



Highlights of [GAO-10-496](#), a report to congressional committees

## Why GAO Did This Study

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) oversees U.S. foreign assistance programs in more than 100 countries. In 2003, GAO recommended that USAID develop a comprehensive workforce planning system to better identify its staffing needs and requirements. Key principles for effective strategic workforce planning are important to an agency's ability to carry out its mission. GAO examined (1) changes in USAID's workforce and program funding since 2004, (2) the extent to which it has developed a strategic workforce plan, (3) the efforts it has taken to implement two key human capital initiatives, and (4) the challenges and constraints that affect its workforce planning and management. To conduct the work, GAO analyzed staffing and program funding data; reviewed documentation related to the agency's workforce planning; and interviewed officials in Washington, D.C., and at six overseas missions selected to obtain an appropriate mix of geographic coverage, programs, and workforce size and composition.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that USAID take several actions to develop more comprehensive workforce plans and improve its workforce data. USAID concurred with GAO's findings and recommendations.

View [GAO-10-496](#) or key components. For more information, contact Jess T. Ford, at (202) 512-4268 or [fordj@gao.gov](mailto:fordj@gao.gov).

# FOREIGN ASSISTANCE

## USAID Needs to Improve Its Strategic Planning to Address Current and Future Workforce Needs

### What GAO Found

USAID's workforce declined 2.7 percent from 2004 to 2009. While the decline is primarily due to decreases in the number of U.S. and foreign national personal services contractors, these staff continue to comprise the majority of USAID's workforce. Over the same period USAID's program funding increased 92 percent to \$17.9 billion. USAID also faces some workforce gaps and vacancies at the six missions visited by GAO. Mission officials cited recruiting difficulties and the need for staff in priority countries, such as Iraq and Afghanistan, as factors contributing to these vacancies. According to mission officials, it is not uncommon for positions to remain vacant for a lengthy period. During this time staff may assume multiple responsibilities and accept additional workload, which present some challenges in the agency's ability to manage and oversee its activities. For example, workforce gaps and heavy workload may limit mission staff's ability to travel to the field to monitor and evaluate the implementation of projects.

USAID's 5-year workforce plan for fiscal years 2009 through 2013 discusses the agency's challenges and the steps it has taken and plans to take to strengthen its workforce. However, the plan lacks several key elements that GAO has identified as critical to strategic workforce planning. For example, the plan generally does not include a major portion of USAID's workforce—U.S. and foreign national personal services contractors. In particular, it is not comprehensive in its analysis of workforce and competency gaps and the staffing levels that the agency requires to meet its program needs and goals.

USAID has taken actions to implement two key initiatives specified in its workforce plan—a workforce planning model and expansion of its Foreign Service—but it generally lacks documented plans to help ensure they are implemented successfully. For example, USAID implemented the workforce planning model to project its workforce and budgetary needs, but it has not developed plans for providing all missions comprehensive information about the model and its projections to inform missions of how it will affect their workforce planning. In addition, USAID has not fully met its Foreign Service hiring targets nor developed plans for how it will meet its hiring goals, and it has not planned the required overseas training assignments for all new hires to help ensure that missions have the necessary resources and mentors.

USAID faces several challenges in its workforce planning and management. First, USAID lacks a sufficiently reliable and comprehensive system to record the number, location, and occupation of its staff. Second, according to mission officials, operating in an uncertain environment with shifting program priorities and funding can make it difficult to ensure that missions have the staff available with the necessary skills when needed. Third, the processes USAID must use to plan for the placement of its overseas staff require coordination with State; however, USAID has not consistently developed and shared its plans for the numbers and specific locations for these assignments.