

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-23-105066](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

Federal agencies must use appropriate authorities and follow proper procedures in hiring current or recent political appointees into career positions, including obtaining prior approval from OPM.

GAO was asked to provide information on political to career hires and examine the implementation and effectiveness of OPM's policies for reviewing them. This report examines, among other things, (1) appointments of current or recent political appointees to career positions; (2) OPM's procedures for reviewing agency requests to make such appointments; and (3) OPM's reporting to Congress on these appointments.

GAO obtained and corroborated OPM data on the number of proposed hires OPM reviewed and agencies intended to complete from March 18, 2016, through January 20, 2021. GAO also assessed OPM's reviews of all approved requests during the same period.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making three recommendations in this report, including that OPM (1) should examine how the public information on political appointees OPM is mandated to provide can be used by agencies to better identify political appointees and (2) should complete the remaining steps needed to ensure that reports to Congress on agency requests to appoint current or recent political appointees to career positions are included on its website. OPM generally agreed with GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-23-105066](#). For more information, contact Alissa H. Czyz, (202) 512-3058, czyza@gao.gov

April 2023

PERSONNEL PRACTICES

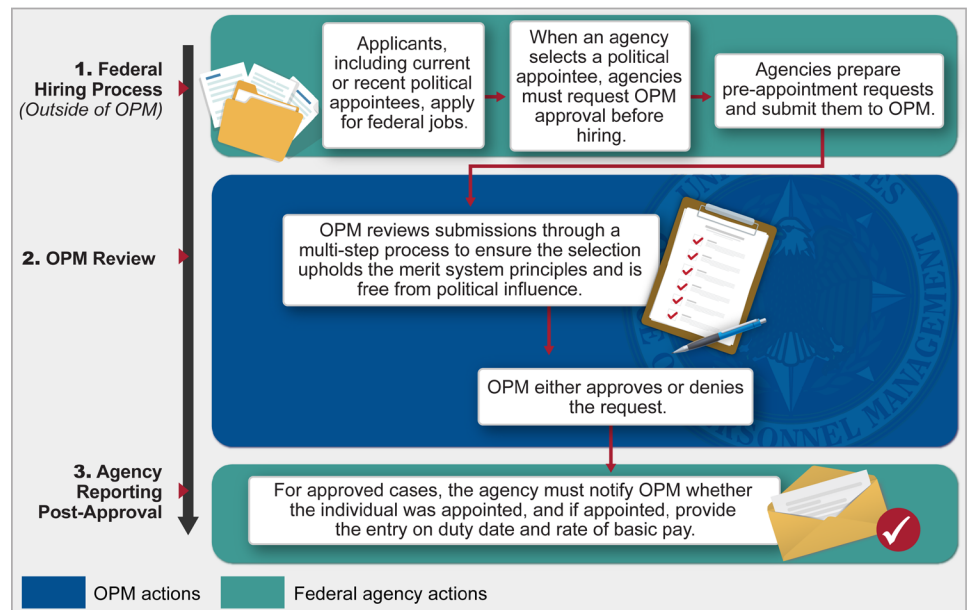
OPM Can Improve Oversight and Transparency of Agencies' Hiring of Political Appointees into Career Federal Positions

What GAO Found

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) approved 129 of 187 agency requests to hire political appointees into permanent career positions from March 18, 2016, through January 20, 2021. OPM returned 26 requests that were not subject to its review or were withdrawn by the agency and denied the remaining 32. Agencies followed through and completed 125 such hires during this period, including 38 made without first obtaining OPM approval as required.

OPM has informed agencies that they must obtain its approval before hiring current or recent political appointees into career jobs. However, agency officials told GAO that it is sometimes difficult for agency staff to identify job applicants who were political appointees. Recent legislation requiring OPM to create an online listing of political appointees could help with this issue if OPM approaches this effort with agencies' information needs in mind.

OPM and Agency Procedures when Agencies Propose Hiring Current or Former Political Appointees into Career Positions



Source: GAO analysis of Office of Personnel Management (OPM) documentation and [dijkstra/Stock.Adobe.com](#) icons. | [GAO-23-105066](#)

For requests OPM approved, GAO found that agencies generally followed proper procedures in making the selections. OPM denied 32 requests for varying reasons, such as agencies bypassing qualified veterans. GAO found gaps in documentation regarding supervisory reviews in certain cases, and OPM adjusted its review process to address these gaps.

OPM reported on political to career hiring as required by law. OPM also released redacted versions of these reports in response to Freedom of Information Act requests and plans to provide them on a public website but has encountered technical delays in doing so, which impede the public's access to the reports.