



Highlights of [GAO-04-797](#), a report to the Subcommittee on Civil Service and Agency Organization, Committee on Government Reform, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

Improving the federal hiring process is critical given the increasing number of new hires expected in the next few years. The subcommittee asked GAO to report on the (1) status of recent efforts to help improve the federal hiring process and (2) extent to which federal agencies are using two new hiring flexibilities—category rating and direct-hire authority. Category rating permits an agency to select any job candidate placed in a best-qualified category. Direct-hire authority allows an agency to appoint individuals to positions without adherence to certain competitive examination requirements when there is a severe shortage of qualified candidates or a critical hiring need.

What GAO Recommends

Last year, GAO made specific recommendations that OPM work with and through the CHCO Council to help agencies better use human capital flexibilities. This includes efforts to improve hiring processes. GAO is thus not making additional recommendations at this time.

In comments on a draft of this report, OPM said that agencies must make fixing the hiring process a priority. OPM also expressed concerns about our survey of CHCOs. We disagreed with OPM's contention that such officials are not knowledgeable enough to respond to our survey. Where appropriate, the report was revised to reflect OPM's comments.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-04-797.

To view the full product, 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.

HUMAN CAPITAL

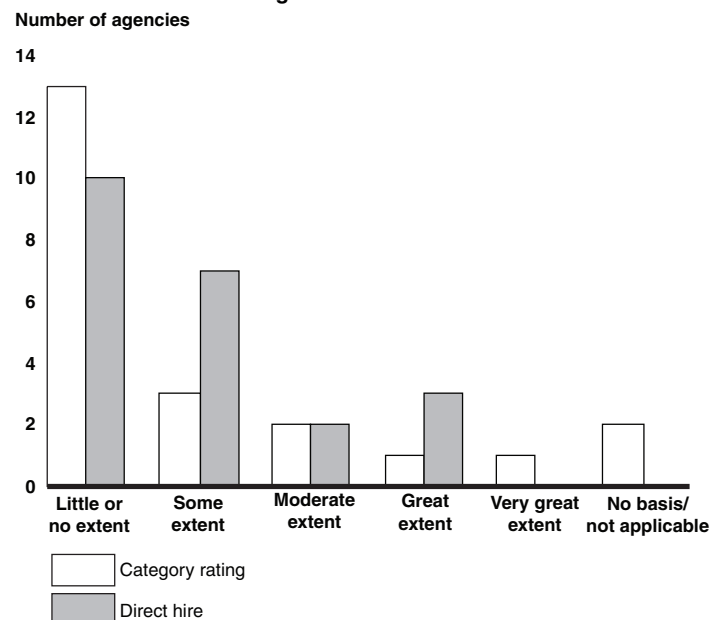
Additional Collaboration Between OPM and Agencies Is Key to Improved Federal Hiring

What GAO Found

Congress, the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), and agencies have recognized that federal hiring has needed reform, and they have undertaken various efforts to do so. In particular, Congress has provided agencies with additional hiring flexibilities, OPM has taken significant steps to modernize job vacancy announcements and develop the government's recruiting Web site, and most agencies are continuing to automate parts of their hiring processes. Still, problems remain with a job classification process that many view as antiquated, and there is a need for improved tools to assess the qualifications of job candidates.

On the basis of our survey of members of the interagency Chief Human Capital Officers (CHCO) Council, agencies appear to be making limited use of two new hiring flexibilities that could help agencies in expediting and controlling their hiring processes (see figure below). Frequently cited barriers to using the new hiring flexibilities included (1) the lack of OPM guidance for using the flexibilities, (2) the lack of agency policies and procedures for using the flexibilities, (3) the lack of flexibility in OPM rules and regulations, and (4) concern about possible inconsistencies in the implementation of the flexibilities within the department or agency.

Extent of Use of New Hiring Flexibilities



Source: CHCO Council members' responses to GAO questionnaire.

The federal government is now facing one of the most transformational changes to the civil service in half a century. Today's challenge is to define the appropriate roles and day-to-day working relationships for OPM and individual agencies as they collaborate on developing innovative and more effective hiring systems.