December 2020

INTELLIGENCE COMMUNITY

Additional Actions Needed to Strengthen Workforce Diversity Planning and Oversight

Why GAO Did This Study

The *2019 National Intelligence Strategy* states that the IC will recruit, develop, and retain a diverse, inclusive, and expert workforce to enable mission success. ODNI reports that the IC is taking steps to increase the representation of diverse groups, such as issuing new strategies to enhance workforce planning. However, barriers to establishing a diverse workforce exist across the IC, according to an ODNI 2017 analysis.

GAO was asked to review the IC's progress in enhancing workforce diversity. This report (1) summarizes ODNI annual demographic reports on the proportion of women, racial or ethnic minorities, and persons with disabilities; and assesses the extent to which (2) IC elements report taking steps to address leading practices for managing workforce diversity and to identify potential barriers to maintaining a diverse workforce; and (3) ODNI is addressing leading practices for coordinating IC workforce diversity initiatives. GAO reviewed IC-wide and IC element specific policies and guidance; interviewed ODNI, and other IC officials; and administered a questionnaire to all 17 IC elements to obtain information on diversity strategies and challenges.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making seven recommendations, including that the Director of National Intelligence issue or update guidance to ensure IC elements maintain diversity strategic plans, assess and take steps to eliminate barriers to diversity, and establish implementation objectives and timeframes to hold IC elements accountable. ODNI agreed with the recommendations.

What GAO Found

The Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI) reported that the representation of some demographic groups within the Intelligence Community (IC) workforce increased from fiscal years 2011 through 2019—the latest available data. Over this period, the proportion of women, racial or ethnic minorities, and persons with disabilities changed by .7, 3.3, and 6.2 percentage points, respectively. However, the representation of women, racial or ethnic minorities, and persons with disabilities remained below comparable benchmarks and declined among higher ranks in fiscal year 2019.

IC elements report taking steps to address leading practices for managing workforce diversity, but report gaps in diversity planning. GAO found that most IC elements report taking steps to address seven of nine leading practices for diversity management. For the remaining two leading practices—strategic planning and measurement—most elements report taking one or no steps.

Number of Intelligence Community (IC) Elements and the Steps They Report Taking to Implement Leading Practices for Workforce Diversity Management, as of August 2020

GAO leading practices	Number of IC elements that report taking steps
Leadership commitment	**17 of 17** IC elements report taking multiple steps
Recruitment	**14 of 17** IC elements report taking multiple steps, and three IC elements report taking one step
Employee involvement	**14 of 17** IC elements report taking multiple steps, two IC elements report taking one step, and one IC element reports taking no step
Diversity training	**14 of 17** IC elements report taking multiple steps, and three IC elements report taking one step
Performance	**12 of 17** IC elements linked diversity management with enhanced performance while five IC elements did not
Succession planning	**9 of 17** IC elements report taking multiple steps, and eight IC elements report taking one step
Accountability	**9 of 17** IC elements report taking multiple steps, seven IC elements report taking one step, and one IC element reports taking no steps
Strategic planning	**3 of 17** IC elements have current and complete strategic plans
Measurement	**6 of 17** IC elements have diversity-related performance measures

Source: GAO analysis of IC element documents and GAO leading practices for diversity management. | GAO-21-83

Further, while all IC elements report having a process to identify barriers to diversity, nine IC elements report not completing required barrier assessments. Without fully implementing leading practices for managing workforce diversity and conducting routine barrier assessments, the IC may miss opportunities to develop effective and efficient diversity policies and programs.

ODNI's Office of Intelligence Community Equal Employment Opportunity and Diversity (IC EEOD) is meeting seven of eight leading practices for enhancing and sustaining the coordination of diversity initiatives across the 17 IC elements. However, IC EEOD partially met the practice to reinforce agency accountability. Specifically, IC EEOD has not established IC-wide implementation objectives and timeframes to demonstrate progress. As a result, IC EEOD risks not holding IC elements accountable for enhancing workforce diversity.

_____ **United States Government Accountability Office**