



Highlights of [GAO-03-450](#), a report to congressional requesters.

HUMAN CAPITAL

Opportunities to Improve Executive Agencies' Hiring Processes

Why GAO Did This Study

Improving the federal hiring process is critical, as the number of new hires is expected to increase substantially. Federal agencies are responsible for their hiring processes, but must generally comply with applicable Office of Personnel Management (OPM) rules and regulations.

Congressional requesters asked GAO to identify federal hiring obstacles, provide examples of innovative hiring practices, and identify opportunities for improvement. To address these issues, GAO interviewed the human resources directors in 24 largest departments and agencies, analyzed the hiring practices of five federal executive branch agencies, and reviewed OPM's role in the hiring process.

What GAO Recommends

As a part of its ongoing efforts to improve federal human capital management, OPM needs to reform the classification process, assist agencies in automating their hiring processes, develop and help agencies develop improved hiring assessment tools; and review the effectiveness of selected hiring authorities.

OPM and the agencies we studied provided comments on a draft of this report. OPM generally agreed with the conclusions and recommendations. The report was revised to reflect the agency comments.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-03-450.

To view the full report, 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.

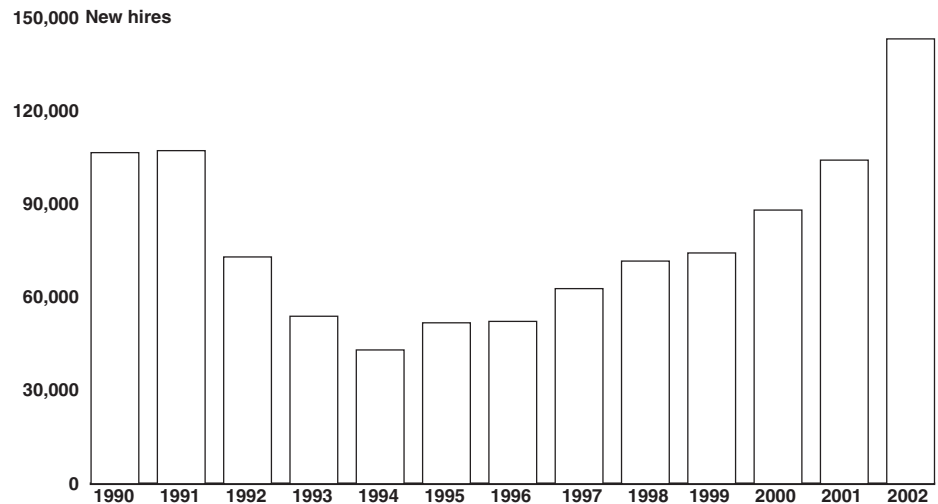
What GAO Found

There is widespread recognition that the current federal hiring process all too often does not meet the needs of agencies in achieving their missions, managers in filling positions with the right talent, and applicants for a timely, efficient, transparent, and merit-based process. Numerous studies over the past decade have noted problems with the federal hiring process. Nearly all of the federal human resource directors from the 24 largest federal agencies told us that it takes too long to hire quality employees. According to data compiled by OPM, the estimated time to fill a competitive service position was typically more than 3 months, with some human resources directors citing examples of hiring delays exceeding 6 months. The competitive hiring process is hampered by inefficient or ineffective practices, including defining a vacant job and pay that is bound by narrow federal classification standards, unclear job announcements, the quality of certain applicant assessment tools, time-consuming panels to evaluate applicants, and the "rule of three" that limits selecting managers choice of candidates. Equally important, agencies need to develop their hiring systems using a strategic and results-oriented approach.

GAO studied five agencies that human capital experts identified as having taken steps to improve parts of the hiring process—the U.S. Geological Survey, the Department of the Army, the U.S. Census Bureau, and the Department of Agriculture's Agricultural Research Service and Forest Service. Some of these practices might help agencies across government improve their hiring processes.

OPM recognizes that the federal hiring process needs reform and has a major initiative to study the federal hiring process. OPM's efforts will be most effective to the extent to which they help transform agency hiring practices from process focused to mission-focused hiring tools that are more closely integrated into agencies strategic plans.

Total Federal New Hires, 1990–2002



Source: OPM Central Personnel Data File.