



Highlights of [GAO-04-291](#), a report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, the Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia, Committee on Governmental Affairs, U.S. Senate

## Why GAO Did This Study

Effective training and development programs are an integral part of a learning environment, helping improve federal workforce performance in achieving agency results. Therefore, in this report GAO was asked to identify examples of selected federal agencies' experiences and some of the key lessons they have learned in designing their training and development programs. This work focused on ways that these agencies (1) assessed agency skills gaps and identified training needs, (2) developed strategies and solutions for these training and development needs, and (3) determined methods to evaluate the effectiveness of training and development programs.

GAO worked with five agencies to identify their experiences and lessons learned: the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE), Department of Defense; Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), Department of the Interior (Interior); Internal Revenue Service (IRS), Department of the Treasury; the Office of Personnel Management (OPM); and Veterans Health Administration (VHA), Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). Agency officials provided information during interviews and furnished supporting documentation for analysis and review.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-291](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-291).

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact George Stalcup at (202) 512-6806 or [stalcupg@gao.gov](mailto:stalcupg@gao.gov).

## HUMAN CAPITAL

# Selected Agencies' Experiences and Lessons Learned in Designing Training and Development Programs

## What GAO Found

GAO identified important lessons learned from five federal agencies' experiences in designing training and development programs for their employees that could be useful to other agencies facing similar challenges. These lessons learned are related to the following three areas.

### Assessing Agency Skill Requirements and Identifying Training Needs

The agencies used a variety of approaches to assess current and future skill requirements, such as implementing workforce planning models and conducting knowledge and skills inventories. Generally, the agencies are transitioning to more comprehensive approaches. One of the lessons learned was to involve stakeholders and benchmark with others to identify critical skills and competencies and related training needs. For example, IRS officials believed they needed a leadership competency model directly based on the work of their agency's business units. To develop a comprehensive model, they interviewed top IRS leaders and benchmarked with leading practices in the public and private sector.

### Developing Strategies and Solutions for Training Needs

The agencies considered a mixture of delivery mechanisms, as well as potential sources for training and development opportunities. However, projecting costs and benefits of proposed training and development programs presented challenges for them. The agencies usually developed broad information on anticipated benefits and expected costs of potential investments, although often without tying benefits to specific performance improvements or considering all costs. One of the lessons learned was to establish mechanisms to avoid duplication or inconsistencies. Education Service Representatives in each regional VHA network, for example, coordinate training and development programs with headquarters—sharing information about successful practices and identifying areas where coordination is needed.

### Determining Methods for Evaluating Training Programs

Overall, the agencies relied primarily on participants' end-of-course evaluations, but they are beginning to use more comprehensive evaluation approaches, including limited use of return-on-investment analysis techniques. One of the lessons learned is to plan for the use of multiple data types and sources in order to attain a balanced assessment once the course is implemented. For example, USACE's training center incorporated pre- and post-tests on over 90 percent of its courses, as well as approaches to collect participants' and course managers' feedback, as part of the design.

Four of the five agencies provided comments on a draft of this report. Interior and VA said that they generally agreed with the report's findings regarding their respective agencies. IRS and OPM said that they appreciated the opportunity to be included in the report and to share information on training activities. USACE provided no comments on the draft report.