

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-17-247](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

The Telework Enhancement Act of 2010 required agencies to develop telework policies and OPM to provide guidance and report on telework use, among other things. GAO was asked to review agency telework programs.

This report examines (1) how selected agencies comply with the act's requirements, (2) the internal controls affecting federal supervisors' ability to hold teleworkers accountable for achieving results, and (3) the challenges selected agencies and OPM face in collecting and reporting telework data. GAO selected four case study agencies for review—Education, General Services Administration, Labor, and Securities and Exchange Commission—based on agency size and telework participation rates. GAO reviewed OPM guidance and reports, and policies and data at case study agencies. GAO also interviewed OPM and case study agency officials and held focus groups with case study agency supervisors and teleworkers.

What GAO Recommends

GAO makes recommendations to each of the case study agencies, including ensuring supervisors complete telework training in a timely manner and improving telework data. GAO also recommends that OPM develop tools to help agencies assess telework barriers, and to improve telework data reported to Congress. Three agencies agreed with the recommendations. One did not comment. OPM disagreed with GAO's recommendations citing limited resources to expend on efforts not specifically required under the act. GAO maintains that OPM should implement these actions as discussed in the report.

View [GAO-17-247](#). For more information, contact Yvonne Jones at (202) 512-6806 or jonesy@gao.gov.

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FEDERAL TELEWORK

Additional Controls Could Strengthen Telework Program Compliance and Data Reporting

What GAO Found

The telework policies at four selected case study agencies GAO reviewed met select requirements of the Telework Enhancement Act of 2010 (the act) for telework eligibility and agreements. These agencies followed similar processes for approving telework agreements. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) guidance recommends managers complete telework training prior to approving telework agreements, but three of the four agencies did not have a mechanism to help ensure managers have completed this training before approving employee telework agreements. Because managers in these agencies may not have completed the training before entering into agreements, they may not be familiar with telework policies. Further, three of the four agencies did not require a periodic documented review of telework agreements. By not requiring regular review of telework agreements, these agencies cannot be assured that the agreements reflect and support their current business needs. Consistent with the act, all four agencies described efforts to encourage telework participation and provide for the technology to enable it. However, GAO's focus groups with teleworkers provided some examples of how supervisors may discourage telework participation and reported that some level of managerial resistance to telework remains. Managerial resistance to telework can undermine reviewed agencies' ability to meet telework participation goals. In its leadership role for telework matters, OPM can assist agencies with tools to assess and resolve these types of concerns.

Consistent with the act, all four case study agencies have controls to help ensure that telework does not diminish employee and organizational performance. These four agencies' policies followed the act's requirement that teleworkers be treated the same as nonteleworkers for the purposes of work requirements, performance appraisals, and other managerial decisions. Agency officials and focus groups reported that telework status did not impact performance expectations. Focus groups with supervisors described numerous strategies and resources they use to supervise and stay connected with teleworking employees.

The four agencies used varied methods to collect and report telework data to be included in OPM's annual telework reports, but all cited challenges to ensuring that employee-reported telework data were accurate because employees may not know or follow policies for recording telework. While three of these agencies use electronic systems to track telework agreements, the Department of Labor (Labor) uses a manual system which limits its ability to access accurate, real-time telework agreement data that management uses to assess compliance and for resource allocation decisions. Further, GAO found that the Department of Education (Education) had not been reporting telework eligibility data compliant with the act. OPM also faced challenges in reporting accurate agency telework data and GAO identified errors in OPM's annual reports to Congress. For example, OPM's report cited Education's fiscal year 2016 telework participation goal as 5 percent, reflecting Education's goal for increasing its participation rate, instead of its overall participation goal of 90 percent. OPM may be missing opportunities to improve its data because it does not always follow up with agencies on significant data differences or outliers. The errors and invalid data in OPM's annual reports to Congress reduce the usefulness of these reports.