-30](#), a report to congressional requesters

## Why GAO Did This Study

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is one of the largest procurement spending agencies in the federal government. In fiscal year 2007, DHS obligated about \$12 billion for a wide range of goods and services to meet complex mission needs. Like other federal agencies, DHS has faced challenges in building and sustaining a capable workforce to support its acquisitions.

GAO was asked to identify and assess DHS's efforts to build and sustain an effective acquisition workforce and determine the extent to which DHS has planned strategically for the acquisition workforce. To conduct the work, GAO collected and reviewed data and interviewed officials from the Office of the Chief Procurement Officer (CPO), DHS's nine procurement offices, and nine program offices, and reviewed in detail workforce information and data for acquisition support contracts from selected offices.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DHS take several actions to better address acquisition workforce challenges, including: establishing an interim acquisition workforce definition and an implementation plan for current initiatives; developing plans as appropriate to expand current initiatives; establishing a coordinated planning process; and improving acquisition workforce data. DHS generally concurred with these recommendations and noted efforts under way to address them.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-09-30](#). For more information, contact John Hutton at (202)512-4841 or [huttonj@gao.gov](mailto:huttonj@gao.gov).

## DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY

### A Strategic Approach Is Needed to Better Ensure the Acquisition Workforce Can Meet Mission Needs

## What GAO Found

DHS has undertaken several initiatives, mostly focused on contract specialists, to begin addressing acquisition workforce challenges. Initiatives related to recruiting, hiring, and training have made progress. In January 2008, CPO implemented a contract specialist intern program, and 49 contract specialists were hired through this initiative as of September 2008. In addition, CPO developed DHS-specific training for program managers through a training program begun in spring 2008. However, most initiatives related to defining and identifying the acquisition workforce and assessing workforce needs have not yet produced results and in some cases are progressing more slowly than originally projected. CPO is considering expanding some of its recruiting and hiring initiatives to address identified shortages in acquisition-related positions other than contract specialists, but has not determined how it will implement such an expansion. Moreover, DHS generally lacks documented performance goals and implementation steps—such as actions to be taken, needed resources, and milestones—for its current initiatives. Without developing this foundation, DHS will not be in a position to effectively monitor and evaluate implementation of these initiatives.

DHS has not developed a comprehensive strategic acquisition workforce plan to direct its future acquisition workforce efforts and generally lacks several elements key to developing such a plan: a coordinated planning process; a comprehensive acquisition workforce definition; and sufficient data on workforce size and skills, including the use of acquisition support contractors. DHS has not set an overall direction for acquisition workforce planning or fully involved key stakeholders, such as the Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer and component procurement and program offices. However, DHS has recently taken steps that may help to include program office stakeholders in workforce planning. The department's narrow acquisition workforce definition, which includes only a portion of the employees performing acquisition-related functions, further limits the scope of planning. While DHS recognizes the importance of expanding the definition, it has not yet established an interim definition that identifies which positions should be included. DHS also lacks sufficient data to fully assess its acquisition workforce needs, including gaps in the numbers of employees needed or the skills of those employees. Understanding such workforce gaps is key to developing effective strategies to address current and future workforce needs. Further, prior GAO work has found that agencies should develop workforce strategies that include contractors; however, DHS has limited insight into the numbers of contractors supporting its acquisition function or the types of tasks performed. While GAO has previously reported that strategic acquisition workforce planning is not an easy task and can take several years to accomplish, government agencies will not be in a sound position to ensure they have capable acquisition workforces without this planning.