

The Retention of New Hires at GAO

A Report of the Personnel Appeals Board



Personnel
Appeals
Board

August 2, 2010

The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro
Acting Comptroller General
U.S. Government Accountability Office
Room 7000
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

Pursuant to the authority granted to it under the Government Accountability Office Personnel Act of 1980, the Personnel Appeals Board has statutory responsibility to oversee equal employment opportunity at GAO. The Board performs this function through a process of review and assessment that includes the conduct of studies and the preparation of evaluative reports containing its findings, conclusions and recommendations. In exercise of that authority, the Board is issuing the attached report on the retention of newly-hired employees at GAO.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Mary E. Leary", is positioned above the typed name.

Mary E. Leary
Chair

attachment

Personnel Appeals Board

Mary E. Leary, Chair
Steven Svartz, Vice-Chair
Paul M. Coran, Member

Table of Contents

Chapter I: Introduction

Background	1
History	2
Additional Studies	8
Study Dimensions	11

Chapter II: The Numbers

15

Chapter III: GAO's Exit Questionnaire

The Survey	27
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Chapter IV: Retention Initiatives

Government-wide Employee Benefits	34
GAO Programs	45

Chapter V: Conclusions and Recommendations

54

Appendix 1: Tables of Raw Numbers

Tables	58
Comments	65

The Retention of New Hires at GAO

Chapter I: Introduction

Background

The Government Accountability Office (GAO or the Agency) has, over the years, invested significant resources in developing a comprehensive recruitment program which is “designed to find the best and brightest wherever they are.”¹ The Personnel Appeals Board (PAB or the Board), recognizing that the retention of new employees is an integral component of any successful recruitment program, has encouraged the Agency to examine separations from the workforce with an eye toward maintenance of its diversity gains over the past decade.²

Given the significant investment in recruitment, GAO acknowledges the importance of retaining the talent it hires. To ensure that it retains new recruits, GAO has set as a performance measure in its current Strategic Plan the goal of improving the development and experiences of newly hired staff.³ According to the Plan, the Agency expects that its efforts to provide

¹ <http://info1.gao.gov/humancapital/recruitment>.

² In 2002, the Board issued a report focused specifically on whether the Agency had implemented a minority recruitment program in accordance with the mandate of 31 U.S.C. §732(f)(1)(B) and, by reference, 5 U.S.C. §7201, which calls for agencies to conduct a continuing program for the recruitment of minority groups. That report, *Minority Recruitment at GAO*, as well as all of the Board’s Oversight reports, can be found at www.pab.gao.gov under the link to EEO Oversight.

³ *GAO Strategic Plan 2007-2012*, GAO-07-1SP (Mar. 2007).

expanded developmental opportunities to newly hired staff will enhance its “ability to attract, retain, motivate, and reward a highly skilled, diverse, and capable workforce.”⁴

The Agency, which describes itself as being at the “epicenter of government decision making,” is marketed as having a progressive environment that offers its employees the flexibilities to maintain a healthy work/life balance⁵ and was in 2009, for the second time, rated second on the list of best places to work, among large agencies, in the Federal government.⁶ Notwithstanding its long history of being in the forefront of Federal agencies when it comes to alternative work arrangements and employee benefits, the Agency has not been able to retain as many newly hired employees as its plans contemplate. Consequently, it has recently taken a number of steps to try to evaluate the reasons why newly hired employees separate from the Agency and to reduce the number of those early departures. This report, undertaken pursuant to the Board’s mandate to review and evaluate the regulations, procedures and practices of GAO as they relate to equal employment opportunity, assesses the Agency’s efforts in this area.⁷

History

During a five year period in the 1990s, the Agency reduced its staff by 39 percent through a hiring freeze, field office closings, separation incentives, relocation of certain

⁴ *Id.* at 172.

⁵ www.gao.gov/careers.

⁶ Results compiled from the Office of Personnel Management’s (OPM) Federal Human Capital Survey by the Partnership for Public Service and the Institute for the Study of Public Policy Implementation at American University which has conducted the survey every other year since 2003. See www.bestplacetowork.org for the 2007 data.

⁷ 31 U.S.C. §732(f)(2)(A); 4 C.F.R. §§28.91, 28.92(b).

functions and personnel to the Executive Branch, and a Reduction-in-Force (RIF).⁸ The five year downsizing precluded any meaningful recruitment efforts and the Agency did not implement a recruiting program or plan again until 1998. By 1999-2000, the Agency had a full scale recruiting process in place, including its student intern program which is open to students pursuing either bachelors or graduate degrees. GAO recruits for the internships by posting a general announcement of the availability of the internships on USAJobs, the Federal portal for job information and applications, and by sending GAO senior staff and managers⁹ to nearly 30 national universities, 15 target universities, and 7 focus or emerging schools each year.¹⁰ The aims of GAO's recruitment strategy with respect to individual schools are threefold: to increase GAO's visibility on campuses; to highlight diversity outreach; and, to establish strong relationships with deans, faculty and career placement staff.¹¹ Student interns who successfully complete 10 weeks of employment at GAO are eligible for noncompetitive appointments to GAO's workforce after graduation. In recent years, upwards of 70% of those completing the program were offered permanent employment. The internship program annually supplies an average of 30% of GAO's new hires, many of whom begin their employment with the Agency with graduate degrees.¹²

⁸ *GAO: The Human Capital Strategic Plan (Fiscal Years 2004-2006)* at 6.

⁹ A member of GAO's Senior Executive Service is assigned to be a campus executive to develop and oversee recruitment strategy at each school. A campus manager and recruiters are also assigned.

¹⁰ "Target" universities have a large concentration of minority students from which GAO has recruited interns in the past; "focus and emerging" schools have shown promising results in specialty areas or are beginning to produce candidates who meet the qualifications for GAO's program.

¹¹ *Campus Executives', Managers', and Recruiters' Panel Session (2008 Recruiters' Update)*.

¹² GAO makes job offers to approximately 70% of its interns, on average, and approximately 70% of those offers are accepted. *Human Capital Interim Strategic Plan (Fiscal Years 2010-2012)* at 4.

In the course of some of its studies in the early part of this decade, the Board began noticing that the retention levels for employees with fewer than five years of employment at GAO appeared to be lower than in the past, which could have consequences for the Agency's more recent diversity gains.¹³ Although not the subject of the PAB's 2002 report on *Minority Recruitment at GAO*, the Board nevertheless expressed its concern about figures relating to employment of black males that showed that 9 of 29 (31%) newly-hired black male analysts left the Agency during the three year time period of the study.¹⁴ A 2005 study in which the Board took a wide-ranging approach to the state of equal employment opportunity at GAO revealed that in 1991, black males made up 5.3% of the GAO workforce and 3.3% of the separations; in 2004, black males were 5.7% of the GAO ranks but constituted 7.7% of the separations.¹⁵ Further research revealed that, between 1999 and 2004, one third of all the employees leaving the Agency left during their first five years; in 2005 and, again, in 2007, 50% of those separating from the Agency did so within their first five years.¹⁶

More recently, a special CG project focused on the retention of GAO analysts/specialists who had been hired during fiscal years 2002-2005.¹⁷ Examining voluntary resignations and

¹³ 31 U.S.C. §731(f)(1)(B). The GAOPA directs the PAB to oversee equal employment at GAO through review and evaluation of its procedures and practices as they relate to equal employment opportunity. The Board conducts studies of selected issues and prepares evaluative reports containing findings and recommendations to the Agency.

¹⁴ This percentage was in contrast to 8 of 37 (21.6%) of African American females and 6 of 28 (21.4%) of Asian American females. Only 1 Hispanic employee of the 16 hired left during the time period of the study.

¹⁵ The Office of Management and Budget (OMB), which sets the standards for the classification of Federal data on race and ethnicity, approves of either black or African American to describe persons having origins in any of the black racial groups of Africa. Revisions to the Standards for the Classification of Federal Data on Race and Ethnicity, 62 Fed. Reg. 58,782 (Oct. 30, 1997). OPM and GAO follow OMB's lead. The terms black and African American are both used in this report.

¹⁶ *The State of Equal Employment Opportunity at GAO in the 21st Century* at 12-16 (2005).

transfers, the study disclosed that, as of January 2007, the Agency had retained 58% of analysts/specialists hired in 2002; 64% of the 2003 hires; 69% of the 2004 hires; and, 87% of those hired in 2005. At the Band I level for the four years of the study, the retention rate for white analysts/specialists was 70%; for Asian Americans, 77%; for Hispanics, the figure was 62%; and for black analysts/specialists, the rate was 61% although it was as low as 48% in one year. There was no significant difference in the retention rates between men (66%) and women (70%).

Among the key factors the presenter identified that influence retention were the organization's culture and the kind of work it does; the quality of supervision; staff opportunities to utilize skills and advance their careers;¹⁸ and, the promotion of a family-friendly work environment.¹⁹ The study presenter also pointed out the importance of diversity at all levels but particularly in the management corps.

In 2007, a congressional subcommittee convened a hearing on the diversity of the SES in Legislative branch agencies. On behalf of GAO, the Managing Director of its Office of Opportunity and Inclusiveness (O&I) testified that since 2000, the Agency had made progress in increasing the representation of minorities in both the SES/SL corps, as well as in the SES feeder pool, which at GAO is the Band III level for analysts, specialists and attorneys and MS-II and PT-IV for Administrative Professional and Support Staff (APSS) . He

¹⁷ Synopsis of *Retention of GAO Analysts and Specialists Hired During Fiscal Years 2002-2005*, a special Comptroller General Project presented at an SES/SL Partners' Workshop (July 2007) [hereinafter *Retention of GAO Analysts Study*].

¹⁸ The importance of this factor is reflected in the data: nearly 78% of the Band I analysts/specialists who were hired in 2002 and subsequently promoted were still at GAO in 2007.

¹⁹ The Study was based on a review of GAO and government-wide data and studies; analyses of Employee Feedback and Exit Survey responses; interviews with managing directors, PDP advisors, program managers, analysts, representatives from employee liaison groups and the EAC. The Entry-level Hire Profile team also contributed.

acknowledged, however, that the Agency still had work to do, particularly with respect to the representation of Hispanics and Asian Americans at the SES and Band III levels.

In 1998, the Board published a report on the selection process for the SES at GAO.²⁰ At the conclusion of the Board's study in 1997, GAO had 129 members in its SES corps as it did in 2009. The demographic breakdown of the corps for those two years, by number and percentage follows:

Table 1: SES at GAO by race, national origin, gender (1997 and 2009)²¹

	WF	WM	BF	BM	AF	AM	HF	HM	Total
1997	35	76	4	5	2	3	2	2	129
	27%	59%	3%	4%	1.5%	2.5%	1.5%	1.5%	100%
2009	46	62	6	5	2	4	4	0	129
	35.7%	48%	4.7%	3.9%	1.5%	3.1%	3.1%		100%

Source: Analysis of GAO data.

Over the span of 12 years, representation of white females in the SES has gone from 27% to 35.7%. The percentages of black males and Asian females remained static and the SES percentages for Asian males and black and Hispanic females increased.

At the direction of Congress, in 2008, the Agency published a Workforce Diversity Plan focusing on the areas of recruitment and hiring, staff development, and the creation of a more inclusive environment.²² The report raised several concerns about sustaining adequate

²⁰ *Selection Into the Senior Executive Service (1992-1997)*.

²¹ The letters in the legend, stand for: white female, white male, black female, black male, Asian American female, Asian American male, Hispanic female, Hispanic male.

²² H.R. Rep. No. 110-198, at 30-31 (2007). GAO was ordered to "develop and institute an affirmative action plan with specific goals and objectives within 180 days of enactment of this Act to further the ability for women, minorities and individuals with disabilities to achieve balanced representation within the GAO workforce." The report accompanied the Legislative Branch Appropriations Bill of 2008.

representation of protected groups at GAO and noted that one of the issues that may be hindering the Agency's ability to maintain an inclusive environment was that, from April 2007 to March 2008, Asian Americans and staff with disabilities were separating from the Agency at rates higher than their representation within the workforce.²³ The data contained in the Agency's 2009 Workforce Diversity Plan show that in the year since the first Plan issued, African American males separated from GAO at a rate higher than their representation, constituting 4.9% of the workforce and 9.3% of the separations.²⁴ The data further showed that African American males represented 10.6% of the resignations and 6.6% of those transferring to another agency. Almost all were analysts; half were at the Band I level; and they had better than average appraisal scores. By contrast, African American females constituted 13.2% of the workforce and 8.4% of the separations.²⁵

The Diversity Plans both noted the importance of having representative pools of employees at all levels in order to foster succession planning and ensure workforce diversity in the future. GAO's 2008 Plan presented a somewhat bleak view of diversity within some of the Agency's job categories. For example, percentages were low for Hispanic males at the entry level; black males at the Band IIB level; and Hispanic females, black males, and Asian American females at the Band III level, which provides the pool of applicants for SES vacancies. At the SES/SL level, there are no Hispanic males and no one with a targeted disability.²⁶ In 2007, no

²³ *Workforce Diversity Plan*, U.S. Government Accountability Office at 16 (2008) [hereinafter *2008 Diversity Plan*].

²⁴ *Workforce Diversity Plan*, U.S. Government Accountability Office at 14 (2009) [hereinafter *2009 Diversity Plan*]. With the exception of African American men, staff in protected groups separated at rates lower than their representation.

²⁵ *Id.* at 21.

²⁶ Targeted disabilities include: deafness; blindness; missing extremities; partial paralysis; complete paralysis; convulsive disorders; mental retardation; mental illness; and distortion of limb and/or spine.

Asian American or Hispanic males or African American females applied for the Executive Candidate Development Program; only one African American male applied and he was not selected.²⁷ While several employee groups expressed concern about minority representation in the SES population at GAO, representatives of the Hispanic Liaison Group made a direct connection between upper-level diversity and retention: “[S]ince SES/SL and other management-level staff make decisions such as staffing, promotions, and final ratings – factors that affect whether staff will stay at GAO – it is important to have better representation of Hispanics and other minorities at those levels.”²⁸

Additional Studies

Retention of newly-hired workers is not an issue unique to GAO. A number of recent studies have concluded that the younger generation entering the workforce or with less than five years of experience is highly mobile, has different workplace expectations, and is not necessarily interested in long-term employment with the same employer.²⁹ An OPM study of career patterns described the “Typical New Professional” as an employee with less than five years experience who is looking for a “somewhat” permanent position but is not bound to a specific geographic

The term “targeted disabilities” was first officially recognized by EEOC in 1979. Individuals with a targeted disability are a subset of people who have a reportable disability. Criteria used to select the nine disabilities that make up the group of targeted disabilities included the severity of the disability, the feasibility of recruitment, and the availability of work force data for individuals with targeted disabilities. According to the EEOC, the purpose of focusing on targeted disabilities is to encourage the hiring, placement, and advancement of selected individuals with disabilities in affirmative action planning. *Improving the Participation Rate of People with Targeted Disabilities in the Federal Work Force* at 4, EEOC (2008).

²⁷ 2009 Diversity Plan at 13-14.

²⁸ *Id.* at 14-15.

²⁹ See *infra* fnns. 31-34.

location. Such an employee is also described as interested in a work environment that offers highly flexible arrangements.³⁰

The Partnership for Public Service summed it up succinctly, noting that this generation does not wish to just have a job but rather looks for employers who meet their needs which include work/life balance and the opportunity to make a difference. The same study pointed out that Federal agencies tend to think that they are in competition with the private sector for the “best and the brightest” when actually the non-profit industry is a leading competitor for a generation that wants to be dedicated to a cause.³¹

In a recent report, the Merit Systems Protection Board (MSPB) cited a number of studies that show that college graduates view entry-level Government jobs as “less challenging, rewarding and professionally beneficial than private and nonprofit sector jobs” and cite slow career progression and the inability to make a difference as major detractors.³²

The recent economic downturn, however, may have a silver lining for Federal recruiters. One research group that has sponsored an annual survey of college students since 2001 has noted a steady rise of interest in government work with at least 38% “fairly interested” in pursuing a government job after college, up from 26% in 2001. Interestingly, the study found that males (43%) are more interested in pursuing government work than females (34%) and minorities

³⁰ *Career Patterns: A 21st Century Approach to Attracting Talent*, U.S. Office of Personnel Management, p.10 (2006) [hereinafter *OPM Career Patterns*].

³¹ *Great Expectations: What Students Want in an Employer and How Federal Agencies Can Deliver It*, Partnership for Public Service at 3 (January 2009).

³² *Attracting the Next Generation: A Look at Federal Entry-Level New Hires*, U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board at 31, 35 (2008) [hereinafter *Attracting the Next Generation*].

(Hispanics - 48%; African Americans - 45%, and Asians - 46%) are more interested than their white counterparts (34%).³³

Studies have also noted that organizational loyalty is more a value of the past. Younger, new hires are simply less likely to stay with one employer during the course of their careers than members of previous generations were. The Bureau of Labor Statistics, reporting on employee tenure in general, noted that “younger workers are more likely than older workers to be short-tenured employees, a group that includes workers who voluntarily change jobs.”³⁴ The MSPB reported that 33% of new Federal hires expected to work in the private sector at some point during their careers; 16% in state or local government; and 10% in the nonprofit sector. Of the new hires who came to the Government directly from college or a university, just over a third of those surveyed by the MSPB said that they plan to stay with the Federal Government until retirement.³⁵

When surveyed about what is attracting young people to the Federal Government, new hires in an MSPB survey were clear that it is the benefits:

- annual salary increase (97%)
- annual and sick leave (94%)
- health insurance (88%)
- 401(k)-type (portable) retirement plan (84%)
- fixed pension (77%)

³³ *2009 Survey of America's College Students*, Hart Research Associates for The Panetta Institute for Public Policy at 9 (May 2009).

³⁴ *Employee Tenure in 2008*, Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor.

³⁵ *Attracting the Next Generation* at 37 (2008).

Additionally, the new hires pointed to the importance of more nontraditional benefits such as structured training programs, flexible or alternative work schedules, tuition reimbursement and the ability to telecommute.³⁶

At GAO, employees joining the workforce are asked to complete a New Hire Experience Survey no later than the end of their third week at the Agency. For the past four years, the most important factor underlying decisions to work at GAO has been that “GAO makes a difference.” The second most important factor was GAO’s reputation; third most important, the salary and benefits. Of note, 21% of the 2009 survey responders said that they plan to remain at the Agency for 1-6 years; in 2006, that percentage was 51%. In addition, in 2009, 20.6% said that they planned to spend their entire careers at GAO as compared to 8.4% in 2006.

Study Dimensions

The purpose of the PAB’s study is to attempt to identify whether there are any cultural, environmental, or organizational factors at GAO that could lead to a disproportionate number of members of any protected class leaving the Agency within their first five years. This study involved data collection on hiring and separations which included gathering information on a unit and office basis, by position/job category and by race, sex, national origin, disability and age in order to discern whether any patterns having EEO consequences emerged. The Board also examined GAO’s retention efforts, as well as those of other Federal agencies and private sector institutions.

When employees separate from the Agency, they are sent an electronic exit questionnaire to complete that asks questions about their time at the Agency. Subsequent to the Board’s

³⁶ *Id.* at 33.

decision to study the retention of new hires at GAO, staff contacted the Human Capital Office (HCO) to inquire about retrieving the results from the exit survey. At that time, however, participation in the survey had dropped to levels that HCO had determined to be no longer useful. In 2006, HCO and the Board's Office of Oversight staff worked on a new questionnaire that is delivered to the separating employees electronically; the data from the questionnaire is tabulated anonymously by race, gender, Band, and year hired.³⁷ Although the response rates have varied since the overhaul of the questionnaire, they reached a high of 71% for non-retirees in 2008; 61% overall. The Board reviewed the responses to the GAO Employee Exit Questionnaire from fiscal years 2007 through 2009 in which each separating employee was asked:

- to state what he or she will be doing after leaving the Agency (*e.g.*, retiring, transferring);
- to identify the extent to which 19 different factors played a role in his or her separation;
- to indicate the level of support and recognition he or she was given for work at each level of supervision.

The survey also seeks to identify employees' views of the opportunities that were or were not provided to them, whether their performance goals were both achievable and realistic, and perceived barriers at GAO.³⁸ Although the survey results will be discussed in more detail in Chapter III, they did indicate certain differences by race. For example, in the 2007 data, a majority of African American responders (56%) cited the lack of opportunity for advancement³⁹

³⁷ Filling in EEO data on the previous survey instrument was optional.

³⁸ The results were tabulated for white and black employees only as there was too low a volume of response for Asian and Hispanic employees.

³⁹ Non-retirees, in general, have cited a lack of opportunity for advancement as a reason for leaving through the years. It peaked as a reason in 2004 (36%) and leveled off at 32.3% by 2008 and 29.7% in 2009, similar to the 30% who cited it in 2003.

as the major reason behind their decisions to separate from the Agency while the major reason given by white employees who were separating was the opportunity to make better use of their skills (40%). In 2008, both African American and white responders noted “Family, Life or Health Considerations” as the chief reason behind their separations. In addition, in 2007, African American responders noted their immediate supervisors as a reason underlying their separations at more than four times the rate (26%) of white responders (6%); in 2008, 24% of African American responders again cited their immediate supervisors versus 7% of white responders. By 2009, however, the immediate supervisor was a factor for only 11.5% of African American responders and 13.3% for white responders.

The results also captured employees who left before the end of their probationary periods, which generally last two years. Finally, the questionnaire enabled the Board to review employees’ perceptions about GAO’s work, its development processes, its organizational climate, its performance culture, the opportunities that were or were not provided to them, the attempts made to ensure that achievable, realistic goals were set, and perceived barriers to mobility at GAO.

Chapter II presents general demographics relevant to this study with particular emphasis on separation/retention data. In Chapter III, the Board attempts to ascertain whether there are human capital or organizational practices or cultural issues that affect the retention of members of certain protected groups and looks at the results of the exit questionnaire. Chapter IV of this report lays out benefits offered by the Federal government, generally, and GAO, specifically. This chapter also examines GAO’s environment and retention initiatives or practices that it has implemented to attempt to determine which benefits and flexibilities are attractors for employees

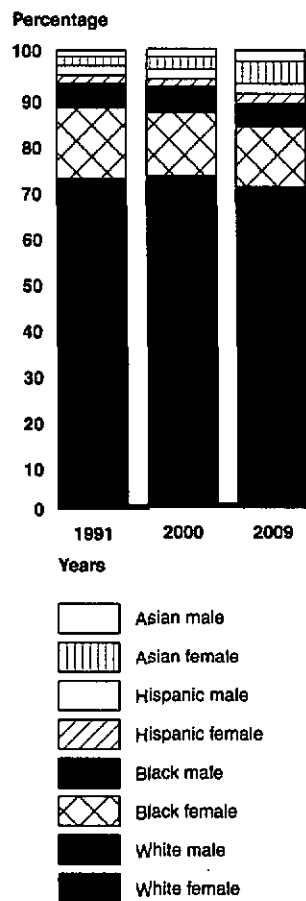
and whether there are barriers at GAO that would preclude the use of some of those practices.

Chapter V presents the Board's findings, conclusions, and recommendations to the Agency.

Chapter II: The Numbers

In order to assess the impact of separations on the diversity of GAO's workforce, the Board looked at the data for hires and separations at GAO by race, national origin, gender, age and disability and also examined separation data by length of service and within the two-year probationary periods.⁴⁰ The first chart sets the stage by showing the Agency's EEO profiles in 1991, 2000 and 2009 by percentages of employees:

Chart 1: EEO Profile of GAO (1991, 2000, 2009)



Source: Analysis of GAO data.

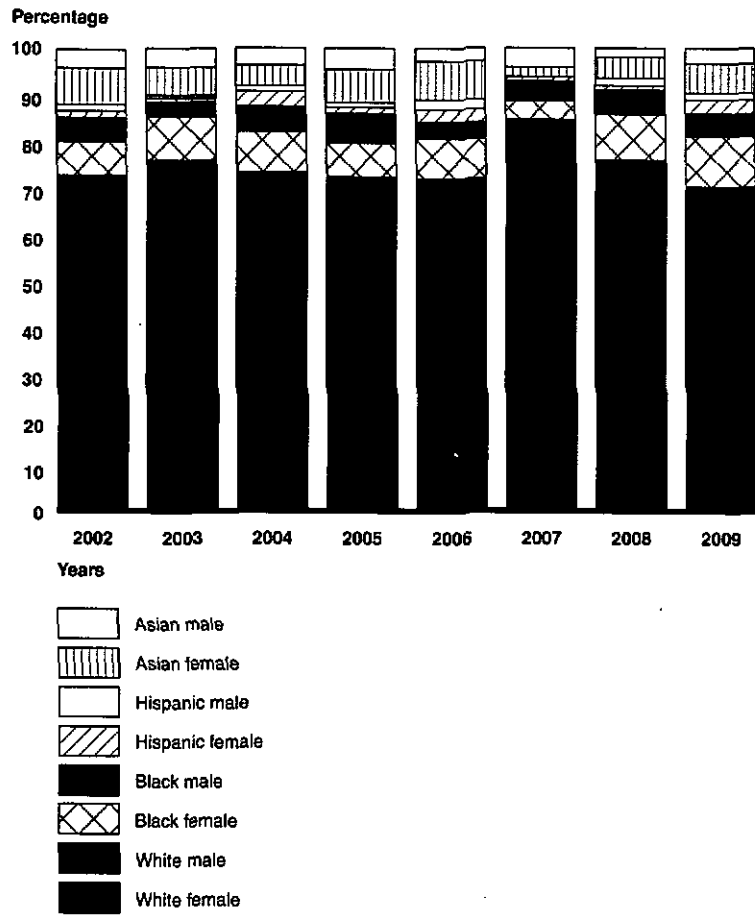
⁴⁰ The raw numbers and percentages on which these charts are based are available in Appendix I of this report.

Over the course of the past 18 years, the Agency has seen modest diversity gains among Hispanic females and Asian American males, with Asian American females (2.9%) and white females (10%) showing the most significant changes in representational percentages. The percentage of black males in the workforce has remained fairly static.⁴¹ Looking at the past nine years when the number of employees at the Agency has been more consistent, the chart shows gains in diversity among Hispanic females and Asian Americans, with small decreases in the African American population. During the same time period, the percentage of white males in the workforce at GAO declined from 43% to 33%.

The next two charts show hires and separations, broken down by race, national origin and gender. There was a sharp decrease in the number of minorities hired in 2007 when compared to the 2006 figures (28% v. 15%) but separations of minority employees dropped from 27% to 20%. In 2008, minorities constituted 24% of the total hired and 30% in 2009. In 2008, separations of minority employees increased again (31%), with a small dip in 2009 (28%).

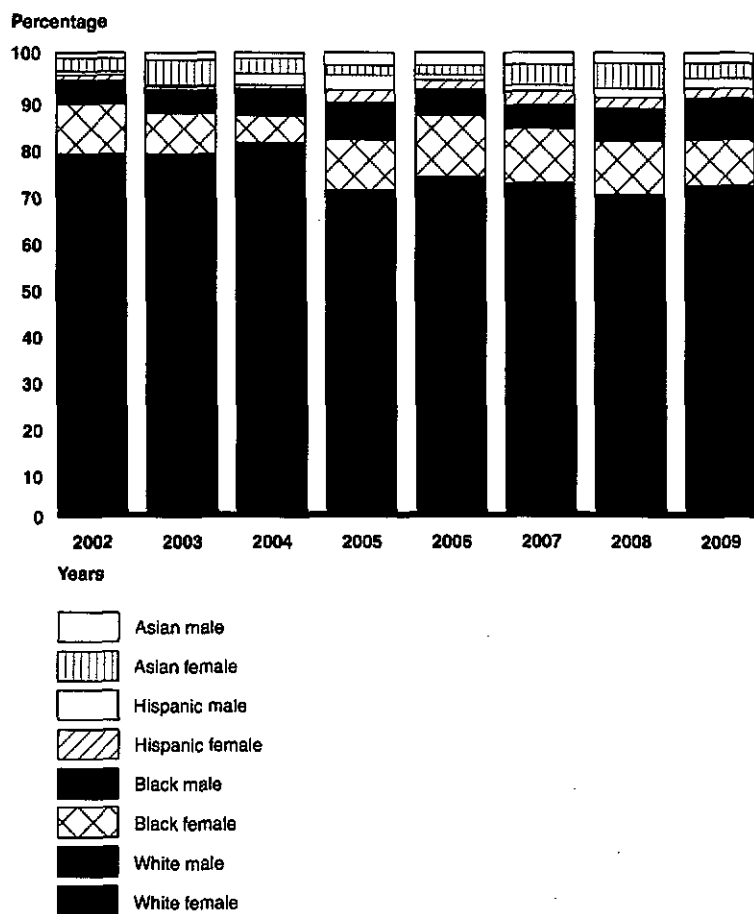
⁴¹ As noted in the Introduction to this report, during a five year period in the 1990s, GAO reduced its workforce by 39%. Overall, the downsizing had little impact on the Agency's EEO profile. The percentages for white, Hispanic, and Asian employees and black males were virtually the same before and after the reductions; the percentage of black females dipped by 1.4% as they bore the brunt of the Reduction-in-Force (RIF) actions. The Agency's increased use of and reliance on technology resulted in a RIF among support staff who were overwhelmingly female and predominantly black. *Downsizing at the U.S. General Accounting Office* at 8 (available at www.pab.gao.gov).

Chart 2: Permanent Hires by Race, National Origin and Gender (2002-2009)



Source: Analysis of GAO data.

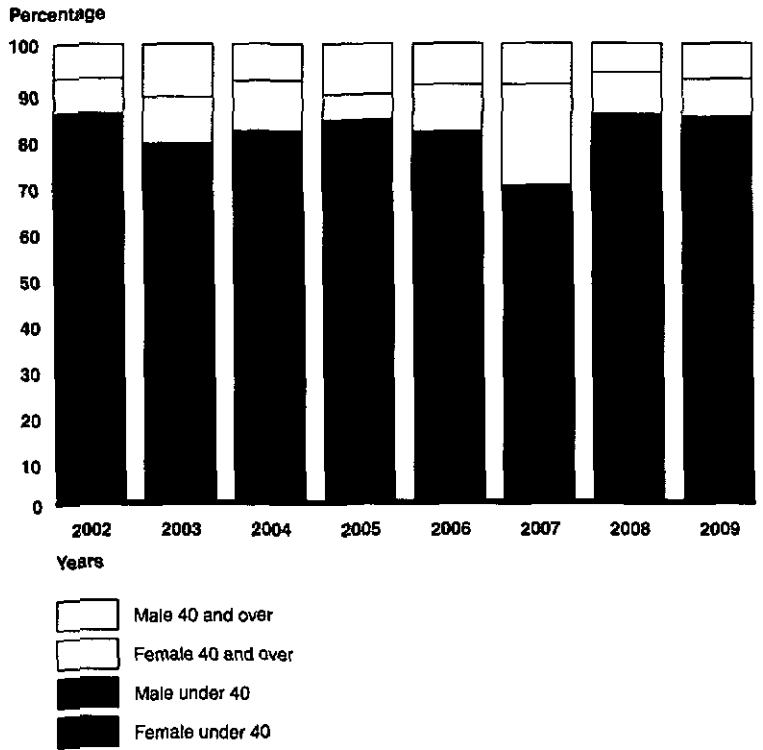
Chart 3: Separations by Race, National Origin and Gender (2002-2009)



Source: Analysis of GAO data.

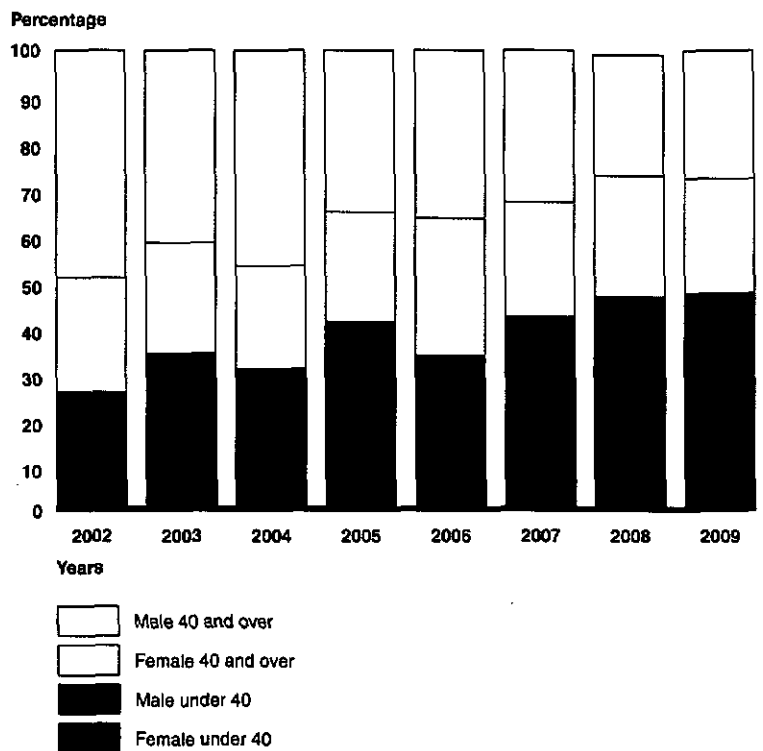
Together, these two charts show that white females and Asian Americans are not separating from the Agency at as high a rate as they are hired. Concomitantly, white males are separating, in both numbers and percentages, at a higher rate than any other group. As Chart 1 showed, however, they did constitute more than 45% of the workforce in 1991 so, as a group, they are more likely to have a higher percentage of retirement-eligible employees within their ranks.

Chart 4: Permanent Hires by Age and Gender (2002-2009)



Source: Analysis of GAO data.

Chart 5: Separations by Age and Gender (2002-2009)



Source: Analysis of GAO data.

As would be expected, employees 40 and over made up 63% of those separating from GAO over the past eight years. Females under 40 left at a much higher rate than males under 40 until 2009, when the same number and percentage (43/23.5%) of males and females under 40 separated.

Table 2: Permanent Hires by Disability and Gender (2002-2009)

	Female none	Male None	Female Non- severe	Male Non- severe	Female severe	Male severe	Total
2002	209	148	9	8	2	1	377
2003	79	62	3	3	0	1	148
2004	133	98	7	2	1	0	241
2005	114	97	4	2	1	0	218
2006	174	106	2	2	4	0	288
2007	67	29	0	1	0	0	97
2008	177	131	1	2	1	1	313
2009	196	135	5	2	0	0	338
Total	1149	806	31	22	9	3	2020
	57%	40%	1.5%	1%	.4%	.1%	100%

Source: Analysis of GAO data.

Table 3: Separations by Disability and Gender (2002-2009)

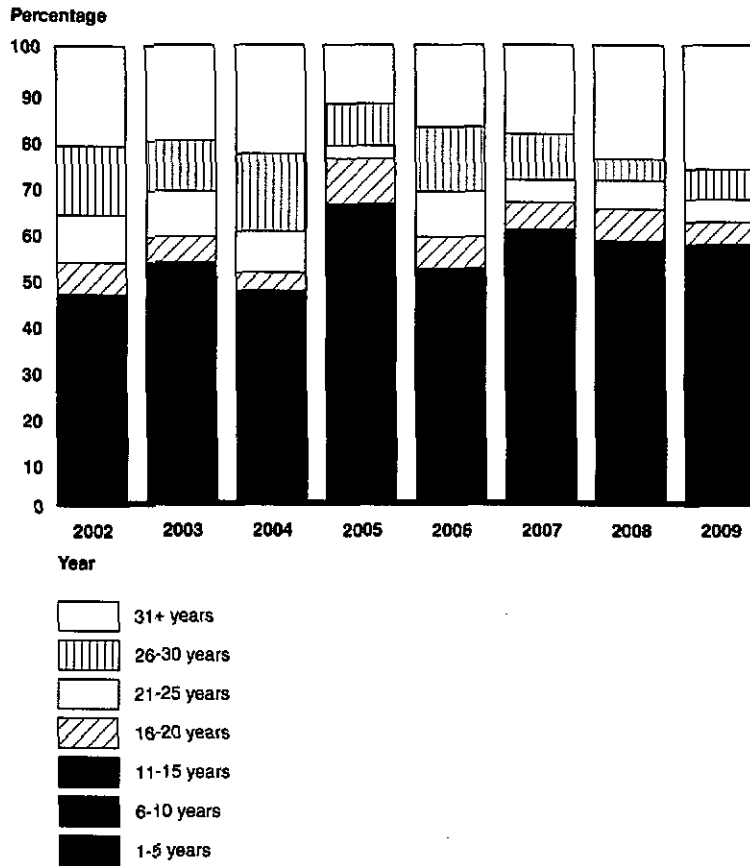
	Female None	Male None	Female Non- severe	Male Non- severe	Female severe	Male severe	Total
2002	95	135	6	12	1	1	250
2003	132	152	3	7	0	2	296
2004	127	172	4	13	1	1	318
2005	128	136	6	10	3	0	283
2006	145	154	6	10	1	1	317
2007	155	144	4	6	0	1	310
2008	147	141	5	3	2	1	299
2009	89	89	0	4	0	1	183
Total	1018	1123	34	65	8	8	2256
	45%	50%	1.5%	2.9%	.3%	.3%	100%

Source: Analysis of GAO data.

The results from these tables confirm the findings reported in GAO's Workforce Diversity Plans: the number of staff with severe or targeted disabilities is decreasing, as people with targeted disabilities constituted .08% of the hires in 2008 and .03% of the hires in 2009. In addition, in 2009, separations exceeded the percentage hired, with more men with disabilities separating than women with disabilities. This trend is occurring throughout the Federal Government, which has reported a decline in the percentage of employees with disabilities each year since 1994. According to the EEOC, the percentage of permanent federal employees with targeted disabilities reached its peak of 1.24% in FY1994 with a total of 32,337 employees. Within a ten year period, the number of federal employees with targeted disabilities decreased from 28,671 in FY 1997 to 24,442 in FY 2006, a net change of -14.75%. Over the past 20 years, the Federal government's efforts to improve the participation rate of employees with targeted disabilities have failed to result in any significant progress. In response to this development, in 2006, EEOC created a program, LEAD (Leadership for the Employment of Americans with Disabilities), designed to address the declining number of employees with targeted disabilities and to significantly increase the employment of that population within the ranks of the Federal government.⁴²

⁴² LEAD's initiatives include training and sponsoring discussion groups and conferences that support outreach to potential employers of persons with disabilities.

Chart 6: Separations by Length of Service (2002-2009)

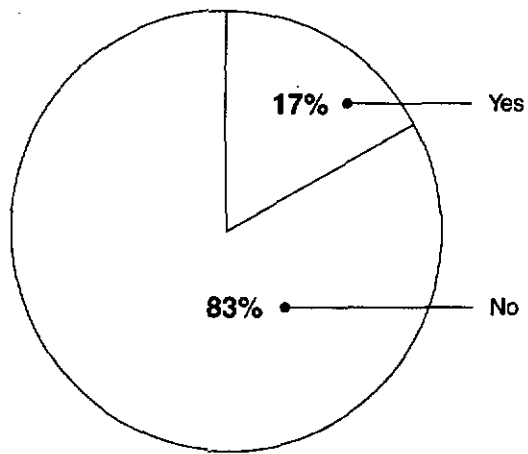


Source: Analysis of GAO data.

Chart 6, which displays separations by length of Federal service for an eight year period, shows that more employees left by their fifth year (911) than left after more than 20 years of service (893). Retention data from OPM's Central Personnel Data File (CPDF) indicate that Federal employees who do not resign in their first year or two of employment become more unlikely to resign as time passes. This pattern has remained consistent since the Federal government first started tracking retentions.⁴³

⁴³ *Attracting the Next Generation* at 39-40.

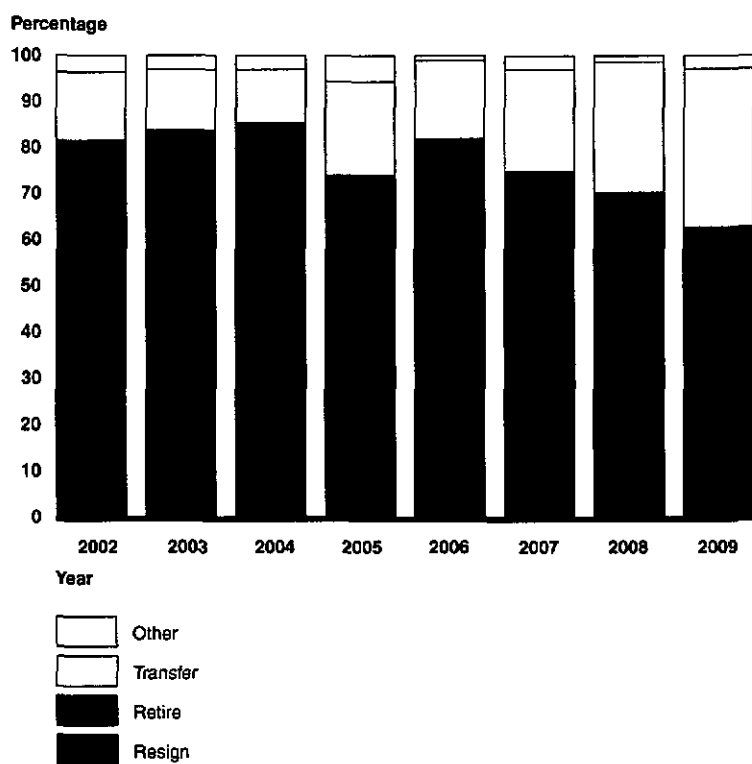
Chart 7: Separations Before the End of the Probationary Period (2002-2009)



Source: Analysis of GAO data.

New hires who left before the end of their probationary periods, a term which is generally two years in duration at GAO, numbered 384 (17%).

Chart 8: Separations by Type (2002–2009)



Source: Analysis of GAO data.

During the eight years in question, a higher percentage of separating GAO employees either resigned or transferred to another Federal agency (53%) than retired (44%). GAO's numbers as compared to the most recent OPM data for the Executive Branch (2007) show: 22% at GAO and 11.7% of separating employees in the Executive Branch transferred to another agency; 36% for both resigned; and, 39% at GAO and 52.7% in the Executive branch retired.

Chapter III: GAO's Exit Questionnaire

In this study, the Board set out to determine whether it could identify any cultural, organizational or environmental factors that may be contributing to recently-hired members of any protected class leaving the Agency early in their tenures. This chapter focuses on GAO's unique culture and its organizational style, components of which were cited by the Ivy Group in its report⁴⁴ as factors in the disparities in performance appraisals between black and white analysts at the Agency. Some of the responses to the exit questionnaire also revealed racial differences among the responders.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ In 2006, top level GAO managers held a meeting to focus on concerns about disparities in performance ratings between African American and white analysts. Shortly thereafter, then Comptroller General David M. Walker determined that the Agency should undertake an independent, external assessment of the factors contributing to the average rating differences between African American and Caucasian analysts. Subsequent to a competitive procurement process, GAO awarded a contract to the Ivy Planning Group to conduct an assessment of the performance rating cycles between 2002 and 2006 to determine what factors were significant in the difference in performance ratings between African American and Caucasian analysts. (www.ivygroupllc.com) In April 2008, the Group produced a report based on its study of GAO: *African American Performance Assessment Study* [hereinafter *The Ivy Study*]. The Ivy Group confirmed disparities in average appraisal ratings between African American and Caucasian analysts from 2002-2005 and further noted statistically significant differences in appraisal averages in the 2007 cycle between Caucasian and African American analysts at both levels of Band II. Differences have since declined but the Agency's 2009 Workforce Diversity Plan noted statistically significant differences in the ratings for African Americans analysts at the Band IIA level in 2008 (*2009 Diversity Plan* at 23).

⁴⁵ Racial disparities noted in the in the performance appraisal system by the Ivy Group are not the first time such differences have been detected in an Agency process. In 1987, the Board published a study that found that there was a statistically significant difference, *i.e.* at or below the .05 level, in the time that black analysts spent in their grades prior to promotion when compared to white analysts. In the mid-1990s, the Board, again, focused on promotions at GAO and found that the median time in band for white employees at the non-competitive promotion point was less than the time that black, Asian and Hispanic employees spent. From Band I to Band II, the median time for all white, Asian, and Hispanic employees was less than five years; the median time to promotion for all black employees was more than five years. That data was right-censored, a technique developed to analyze lifetime data. See, *Functional Study of GAO's Career Ladder Promotional Process* (1987) and *Promotions of Banded Employees* (1999).

In addition, a recent MSPB report, based on a survey of Executive Branch employees noted that minority employees were more likely to report unfair treatment and were also less likely to hold favorable opinions of their agencies' human capital practices.⁴⁶

The Exit Survey

As discussed in the Introduction to this report, the exit questionnaires were designed to elicit perceptions about GAO's work, development processes, organizational climate, and performance culture that may have affected an individual's decision to separate from the Agency.⁴⁷

To assist GAO in coming to terms with areas of concern it did identify, the Ivy Group made a number of recommendations to the Agency, some of which are germane to the retention issue, but, echoing an MSPB finding that "It is much easier to change policies than it is to change organizational culture,"⁴⁸ cautioned that implementing many of them will require a shift in the "GAO culture" which will take time.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ *The Federal Government: A Model Employer or a Work in Progress? Perspectives from 25 Years of the Merit Principles Survey*, at 15, U.S. Merit Systems Protection Board (2008) [hereinafter *MSPB Merit Principles Survey*]. By age, older employees reported unfair treatment in career advancement which may be more a reflection of decreasing opportunities. With respect to ethnicity and race, however, the conclusion was that "significant differences persist in many areas," noting that minority employees were more likely to report they had been treated unfairly; less likely to hold favorable opinions of agency human resource practices; and, less likely to agree that their opinions count at work. *Id.* at 15, 23.

⁴⁷ When an employee separates from GAO he or she is entered into an automatic exit system and invited to complete the exit questionnaire. The 2008 response rate was 71.2% from non-retirees; 61% overall. The overall response rate in 2004 was 41.9%, in 2005, 37.7% and in 2005, just before the overhaul of the questionnaire, it was 43.2%. Prior to the use of the new instrument, EEO data was collected on a voluntary basis. This survey is not given to interns who leave at the end of their terms; they are given a separate survey.

⁴⁸ *MSPB Merit Principles Survey* at 24.

⁴⁹ The Board has previously found in its studies that GAO has sometimes been slow to make institutional changes in its policies and procedures that affect equal employment opportunity at the Agency. For

The results of the exit questionnaire included in this report are from FY 07, FY 08, and FY09; the universe is all permanent and temporary employees, excluding interns. In FY 08, the response rate for the questionnaire reached 71%, the highest since GAO began surveying staff. The questionnaire gives responders 19 choices and asks them to identify as major, minor, or not a reason the extent to which each factor played a role in their decisions to separate. Another set of four inquiries asks responders to indicate the amount of support and recognition they received from their immediate supervisors and then to answer the same inquiries with respect to their team and unit management. Some of the most notable differences in responses by ethnicity are reflected in Table 4.⁵⁰

example, GAO's Order on discrimination complaint processing was not updated for 10 years even though significant changes had occurred in the law and within the internal Office that administers the complaint process. Similarly, the Agency has, for years, assured the Board that employee's disability status would be updated annually and that O&I would begin using a customer satisfaction survey. Neither has occurred. *State of Equal Opportunity at GAO* at 40.

⁵⁰ The responses from Hispanic and Asian American employees were excluded due to low volume or no responses.

Table 4: Exit Questionnaire Responses to Reasons for Separating by Ethnicity

	African American FY 07	White FY 07	...	African American FY 08	White FY 08	...	African American FY 09	White FY 09
Factors in Separation:								
Lack of opportunity for advancement	56%	24%		40%	25.2%		19.2%	24.4%
Immediate supervisor	26%	6%		24%	6.9%		11.5%	13.3%
Opportunity to make better use of skills	48%	40%		48%	45%		38.5%	41.1%
Supervisor:								
Treated fairly always or most of time	60%	85%		60%	84.7%		73.1%	73.4%
Given open and honest feedback	39%	76%		52%	75.6%		61.5%	60%
Had sense that work was valued	52%	76%		56%	79.4%		69.2%	60%
Team/Unit Management:								
Treated fairly always or most of time	52%	71%		56%	72.5%		53.8%	74.4%
Given open and honest feedback	43%	56%		52%	54.2%		46.2%	53.3%

In FY 07, a majority of black responders (56%) cited the lack of opportunity for advancement as the major reason behind their decisions to separate from the Agency, more than double the percentage of white responders who selected that as a reason (24%). In FY 2008, the lack of opportunity for advancement was cited by 40% of black responders and 25 % of white

responders.⁵¹ By FY 2009, the major reason for leaving GAO selected by all responders was to make better use of their skills; lack of opportunity for advancement was cited by only 19.2% of black responders and 24.4% of white responders.

There was a significantly wide gap between black and white analysts in the 2007 exit questionnaire results relating to the role of the immediate supervisor as a reason for an employee to separate from the Agency. In FY 07, 26% of African American analysts cited their immediate supervisors as a major reason for leaving GAO compared to 6% of white analysts; in FY 08, the corresponding figures were 24% and 7%. In FY 09, the gap disappeared. Only 11% of African Americans and 13% of white responders cited their immediate supervisor as a factor in their decisions to separate.

Nearly every response about immediate supervision differed by ethnicity in the exit questionnaire in 2007 and, generally, into 2008. Although 60% of African American responders in both FY 07 and FY 08 said that their immediate supervisors treated them fairly “always/most” of the time; the percentage of white responders who answered that question in the affirmative was 85%. The percentages were even at 73% in FY 09.

In 2007, “honest and open feedback, always/most of the time” garnered a 39% response from African Americans and 76% from white responders; in 2008, the percentage was the same for white responders versus 52% for African Americans. The results evened out in FY 09. The separating employees’ questionnaires indicated that 52% of African American analysts versus 76% of white employees sensed that their immediate supervisors’ valued their work in FY 07

⁵¹ In its most recent Executive Branch survey, the MSPB confirmed that black employees throughout the Federal Government are more likely to report they were “passed over” for a promotion or job opportunity. Similarly to the Ivy Study, the MSPB cautioned managers not to rely on informal networks to recruit or for insight into prospective applicants’ backgrounds or qualifications, noting that such reliance can disadvantage those employees not fully represented or included in informal networks. MSPB *Merit Principles Survey* at 48.

and was roughly the same in FY 08. In comments appended to the exit questionnaires in those years, employees cited the Agency's reluctance to hold supervisors accountable for providing open, timely and constructive feedback and for not doing a better job of making all staff feel valued. By 2009, however, 69.2% of African American respondents believed that their immediate supervisors valued their work as compared to 60% of white respondents.

In the category of team and unit management, "treated me fairly always/most of the time" showed a 19% disparity in 2007 (52% African American v. 71% white); a 16.5% disparity in 2008 (56% African American v. 72.5% white); and, a 20.6% disparity in 2009 (53.8% African American v. 74.4% white). African American employees also cited the opportunity to make better use of their skills elsewhere at higher rates than their white counterparts in both 2007 and 2008 but that evened out on 2009.

Although the exit questionnaire provides useful insights into why certain employees opt to leave GAO before retirement, it certainly does not and cannot answer all of the questions. The questionnaire does, however, support the Agency's decision to tackle the race issue directly as the survey clearly pointed out differences in perceptions that black employees and white employees had about the Agency in 2007 and 2008 and that, in turn, may have influenced employees' decisions about whether to remain in a given environment.

One of the primary recommendations of the Ivy Study was to call on GAO to facilitate conversations among its employees about race and ethnicity. GAO contracted with the Ivy Planning Group to hold such Agency-wide conversations in order to raise awareness of behaviors and actions that could have an impact on performance as well as conscious and unconscious perceptions about race that may affect the GAO workforce. The conversations took place in 2008 and into early 2009 and involved all staff divided into eight groups in order to

minimize situations in which one's supervisor might be present. The Ivy Group tabulated results from evaluations, comments and observations of the facilitators and prepared a report.⁵²

The overarching message from the conversations was that GAO must work at creating a general understanding among its employees that a diverse and inclusive organization will help everyone meet organizational and personal goals. To ensure full deliverability of that message, the Ivy Group challenged GAO to make a business case for diversity, *i.e.*, making diversity an organizational priority that is integral to the achievement of the Agency's strategic goals and objectives. Goal 4 of GAO's current Strategic Plan calls for it to be a "Model Federal Agency and a World-class Professional Services Organization" and the way in which GAO intends to achieve that Goal is by becoming a professional services employer of choice. The Agency has identified key efforts that need to be monitored and its Strategic Plan includes potential outcomes to its efforts in order to measure, to the extent possible, whether the Agency is achieving its goal of attracting, retaining, motivating, and rewarding a highly skilled, diverse and capable workforce.

The Agency's plans, geared heavily toward organizational change, include the development and maintenance of a mentoring program; changes to the compensation and performance management plans; pilot approaches to engaging GAO's interns; and the provision of targeted developmental opportunities for the PDP staff. In addition, the Agency promulgated a *Management Improvement Priorities Action Plan*, which focuses on five distinct areas for improvement: (1) Recognizing and Valuing Diversity; (2) Reassessing the Performance Appraisal System; (3) Managing Workload, Sustaining Quality, and Streamlining Processes; (4)

⁵² *What Was Learned and Proposed Diversity and Inclusion Training Plan* (March 31, 2009). Based on The Ivy Group's recommendations, the Agency is seeking contractor support to develop the Diversity Basics and Leadership for a Diverse and Inclusive Workplace curricula, which will include the objectives from courses on "Dispelling Myths and Misconceptions" and "Cultural Competency," and is also seeking a vendor to provide GAO-wide diversity training that focuses on inclusion.

Enhancing Staffing Practices and Developing the Workforce; and, (5) Strengthening Recruitment and Retention Initiatives. The detailed Plan ties its 47 separate goals and objectives to specific recommendations from The Ivy Study, Comptroller General projects, leadership meetings, employee feedback, and the Executive Committee. Each goal and objective relates to a specific project, the status of which is updated on a regular basis.

While the Agency's potential or expected outcome envisions an improved, bias-free work environment that will produce a more productive, diverse, and professionally developed workforce, the development and continuing refinement of accurate performance measures are imperative to a realistic assessment of the effects of GAO's attempts to effect meaningful organizational change.

Chapter IV: Retention Initiatives

GAO's ability to retain new and recent hires stems, in large part, from their job satisfaction and sense of fulfillment and potential for advancement. However, more readily quantifiable are two elements: (1) the standard emoluments of employment and fringe benefits that exist throughout the Federal government employment sector; and (2) GAO's more individualized and tailored provision of benefits that arise from its discretion to promote career advancement and enrichment.

The success of GAO's efforts to provide a progressive work environment that allows employees to balance their work and personal lives is reflected in the responses to the exit questionnaire. Hardly any responders mentioned GAO's flexibilities as a reason for separating and, as previously noted, the only employees leaving to seek "Better Benefits" were in Band I, 15% of whom listed that factor as a major reason for their separations. In addition, GAO's annual Employee Feedback Survey results for 2008 showed that 78% of the responders would recommend GAO as a good place to work; 89% gave GAO's programs to balance work and personal life positive marks.

I. Government-wide Employee Benefits

The Federal government, as a modern 21st Century employer, affords its employees an unparalleled perquisites package consisting of pension, savings, health benefits insurance, life insurance, sick and annual leave, and other financial and non-financial workplace benefits. These employment emoluments, as described below, make the Federal government an employer of choice. The following listing of Federal benefits contains references to GAO and its internal Orders where relevant.

A. Federal Retirement System

There are two primary types of federal retirement, the Civil Service Retirement System (CSRS) and the Federal Employees Retirement System (FERS).⁵³ Both are defined benefit programs with spousal survivor benefits although a greater percentage of retirement benefits under FERS come from social security and the Thrift Savings Plan (TSP). Most employees hired after December 31, 1983 are in the FERS System.

B. Thrift Savings Plan

The Government-wide Thrift Savings Plan (TSP)⁵⁴ affords federal employees multiple investment options, with prescribed government contributions, similar to a 401(k) plan. The TSP allows employees to plan their financial future security, in conjunction with their federal retirement benefits, through an array of investment options (Government Securities Investment (G) Fund; Fixed Income Index Investment (F) Fund; Common Stock Index Investment (C) Fund; Small Capitalization Stock Index Investment (S) Fund; International Stock Investment (I) Fund; & Lifecycle (L) Funds). TSP accounts are also a source of low interest loans for employees for general purposes or to purchase a primary residence.

Only FERS employees are entitled to receive agency contributions to their TSP. An agency automatically contributes 1% of basic pay per pay period, whether or not an employee

⁵³ <http://federalretirement.net/annuity.htm#CSRS%20CALCULATIONS>. Computation of a CSRS annuity is based upon an employee's high-3 years average pay multiplied by a factor of 1 ½ % for service up to 5 years; 1 ¾ % for service for over 5 and up to 10 years; and 2 % for years of service over 10. The FERS plan consists of three parts: (1) Social Security Benefits; (2) the Basic Benefit Plan; and (3) the Thrift Savings Plan. Generally, the FERS basic benefit is calculated according to the formula of 1% of an employee's high-3 years of average pay times the employee's total years of creditable service. CSRS includes an optional contribution to the TSP without an agency match.

⁵⁴ www.tsp.gov.

contributes his/her own money into the TSP account. When employees contribute to the TSP their agency matches that for the first 3% of basic pay dollar-for-dollar; and 50 cents on the dollar for the next two percent of pay. While employees may contribute beyond 5% of their basic pay agencies do not match the contributions beyond the 5% level.

“Catch-up contributions” are supplemental tax-deferred employee contributions that eligible employees age 50 or older (or turning age 50 during the calendar year) can make to the TSP beyond the \$16,500 maximum amount they can contribute through regular contributions. In 2009 eligible employees may contribute up to an additional \$5,500.

C. Social Security

Under FERS, Social Security provides employees full credit for Social Security covered service in Federal and non-Federal covered employment. However, employees under the CSRS are subject to a “windfall” provision that reduces their Social Security benefits except for those employees with extensive earnings under the Social Security System.

D. Medicare – Part A

Medicare-Part A is available to persons at no cost at age 65. Federal employees may also, for a fee, purchase additional Medicare coverage for physician care and prescription medications. Retiring employees must carefully consider, on an individual basis, choosing between their benefit options under Medicare and the Federal Employee Health Benefits Program.

E. Federal Employees Health Benefits Program (FEHBP)

The Federal health benefit plan has no waiting periods, required medical exam, or age/physical condition restrictions, and allows for individual or family coverage. The FEHBP offers a wide choice of private insurers on a national and regional basis, and through fee for service or a Health Maintenance Organization (HMO). Employees control premium costs through the choice of plans offering more or fewer benefits, higher or lower deductibles and exclusions. Through separate enrollments employees may choose comprehensive dental and visual coverage for which they pay the full premiums. Employees may carry their FEHBP coverage into retirement. The Government contributes the greater portion of the premium cost for employees and annuitants; active employees pay their share with “pre-tax” dollars. The employee share paid by active employees, in contrast to annuitants, is not subject to income tax.

Active employees may also avail themselves of the Federal Flexible Spending Account Program (FSAFEDS).⁵⁵ FSAFEDS offers three different flexible spending accounts (FSAs): a health care flexible spending account, a limited expense health care flexible account, and a dependent care flexible account. Eligible employees can enroll in FSAFEDS each year during the Federal Benefits Opens Season (the November/December timeframe). Enrollment does not carry forward year to year. FSAFEDS permits employees to pay for not otherwise insured health-related expenses with pre-tax dollars. However, the failure to expend all of the deposited funds for expenses incurred during the covered year will result in their forfeiture if not spent by the end of the first quarter of the subsequent year on the eligible expenses.

⁵⁵ <http://www.opm.gov/insure/flexible/index.asp>.

F. Federal Employees Group Life Insurance (FEGLI)

Group term life insurance is available to Federal employees as Basic life insurance and with three options (Standard, Additional, and Family). This benefit is not subject to an employee's state of health. Employees are automatically provided basic FEGLI benefits for their annual rate of pay plus \$2,000. As new hires, employees may increase their FEGLI benefits by multiples of their basic rates of pay, with an equivalent increase in premium costs. Subsequently, employees may only change their FEGLI coverage during declared Open Seasons which are held infrequently and irregularly. The most recent Open Seasons were in September 2004 and, prior to that, in 1999.

G. Leave and Holidays

Fulltime Federal employees earn 13 days of sick leave each year; 13, 20, or 26 days of vacation leave each year, depending on years of service; and, 10 days of paid holiday leave each year. Part-time employees earn leave, as well, but on a pro-rated basis.

H. Family Friendly Programs

Over the years the Government has added numerous family-friendly programs allowing employees far greater flexibility in how work is performed and how they may harmonize their work responsibilities with family and social needs.⁵⁶ These include flexible work schedules; telecommuting; family friendly leave policies; part-time and job sharing positions; child and elder care resources; adoption information/incentives; and child support services. Other arrangements include nursing mothers program; on-site/near site day care; day care tuition

⁵⁶ <http://www.opm.gov/oca/leave/index.htm>.

assistance; child care/elder care support groups. These programs afford agencies the latitude to accommodate, to the extent practicable, the personal and family needs of their employees.

GAO was in the forefront of Federal agencies with respect to flexible schedules, maternity leave, telework and daycare. It participated in an OPM-sponsored pilot program in 1990 and established a permanent flexiplace program in 1994; the Agency's on-site day care center, Tiny Findings, opened in 1990 at its headquarters in Washington, DC.

Another example of a family-friendly leave policy is the Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA) that entitles covered employees to a total of 12 work weeks of unpaid leave during any 12-month period for (a) the birth of a child and care of the newborn; (b) the placement of a child with the employee for adoption or foster care; (c) the care of a spouse, domestic partner, child or parent with a serious health condition; and (d) a serious health condition of the employee that makes the employee unable to perform the duties of his or her position.

Under the Federal Employees Family Friendly Leave Act most Federal employees may use up to 104 hours (13 days) of sick leave each leave year to care for a family member or to arrange for or attend the funeral of a family member. Full-time employees may use 40 hours (5 days) of sick leave for these purposes without regard to their current sick leave balance. An additional 64 hours (8 days) may be used if the employee maintains a balance of at least 80 hours of sick leave in his or her sick leave account.

Federal employees are entitled to use sick leave for purposes related to the adoption of a child. A Federal employee is also entitled to use 7 days of paid leave each calendar year (in addition to annual or sick leave) to serve as a bone-marrow donor.⁵⁷

⁵⁷ Pub. L. 103-329 §§629(a), (b) (Sept. 30, 1994).

Leave transfer programs allow Federal employees to donate annual leave to other Federal employees who have medical emergencies and who have exhausted their own leave. Leave banks allow employees to contribute a specified amount of annual leave yearly to their agency leave bank; leave bank members with medical emergencies can withdraw leave from the bank if they exhaust their own leave. GAO has a leave sharing program that allows leave donations that are designated for specific employees but the Agency does not maintain a leave bank.

I. Work/Life Support Programs

The Government offers support programs to help employees with balancing various work/life situations. The Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is designed to restore employees to full productivity and functionality by providing free, confidential short term counseling to identify the employee's problem and, when appropriate, make a referral to an outside organization, facility, or program that can assist the employee in resolving his or her problem.

J. Recruitment Bonus

Lump-sum bonuses can be made available to newly appointed employees for difficult-to-fill positions. For this purpose, up to 25% of basic pay may be paid prior to an employee entering on duty. A service agreement is required that includes a repayment plan if service time is not fulfilled. GAO Order 2575.1.

K. Relocation Bonus

Lump-sum bonuses of up to 25 % of basic pay are also available for difficult-to-fill positions in a different commuting area than the one in which the prospective employee resides.

A service agreement is required with a repayment plan if service time is not fulfilled. GAO Order 2575.1.

L. Retention Allowance

The Government has a program to provide incentives aimed at retaining employees which provides for a retention allowance of up to 25% of basic pay. GAO Order 2575.1, Ch. 4, ¶5 permits incentive payments of up to 50% of basic pay based on critical agency need; such retention payments must also be reviewed and approved by the Chief Administrative Officer. An employee is eligible for this allowance unless the prescribed service period for his or her acceptance of a relocation or recruitment bonus has not been completed. A unit head recommends a retention allowance to an authorizing official. Eligibility depends on the outside availability of persons with equivalent competencies; the history of successful recruitment of such comparators; non-federal prevailing salaries for such competencies; the current labor market; and other relevant factors. The grant of a retention allowance is subject to a service requirement as set by the approving official. There is no set minimum or maximum service period required for a retention incentive.

M. Incentive Awards

The Agency provides employees with a host of incentive awards linked to performance and teamwork that can be in the form of money, time off, an honorarium or other non-pecuniary means. GAO's awards program provides a mix of financial, paid days-off and other recognition benefits that motivate enhanced employee performance. Agency heads are authorized by law to "pay a cash award and incur necessary expense for the honorary

recognition” of an employee who makes any of several forms of contribution or to “grant employees time off from duty, without loss of pay or charge to leave, as an award.”⁵⁸ Agencies may also grant Honorary Awards and Informal Recognition Awards. Such are intended to recognize contributions of lesser scope that might otherwise go unrecognized. In addition, informal recognition awards typically have more informal approval procedures and presentation setting than honorary awards. The array of awards, in scope and variety, are GAO-Wide, Teamwork Awards, Executive Awards, and individual Unit Awards. GAO Order 2451.1, *GAO Awards Program*.

N. Community Service Support

The Government has established programs to support its employees’ community service commitment. The Combined Federal Campaign (CFC) is the world’s largest and most successful annual workplace charity campaign. In 2008, Federal employees participating in the National Capital Area Combined Federal Campaign raised \$62.7 million dollars; GAO Headquarters staff pledged \$759,000. Pledges made by Federal civilian, postal and military donors during the campaign season (September 1st to December 15th) support eligible non-profit organizations that provide health and human service benefits throughout the world. Thousands of IRS tax-exempt charities participate in the CFC and they cover a wide range of charitable purposes. OPM issues an annual guide during Open Season that fully describes the activities of each participating charity and indicates the percentage of each charity’s collections that are devoted to administrative costs in contrast to direct charitable use. Employees may allocate specific contributions for identified charities or allow their pledges to be distributed proportionately to all of the participating charities. Employees may make their contributions by

⁵⁸ 5 U.S.C. §4503; 5 U.S.C. §4502(e).

lump sum check or through designated bi-weekly salary allotments. CFC pledges do not carry over from year to year and must be renewed each Open Season.

O. Inter-agency Transfers

The Government has a program that allows employees to transfer between and among agencies without a break in service.⁵⁹ Employees may pursue their careers and personal goals through inter-agency transfers without foregoing their acquired benefits or seniority, unlike the possible consequences of private sector job hopping. A career or career-conditional employee of one agency may transfer to a competitive service position in another agency without competing in a civil service examination open to the public. A transfer eligible employee may apply under vacancy announcements open to status candidates. An employee may transfer to a position at the same, higher, or lower grade level. GAO employees completing one year or more of continuous service under a non-temporary appointment obtain competitive service eligibility for such inter-agency transfers.⁶⁰

P. Student Loan Repayment

The Government's Student Loan Repayment Program permits agencies to repay the student loans of Federal employees, at the discretion of the agency, up to a maximum of \$10,000 for an employee in a calendar year and a total of not more than \$60,000 for any one employee. All recipients must sign a written service agreement to complete a minimum of three years of employment with GAO which can be increased at GAO's discretion if the loan repayment is increased or renewed. The service agreement also specifies the level of performance to be

⁵⁹ <http://www.usajobs.gov/ei5.asp>.

⁶⁰ 31 U.S.C. §732(g).

maintained. In FY 2009, the Federal government is expected to spend \$60 million repaying college loans for employees; GAO budgets just under \$2 million annually for its program.⁶¹

GAO Order 2537.1, *GAO Student Loan Repayment Program*.

Q. Long Term Care Insurance Program

Recently the Government set up a long term care insurance program for its employees.⁶² Insurance giants John Hancock and MetLife formed Long Term Care Partners, a jointly owned new company exclusively dedicated to serving the long term care insurance needs of the Federal family. Federal employees may obtain this protection for themselves and their spouses with some medical eligibility requirements. The Government does not contribute towards these plans and the premiums are subject to the employee-opted coverage.

The Government program offers employees the choice of four pre-packaged plans. The Facilities 100 Plan covers care in a nursing home, assisted living facility, and/or a hospice facility, as well as respite services provided in a facility. This plan also includes a daily benefit amount of \$100; a benefit period of 3 years; a maximum lifetime benefit of \$109,500; a waiting period of 90 days; and specified inflation protection.

The Comprehensive 100 Plan, in addition to the Facilities 100 Plan benefits, additionally covers home care, adult daycare centers, respite services at home and home hospice care. The Comprehensive 150 plan is the same as the Comprehensive 100 plan except the Comprehensive 150 plan has a \$150 Daily Benefit amount and a 5 year benefit period.

⁶¹ Elizabeth Williamson, *Loan Repayment Benefit Grows for Hill Staffers*, Wall St. J., June 25, 2009 at A4; *FY 2008 Student Loan Repayment Informational Briefing* (June 2008).

⁶² <http://www.ltcfed.com>.

The Comprehensive 150+ Plan is the same as the Comprehensive 150 plan, except the Comprehensive 150+ plan has an Unlimited Benefit Period.

R. Tuition Assistance

The Government has a tuition assistance program where money is offered to employees to help pay for their current classes when it is part of their training and directly relates to the employees'/students' official duties. GAO Order 2410.1, *Continuing Professional Learning and Development at GAO*.

S. Transit Benefit/Headquarters Smartbenefits Program

This program affords employees a transportation fringe benefit for public transportation or a commuter highway vehicle (vanpool) for commuting to and from work. GAO participates in this statutory program that subsidizes the public transportation expenses of its employees. The subsidy is non-taxable income and currently provides up to \$230 a month to eligible employees. GAO Order 2820.1.

II. GAO Programs for Career Advancement and Enrichment Programs

A. Congressional Committee Details

GAO has a program whereby its personnel have the opportunity to be assigned/detailed to congressional committees having jurisdiction over revenues, appropriations, or expenditures. Such assignments/details broaden GAO's personnel experience and perspective as to the mission and work of Congress and GAO's contributions to that process. See GAO Order 1141.1,

Assignment of U.S. GAO Personnel to Congressional Committees.

GAO assigns to congressional committees employees deemed to be best qualified to carry out the particular work. Eligibility for promotion is not diminished for such assigned employees. GAO's Office of Congressional Relations (CR) determines the nature of the assignment in cooperation with the teams and offices. The work must be for a specific purpose that is significant to the committee's objectives and can be done within the limits of GAO's resources. A staff member is assigned, subject to the specific approval of the Comptroller General and CR based on "an analysis of the individual's background and security clearances and approval by the committee." Such assignments or details may not be for longer than a period of one year.

B. Merit Promotion Program

GAO has established a Merit Promotion Program in order to ensure that employees advance based upon their qualifications and achievements.⁶³ The Program establishes requirements for merit promotion plans with the intent to ensure that promotions are made on a merit basis under systematic and equitable procedures. Merit promotion strives to fill all positions from among the best-qualified candidates and without regard to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, political affiliation, marital status, sexual orientation or other nonmerit factors, based solely on job-related requirements. The Merit Promotion Program operates in accordance with the Veterans Employment Opportunities Act of 1998.

The Program's requirements describe the procedures for identifying, evaluating and selecting employees for advancement; identify the types of actions that require the use of

⁶³ At one time, GAO also had an Upward Mobility program. The Board will include information about that program in its upcoming study of women in the GAO workforce.

competitive processes and the exceptions thereto; define the area of consideration within which candidates will be sought for each vacancy; and, allow for consideration of employees temporarily absent in the military service, in an international organization, on an Intergovernmental Personnel Act assignment, or due to a compensable injury that will not last more than a year. See, GAO Orders 2316.1, *Competitive Time Limited Appointment*; 2335.1, *Promotion and Internal Placement*; and, 2335.6, *Competitive Selection Program (APSS Staff)*.

C. Professional Development Program (PDP) and the Program Technical Development Program (PTDP)

The PDP offers employees a wide range of professional development and learning activities. The PDP prepares newly hired, entry level staff to fully perform as Analysts by acquiring or enhancing the competencies and work experiences that will enable them to succeed at GAO. The Program includes opportunities to rotate on at least three engagements over a 2-year period, to develop an Individual Development Plan (IDP), and to receive quality supervision, mentoring and formal on-the-job training. In addition, PDP staff can participate in a congressional hearings program that gives them firsthand exposure to the hearing process and allows them the opportunity to prepare oral and written summaries of selected hearings for GAO management. GAO Order 2410.1, *Continuing Professional Development and Learning at GAO*.

The PTDP provides newly-hired employees in the Program and Technical (PT) pay plan an orientation to GAO and its unique work environment, targeted job experiences to assist in developing proficiency in all competencies, and enhanced supervision. During the two year program, each participant is expected to experience three developmental projects or assignments. GAO Order 2540.4, *Pay Administration in the Administrative Professional and Support Staff*

Performance-Based Compensation System.

D. Biennial Employee Preference Survey Program

GAO conducts a biennial employee preference survey. This program provides employees with the opportunity, through reassignments, to broaden their work experiences, enrich their skills, and better accommodate personal interests and/or needs while simultaneously meeting organizational needs and priorities. The survey is open only to analyst and specialist staff in teams and specialist staff working off-line, *i.e.*, in non-mission related positions, who want to go back on-line. Governing factors include organization staffing needs, applicant qualifications and most recent performance ratings, and applicant preferences. The Executive Committee makes the final reassignment decisions based on the foregoing factors. GAO Order 2900.1, *Employee Preference Survey Program*.

E. Surveys Seeking Employees' Input on GAO's Programs and Practices

GAO regularly conducts empirical employee surveys on matters of current topical interest; *e.g.*, seeking employees' views on GAO's performance appraisal system.⁶⁴ Examples of other surveys include: (1) Employee Feedback Survey seeking People Measures (Organizational Climate, Staff Development, Staff Utilization, and Leadership); (2) Employee Feedback Survey also seeking the aforementioned People Measures data. These surveys have been conducted annually in recent years. Such surveys serve the dual purpose of keeping GAO apprised of its employees' attitudes and sentiments while reinforcing to its employees that GAO values their input.

⁶⁴ *Management News*, Vol. 36, No.18, Week of February 9-13, 2009.

F. The Employee Advisory Council (EAC)

The Employee Advisory Council (EAC) serves as an advisory body to the Comptroller General and the Executive Committee (Chief Operating Officer, Chief Administrative Officer, and General Counsel).⁶⁵ Its elected membership represents distinct GAO employee constituencies (presently 9 elected representatives) in dealing with GAO management over employee concerns. The EAC advocates on behalf of non-bargaining unit GAO employees consisting of Administrative/Professional/Support Service employees (APSS), Attorneys, and Band III staff. GAO affords official time to the EAC members for performing their functions that encompass, *inter alia*: liaison with employees; management; mentoring employees; conducting monthly and quarterly meetings; forming special task teams to address specific issues; issuing year-end activities reports; and conducting surveys. In May 2007, during a hearing on GAO's personnel reforms, Rep. Danny Davis (D-II), Chairman of the House Subcommittee on the Federal Workforce, Postal Service, and the District of Columbia, asked the EAC to conduct a survey of all GAO employees, except for Senior Executive Service and interns, about the Band II Restructuring, and the general climate at GAO. The EAC presented the results of its survey to the Subcommittee on March 13, 2008.

G. Collective Bargaining for Represented Employees

GAO has its own statutory system that governs the collective bargaining rights of its employees.⁶⁶ In 2007, GAO's Band I and Band II analysts voted in a secret ballot election run

⁶⁵ Previously, the EAC included representatives of GAO's diversity groups. Currently, the Agency has a Diversity Council that includes managers and representatives from the union and employee liaison groups. The Council focuses exclusively on diversity issues at GAO and serves as an advisory body to GAO's executive committee. *Management News*, Vol. 35, No. 44 (Aug. 4-8, 2008).

⁶⁶ 31 U.S.C. §732(e).

by the PAB to be represented by a labor organization. The Personnel Appeals Board certified that labor organization, International Federation of Professional and Technical Engineers (IFPTE), as the exclusive bargaining representative for those Band I and Band II analysts. Those employees are now availed of the full benefits of collective bargaining and the advocacy of their exclusive bargaining representative.

H. Headquarters Parking

GAO offers a program that provides parking for employees in the Headquarters building. The parking program places emphasis on carpool parking thus encouraging energy conservation and benefiting the greatest number of employees. Individual parking permits essentially are awarded based on rank or disability. The system is designed to issue carpool permits on a fair and competitive basis that also favors employees who have children enrolled in GAO's daycare facility. Any employee may apply for a permit to park in the Headquarters building evenings, weekends, and holidays. GAO Order 0681.1, *GAO Vehicle Parking Program*.

I. Inter-Career Development Agreement Program

GAO's Inter-Career Development Agreement Program provides employees with the opportunity for obtaining assignments to aid in career development. This program features an Individual Development Plan (IDP) and developmental assignments crafted to enhance participant qualifications for ultimate reassignment to positions of higher responsibility. The Agency rarely uses this program. GAO Order 2335.7, *Inter-Career Developmental Agreement (ICDA)*.

J. Communities of Practice (COP)

GAO endorses Communities of Practice as an addition to other centralized and team-specific learning and knowledge sharing initiatives. The Learning Center helps launch and facilitate the first meeting of new COPs and provides consultation and support thereafter as resources permit. The COP Guide is a manual intended to provide a primer on COPs and to help those interested in forming a COP understand what is involved in creating and sustaining a vibrant and successful community. GAO has launched more than a dozen COPs in the past few years.

K. Payment for Professional Credentials and Related Examinations

GAO has a program whereby it pays for professional credentials and related examinations that its employees need to acquire job-related professional certifications and licenses and/or annual organizational dues or state fees required to maintain job-related professional certification and licenses. These benefits assist employees in retaining their professional credentials. GAO is one of the very few federal agencies that affords these employee benefits. GAO Order. 2300.6, *Payment for Professional Credentials and Related Examinations*.

L. Voluntary Transfer Program

GAO's Voluntary Transfer Program allows employees to request transfers at no-cost to the Agency from one permanent duty station to another permanent duty station primarily for the benefit of the employee and at his or her request. Employees seeking such transfers must do so

through their current team managing director to the Managing Director for Field Offices or through other designated officials. A collaborative process results between the losing team managing director and the gaining team managing director who submit their recommendations to the Managing Director for Field Offices, who decides based on prescribed criteria. GAO Order 2900.2, *Voluntary Transfer Program*.

M. Onsite Banking

GAO's headquarters houses a branch of the United States Senate Federal Credit Union (USSFCU) which GAO employees are eligible to join.

N. On-Site Childcare Facilities

GAO's headquarters houses the Tiny Findings Child Development Center. The facility maintains a tuition assistance policy to subsidize child care for employees that is supported by Combined Federal Campaign Contributions. Tiny Findings was established in 1990 and features five classrooms for children from 3 months to five years of age.

O. Wellness and Fitness Center

GAO headquarters affords employees workday access to an array of cardiovascular and weight resistance equipment and conducts some health screenings; *e.g.*, bone density tests. The Wellness and Fitness Center also serves as a base for employees to avail themselves of the excellent jogging and cycling opportunities in downtown Washington, D.C.

P. Other Flexibilities

Through amendments to GAO's authorizing statute, the Comptroller General has, among other capacities, permanent voluntary retirement and buyout authority, the ability to provide for accelerated accrual of annual leave for certain newly hired employees and to adjust GAO's pay rates separately from the Executive branch, and to establish the highest basic rate of non-SES/SL pay at GAO from GS-15, step 10 to Level III of the Executive Schedule.⁶⁷

GAO, it may be argued, stands out by the intense resources and programs it devotes to developing its employees and by its focus in utilizing and expanding their varied skill sets. This coupled with an enlightened, progressive and far reaching employee benefits program enhances GAO's reputation as an employer actively seeking to attract and retain the best available employees.

⁶⁷ Pub. L. 106-303 (Oct. 13, 2000); Pub. L. 108-271 (July 7, 2004); Pub. L. 110-323 (Sept. 22, 2008).

Chapter V: Conclusions and Recommendations

Since it resumed aggressive recruiting in the late 1990s, GAO has developed a flourishing program that demonstrates its commitment to hiring a diverse and highly skilled workforce. The Agency recruits at national universities that have demonstrated academic excellence in disciplines related to GAO's work, provide some applicant diversity, and have proven successful for GAO during past recruitment efforts. In addition, GAO has identified "Target" schools comprised of universities with superior academic reputations and relevant program components or a high concentration of minority students.

Unfortunately, recruiting/hiring is only half of the equation as any truly successful recruitment program must be measured by the people it retains once they are on board. The PAB has noted in a couple of its reports that members of some protected groups are leaving the Agency earlier in their tenures than non-minority employees and that, overall, employees with fewer than five years are exiting at a higher rate than anticipated. An SES workshop study at GAO noted, however, that 78% of Band I analysts hired in 2002 and subsequently promoted were still at the Agency 5 years later.⁶⁸

In this study, the Board set out to determine whether there are cultural, environmental, or organizational factors at GAO that could be leading to an early exodus of members of any protected class. Chapter I of this report recounts studies that have shown that, culturally, there has been a shift in what the generation entering the workforce expects from its employers in terms of benefits and perquisites and what, in return, employers can expect in the way of long term commitments from its younger employees. Separating African American employees who

⁶⁸ *SES Workshop Retention Study* at 6.

responded to the exit questionnaire in 2007 and 2008 indicated, at rates higher than white analysts, that their immediate supervisors were factors in their decisions to leave and that their opportunities for advancement were more limited. The lack of open and honest feedback played a larger role, in general, for African American responders from both immediate supervisors and team management. Some of the more notable disparities in responses between black and white analysts in 2007 and 2008 disappeared in the 2009 results, possibly portending success for the Agency's myriad, and recent, diversity initiatives.

In Chapter IV, the Board looked at the many benefits, programs, and flexibilities available to GAO employees, specifically, and Federal employees, generally. The Board, which has previously studied alternative work programs at GAO, reaffirms one of its findings from a prior report: in the area of creating a family and worker friendly environment, GAO has been, and remains, in the forefront of the Federal government's efforts. With respect to the exit questionnaire and GAO's environment, there was no difference, by race, between analysts who left GAO to seek better benefits; the only disparity was by position, with 14.7% of Band I analysts listing "Better Benefits" as the major reason for leaving GAO versus 1.6% of Band II analysts in FY 07. In FY 09, not one Band III employee cited "Better Benefits" as a reason for leaving although 12.1% of the Band I employees did.

The final element of Board study was the impact of organizational factors on an employee's decision to separate. On this subject, there was evidence from the results of the exit questionnaire that elements of how GAO operates are problematic for some employees but because of wide swings from year to year responses, no conclusions as to a pattern of perceptions based on membership in a protected class can be drawn. For example, within the exit questionnaire results, changes in the performance management system and Agency

management were cited by African American employees as a major reason for separating at almost twice the percentage of white employees in 2007. In 2008, however, more white employees selected both factors as major reasons for leaving at a higher percentage than did African American employees. In 2009, 13.3% of white employees indicated that the Performance Management system was a major reason underlying their decision to leave GAO; no black employee identified it as a factor.

As noted previously, in response to the Ivy Study, GAO developed a *Management Improvement Priorities Action Plan*, which focuses on five distinct areas for improvement: (1) Recognizing and Valuing Diversity; (2) Reassessing the Performance Appraisal System; (3) Managing Workload, Sustaining Quality, and Streamlining Processes; (4) Enhancing Staffing Practices and Developing the Workforce; and, (5) Strengthening Recruitment and Retention Initiatives.

In order to achieve the fifth goal regarding recruitment and retention, GAO lays out a number of recommendations for improvement, the focus of which address recruitment more than retention. As the Board has noted, strong recruitment is only half the battle; equally valiant efforts are required to retain recent hires and recoup the investment that hiring, training and developing them necessarily entails.

Consequently, the Board recommends the following:

- The Agency should continue to closely monitor the results of the exit questionnaire. The Agency should fine tune the questionnaire to ensure the most detailed, on point responses possible. The questionnaire should focus on soliciting information about the accuracy of the description of the nature of the work during the hiring process; whether supervisory lines of communication were always open; whether training was adequate to enable job performance; and, whether there was a clear link between performance and recognition of it.
- The Agency should seek greater transparency by ensuring that its recruiters are providing accurate information to potential candidates about the scope and nature of the work they will be performing and the levels of supervision/independence to expect.

- The Agency should ensure that there is minority representation among PDP advisors and within program management as the PDP not only provides the introduction to GAO's practices but serves as a critical window to its culture.
- The Agency should compute the cost of turnover, especially as it relates to short-tenured employees, to understand the economic impact of such turnover. While the global economic climate recently may have slowed the loss of retirement eligible employees, it will be critical to know the costs related to turnover to inform its strategy to maintain diversity gains.
- The Agency should establish a management development program that includes formal mentoring for senior level staff in order to encourage qualified employees to pursue promotions and SES candidate development opportunities.
- The Agency should establish a training program for first-line supervisors upon their entry into management ranks designed to enhance supervisory skills, to promote an understanding of the impact their positions have on retention, and to learn to provide appropriate feedback to ensure that employees understand that their work is valued.
- The Agency should analyze retention and turnover data in two and five year increments, as well as the annual review, in order to identify trends within teams/units and for protected groups.
- Repeating and expanding on an earlier recommendation, GAO's Office of Opportunity and Inclusiveness should issue an annual or biennial report equivalent to the Federal Equal Opportunity Recruitment Program (FEORP) describing and grading GAO's minority recruitment, hiring and retention efforts.
- The Agency's Workforce Diversity Plan, while necessarily focused on underrepresentation, should include actual projections for what the Agency will look like in the future based on present hiring, retention and separation rates and trends. Based on its projections for the future, the Agency's Diversity Plan should include plans to address potential areas of concern with respect to representation of protected groups.
- The Agency should continue its efforts to be, and remain, in the forefront of agencies in the Federal government in the provision of a high-quality work-life framework.
- The Agency should continue to monitor its promotion data and be mindful that a very high percentage of Band I employees who are promoted, remain at the Agency.

Appendix I: Tables of Raw Numbers and Percentages

Table I: EEO Profile of GAO (1991, 2000 & 2009)

	WF	WM	BF	BM	HF	HM	AF	AM	Total
1991	1366 26.4%	2354 45.4%	815 15.7%	277 5.3%	92 1.8%	111 2.1%	102 2%	68 1.3%	5185 100%
2000	903 29%	1335 43%	447 14%	179 5.8%	51 1.6%	69 2.2%	81 2.7%	54 1.7%	3119 100%
2009	1143 36.4%	1044 33.3%	415 13.2%	158 5%	73 2.3%	67 2.2%	154 4.9%	74 2.4%	3128 ⁶⁹ 99.7%

Source: Analysis of GAO data.

⁶⁹ Not reflected in the chart for 2009 are 6 employees who are American Indian/Alaskan Native (AI/AN) and 2 who are Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander (NP/PI). They constitute .3% of the GAO workforce.

Table II: Permanent Hires by Race, National Origin and Gender (2002-2009)⁷⁰

	WF	WM	BF	BM	HF	HM	AF	AM	Total
2002	155 41.2%	118 31.2%	28 7.4%	19 5%	6 1.6%	5 1.3%	30 8%	15 4%	376 100%
2003	58 39.2%	54 36.5%	14 9.4%	5 3.3%	1 .7%	1 .7%	9 6.1%	6 4.1%	148 100%
2004	100 42%	75 31%	22 9%	13 5.3%	8 3.3%	3 1.2%	11 4.5%	9 3.7%	241 100%
2005	84 38.5%	73 33.6%	16 7.3%	14 6.4%	3 1.4%	2 .9%	16 7.3%	10 4.6%	218 100%
2006	122 42.7%	83 29%	25 8.7%	10 3.5%	8 2.8%	6 2.1%	24 8.4%	8 2.8%	286 100%
2007	60 62.5%	21 21.9%	4 4.2%	4 4.2%	0 0%	1 1%	2 2%	4 4.2%	96 100%
2008	129 41.7%	105 34%	31 10%	16 5.2%	3 1%	5 1.6%	14 4.5%	6 2%	309 100%
2009	127 38.5%	104 31.5%	36 11%	16 4.8%	10 3%	5 1.5%	21 6.4%	11 3.3%	330 100%
Total	835 41.7%	633 31.6%	176 8.8%	97 4.8%	39 1.9%	28 1.4%	127 6.4%	69 3.4%	2004 100%

Source: Analysis of GAO data.

⁷⁰ There were 2,020 hires. There was one person each in 2002 and 2007 who described their race/national origins as "other" and there were two who did so in 2006. In addition, 4 employees identified themselves as American Indian in 2008 and, in 2009, 6 employees identified themselves as being of 2 or more races.

Table III: Separations by Race, National Origin and Gender (2002-2009)⁷¹

	WF	WM	BF	BM	HF	HM	AF	AM	Total
2002	65 26%	130 52%	27 10.8%	13 5.2%	3 1.2%	2 .8%	7 2.8%	3 1.2%	250 100%
2003	89 30.3%	140 47.6%	26 8.9%	15 5.1%	2 .7%	1 .3%	16 5.4%	5 1.7%	294 100%
2004	99 31.2%	156 49.2%	19 6%	18 5.7%	3 .9%	8 2.5%	10 3.2%	4 1.3%	317 100%
2005	91 32.2%	107 37.8%	32 11.3%	22 8%	8 2.8%	9 3.1%	6 2%	8 2.8%	283 100%
2006	97 30.6%	134 42.3%	43 13.5%	18 5.6%	6 2%	4 1.2%	6 2%	9 2.8%	317 100%
2007	99 32%	123 39.6%	37 12%	16 5.1%	9 2.9%	4 1.3%	14 4.5%	8 2.6%	310 100%
2008	96 32.1%	110 37%	35 11.7%	21 7%	7 2.4%	6 2%	16 5.4%	7 2.4%	299 100%
2009	61 33.1%	70 38%	18 10%	16 9%	4 2.2%	4 2.2%	6 3.3%	4 2.2%	183 100%
Total	697 31%	970 43%	237 10.5%	139 6.2%	42 1.9%	38 1.7%	81 3.6%	48 2.1%	2253 100%

Source: Analysis of GAO data.

⁷¹ There were actually 2256 separations. There were two persons in 2003 and one in 2004 who described their race/national origins as "other".

Table IV: Permanent Hires by Age and Gender (2002-2009)

	Female Under 40	Male Under 40	Female 40 & over	Male 40 & over	Total
2002	191 51%	129 34%	29 7.6%	28 7.4%	377 100%
2003	67 45.3%	49 33.1%	15 10.1%	17 11.5%	148 100%
2004	115 48%	79 33%	26 11%	21 8%	241 100%
2005	107 49.1%	75 34.4%	12 5.5%	24 11%	218 100%
2006	151 52.4%	82 28.5%	29 10.1%	26 9%	288 100%
2007	46 47%	21 22%	21 22%	9 9%	97 100%
2008	151 48.2%	114 36.4%	28 9%	20 6.4%	313 100%
2009	173 51.1%	111 33%	28 8.2%	26 7.7%	338 100%
Total	1001 49.5%	660 32.7%	188 9.3%	171 8.5%	2020 100%

Source: Analysis of GAO data.

Table V: Separations by Age and Gender (2002-2009)

	Female Under 40	Male Under 40	Female 40 & over	Male 40 & over	Total
2002	39 15.6%	24 9.6%	63 25.2%	124 49.6%	250 100%
2003	63 21.2%	37 12.5%	72 24.3%	124 42%	296 100%
2004	60 19%	36 11.3%	72 22.6%	150 47.1%	318 100%
2005	69 24.4%	46 16.3%	68 24%	100 35.3%	283 100%
2006	56 17.8%	49 15.4%	96 30.2%	116 36.6%	317 100%
2007	82 26.4%	48 15.4%	77 25%	103 33.2%	310 100%
2008	75 25.1%	63 21.1%	79 26.4%	82 26.4%	299 100%
2009	43 23.5%	43 23.5%	46 25%	51 28%	183 100%
Total	487 21.6%	346 15.3%	573 25.4%	850 37.7%	2256 100%

Source: Analysis of GAO data.

Table VI: Permanent Hires by Disability and Gender (2002-2009)

	Female None	Male None	Female Non-severe	Male Non-severe	Female Severe	Male Severe	Total
2002	209	148	9	8	2	1	377
2003	79	62	3	3	0	1	148
2004	133	98	7	2	1	0	241
2005	114	97	4	2	1	0	218
2006	174	106	2	2	4	0	288
2007	67	29	0	1	0	0	97
2008	177	131	1	2	1	1	313
2009	196	135	5	2	0	0	338
Total	1149 57%	806 40%	31 1.5%	22 1%	9 .4%	3 .1%	2020 100%

Source: Analysis of GAO data.

Table VII: Separations by Disability and Gender (2002-2009)

	Female None	Male none	Female Non- severe	Male Non- severe	Female severe	Male Severe	Total
2002	95	135	6	12	1	1	250
2003	132	152	3	7	0	2	296
2004	127	172	4	13	1	1	318
2005	128	136	6	10	3	0	283
2006	145	154	6	10	1	1	317
2007	155	144	4	6	0	1	310
2008	147	141	5	3	2	1	299
2009	89	89	0	4	0	1	183
Total	1018 45.1%	1123 49.9%	34 1.5%	65 2.9%	8 .3%	8 .3%	2256 100%

Source: Analysis of GAO data.

Table VIII: Separations by Length of Service (2002-2009)

Years:	1-5	6-10	11-15	16-20	21-25	26-30	31+	Total
2002	79 31.6%	7 2.8%	27 10.8%	17 6.8%	26 10.4%	38 15.2%	56 22.4%	250 100%
2003	123 41.5%	2 .6%	30 10.1%	17 5.7%	29 10%	33 11.1%	62 21%	296 100%
2004	119 37%	6 2%	23 7%	14 4%	26 9%	54 17%	76 24%	318 100%
2005	147 52%	18 6.3%	19 6.7%	27 10%	8 2.8%	26 9.2%	38 13%	283 100%
2006	124 39%	23 7.3%	14 4.5%	22 7%	32 10%	45 14.2%	57 18%	317 100%
2007	157 51%	26 8.4%	0	19 6%	15 5%	32 10%	61 19.6%	310 100%
2008	101 34%	58 19.4%	11 3.6%	21 7%	19 6.3%	14 4.7%	75 25%	299 100%
2009	61 33.3%	32 17.5%	10 5.5%	9 4.9%	9 4.9%	12 6.6%	50 27.3%	183 100%
Total	911 40.4%	172 7.6%	134 5.9%	146 6.5%	164 7.3%	254 11.3%	475 21%	2256 100%

Source: Analysis of GAO data.

Table IX: Separations before the end of the Probationary Period (2002-2009)

Before the end of Prob. Period:	NO	YES	Total
2002	204	46	250
2003	224	72	296
2004	268	50	318
2005	231	52	283
2006	275	42	317
2007	250	60	310
2008	264	35	299
2009	156	27	183
Total	1872 (83%)	384 (17%)	2256 (100%)

Source: Analysis of GAO data.

Table X: Separations by Type (2002-09)

	Resign	Retire	Transfer to Fed. Agency	Other ⁷²	Total
2002	62 24.8%	142 56.8%	37 14.8%	9 3.6%	250 100%
2003	94 31.8%	154 52%	39 13.2%	9 3%	296 100%
2004	96 30.1%	176 55.3%	37 11.6%	9 3%	318 100%
2005	118 42%	91 32%	58 20.4%	16 5.6%	283 100%
2006	108 34.1%	153 48%	53 17%	3 .9%	317 100%
2007	111 36%	122 39%	68 22%	9 3%	310 100%
2008	110 36.8%	100 33.5%	85 28.4%	4 1.3%	299 100%
2009	59 32.2%	56 30.6%	63 34.4%	5 2.8%	183 100%
Total	758 33.6%	994 44.1%	440 19.5%	64 2.8%	2256 100%

Source: Analysis of GAO data.

⁷² The category "Other" includes expiration of appointment, death, removal and discharge during probation.

GAO Employee Exit Questionnaire

U.S. Government Accountability Office

Instructions

To answer open-ended questions: Click anywhere inside the box and begin typing. When you reach the limit of the open space, keep typing and the box will automatically expand.

To print your responses: Click on the "Print" button at the end of each screen. The last screen also provides a link if you want to print your entire response.

Indicating You Have Completed the Survey

The last question in the last section asks you to indicate if you have completed this survey. By clicking on "complete," this tells us that your answers are official and final.

Your answers will not be used unless you have done this. Please note we will not send follow up e-mails to those who have checked the "Complete" button.

What you will be doing

1. Which of the following best describes what you will be doing when you leave GAO?

(Select one.)

1. ☐ Retiring
2. ☐ Voluntarily resigning
3. ☐ Transferring to another federal agency
4. ☐ No response

2. Please indicate the extent to which each of the following was a reason for your decision to leave GAO.

(Select one for each.)

Not a reason

Minor reason

Major reason

**No
response**

- a. The work you were doing,

- | | | | | |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| b. Light workload | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| c. Heavy workload | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| d. Lack of opportunity for advancement | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| e. Opportunity to make better use of skills | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| f. Co-workers | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

- | | Not a
reason | Minor
reason | Major
reason | No
response |
|---|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| g. Immediate supervisor | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| h. Team or Unit management | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| i. Agency management (Executive Committee) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| j. Compensation system | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| k. Changes in GAO's performance management system | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| l. Band II restructuring | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| m. Changes in GAO's products and work processes | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

- | | Not a
reason | Minor
reason | Major
reason | No
response |
|---|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| n. Higher salary | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| o. Better benefits | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| p. Flexibility of hours | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| q. Flexibility of place of work | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| r. Opportunity to work for another organization | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| s. Family, life, or health considerations | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

Comments about leaving

3. Do you have any additional comments about your reason(s) for leaving GAO.

Your immediate supervisor

4. In your opinion, how much was your work at GAO supported and recognized by your immediate supervisor?

(Select one.)

1. ☐ Definitely yes
2. ☐ Probably yes
3. ☐ Uncertain
4. ☐ Probably not
5. ☐ Definitely not
6. ☐ No response

5. **During the last 12 months** (less if you came to GAO more recently), how often did each of the following occur? (*Click one circle in each row.*)

[illegible]

Do you have any additional comments about your immediate supervisor.

Your team or unit management

6. In your opinion, how much was your work at GAO supported and recognized by your team or unit management?

(Select one.)

1. ☐ Definitely yes
2. ☐ Probably yes
3. ☐ Uncertain
4. ☐ Probably not
5. ☐ Definitely not
6. ☐ No response

7. During the last 12 months (less if you came to GAO more recently), how often did each of the following occur? (Click *one* circle in *each* row.)

	Always or almost always	Most of the time	About 1/2 of the time	Some of the time	Never or almost never	No basis to judge/Not applicable	No response
a. My team or unit management treated me fairly.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. My team or unit management gave me open and honest feedback about my job.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c. My team or unit management gave me the sense that my work was valued.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d. My team or unit management provided meaningful incentives for high performance.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Suggestions for improvement

8. Do you have any suggestions regarding how to make GAO a more inclusive and effective agency?

Returning to GAO

9. Would you consider returning to GAO in the future?

(Select one.)

1. ☐ Definitely yes
2. ☐ Probably yes
3. ☐ Uncertain
4. ☐ Probably no
5. ☐ Definitely no
6. ☐ No response

Other comments

10. Is there anything you would like GAO's Executive Committee to know about your experience at GAO?

Submitting Your Completed Survey

If you have completed the questionnaire, please check the Completed box below. (Please note: You must answer "Completed" for your answers to be included. We will not send

follow-up e-mails to those who have marked the "Completed" option below.)

(Select one.)

1. ☐ Completed
2. ☒ Not Completed

If you would like to view and print your completed survey, continue to the next screen. Otherwise click on the **Exit** button below to exit the survey and send your responses to GAO's server.

Thank you for Your Responses

Thank you.

Click here to view and print your completed survey.

Click the **Exit** button below to exit the survey and send your responses to GAO's server.

Print

Exit

Cancel

Questionnaire Programming Language - Version 5.0
U.S. Government Accountability Office



GAO

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United States Government Accountability Office
Washington, DC 20548

July 26, 2010

Ms. M. Gail Gerebenics
Director, Office of EEO Oversight
Personnel Appeals Board
Union Center Plaza II, Suite 500
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Ms. Gerebenics:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Personnel Appeal Board's draft report on retention at the Government Accountability Office (GAO). We also appreciate the balanced perspective provided in the report relative to how GAO compares to the rest of the federal government in many of the challenge areas. GAO strives to create an environment that supports employee engagement, offers a level playing field and worklife balance and provides challenging work and career opportunities. These goals and our success in achieving them are the keys to retention of staff.

We welcome the Board's recommendations and have the following comments:

- *The Agency should continue to closely monitor the results of the exit questionnaire. The Agency should fine tune the questionnaire to ensure the most detailed, on point responses possible. The questionnaire should focus on soliciting information about the accuracy of the description of the nature of the work during the hiring process; whether supervisory lines of communication were always open; whether training was adequate to enable job performance; and, whether there was a clear link between performance and recognition of it.*

GAO uses a variety of surveys and data sources each year to gather detailed information about many aspects of the work environment and human capital processes that impact our ability to attract and retain high quality staff. One of these surveys is the exit survey, and we agree that comments shared by exiting employees can provide useful information about possible areas of focus for our retention efforts. We will continue to monitor these data and are committed to periodically reviewing the exit survey instrument and process.

We also solicit staff views annually as part of GAO's Employee Feedback Survey. This survey asks a wide variety of questions, including several about supervision, training, performance and recognition/awards. The responses to questions on staff development, staff utilization, effective leadership by

supervisor, and organizational climate form the basis for our 4 agency-wide "people" measures. In FY 2009, we exceeded our targets in these areas with a high survey response rate. We are currently conducting our 2010 Employee Feedback Survey to again examine trends and assess the overall satisfaction of all staff.

In addition, we conduct an annual Customer Satisfaction survey to gain staff input on how satisfied staff are with 31 internal operations services in two categories: (1) services that help employees get their job done and (2) services that improve employees' quality of work life. In FY 2009, on a scale of 1 to 5, we met our target of "4" for both categories of services. This survey data provides us rich information on the administrative services that we use to proactively identify areas to address customer issues and recommendations.

Finally, we also survey our new employees through our new hire survey and the Professional Development Program survey. These surveys help us determine new employees' views on a variety of topics, including the hiring process. The data from our 2009 new hire survey showed that over 80 percent of respondents had high levels of satisfaction with the hiring process. An equally high percentage said they had a clear understanding of their work expectations. Survey data from our PDP participants were also generally positive. The first survey included staff that were hired in fiscal year 2006 and completed the program in fiscal year 2008. The responses were positive in most areas. For example, they expressed positive views of their PDP advisors, indicated that they were satisfied with their developmental experiences and permanent placement decisions and that they understood our performance appraisal system. The second round for the survey included staff that were hired in fiscal year 2007 and completed the program in fiscal year 2009. The preliminary analysis indicates continued positive results in most areas, improvements in some areas, and no new aspects of the program needing attention.

These surveys and other data sources provide us valuable insight on areas for improvement. In 2008, we established over 40 management improvement initiatives to address some of these areas. We sought volunteers from all staff levels, offices, and locations to work on these initiatives. One of our major initiatives was the comprehensive assessment of our performance appraisal system. For this project we obtained employee and manager perspectives through 53 interviews and 28 focus groups, implemented an agency-wide survey, and issued a report in November 2009 that identified a variety of short-term and long-term recommendations. In response to those recommendations, we are close to issuing a statement of requirements for the design and implementation of a new performance appraisal system.

- *The Agency should seek greater transparency by ensuring that its recruiters are providing accurate information to potential candidates about the scope and nature of the work they will be performing and the levels of supervision/independence to expect.*

We agree that it is important for recruiters to share relevant and accurate information about GAO as a possible employer. In 2009, we undertook a comprehensive review of our recruiting and hiring practices, including our efforts to recruit diverse candidates. This review produced baseline data on the results of our recruiting and hiring efforts and formed the basis for our recruitment program goals and objectives. We took several steps to ensure that our recruiters are providing accurate information and to enhance accountability in our recruiting process. Specifically, we (1) centralized oversight of our external recruitment activities in the Human Capital Office with an Assistant Director providing overall program management and coordination, (2) developed and delivered a mandatory recruiting workshop for all GAO recruiters, and (3) required that recruiters submit plans for review describing their proposed activities. We also implemented a comprehensive communication strategy for recruiters that provided them with necessary support to ensure greater consistency and accuracy in the messages being delivered to prospective candidates. We plan to make the Band I PDP job description a part of our recruiting materials and will develop a set of "Frequently Addressed Questions" to support recruiters in providing consistent responses to candidates.

- *The Agency should ensure that there is minority representation among PDP advisors and within program management as the PDP not only provides the introduction to GAO's practices but serves as a critical window to its culture.*

We work to ensure that all of our programs reflect our diverse workforce and involve employees that demonstrate a commitment to fostering an inclusive work environment. As of July 2010, 7 of the 13 PDP advisors for our "among" program were minorities. While diversity among the PDP advisors is important, we have been told by PDP staff that the influence of colleagues, Analysts-in-Charge, Assistant Directors and team management is more frequent and persuasive. As a result, our success at maintaining a diverse workforce throughout the organization plays an even more important role in introducing new staff to GAO's practices and culture.

In addition, we have established several ways to help new PDP staff understand our culture. Since April 2010, the bundle of required courses for new staff includes a session on "Exploring the Unwritten Rules." The focus of this course is to help new PDP staff acclimate to GAO's culture. We assign buddies to all new PDP staff – a practice that has been underway for a while; and PDP staff as well as any interested staff can participate in our mentoring program.

- *The Agency should compute the cost of turnover, especially as it relates to short-tenured employees, to assist it in maintaining the diversity gains of its recent hiring and achieving the first objective of its Human Capital Interim Strategic Plan to recruit, develop, deploy, and retain a diverse, high-quality workforce.*

GAO has researched the efficacy of this approach. Through that research, we determined that there is no single “cost of turnover” that applies universally. We believe that we can ensure continued diversity gains by carefully monitoring an array of turnover indices and by taking prompt action to address potentially negative trends. We monitor attrition closely, conduct trend analyses to assess what may cause a change in attrition, and follow relevant and appropriate leading retention practices. We believe that overall GAO is a satisfying and dynamic workplace and as such, our overall attrition rates remain low. For example, we generally experience about 10 percent attrition per year and in the last 2 years this number has been closer to 5 or 6 percent. We have established agency-wide retention measures— with and without retirements – that we report annually in our performance and accountability report to measure whether we are retaining staff that we have invested in hiring and training. For the four years prior to fiscal year 2009, we consistently met the 90 percent target rate for overall retention (with retirements). In fiscal year 2009, we exceeded the rate considerably by 4 percentage points with a 94 percent retention. For 3 of the 4 years prior to fiscal year 2009, we consistently met the target for retention without retirements of 94 percent. In fiscal year 2009, we exceeded the rate by 2 percent with a 96 percent retention. With regard to short-tenured staff, the PDP office has conducted reviews of the reasons why PDP staff leave GAO and they most often involve non-work issues such as pursuing advanced education or relocation due to personal or family considerations.

- *The Agency should establish a management development program that includes formal mentoring for senior level staff in order to encourage qualified employees to pursue promotions and SES candidate development opportunities.*

We have a formal mentoring program for all staff, including senior level staff. We are currently administering our fourth cohort for the program that includes a number of activities (e.g., one-to-one sessions, group mentoring sessions focused on areas of common interest, and facilitated discussions with members of the SES corps) designed to help staff become effective leaders and team players, manage their work environments, and develop their careers.

In addition, over the last couple of years, we redesigned and expanded our learning programs to leverage technology solutions and enhance leadership and career progression programs. We designed and implemented six new classes for Band IIIs, including courses to help supervisors provide feedback to their staff and receive feedback on themselves via a 360-degree feedback tool and eight new leadership courses for Band IIs and Administrative Professional and Support Staff (APSS) equivalent staff. In addition, we are

requiring that all Senior Executives participate in the training that uses the 360-degree feedback tool to solicit staff, peer, and supervisor input.

Even with our mentoring program and enhanced leadership development training, there are several factors that influence employees decisions to pursue promotions and SES candidate development opportunities. We have found, based on discussions between staff and managers, that one of the main detractors for applying for SES positions was the potential negative impact on the balance of work and family responsibilities. This finding is consistent with data reported by the Senior Executives Association in its 2010 report, "Taking the Helm: Attracting the Next Generation of Federal Leaders."

- *The Agency should establish a training program for first-line supervisors upon their entry into management ranks designed to enhance supervisory skills, to promote an understanding of the impact their positions have on retention, and to learn to provide appropriate feedback to ensure that employees understand that their work is valued.*

In 2009, we purposefully expanded the transition training we provide new managers to focus intentionally on leadership aspects of their new responsibilities. In addition to the traditional 1-day transition seminar that addresses critical success factors for their new jobs, we began enrolling them as a cohort in the first two classes in our leadership curriculum – Role of the Leader and Working With Communication Styles, as well as a new offering, Principles of Effective Feedback, that is foundational for their new Designated Performance Manager (DPM) responsibilities. In 2010, we added to this program a pilot course entitled "Inside-Out Coaching" that provides a straightforward, focused means to incorporate coaching into day-to-day supervisory activities, as well as longer-term developmental efforts.

We similarly enhanced the transition training we provide newly-promoted senior staff, i.e., new Band IIAs and mission support staff promoted into senior/supervisory positions (enrolled as a cohort in leadership classes, feedback, and supervising the audit documentation process).

- *The Agency should analyze retention and turnover data in two and five year increments, as well as the annual review, in order to identify trends within teams/units and for protected groups.*

We routinely conduct appropriate trend analyses of retention as part of our continuous workforce planning activities.. Our analysis shows that over the course of the last 5 years, cohorts by demographics that stay 3 years or more are relatively consistent. Also, as part of our annual workforce diversity plans, we analyze separation data by demographic groups to help us determine whether we need to focus our efforts to help us attract candidates from particular groups or if we need to investigate work place practices that are having more of an impact on a particular group. Our analysis of the data from 2008 to 2010 determined that we have not had any one race/gender group with higher than expected separation rates in consecutive years.

As the Board noted, however, it is difficult to draw conclusions about trends among particular demographic groups or specific issues as these vary greatly on an annual basis. We will continue to monitor retention and separation data by demographic groups in order to identify trends and take appropriate actions.

- *GAO's Office of Opportunity and Inclusiveness should issue an annual or biennial report equivalent to the Federal Equal Opportunity Recruitment Program (FEORP) describing and grading GAO's minority recruitment, hiring and retention efforts.*

GAO's Workforce Diversity Plan is responsive to this recommendation. Our Workforce Diversity Plan includes the relevant statistics for all demographic groups represented in the FEORP as well as for staff with disabilities and staff by age groups—2 groups not included in FEORP. The Workforce Diversity Plan discusses representation of all groups in the workforce, those we hired during the last year and those that separated. The Workforce Diversity Plan includes information on outcomes from key human capital processes (such as awards, promotions and appraisals) and views of our employees (from various surveys as well as comments from employee group representatives). Also, the Workforce Diversity Plan identifies steps taken to improve various aspects of the work environment as well as areas where further steps are needed. For example, the 2010 Workforce Diversity Plan notes that we took many steps to improve our recruitment efforts in 2009, such as

- Participating in an event sponsored by the Association of Latino Professionals in Finance and Accounting;
- Entering into a contract with the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities (HACU) and hiring seven HACU students in January 2010;
- Meeting with representatives of the Congressional Hispanic Leadership Institute (CHLI) to discuss opportunities for GAO to partner with this group;
- Networking with the National Association of Black Accountants;
- Participating in a career fair at Gallaudet University on February 25, 2010; and
- Attending the Asian MBA Leadership Conference and Career Expo.

We also identified areas that need further attention and developed an action plan to guide our work in the 2010-2011 time frame.

- *The Agency's Workforce Diversity Plan should include actual projections for what the Agency will look like in the future based on present hiring, retention and separation rates and trends. Based on its projections for the future, the Agency's Diversity Plan should include plans to address potential areas of concern with respect to representation of protected groups.*

We disagree with this recommendation. The Workforce Diversity Plan is developed based on guidance from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission's Management Directive 715. The guidance includes four steps—analyzing current workforce data compared to appropriate benchmarks, identifying barriers that may limit participation or representation of any group, developing plans for improvement, and assessing the plans. These steps provide a sound basis for identifying areas of concern with respect to representation of certain groups and our human capital management policies and practices. We use the results of our analysis to develop a detailed action plan to address areas where representation is lower than established benchmarks, as well as other areas of concern identified based on our analysis or views from employees. This action plan guides our efforts and helps us make improvements.

- *The Agency should continue its efforts to be, and remain, in the forefront of agencies in the Federal government in the provision of a high-quality work-life framework.*

We agree with this recommendation and are proud that we have been named the 2nd best place to work among large federal agencies for the last 2 cycles. We work hard at continuous improvement and have taken many steps to create and support a positive work environment and a high-quality work-life framework. We have many efforts underway that embody the spirit of best practices for cultivating a diverse work environment that have been identified by GAO,¹ the EEOC,² and others such as the Conference Board³ and the Society for Human Resources Management. These practices have been found to help organizations attract and retain a diverse workforce and create and maintain an inclusive work environment.³ In addition, GAO supports varied employee benefit programs including student loan repayment, transportation subsidies, maxiflex, and telework, that help employees balance work and personal demands and are generally recognized as important employee retention programs. GAO also allows staff to request transfers between GAO work locations or between GAO units.

¹GAO, *Diversity Management: Expert-Identified Leading Practices and Agency Examples*, GAO-05-90 (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 14, 2005).

²The Conference Board is a global nonprofit business organization that creates and disseminates knowledge about management and the marketplace to help businesses strengthen their performance and better serve society.

³GAO's actions align with the following leading practices—top leadership commitment, incorporating diversity into strategic plans, measurement, accountability, succession planning, recruitment, employee involvement, diversity training, and proactive prevention of discrimination.

- *The Agency should continue to monitor its promotion data and be mindful that a very high percentage of Band I employees who are promoted, remain at the Agency.*

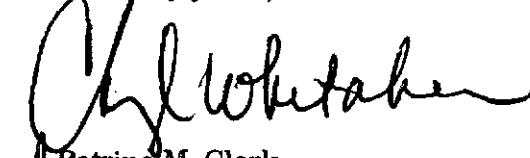
The recommendation seems to suggest that Band I employees who are promoted to Band II are more likely to remain with the agency. While being promoted does provide additional incentives to remain with the agency, we have also found that, once promoted, employees often have additional opportunities and may leave GAO to pursue those opportunities. As a result, we are not convinced that this statement is correct. Nonetheless, we will continue to monitor promotion and attrition data to identify particular trends with regard to time in position.

- *Since 1990, the Board has been recommending that GAO encourage its employees to update annually information about their disability status. Given the underrepresentation of employees with targeted disabilities at the Agency, the Board renews its recommendation and calls on GAO to provide Form SF-256 to its employees each year.*

In March 2010, we requested updated information from all staff on their personnel information, including disability status, race, ethnicity, and veteran status to ensure the accuracy of the information. We received three requests for changes to disability status. The appropriate corrective actions are being processed, and HCO is continuing to work with various organizational stakeholders to enhance the timeliness and quality of agency-wide workforce data. We are committed to undertaking updates to our employees' personnel data on a regular and recurring basis. We will issue bi-annual reminder notices to advise staff how they can update their employee data including disability or veterans status.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to comment on this report. I am happy to discuss any questions or requests for additional information.

Sincerely yours,



Patrina M. Clark
Chief Human Capital Officer

**BAND
TOGETHER**

GAO EMPLOYEES ORGANIZATION

IFPTE Local 1921

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July 16, 2010

M. Gail Gerebenics
Director, EEO Oversight
Personnel Appeals Board
U.S. Government Accountability Office
Union Center Plaza II, Suite 560
820 First Street, N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20002

Dear Ms. Gerebenics:

Thank you for providing the GAO Employees Organization (GAO Union) an opportunity to comment on your recent draft report, *The Retention of New Hires at GAO*. We appreciate your examination of factors that may contribute to a disproportionate number of newly hired minority employees leaving GAO. We offer comments to overarching issues that may impact the interpretation of the results and subsequent recommendations for future action. In addition, we have included several technical comments.

- The GAO Union is aware that certain voluntary resignations are not always voluntary: some employees are presented with an ultimatum - resign voluntarily or be terminated for cause. Given that choice, employees may feel compelled to resign to preserve a reasonable employment record. We ask PAB to consider the possibility that some of the voluntary resignations were not truly voluntary.
- Without additional information, the report is limited in its ability to distinguish between respondents who freely made a career choice and those who were unable to continue working at GAO because their family, health, or disability-related needs were not accommodated by the agency.
- The absence of cell counts in tables analyzing the separation survey hinders interpretation of the data. To the extent that some of these counts are very small, particularly with respect to minority respondents, what is currently portrayed as a trend toward improvement from 2007 to 2009 may actually reflect random fluctuation in the groups of departing employees.
- There is little elaboration on the issue of how managerial and supervisory practices at GAO may contribute to employee dissatisfaction and subsequent separation. What mechanisms, if any, are there for identifying, confronting, and correcting discriminatory and other problematic practices on the part of managers and directors? How thoroughly are supervisors trained in EEO and

diversity issues, or in strategies for ensuring that the professional environment enables employees of all backgrounds to thrive at GAO?

- We encourage the PAB to analyze how the age makeup of the new hires pool has affected some of the trends the report describes. There is currently a higher percent of employees under 40 at the GAO than at many other federal agencies; this may be a function of recruiting strategies that target younger, recent graduates rather than mid-career job recruits. The age composition of recent hires has numerous implications for the interpretation of the report's findings and merit further examination. For example, do mid-career hires who join GAO outside of the PDP program have similar retention outcomes to entry-level hires in the program? Would hiring mid-career candidates into the managerial pool provide avenues for increasing the diversity of that pool?
- Although the report offers examples of other federal agency experiences and initiatives to promote hiring and retention of employees with disabilities, it does not discuss the applicability of executive branch plans such as EEOC's LEAD initiative to GAO. It leaves unanswered the question of whether GAO should take part in this initiative or adopt its principles. Additionally, while we applaud your recommendation for GAO to encourage employees to annually update information about their disability status, such disclosure is voluntary and not all disabilities are obvious. A more appropriate characterization of employees in the report would be staff that "report" having disabilities.
- The report's lengthy enumeration of federal and GAO-specific benefits seems out of place given the observation that few employees cite federal and GAO-specific benefits as reasons for separations. The impact of such programs on employee retention at GAO would require a careful examination of the value of these benefits to employees, would better distinguish between desired and existing benefits, and would note that many of these benefits are denied to domestic partners of Gay and Lesbian employees. The report also fails to note that some field offices lack benefits available at headquarters (e.g., child care, parking, health club access, etc.).

Additional recommendations for the PAB to consider

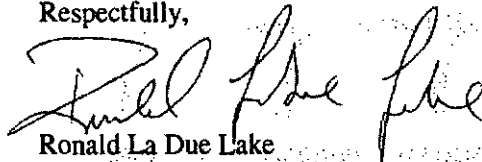
- GAO should review its training, incentives, and requirements for managers and supervisors at all levels to promote awareness of and accountability for EEO responsibilities. This should include appropriate revisions for SES contracts and incentive payments.
- GAO should publicly commit to adopting and meeting the requirements of executive branch EEO standards, guidance, and initiatives, such as the LEAD initiative for employment of people with disabilities, even if the agency is not legally required to do so.
- GAO should regularly publicize aggregate results of its employee separation survey, with appropriate safeguards to prevent the identification of individual respondents.
- GAO should continue to regularly consult with its grassroots diversity organizations on ways to improve retention for protected classes.

- GAO should ensure that its recruitment teams include representatives from a variety of diverse backgrounds and ages and that its recruitment strategy goes beyond colleges and universities.

Technical Comments for the PAB to Consider

- The report states (p. 5) that, "Excluding all but voluntary resignations and transfers, the study disclosed that, as of January 2007,..." This wording is confusing, because it suggests that employees who voluntarily resigned were not considered in the study, when the point of the study was to look at retention.
- Chart 4 (p. 19) is labeled, "Permanent Hires by Age and Gender" but the sentence under the chart discusses percents separating from GAO by age and gender instead of the age/gender makeup of all those hired in each year. Additionally, the 63% separating in this sentence seems to be referring to Chart 4. It is unclear whether the report language is referring to Chart 4, since the Chart displays hires rather than separations.
- For the disability tables (Tables 2 and 3, p. 20) and discussion, the report does not clarify whether "severe" is the same as "targeted" disability, although "Targeted" is defined in footnote 26.

Respectfully,



Ronald La Due Lake
President
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