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**BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON OVERSIGHT OF GOVERNMENT
MANAGEMENT, THE FEDERAL WORKFORCE, AND
THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**

**COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY
AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS**

UNITED STATES SENATE

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Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Voinovich, and members of the Subcommittee. It is a pleasure to appear before you to discuss the critical subject of the Federal acquisition workforce. This committee has expressed concern about the size and adequacy of the acquisition workforce both for GSA and government-wide on numerous occasions. I can assure you that we at GSA share the committee's concerns.

GSA is the only civilian agency whose primary mission is the acquisition of goods, services, and real property for the entire Federal government. GSA also provides assistance in a variety of ways to State and Local government, international bodies, and the legislative and judicial branches. Our various acquisition programs include real property for offices and courthouses, as well as the delivery of telecommunication services, fleet and contract support for just about everything you can imagine and a few you would never imagine. The importance of the acquisition workforce for GSA and government-wide, and the statistics about that workforce, which have been presented by the Office of Federal Procurement Policy (OFPP), raise for us, and should raise for you, even more concern about its current status. The acquisition workforce today is smaller than it was in 1992 and, measured in dollars, is doing over three times the amount of work, at a higher level of complexity, than it did almost two decades ago. In addition, almost 50 percent of that workforce will be eligible to retire by the year 2012. GSA's acquisition personnel account for at least 25 percent of GSA's total agency workforce, and so we are very aware of the challenges of recruiting and retaining acquisition staff to sufficiently address current and future business needs.

Without our acquisition workforce, our government literally would have difficulty opening our doors each morning for business, turning on our lights, or even supporting the myriad of programs designed to service our key stakeholders, America's citizens. For these reasons, we have made focusing on our acquisition workforce one of our key objectives and plan to report to you our success in addressing this critical issue.

At GSA we strive for excellence in the business of government, and we seek nothing less for our acquisition workforce. Let me share with you some of the things that are already in motion at GSA. We have set aggressive performance goals to ensure that we employ an acquisition workforce with the right competencies and skills, supported by the right tools, and the right policies to obtain the best value in goods, services and real property that meet our customer's requirements. We will do this by strengthening our Acquisition Workforce Succession Plan, improving work tools, leveraging and maximizing our use of human resource flexibilities, and maintaining a governance framework to oversee our progress.

For example, we are planning to implement our Acquisition Workforce Succession Plan starting at the beginning of this coming fiscal year. Our plan will focus on ensuring that we have the capacity to meet GSA's business goals. It will also address human resource flexibilities and programs that optimize our ability to recruit and retain members of the acquisition workforce, and ensure that we have the right competencies and skills to perform the work of our agency and that of our government-wide

customers. To optimize our ability to recruit and hire acquisition staff, we are actively using the delegated Direct Hire Authority Congress reauthorized last year for the Acquisition Workforce. We have established standing registers to provide a constant applicant source. Last month, we held a GSA Hiring Fair and filled over 15 vacant acquisition positions using that authority.

Our plan will establish an internship program that can be leveraged GSA-wide, and we hope government-wide. The focus of our internship program will be to ensure that we can nurture an acquisition workforce through education, training, career path development and succession planning. To support the internship program, we will establish and maintain defined staffing standards that will ensure the appropriate capacity GSA-wide to meet business demands. Through our Acquisition Workforce Succession Plan, we will be able to identify new authorities that support our ability to achieve our goal. To this end, we have already identified certain differences between the DoD authorities and those of the civilian agencies and we plan to seek relief in this year's legislative agenda.

To ensure agency wide collaboration and oversight, GSA has formed an Acquisition Workforce Steering Committee co-chaired by our Chief Human Capital Officer and our Chief Acquisition Officer with representatives from our Services and Staff Offices. This committee meets monthly to oversee and guide the implementation of the Acquisition Workforce Succession Plan and its related initiatives and programs.

To improve our ability to capture acquisition workforce and training data, GSA is reworking its Applied Learning Center (ALC). GSA was the first agency in the government to establish a tool that accomplished subjective evaluation of competency and skill levels of acquisition workforce members. The ALC is undergoing a revision to ensure that this tool is useful for all members of the Acquisition Workforce, not just contracting specialists. This work will begin later this summer in conjunction with work being done to update GSA's On-Line University.

As part of our implementation of the Acquisition Workforce Succession Plan, GSA is reviewing ways to make our acquisition workforce more virtual. We have had a number of successes in moving work to where our people are located instead of moving people to where the work is located. In many cases, acquisition work can be done from anywhere if you have the right number of people with the right competencies and skills, and the right tools and policies in place. GSA has excellent IT resources and a very proactive teleworking policy. Combine this with the fact that there are certain localities where our pay and benefits are not competitive with the private sector and you can see that we can improve retention by moving the work to locations where we are competitive and we have a stable workforce to perform the work. This flexibility also allows us to support our customers in emergencies, no matter the nature. There are some exceptions to this general principle, but our program is designed to be tailored to the customer's requirement so that we won't impose a one-size fits all solution government-wide.

Improving work tools is another critical area that enables our efforts to recruit and retain our acquisition workforce. Having a tool that supports our workforce will provide the greatest leverage of their skills and competencies while improving compliance and the advancement of our collective socio-economic objectives. For all the money we spend both in GSA and across the government, we have failed to date to make an investment in the tools that all those involved in acquisition can use to achieve their mission, and to improve competition, transparency and compliance with the myriad of rules and policies imposed on acquisition. The investment we must make to get the right tools is small in comparison to what we spend each year, but its value as a retention tool for the Acquisition Workforce members is invaluable. The amount of rework that has to be done today and the manual entry of data, multiple times, in multiple places, is cumbersome and a huge disincentive, particularly for our current and future generations who seek streamlined and state of the art operating tools and systems.

Now I'll talk about the activities and support that the Federal Acquisition Institute (FAI) has delivered to the federal government regarding recruiting, training and development, and retention, since FAI last provided testimony in February 2008. In FY2009, under the strategic leadership of the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), the Chief Acquisition Officers Council (CAOC), and GSA, FAI has led a number of programs to help understand, recruit, and develop the acquisition workforce. Work notionally planned for FY2010 will continue to expand upon this support. Following is a summary of key initiatives FAI has led during the current fiscal year to support the Federal civilian acquisition community government-wide.

Recruiting and Staffing

1. Through the **FY2008 Annual Report on the Federal Acquisition Workforce**, FAI provides visibility into workforce demographics, and it identifies trends likely to impact workforce supply and future hiring and training strategies. FAI has produced the annual report since 1976, and the 2008 report was recently posted on the FAI Web site; The **Competencies Assessment Survey 2008 is a voluntary and anonymous** survey that provides benchmark data about civilian agency Contracting professionals, Program and Project Managers, and Contracting Officer Technical Representatives. Survey results, when leveraged against the annual report, provide important data points on the competencies of the acquisition workforce and its training needs.
2. The Federal Acquisition Intern Coalition was launched in January 2008 to promote career opportunities for contracting professionals in the federal government.

Entry-Level Recruiting activities, in partnership with the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) consist of:

- Developing a streamlined job announcement. This announcement is in use for entry-level and is in process for mid-level contracting positions. Streamlined announcements use plain language and they are resume-based as opposed to relying on a listing of knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs);

- Developing a strategy that uses a Central Register, which incorporates a “streamlined” central job announcement for both civilian and Department of Defense (DoD) entry-level GS-1102 positions, and collects metrics highlighting qualifications information about the candidates; and
- Attending career fairs. From the fall of 2008 through the summer of 2009, FAI attended 9 such fairs.

For Mid-level recruiting, FAI collaborated with the Department of Homeland Security in conducting a training needs assessment and developing a mid-level recruiting strategies report. The report is helping FAI determine its training priorities and required new training initiatives for FY2010.

The chairperson of the FAI Board of Directors is leading two working groups established under the Chief Acquisition Officers Council (CAOC). Participants from many Federal agencies are tasked with finding ways to better recruit new employees. Their focus is on developing methods for attracting experienced acquisition professionals into government and to develop better marketing strategies for use at colleges and universities.

Training and Development

FAI continues to provide workshops, acquisition learning seminars, federal acquisition certification (FAC) courses and continuous learning modules. This year it:

- Held 41 training sessions at GSA EXPO, with about 110 trainees at each session., for a total of about 4,500 personnel trained in various acquisition subjects;
- Developed courses focused on Negotiation and Contract Management competencies;
- Used the Acquisition Workforce Training Fund (AWTF) to support acquisition certification and CORE training courses for new, mid-level and senior-level members of the acquisition workforce; and
- Established the Vendor Consortium (VC), a partnership between agencies and vendors who provide acquisition training for program and project managers (PPM). This pooling of resources created a one-stop shop for those who seek training to complete a FAC-P/PM certification. The VC includes 87 courses that are provided by 12 vendors. A website contains all pertinent information.
<http://www.fai.gov/certification/VendorConsortium.asp>.

Acquisition Workforce Retention

FAI’s efforts at retaining the acquisition workforce have been centered on awards programs that recognize and reward exceptional performance. These include: a government-wide recognition program established in 2007 by the Office of Federal Procurement Policy; and the CAOC Acquisition Rewards and Recognition Awards

luncheon held at GSA EXPO to publicly acknowledge the best and brightest in the acquisition workforce from across the civilian agencies and DoD.

In addition, FAI has established a webpage (www.fai.gov) to solicit interest from federal agencies about the utility of a government-wide acquisition mentoring program for use by senior government leaders in mentoring future acquisition professionals. Further, a new initiative allows agencies to post rotational opportunities on FAI's website so that they can seek and share acquisition expertise where most needed in support of ARRA efforts across government. We expect this new initiative will become more useful to agencies over time.

Next I would like to address what GSA is doing as the managing partner for the Federal Acquisition Institute. FAI leads the way in the development of contract training and shares its materials with DAU, as DAU shares its materials with FAI. Since October 1, 2008, civilian agency employees completed more than 13,000 certification training courses and approximately 100,000 web-based continuous learning courses.

As you may know, the Director of FAI left late last year to accept a position with OFPP. GSA initially decided to wait to fill this position until a new Administrator of OFPP is hired, but that has not happened yet. GSA is now actively recruiting a new Director and hopes to make an appointment of the new Director within the next 30 days. Finally, GSA is actively recruiting for all other vacancies in FAI and hopes to fill those positions expeditiously. Once the staff is in place, we will make sure, through daily management of FAI, that it retakes its position government-wide and provides more aggressive leadership in the area of Acquisition Workforce Training and Management.

We are working with OMB to resolve the issues associated with filling the Associate Administrator of OFPP for Workforce Development. We need to fill this critical position that Congress created and authorized to move the management of the government-wide Acquisition Workforce forward.

Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Voinovich, there's a lot of work before us to do, and it's not going to be easy work. The results won't be measured in days, but rather in years. However, we must undertake this work now and we must not falter or simply check a box and say we're done. Together the Congress and the Executive Branch must make the Acquisition Workforce a matter of daily interest and incorporate it into our daily management responsibilities. We at GSA are committed to it, and I'm pleased that this committee and its members share that commitment.

I will be glad to answer any questions.