

GAO

Testimony

Before the Subcommittee on Federal
Workforce, Postal Service, and the District of
Columbia, Committee on Oversight and
Government Reform, House of Representatives

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**DIVERSITY
MANAGEMENT**

**Important Actions Taken
and Planned to Further
Enhance Diversity**

Statement of Ronald A. Stroman, Managing Director
Office of Opportunity and Inclusiveness





Highlights of [GAO-08-1160T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Federal Workforce, Postal Service, and the District of Columbia, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

For GAO, having a diverse workforce at all levels is an organizational strength that contributes to the achievement of results by bringing a wider variety of perspectives and approaches to policy development and implementation, strategic planning, problem solving and decision making. GAO's Office of Opportunity and Inclusiveness (O&I) is responsible for all functions and activities designed to promote diversity and maintain a work environment that is fair, unbiased, and inclusive. O&I's analysis of performance appraisal data indicated that there were significant differences in appraisal averages for African American and Caucasian analysts. GAO contracted with the Ivy Planning Group to assess the factors that influenced the differences. Ivy issued its African American Performance Assessment Study report on April 25, 2008 and the Acting Comptroller General issued a memorandum on April 30, 2008 expressing his commitment to addressing all of the report's recommendations.

The subcommittee asked GAO's Inspector General (IG) to examine the effectiveness of O&I and analyze the representation of women and minorities in the agency's Senior Executive Service (SES) and managerial ranks (GS-15 and equivalent level). This testimony focuses on the results of the IG's review and provides information on actions taken and planned to further enhance diversity at GAO.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-1160T](#). For more information, contact Ronald A. Stroman at 202-512-8401 or stroman@gao.gov.

DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT

Important Actions Taken and Planned to Further Enhance Diversity

What GAO Found

The Inspector General's (IG) report recognizes the gains GAO has made to enhance the profile of its SES and managerial ranks. The report notes that the representation of most groups in GAO's SES and managerial ranks exceeded or equaled the representation in either the civilian labor force or the executive branch agencies. For example, the percentages of African Americans at the SES level and at the GS-15 and equivalent level exceeded the percentages in both the civilian labor force as well as in the executive branch agencies. The report also acknowledges that GAO has implemented many of the leading diversity management practices. Additionally, the report includes four recommendations that GAO has already taken steps to implement. For example, GAO is revising the discrimination complaint process order to clarify responsibilities and procedures when a complaint concerns O&I staff, and strengthening its internal controls for tracking, reviewing, and reporting on complaint data.

In addition to implementing the recommendations in the IG's report, GAO has taken steps to address many of the recommendations in the African American Performance Assessment Study report prepared by the Ivy Planning Group. The report included more than 25 recommendations. The Acting Comptroller General has committed to addressing all of them and issued a memorandum on September 10, 2008 that highlighted the progress made. For example, GAO has developed an approach for convening a series of facilitated conversations on race, begun to reassess the appraisal system, created standards for appraisal reviews, and taken steps to strengthen its recruitment and retention initiatives.

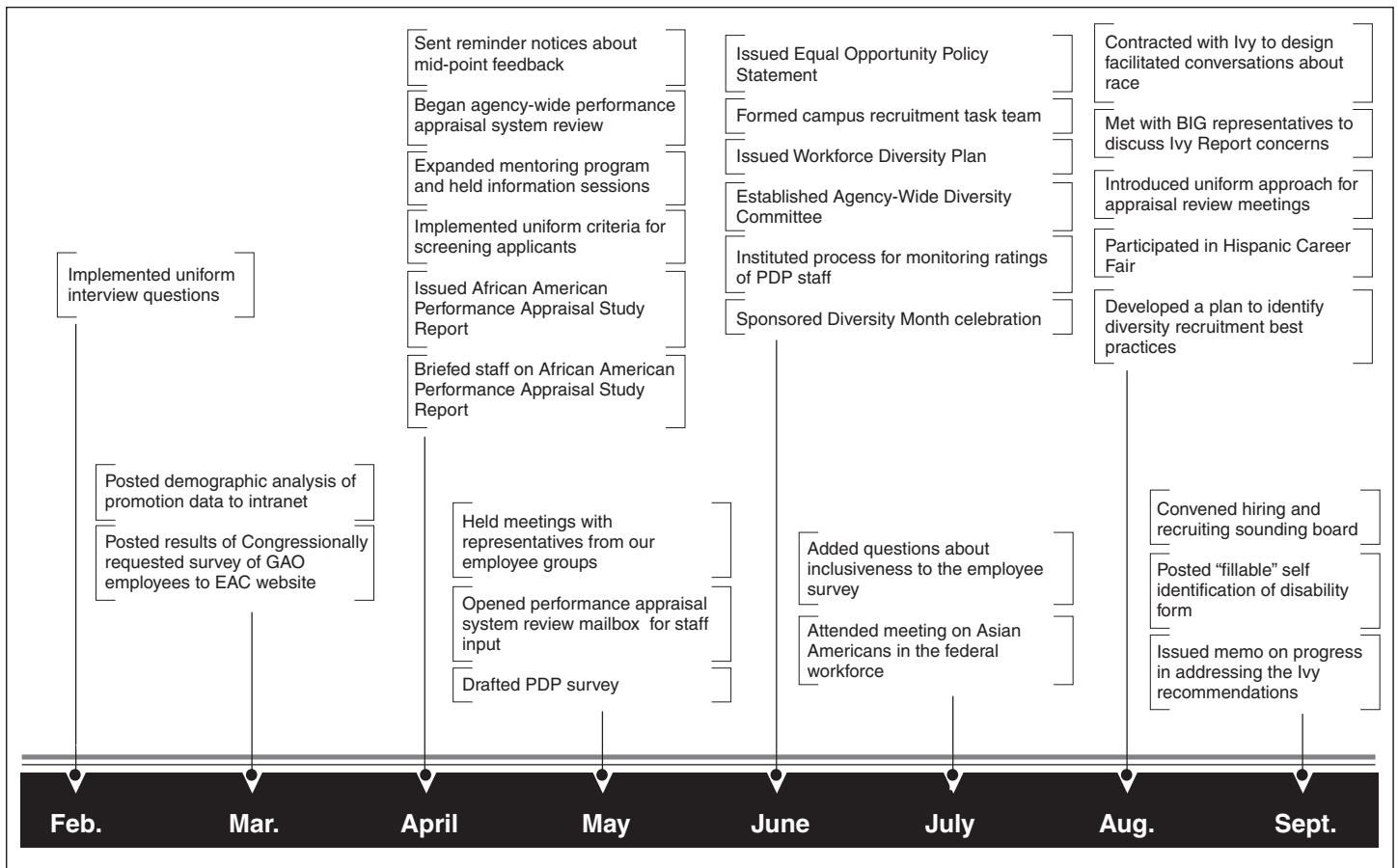
Furthermore, GAO plans to take additional steps to enhance its diversity by completing actions in its Workforce Diversity Plan. In June 2008, GAO issued a detailed Workforce Diversity Plan designed to build on the gains made in the diversity of its management and overall workforce. The plan lists about 20 actions that the agency will take. For example, the plan requires that GAO develop a diversity recruitment plan and calls for GAO to develop stronger relationships with Hispanic Serving Institutions and organizations that work with disabled students.

GAO is committed to working closely with all employees to ensure its diversity efforts and work environment are fully inclusive. GAO has established a comprehensive accountability framework to ensure the effective and efficient implementation of the Ivy report recommendations and the workforce diversity plan action steps. GAO has taken many steps and plans to take others to help enhance its diversity, recognizing that diversity is a journey that will require constant and sustained commitment.

Chairman Davis and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am Ron Stroman, Managing Director of the Office of Opportunity and Inclusiveness at the United States Government Accountability Office (GAO). Thank you for the opportunity to testify about the Inspector General's (IG) report on GAO's diversity efforts. GAO has a diverse workforce. Specifically, as of April 2008, minorities represented about 30 percent of our total workforce, and women comprised more than one-half. Nonetheless, we have gaps in certain categories. We are committed to making improvements. To this end, as figure 1 shows, we have completed several tasks in support of our diversity management efforts. Also, we have undertaken a number of important initiatives and have plans to implement others to improve the diversity of our leadership as well as our overall workforce, which I will discuss later in my testimony.

Figure 1: Timeline of Key Diversity Management Related Tasks Completed From February to September 10, 2008



Source: GAO.

IG Cites Diversity Improvements and Makes Recommendations That We Are Implementing

We appreciate the IG's recognition of the gains GAO has made to the diversity profile of our Senior Executive Service (SES) and managerial (GS-15 and equivalent) ranks. The IG's report indicates that from 2002 to 2007, the number of women in the SES increased and the number of African American, Asian American, and Hispanic managers also increased. For example, the data in the report show that the number of Hispanic managers increased from 17 in 2002 to 26 in 2007—an increase of 53 percent. Additionally, the report notes that the representation of most groups in GAO's SES and managerial ranks exceeded or equaled the representation in either the civilian labor force (CLF) or the executive branch agencies. Specifically, the percentages of

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- African Americans at the SES level and at the GS-15 and equivalent level exceeded the percentages in both the CLF as well as in the executive branch agencies.
 - Asian Americans at the SES level exceeded the percentages in the CLF as well as in the executive branch agencies.
 - Hispanics at the GS-15 and equivalent level slightly exceeded the percentage in the executive branch agencies; and
 - women at the SES and GS-15 and equivalent level exceeded the percentages in the executive branch agencies and at the GS-15 and equivalent level the percentage of women nearly equaled the percentage in the CLF.

The IG's report also acknowledges that we have implemented many of the leading diversity management practices. For example, we have

- recruited at historically black colleges and universities as well as Hispanic serving institutions,
- implemented an agency-wide mentoring program,
- supported employee involvement in diversity management through our newly established Diversity Committee,
- included diversity in our strategic plan, and
- incorporated diversity principles into our performance appraisal systems.

Additionally, the IG's report identifies areas for improvement and includes four recommendations that we have already taken steps to implement. We are revising the Office of Opportunity and Inclusiveness (O&I) order to require an annual Workforce Diversity Plan and revising the discrimination complaint process order to clarify responsibilities and procedures when a complaint concerns staff within O&I. We are also strengthening our internal controls for tracking, reviewing, and reporting on complaint data. In addition, we are planning to incorporate the diversity plan goals into the SES performance appraisal system when it is revised. We are also looking into ways to remove O&I staff from the pre-complaint processing stage without reducing our ability to successfully resolve employee concerns informally.

Steps Taken to Address the Ivy Planning Group Recommendations

In April 2008, the Ivy Planning Group (Ivy) issued its African American Performance Assessment Study report. This study was undertaken in response to significant differences in performance appraisal averages between African American and Caucasian analysts. The fundamental issue identified by the Ivy report is that the GAO culture, which values a singular and uniform approach to producing its work for the Congress must continue to change. Ivy recommended that GAO improve its ability to adapt to the diverse backgrounds and working styles of its changing workforce and make its human capital process fairer, more consistent, and more transparent. Moreover, the Ivy Report recommended that GAO raise staff awareness of the role that race can and does play in affecting performance related communication. The report included more than 25 recommendations.

The Acting Comptroller General wrote to all GAO staff on April 30, 2008, to express his commitment to address all of the Ivy report's recommendations. He issued another memo on September 10, 2008 updating the progress in addressing these recommendations, including the following.

Convening a Series of Facilitated Conversations on Race

The Ivy report suggested that we begin our efforts to create a more inclusive environment by convening a series of facilitated conversations across the agency about perceptions and assumptions regarding race. These conversations are intended to eliminate barriers to effective performance-related communication and bridge different perceptions on the likely causes for ratings disparities. After thoroughly researching qualified firms and gaining an in-depth understanding of the complexities associated with this effort, we signed a contract with Ivy in August 2008 to help us design and facilitate these discussions. We decided to use Ivy because of its extensive experience in convening these sensitive discussions, and because of its knowledge of GAO's culture and understanding of diversity issues confronting GAO's workforce. Ivy has begun to plan for these sessions and we expect that they will begin this fall and last through the spring. Importantly everyone at GAO will participate in these conversations. Lessons learned from these conversations will inform agencywide diversity training—another of Ivy's recommendations—which we will develop as part of GAO's ongoing mandatory training curriculum for all employees.

Proactively Assessing the Needs of a Diverse Workforce

The Ivy report also stressed the importance of implementing our diversity initiatives in a broad and inclusive manner, and Ivy recommended that we proactively assess the needs of the broad ranges of groups within GAO as early steps in becoming more inclusive. O&I staff held meetings with representatives from Blacks in Government (BIG), the Advisory Council for Persons with Disabilities (ACPD), the Asian American Liaison Group (AALG), the Gay and Lesbian Employee Association, and the Hispanic Liaison Group (HLG) in conjunction with developing our June 2008 Workforce Diversity Plan. During these meetings the representatives shared their concerns about the work environment and suggested steps that we can take to make the environment more inclusive. We have already taken some steps to address several of these concerns. For example, to help address the concern about underrepresentation of Hispanics at GAO, we joined with HLG in setting up a booth at a Hispanic Career Fair. To help address a concern about retention of Asian Americans, we worked in partnership with AALG to attend an Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) meeting on Asian-Americans in the federal workforce. Additionally, to help address the concern about limited information on staff with disabilities, we created a version of the self-identification of disability form that can be completed electronically.

Creating a More Inclusive Work Environment

In addition to the steps outlined above, this June we established and convened an agency-wide Diversity Committee, which aims to foster opportunities for dialogue and serve as an advisory body to the Executive Committee and other senior executives. Representation on the Committee is comprised of employees elected to the designated diversity seats on the interim council of GAO's Employee Organization, International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers (IFPTE); employees designated by GAO employee organizations; and GAO management representatives. The committee has met twice to date, and a Website is in development so employees can learn more about its efforts.

In addition, in June the Acting Comptroller General issued an equal employment opportunity statement in which he articulated his view of and commitment to the principles of fairness and equal opportunity. Further, we added questions to the employee feedback survey to measure staff views about the inclusiveness of our work environment. We also instituted a process for monitoring the ratings of those in the Professional Development Program (PDP) to identify and assess any disparities by race or other factors, and opened up our existing mentoring program to PDP and other developmental staff.

Finally, but equally importantly, the Acting Comptroller General and members of the Executive Committee met with BIG representatives to discuss their views of the Ivy report and to learn more about their suggestions for our approach going forward. The Executive Committee committed to an ongoing dialogue with BIG and made the same pledge to other employee groups throughout the agency, including the new Diversity Committee.

Reassessing the Appraisal System - the PAS Study

Ivy recommended that GAO conduct an agency-wide review of our performance appraisal system. We had anticipated the need for such a study before Ivy's report was completed. Throughout the spring and summer, our Performance Appraisal System (PAS) study team has been working to re-examine what works, what does not, and what could be done better with our current system. The team is guided both by a Steering Committee of senior executives and a stakeholder group comprised of representatives from the Employee Advisory Council (EAC); IFPTE; and the Diversity Committee, as well as O&I and GAO's Applied Research and Methods (ARM) team, among others. The PAS study team has completed its interviews with more than 50 GAO executives and managers and conducted nearly 30 focus groups with staff from all pay plans and bands. Seven of the focus groups were convened to gather views from specific populations, including African Americans, Hispanics, and employees with disabilities, in order to determine whether there were issues of concern that were unique to these groups. In sum, more than 200 individuals participated in all of the team's interviews and focus groups. Additionally, the PAS team has drafted a survey that will be sent to all employees this fall. The objective of the survey is to systematically collect employee opinions on what aspects of the performance appraisal system are working well and what merits attention. The team's final report is expected in early 2009.

Training for Designated Performance Managers and All Staff on the Appraisal Process

Ivy also recommended that we retrain all Designated Performance Managers (DPMs) and reviewers and provide more specific examples of the performance that supports the work activities and standards for each rating. This month we issued a notice informing all DPMs that they will be required to take appraisal training by October 7. We also issued a notice advertising the briefings we have scheduled through September for employees on the appraisal process, as well as the one-on-one help sessions we will provide to (1) offer employees individual assistance with preparing self assessments and (2) provide an opportunity for DPMs to ask questions about or request guidance on assigning checkmarks or preparing narratives.

Creating Standards for Appraisal Reviews

Ivy also recommended that GAO create standards for team performance appraisal review meetings. In response, we studied existing practices across GAO as well as prevalent practices in the literature, and just recently issued interim guidelines for teams, staff offices, Chief Administrative Office (CAO) units and the field. These interim guidelines for review of performance ratings are to be used for the 2008 performance appraisal cycle.

Instituting and Deploying Upward Feedback Tools

Ivy also recommended that we design and implement a measure for upward feedback. Steps are underway to institute and systematically deploy an agency wide upward feedback tool to provide feedback on management's effectiveness in supervising and developing staff. The plan is to implement this tool in March 2009.

Monitoring Mid-Point Feedback

Ivy also honed in on the importance of ongoing feedback. In addition our staff, managers, and senior executives have indicated that mid-point feedback was either not occurring or not being documented. In response, we sent reminder notices earlier this spring about the importance of delivering mid-point feedback.

Addressing Concerns with the Professional Development Program (PDP)

We have established a working group of executives and managers to address the issues related to the PDP. Also, a survey instrument has been designed and pre-tested to assess the views of PDP staff as they complete the program. The survey includes questions about the role of the advisors.

Strengthening Recruitment and Retention Initiatives

We also have taken steps in response to three of Ivy's recommendations by (1) forming a task team to analyze the schools we visit; identify different types of on-campus activities we support; determine the numbers and types of staff that participate in our on-campus recruiting efforts; and measure the costs, outcomes, and yields from these efforts; (2) developing a plan to research and identify best practices in diversity recruitment; and (3) establishing consistent criteria for our screeners to use when evaluating applications and a consistent set of questions for our managers to use when interviewing candidates. We also plan to map the recruitment and hiring process to identify pain points and areas for improvement, and calculate the cost of turnover.

Workforce Diversity Plan Identifies Additional Steps We Will Take to Enhance Diversity

This spring we conducted a workforce diversity review. The review included a careful analysis of our workforce data in comparison to benchmarks recommended by the EEOC. In conducting this review, we consulted a wide range of sources to identify areas where barriers may exclude certain groups. Specifically, we shared data with and obtained views from representatives from our employee groups and the GAO unit of IFPTE, analyzed employee feedback survey responses for 2006 and 2007, reviewed relevant policies, procedures and practices; analyzed findings from prior O&I efforts; and interviewed responsible officials.

The review found that our overall workforce was diverse and included a significant percentage of minorities and women. Specifically, as of April 2008, our workforce was more diverse than the civilian labor force (CLF).¹ Minorities represented about 30 percent of GAO's total workforce, and women comprised more than one-half of the workforce. In comparison, minorities comprised about 28 percent of the CLF and women represented about 47 percent. Furthermore, the diversity in the predominant employee group—analyst and analyst-related staff—exceeded the diversity in the relevant civilian labor force (RCLF).² In addition, for three of the larger job series that included about two-thirds of the workforce—the analyst, auditor, and attorney job series—the representation of each minority group was about the same or exceeded such representation in the RCLF. Furthermore, we hired a diverse group of employees. From March 2007 to April 2008, we hired 238 new staff. The percentages of African American women hired equaled the CLF percentages and the percentages of Asian American men and women hired exceed the percentages in the CLF.

However, our review found that Hispanic staff were underrepresented in our total workforce when compared to the CLF. Although the total percentages of Hispanic staff in analyst and analyst-related positions as well as in attorney positions equaled the representation in such positions compared to the RCLF, the percentages of Hispanic staff in other positions were low. Our analysis revealed that additional steps are needed to recruit Hispanic staff. For the most part, our efforts have focused on recruiting

¹The CLF is composed of those 16 and older (including federal workers) who are employed or looking for work and not in the military or institutionalized. We used 2000 CLF data because it is the most current and reliable at this time.

²RCLF data are the CLF data directly comparable (or relevant) to the occupational population being considered. We use the RCLF when analyzing occupational series. We use the 2000 RCLF because it is the most current and reliable data available at this time.

Hispanic staff for analyst and analyst-related positions. While we will continue to enhance these efforts, we also need to improve our approach to recruiting attorneys and recruiting for mission-support positions, recognizing that the number of opportunities to recruit for these positions may be limited.

Additionally, we determined that the percentage of staff with targeted disabilities in our workforce was lower than the EEOC-recommended benchmark.³ The EEOC has raised concerns that data on employees with disabilities in the federal government may not be accurate. GAO shares this concern and will be following up to enhance the accuracy of self-reported information.

The review also indicated that there were few minorities at certain levels in several job categories. Furthermore, we obtained information about agency practices that need to be addressed to improve our efforts to develop and maintain an inclusive environment.

Based on the review we issued a detailed Workforce Diversity Plan in June 2008. The action steps in the plan are designed to build on the gains we have made in the diversity of our management and overall workforce. The Workforce Diversity Plan requires that we develop a specific diversity recruitment plan (also a recommendation in the Ivy report) that includes efforts to recruit for analyst, attorney, and administrative positions. We will expand our relationships with Hispanic-serving institutions as well as expand the range of sources from which candidates are found. Specifically, we plan to contact campus organizations, national sororities, and fraternities when visiting campuses; reach out to professional organizations that we have not previously established relationships with; and attend job fairs targeted to Hispanic and other minority candidates. We also are gathering information from our current Hispanic employees, as well as reviewing data from the national data base on college graduates.

The plan also commits GAO to take additional steps to recruit staff with targeted disabilities. In order to address this concern, we recently formed a working group on disability issues that included staff from the ACPD—our employee group that focuses on disability issues. Our diversity

³The targeted disabilities are deafness, blindness, missing extremities, partial paralysis, complete paralysis, convulsive disorders, mental retardation, mental illness, and distortion of limb and/or spine.

recruitment plan will include efforts to recruit persons with disabilities for analyst, attorney, and administrative positions. We plan to expand and enhance our relationships with institutions and organizations that work with students with disabilities such as the Career Opportunities for Students with Disabilities—a nationwide consortium of higher education institutions and employers that facilitates the career employment of college graduates with disabilities. Also, we plan to gather information to help inform our recruitment efforts by surveying staff to update their disability status, interviewing our staff with disabilities, and analyzing national data on graduates. Further, we plan to use our non-competitive appointment authority to hire staff with disabilities.

As shown in Table 1, the plan recommends changes that can be accomplished by April 2009—12 months from the start of our review—in order to hold ourselves accountable for achieving the plan’s goals. The plan will be updated annually and will lead to significant long term improvements to our human capital processes that are at the heart of diversity issues confronting GAO.

Table 1: GAO's 2008—2009 Workforce Diversity Action Plan

| GOAL: Recruit More Hispanics, African Americans and Staff with Disabilities | | |
|--|------------------------|--------------------------|
| Action items | Completion date | Responsible units |
| 1. Develop a diversity recruitment and hiring plan to enhance participation from all groups | April 2009 | O&I, HCO |
| In support of this plan | September 2008 | O&I, HCO |
| a. Interview current minority and disabled staff to determine what led them to join GAO | | |
| b. Analyze data from Department of Education on minority graduates with selected majors | December 2008 | O&I, ARM, HCO |
| c. Develop stronger relationships with Hispanic-serving Institutions, historically-black colleges and universities and institutions and organizations that work with disabled students. | January 2009 | HCO, Campus Executives |
| d. Expand the range of sources from which candidates are recruited (including campus organizations, national sororities and fraternities and professional organizations as well as using electronic recruiting efforts). | March 2009 | HCO |
| e. Issue guidance to recruiters emphasizing diversity as a recruitment factor and ensure that recruitment efforts include law schools and job fairs targeted to higher concentrations of minority students. | March 2009 | GC |
| 2. Use noncompetitive appointment authority to hire qualified staff with disabilities | March 2009 | O&I, HCO |
| GOAL: Enhance Staff-Development Opportunities That Prepare Staff for Upper-Level Positions | | |
| 1. Expand one-to-one mentoring program | August 2008 | HCO/LC |
| 2. Hold managers accountable for providing performance feedback by analyzing data in our competency based performance system | December 2008 | O&I |
| 3. Identify steps for success and discuss the unwritten rules during workshops to share this information | January 2009 | O&I, HCO/LC |
| 4. Complete data analysis for performance appraisal system review | September 2008 | HCO |
| 5. Announce opportunities for staff to participate in agency-wide projects. | March 2009 | CG |
| GOAL: Create a More Inclusive Environment | | |
| 1. Revise employee survey to include questions to measure the extent to which staff view our work environment as inclusive | June 2008 | ARM, HCO |
| 2. Issue EEO statement | June 2008 | O&I, CG |
| 3. Provide training sessions on EEO Policy/Harassment Issues | October 2008 | O&I, GC |
| 4. Provide employee groups with information that would allow them to reach out to new GAO staff and help improve retention of minorities | October 2008 | HCO, GC |
| 5. Hold facilitated discussions on race | December 2008 | HCO/LC; O&I |
| 6. Modify/revise Self-Identification of Handicap Form (SF 256) | December 2008 | O&I, KS |
| 7. Survey staff to update disability status | January 2009 | HCO, O&I, ARM |
| 8. Revise the reasonable accommodation process | March 2009 | O&I, HCO |
| 9. Interview minorities and staff with disabilities to obtain information on reasons for staying and reasons for leaving and analyze staff retention data | March 2009 | O&I |
| 10. Conduct diversity training to help staff understand barriers that may limit effective communication, coaching, and career development. | April 2009 | O&I, HCO/ LC; |

Source: GAO.

Conclusion

With the support of our top leadership, we have made diversity a part of our strategic plan, implemented leading diversity practices throughout the organization and developed annual plans that will help us enhance our diversity, particularly within our managerial ranks. Moreover, we have established a comprehensive accountability framework to ensure the effective and efficient implementation of the recommendations in the Ivy Report as well as the action steps in our Workforce Diversity Plan.

Finally, we are committed to working closely with the entire GAO community to ensure that our diversity efforts and our work environment are fully inclusive. We intend to take many steps to help enhance diversity at GAO, recognizing that diversity is a journey that will require constant and sustained commitment.

This concludes my prepared statement. At this time I would be pleased to answer any questions that you or other members of the subcommittee may have.

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