

## Why GAO Did This Study

With 1,440 employees in the U.S. and overseas as of fiscal year 2021, GM assists U.S. businesses to enter and expand international markets, advance U.S. business interests abroad, and attract investment. However, GAO previously found that GM had weaknesses in management controls and in workforce planning and hiring, and faced difficulties in conducting core mission activities.

Congress included a provision in the Joint Explanatory Statement accompanying the Consolidated Appropriations Act for fiscal year 2021 for GAO to assess GM's workforce. This report examines (1) challenges related to changes in GM's organizational structure; (2) how GM's budget affected its workforce over time; (3) the extent to which GM has aligned its resources to meet key goals and priorities; and (4) the extent to which GM has undertaken key workforce management practices.

GAO reviewed agency documents on organizational consolidation, strategic planning, and staffing procedures. GAO also collected workforce data and information on resource allocation decision making. GAO also convened focus groups of employees.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is making four recommendations to Commerce to (1) document the processes for updating staff allocation models, (2) regularly review the need for positions that exceed model recommendations, (3) develop a comprehensive workforce plan, and (4) address human capital office vacancies. Commerce concurred with GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-23-105369](#). For more information, contact Kimberly Gianopoulos at (202) 512-8612 or [gianopoulosk@gao.gov](mailto:gianopoulosk@gao.gov).

## EXPORT PROMOTION

### Commerce Should Improve Workforce Planning and Management of Its Global Markets Unit

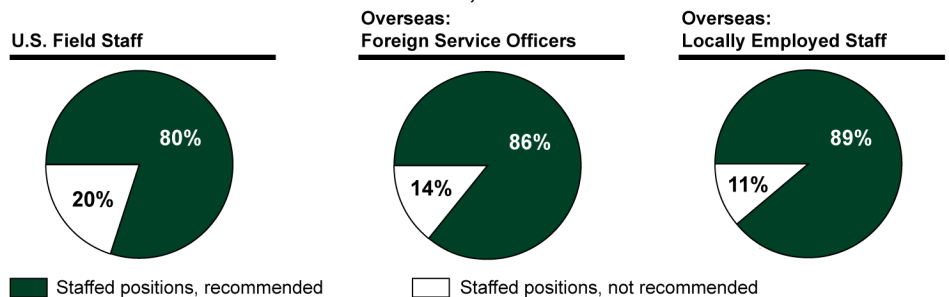
## What GAO Found

The Department of Commerce established Global Markets (GM) in 2013 by merging the International Trade Administration's (ITA) Market Access and Compliance unit with the U.S. and Foreign Commercial Service. Although GM has taken steps to consolidate its workforce, challenges remain regarding divided organizational purpose, weak brand identity, and transparency of staffing.

Between fiscal years 2014 and 2021, GM's net funding available for obligation has remained consistent, not changing annually by more than 4 percent. Although GM's payroll obligations consistently averaged 54 percent of total obligations, service costs paid to Commerce and the Department of State increased from 23 to 32 percent. Staffing levels for GM's federal employees declined about 7 percent due to the increasing service costs and vacancies created by attrition, according to GM officials.

GM's actual allocation of staff differs from its quantitative staffing models, which are meant to help it align staff in its field locations with agency goals and priorities. GM justifies deviations from model recommendations, but does not regularly review the justifications later. GAO found that 156 employees are currently serving in positions that differ from model recommendations, including 20 percent in the U.S. Field (see fig.). GM primarily shifted employees from locations with smaller recommended staffing levels to ones with larger levels. Although the models recommended more, 33 U.S. offices have only one employee to carry out agency duties. GM also has not completely documented the processes to operate and change the models, which raises risks for knowledge retention and consistency in decision-making.

**Percent of U.S. Field and Overseas Positions at International Trade Administration's Global Markets Staffed Above Recommended Levels, Fiscal Year 2022**



Source: GAO analysis of Global Markets data. | GAO-23-105369

GM lacks a workforce plan that covers all employees. Employees have reported issues with how GM conducts key workforce activities, such as succession planning and managing diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility. They also noted issues with how GM provides human resource services like recruiting, hiring, and payroll. Best practices in workforce management stress the importance of having comprehensive strategic workforce plans and core human capital services to support an agency's mission. GM's human resources office also has had chronic vacancies that reduce its ability to provide those services. Without a comprehensive strategic workforce plan and effective human resource services, GM risks not being able to carry out its mission effectively.