

GAO

Report to the Chairman, Subcommittee on  
International Operations, Committee on  
Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives

July 1989

# VOICE OF AMERICA

## Selected Personnel Practices Warrant Management Attention



**RESTRICTED**—Not to be released outside the  
General Accounting Office unless specifically  
approved by the Office of Congressional  
Relations.

545954/139291



United States  
General Accounting Office  
Washington, D.C. 20548

National Security and  
International Affairs Division

B-230358

July 12, 1989

The Honorable Mervyn M. Dymally  
Chairman, Subcommittee on  
International Operations  
Committee on Foreign Affairs  
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Chairman:

In response to a request from the former Chairman, we reviewed certain personnel management practices at the U.S. Information Agency's Voice of America (VOA) and Radio Marti. This review was requested because of numerous employees' allegations about the personnel management practices at VOA and Radio Marti.

---

## Results in Brief

Our review of personnel practices at VOA indicated (1) inadequate controls over time and attendance; (2) weaknesses in the administration of contracts to hire consultants (purchase order vendors); (3) different grade structures between the Regional Language Broadcast Divisions and the News and English Broadcasts Divisions; (4) underrepresentation of women and minorities, especially in the senior or supervisory ranks; and (5) limited employment rights for noncitizen employees. Our review also indicated that Radio Marti had hired individuals who did not meet the requisite criterion of having expertise in Cuban affairs, which was the justification for using excepted service hiring authority. VOA management has initiated some actions designed to address the problems identified.

---

## Background

VOA is a major element of the U.S. Information Agency (USIA). USIA's purpose is to increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and people of other countries. VOA, which broadcasts in English and 42 foreign languages to 127 million people around the world, has a staff of about 2,800. Nearly all broadcasts originate in Washington, D.C., and are prepared by either the News and English Broadcasts Divisions or the six Regional Language Broadcast Divisions. Radio Marti, which broadcasts to Cuba, has an authorized staffing of 165 positions. Like VOA, Radio Marti broadcasts originate in Washington, D.C. Radio Marti, which began broadcasting in 1985, operates quasi-independently from VOA.

In the mid-1980s, VOA began to face a tightening budget that reduced its programs and constrained employees' advancement opportunities. The 1980s saw a continuous turnover of key VOA management positions, such as the director of VOA and the heads of engineering, programming, and personnel offices. For example, there have been six directors of VOA in the past 8 years. Various mid-level management officials told us that the turnover in top management permitted some language service chiefs and branch heads to take a more independent view on control of their operations.

---

## Employees' Allegations

Because your Subcommittee had received a number of complaints from VOA and Radio Marti employees about personnel practices, we were asked to provide these complainants and other employees the opportunity to express their concerns about personnel practices.

Of 2,020 employees located in the United States, 178 contacted us during our review. Generally through interviews, employees made over 680 allegations to us concerning personnel matters. Using the allegations as a starting point, we reviewed various personnel processes and practices.

In some cases, the problems were not as dire as the employees had presented them to be; the lack of supportive documentation and/or the lapse in time since some of the incidents occurred precluded us from making factual determinations of the validity of some of the specific allegations. However, our discussions with 65 VOA officials and our examination of available reports, personnel records, and other documents did corroborate that a number of personnel problems exist.

---

## Inadequate Controls Over Time and Attendance

VOA had not developed or enforced sufficient internal control procedures to ensure that VOA paid employees only for actual hours worked. VOA officials stated that VOA had placed controls on its employees that go beyond those required by USIA; however, during our review of time and attendance practices in three Regional Language Broadcast Divisions, we noted instances of (1) abuses in time and attendance reporting, (2) failure to abide by overtime and compensatory time rules, and (3) work scheduling shortcomings. During our review, VOA took a number of steps to improve control of time and attendance, such as conducting seminars on time and attendance rules, establishing a policy of zero tolerance for violation of time and attendance rules, and planning a review of the justification for an 8-hour day without a meal break.

---

## Weaknesses in Control Over Purchase Order Vendors

Our review of contracts for purchase order vendors (POV) in the first 6 months of fiscal year 1988 in four of VOA's Regional Language Broadcast Divisions disclosed numerous problems. VOA used between 300 and 400 POVs to help meet programming requirements; however, it had no central unit to monitor the use of POVs. As a result, many regulations and procedures were not followed. For example, contracts had not been awarded on a competitive basis, contracts had been awarded to former employees and relatives of current employees without proper approval, and three of the four divisions did not follow the Federal Acquisition Regulation concerning proposed purchase orders exceeding \$10,000 for any one vendor. VOA's process to secure talent services through purchase orders continues to suffer from many of the same weaknesses we reported in 1982.<sup>1</sup>

---

## Differences in VOA Grade Structure

Opportunities for advancement in the Regional Language Broadcast Divisions have generally been limited to grade 12 or below; at the time of our review 84 percent of the staff was at grade 12 or below. In contrast, 62 percent of the News and English Broadcasts Divisions' staff were grade 13 or above.

The News and English Broadcasts Divisions—a centralized service—produce VOA news, correspondent reports, backgrounders, and current affairs and feature programs. The Regional Language Broadcast Divisions edit, adapt, and translate this material; create programs tailored to specific countries; broadcast programs in 42 languages; and prepare material for use by foreign radio stations.

VOA officials noted that because of the way VOA's work is organized and accomplished, broadcasting positions in the News and English Broadcasts Divisions tend to be one or two grades higher than those in the Regional Language Broadcast Divisions.

VOA officials stated that VOA applied the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) classification criteria and standards to determine the grade level of a VOA position. The determination of each level was based on the difficulty and responsibility of each position and qualification requirements. VOA officials stated that, in applying these guidelines, the major factors upon which higher grades were based were complexity and originality of the writing and editing of scripts.

---

<sup>1</sup>Weaknesses in Procurement Practices to Obtain Outside Professional Talent Services (GAO ID-82-46, Aug. 10, 1982).

---

We found that in the larger foreign language services considerable original writing was being done. When we brought this to VOA management officials' attention, they said that, in setting up the present grade structure, consideration had been given to the original writing done by the foreign language service staff.

VOA officials said that under the OPM classification system the career ladders in the News and English Broadcast Divisions are not possible in the foreign language services. However, during our review, we learned that VOA had initiated a promotion-for-talent program, which in 1988 promoted several foreign language broadcasters at a grade higher than normal in an effort to provide greater opportunities for Regional Language Broadcast employees.

---

## Underrepresentation of Women and Minorities

Since 1984, the percentage of women and minorities has increased to some degree, but VOA still has not met its affirmative action goals for broadcasters, radio broadcast technicians, and radio electronic technicians. Our review indicated that minorities and women were generally in the lower graded positions. Our analysis of the grade structure for the 2,164 employees in the United States and Americans overseas showed that women and minorities represented 48 percent of the staff, but only 18 percent of the positions of grade 13 or above were filled by women or minorities. Women filled only 3 of the 42 language service chief positions and 80 of the other 329 managerial and supervisory positions (grade 13 and above). VOA officials acknowledged the need for improvement in this area.

---

## Employment Rights of Noncitizen Employees

Since VOA's noncitizen employees are excepted from the competitive civil service, civil service law affords them fewer job rights and less protection from adverse or disciplinary action than their U.S. citizen (competitive service) counterparts; noncitizen employees cannot directly appeal such actions as civil service employees can. Noncitizen employees expressed concern that they are more vulnerable to abusive personnel practices by managers than other employees.

As an exception to civil service rules, VOA is authorized by law to employ foreign nationals in the United States, without regard to civil service and classification laws, in positions requiring special talent when suitably qualified U.S. citizens are not available. In 1988, VOA employed about 300 noncitizens in the United States who were recruited from overseas

---

as well as from the U.S. domestic work force (typically, permanent resident aliens). VOA sponsors the noncitizens recruited overseas for entry to the United States as nonimmigrant exchange visitors on J-1 exchange visas. Since the sponsorship and visas are tied directly to VOA employment, these employees in most cases lose their authorization to remain in the United States if their employment ceases.

Although the J-1 visa is designed to bring people into the United States on a temporary basis, VOA officials were routinely using it as a vehicle to hire permanent employees. Over 50 percent of the noncitizen employees received a waiver from the requirement to return to their homeland and were sponsored by VOA to become permanent resident aliens.

---

## Need for Excepted Service Hiring Authority at Radio Marti

Radio Marti continues to use the Schedule B hiring authority (for non-competitive, excepted service) to fill 117 positions, even though the continuing need for this authority to cover some positions, particularly the lower graded ones, is in doubt. This authority was granted after OPM determined that it would be impracticable to examine applicants for the particular knowledge of Cuba that is required for certain positions at Radio Marti. Our review of personnel files of 35 employees in the excepted service showed that 5 of them did not possess the knowledge of Cuba called for by the Schedule B authority.

A May 1987 VOA report on alleged administrative irregularities within Radio Marti recommended that a review be undertaken to determine whether the Schedule B authority should be modified, but the Director of Radio Marti rejected the recommendation.

Personnel regulations do not provide the same protection to Schedule B employees as is provided to competitive civil service personnel. From an employee's viewpoint, continued use of the excepted service reduces job security and limits the employee's ability to express concerns to management.

---

## VOA Actions

At the start of our review, some in VOA management believed that the existing personnel practices were appropriate and that we would hear only overstated allegations from a few disgruntled employees who had been subject to disciplinary actions. VOA management also stressed the uniqueness of the multicultural work force at VOA as an important consideration in conducting our review. Despite these views, during our review, VOA initiated a number of actions to address personnel-related

problems. For example, VOA has (1) employed an ombudsman to assist employees in resolving problems; (2) revitalized the orientation program for new employees, particularly noncitizens; (3) increased training for managers, with emphasis on such matters as affirmative action and performance appraisals; (4) emphasized the importance of communicating with the employees through staff meetings at various levels; (5) initiated an impact promotion program to recognize talented broadcasters; (6) obtained agreement from the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) to make it easier for noncitizens to obtain immigrant visas; (7) improved benefits accorded to noncitizen appointees; (8) emphasized compliance with time and attendance rules; and (9) initiated a study on pay system alternatives for broadcasters.

Radio Marti also initiated action to improve communication, train managers, provide training for employees, and better orient new employees.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Our review showed a number of personnel issues that warrant VOA management's continued attention. These are time and attendance, the administration of POV contracts, the grade structure of the foreign language services, the representation of women and minorities, and employment rights of noncitizens. VOA has acknowledged these problems and has initiated some corrective actions. VOA's action on time and attendance now appears to be going in the right direction, but other initiatives are too recent for us to determine if they will resolve the problems.

Radio Marti's need to continue using noncompetitive excepted service (Schedule B) authority for 117 of its 165 authorized positions appears to have diminished. Some employees of the Radio Marti program have been appointed under Schedule B, even though they appear to lack the specialized knowledge of Cuba required for appointment under that authority.

We recommend that the Director of the U.S. Information Agency direct the Director of the Voice of America to

- ensure full implementation of VOA's initiatives to improve time and attendance control;
- determine if artificial barriers are contributing to the underrepresentation of women and minorities and then take the necessary steps to increase the representation of women and minorities, especially at the senior levels;

- 
- create a central unit to review and approve the use of POVs to ensure that VOA complies with federally prescribed standards in awarding contracts to POVs;
  - continue to assess personnel practices in the areas of pay and classification of broadcasters and employment of noncitizens; and
  - review the use of Radio Marti's Schedule B hiring authority with a view toward ensuring that those hired under that authority have the requisite knowledge of Cuba and that all the positions designated to be covered by the Schedule B authority are warranted.

---

## Agency Comments

In its formal comments on our draft report, USIA stated that the report identified personnel issues already of concern to VOA management (see app. III). Orally, VOA officials stated that they generally agreed with our recommendations.

---

Appendix I provides a detailed discussion of the personnel practices that concern VOA and Radio Marti employees and the problems we noted. In addition, appendix I provides a summary of the allegations employees made to us.

We performed our review from December 1987 through January 1989 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. The objectives, scope, and methodology of our review are discussed in appendix II.

As arranged with your office, unless you publicly announce its contents earlier, we plan no further distribution of this report until 30 days from its issue date. At that time, we will send copies to the Director, United States Information Agency; Director, Office of Management and Budget; and other interested parties.

This report was prepared under the direction of Joseph E. Kelley, Director, Security and International Relations Issues. Other major contributors are listed in appendix IV.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Frank C. Conahan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'F' and 'C'.

Frank C. Conahan  
Assistant Comptroller General



---

# Contents

---

Letter		1
Appendix I		12
Evaluation of VOA and Radio Marti Personnel Issues	Allegations Made by Employees	12
	Inadequate Controls Over Time and Attendance	13
	Long-Standing Weaknesses in Contracting for Purchase Order Vendors	17
	Career Opportunities in the Regional Language Broadcast Divisions	18
	Role of Women and Minorities	19
	Use of Noncitizen Employees	21
	The Grievance Process	24
	VOA Management's Views on Employees' Concerns	26
	Radio Marti's Use of Schedule B Hiring Authority	27
Appendix II		30
Objectives, Scope, and Methodology		
Appendix III		32
Comments From the U.S. Information Agency	GAO Comments	34
Appendix IV		35
Major Contributors to This Report	National Security and International Affairs Division, Washington, D.C.	35

---

## Abbreviations

EEO	Equal Employment Opportunity
INS	Immigration and Naturalization Service
OPM	Office of Personnel Management
POV	purchase order vendor
USIA	U.S. Information Agency
VOA	Voice of America



---

# Evaluation of VOA and Radio Marti Personnel Issues

---

The Voice of America (VOA) broadcasts over 1,050 hours weekly to over 127 million people around the world in English and 42 foreign languages. Nearly all broadcasts originate in Washington, D.C., and are transmitted overseas by satellite and shortwave relays to transmitters for rebroadcast to the target audience. The VOA operating budget for fiscal year 1989 was estimated to be \$170 million. VOA has a staff of 2,020 in the United States and 816 overseas.

In the early 1980s, VOA's increasing budget provided employees incentives and opportunities for advancement. On October 1, 1981, the U.S. Information Agency (USIA) delegated to VOA the responsibility for its own personnel management. VOA's Office of Personnel was delegated authority for position classification, recruitment, staffing, position management, applicant examination, transaction processing, record management, policy development and implementation (in coordination with USIA), labor relations, foreign service personnel advising, and training.

In the mid-1980s, VOA began to face a tightening budget that reduced its programs and constrained employees' opportunities for advancement. In recent years, continuous turnover has occurred at key management positions, such as the director of VOA and the heads of the engineering, programming, and personnel offices. In the 1980s, there have been six directors of VOA. Various mid-level management officials told us that the turnover in top management permitted some service chiefs and branch heads to take a more independent view on control of their operation.

In 1983, the Radio Broadcasting to Cuba Act (22 U.S.C. 1465) established the Radio Marti Program within VOA. Radio Marti went on the air in May 1985. Radio Marti broadcasts 24 hours daily with an authorized staffing of 165 positions and a budget of about \$13 million. Radio Marti operates quasi-independently from VOA. The VOA directorate provides broad guidance, but Radio Marti manages its day-to-day operations.

---

## Allegations Made by Employees

Of the 2,020 domestic VOA and Radio Marti employees, 178 made over 680 allegations to us about abuse and violations of personnel regulations and procedures and made 191 other allegations about nonpersonnel-related problems. The allegations included generalizations of problems as well as cases with specific details. The allegations were diverse and included such issues as (1) time and attendance abuses, (2) employment of some people who were not qualified and the release of individuals who questioned management decisions, (3) employees' use of government facilities and time to operate private businesses, (4) inappropriate

performance ratings and awards for certain employees, (5) award of purchase order vendor contracts to former employees and relatives, (6) national security concerns, (7) discrimination and sexual harassment, (8) supervisors' abuse of noncitizens and use of them for personal services, (9) quick promotions for friends and relatives, and (10) an ineffective grievance system.

A large number of the VOA managers and employees that we interviewed expressed the view that the general state of employee-management relations was confrontational and mutually suspicious. Those employees interviewed perceived that certain personnel procedures and practices were not being uniformly or consistently applied and that appearances of favoritism existed. Many of the employees we interviewed did not trust the grievance process; they feared that using it would result in harassment from managers. VOA and Radio Marti employees we interviewed told us that they were frustrated because they perceived that career opportunities were limited and they were cynical about the VOA's management style. Most of the employees we interviewed alleged that the morale of VOA and Radio Marti employees was low.

We received allegations mainly from employees in the VOA program and technical operations. Most of the employees asked for and received pledges that their identity would remain confidential. Our review indicated that (1) some allegations did have merit and some did not, (2) some were a restatement of past problems that had largely been resolved, (3) some were partially true, and (4) some concerned long-standing problems that remain unresolved.

We did not pursue individual cases because (1) most of the employees requested confidentiality, (2) some of the allegations were generalizations of problems, (3) the time lapse between the alleged event and our work was substantial, (4) some of the problems were of a subjective nature, and (5) clear documentation was lacking. Instead, we reviewed personnel management practices in areas that seemed to have systemic or long-standing problems.

---

## Inadequate Controls Over Time and Attendance

Our review of time and attendance practices in three of the Regional Language Broadcast Divisions indicated that weak internal controls resulted in the abuse of time and attendance requirements, failure to abide by overtime and compensatory time rules, and irregularities in work scheduling.

---

## Documentation of Time and Attendance

VOA requires that sign-in/sign-out sheets be used to help managers manage the work hours of staff members and serve as a check for timekeepers in verifying employees' time and attendance records. Despite the procedures used to track the attendance of night shift and weekend staff, some staff members recorded false times of entry or exit and signed in for other employees. We found that supervision of the process was limited.

All employees are required to sign their service's sign-in/sign-out logs. There was also a log that all night and weekend shift personnel must sign upon entering and exiting the building. These logs come under differing degrees of observation and supervision, depending on the service. The amount of supervision of the night and weekend shifts varied widely as well. The front desk sign-in system was easy to circumvent, as the guards often did not observe who signed in and whether the noted time was accurate.

VOA regulations recommend that unless a timekeeper's work schedule is such that more time cards can be maintained without error or omission, no timekeeper will be responsible for more than 20 time cards. We found that several timekeepers were responsible for up to 50 time cards. According to one timekeeper, she depended on employees' honesty rather than a check of their schedules against the sign-in/sign-out logs. VOA officials agreed that the sign-in/sign-out log procedures alone were inadequate in the face of the widespread abuse.

---

## Compensatory Time and Overtime

A few VOA managers (1) granted extra compensatory time or overtime as an incentive to employees to work unpopular shifts or perform translation duties within the course of a normal 40-hour work week, (2) recorded compensatory time and overtime earned by employees in an unofficial log, (3) did not provide for adequate supervision of night shifts, and (4) unevenly enforced time and attendance regulations.

Under 5 U.S.C. 5542, overtime must be officially assigned and approved before an employee is entitled to overtime or compensatory time. Hours in excess of 8 in a day and 40 in a week are considered overtime.

In 1986, to provide relief from night duty, employees of one language service were granted a "research day." After 3 days of night duty, employees were given a day, ostensibly to study new language terminology. Employees reportedly came to work, signed in and out, and then went home. In effect, they were granted 8 hours of compensatory time

---

to work the night shifts. In 1988, the practice was so abused that employees on the day shift complained to the union, which worked with the language service chief to reduce and then eliminate the practice.

In another language service, the chief automatically credited 4 hours of compensatory time to employees who volunteered to do extra translation work on Saturday. We were told that in actuality the volunteers performed the work during their regularly scheduled 40-hour week or completed the translations within 1 hour on Saturdays. VOA's Office of Personnel investigated and found that the tasks did not always take 4 hours but the employees were credited with 4 hours of compensatory time. The Office of Personnel directed the division chief to stop the practice.

We found that weekend and night shifts were inadequately supervised. In some of the smaller language services, it was unusual to have a supervisor on duty at all. Night shift employees of some of the larger language services might not see a manager or editor throughout their night rotation period.

---

## Dealing With Violators

Managers have wide latitude in taking action against time and attendance violators. They can give a verbal warning, deduct leave or charge absence without leave, or give a letter of admonishment, a reprimand, or a suspension.

According to a VOA summary of cases of employees whose absence without leave resulted in disciplinary actions between 1981 and 1988, the punishments for similar offenses varied widely. For instance, a foreign service officer and a grade 3 employee were both charged as absent without leave for 80 hours each. The foreign service officer received a 5-day suspension; the grade 3 employee received a 30-day suspension. In another case, a grade 3 employee was given a 5-day suspension for being absent 12 hours without leave, while a grade 11 employee was given an equal suspension for being absent without leave for 235 hours. Only 3 of the 24 cases concerned employees above a grade 11, and their punishments varied widely as well. One grade 12 employee was absent without leave for 64 hours and received a letter of admonishment, while another grade 12 was absent without leave for 62 hours and was suspended 10 days.

VOA officials stated that when taking disciplinary action they determine the reasonableness of a penalty by considering each case individually

and applying various factors. They noted that consistency of the action with the penalties imposed on other employees is only one factor of many that must be considered. They said that consideration is also given to the presence of more than one charge, the discipline record of the employee, the employee's contrition, and various mitigating factors.

---

## Work Scheduling

Work schedule records showed irregularities in the scheduling process. VOA regulations require that in scheduling an employee's weekly tour of duty there must be at least a 12-hour break between tours. However, in several services these regulations were not adhered to; managers were scheduling employees to shift from a night to a morning schedule without the prescribed break.

The normal work day is 8 hours with an unpaid lunch period of 45 minutes. An alternative is an 8-hour shift with no meal period, but this must be approved by the department head and the Director of Personnel. The alternative is for employees who must perform specified duties during the meal period, as directed by their managers, or spend their time in close proximity to their work stations.

Our review indicated that the 8-hour schedule was being used without authorization, but less so than in the past. In 1983, the USIA's Office of Inspector General found that 70 percent of VOA's employees worked the 8-hour schedule, most without written justification. Forty-nine percent of the language service staff worked such a schedule in August 1988, but generally there was written support.

The justifications for working an 8-hour schedule must meet specific criteria, be approved by a panel on a case-by-case basis, and be periodically reviewed for continued relevance. We found that, in practice, blanket approvals were granted to some language services based on what appeared to be a personnel shortage, which by itself is not a relevant criterion. Other services granted individual requests simply because the 8-hour schedule had become the norm. Some managers seemed unaware of the requirement to justify requests and get approval from higher authority for use of an 8-hour schedule without a meal period.

---

## VOA's Corrective Action

Because of our findings, VOA has taken action to curb the time and attendance problems. In October 1988, it initiated seminars for all managers and timekeepers on time and attendance procedures and proper justification and policy for straight 8-hour shifts. Furthermore, the Director of VOA announced a policy of "zero tolerance" for violations of the time and attendance regulations. Under this policy, managers are to be held accountable for abuse of the procedures, and those who are lax in enforcing time and attendance policy are to lose supervisory responsibilities. VOA plans to review the straight 8-hour day justifications (the first since 1985) to determine whether the system is too cumbersome to regulate.

---

## Long-Standing Weaknesses in Contracting for Purchase Order Vendors

In fiscal year 1987, VOA used approximately 300 to 400 purchase order vendors (POV) or talent vendors and issued 5,700 purchase orders. VOA uses POVs to fulfill programming needs (1) during evening and weekends, (2) normally required of staff positions that are temporarily vacant, or (3) required on short-term notice because of staff being on leave.

The procurement of these POVs was handled within each organizational unit rather than through a centralized structure, and many regulations and procedures were not followed. VOA's process to secure talent services through purchase orders continues to suffer from many of the same weaknesses we reported in 1982. At that time, we reported that (1) awards were made without formal advertising, (2) more competition was needed in negotiated procurements, (3) former employees and dependents of current employees were frequently used, and (4) talent vendors were used in lieu of hiring staff. Subsequently, VOA issued instructions and guidelines to tighten controls; however, problems remain regarding VOA's compliance with the regulations and procedures.

A 1987 USIA study of small purchasing by VOA and other USIA bureaus identified the following major deficiencies: (1) an insufficient knowledge of pertinent regulations, (2) a lack of procurement oversight, and (3) a need for organizational control of personnel and fiscal resources. We found some of the same situations as were noted in the study. For example, (1) individuals without purchasing authority solicited and negotiated prices and prepared purchase orders, (2) roles of the purchasing agent and program officer did not appear to be understood, (3) justifications for noncompetitive procurement were not always in the files, and (4) purchasing personnel and program staff did not function as a team. USIA's study concluded that the decentralized system contributed to the improper handling of many POV contracts.

---

## Selection Process Weaknesses

In our review of POVs used in the first 6 months of fiscal year 1988 by four Regional Language Broadcast Divisions, we identified numerous problems in the way VOA used POV contracts. Contracts were not awarded on a competitive basis, contracts were awarded to former employees and relatives of current employees, administrative officers did not solicit alternate sources, program officers selected vendors known to them, and no effort was made to rotate the awards among eligible competitors. Three of the four divisions we reviewed did not follow the requirement in the Federal Acquisition Regulation that a Commerce Business Daily synopsis be published. The Regulation requires such a notice for all contracts in excess of \$25,000 or \$10,000 if there is not a reasonable expectation that at least two offers will be received from responsive and responsible offerors.

To avoid potential conflicts of interest or the appearance of nepotism, USIA's general policy is not to award contracts to former employees within 2 years of their separation or to relatives of current employees. Our review of 175 POVs used in four Regional Language Broadcast Divisions during the first 6 months of fiscal year 1988 showed that 14 former employees and 10 relatives of current employees were awarded separate contracts. VOA procedures permit exemptions for the use of former employees and relatives of current employees as vendors if approvals are obtained. Our review of VOA files indicated that the appropriate officials had approved only 5 of the 24 awardees.

---

## Career Opportunities in the Regional Language Broadcast Divisions

The grade structure in the Regional Language Broadcast Divisions was lower than that in the News and English Broadcasts Divisions. Opportunities for advancement in the foreign language services were generally limited; 84 percent of the staff were grade 12 or below. In contrast, 62 percent of the News and English Broadcasts staff were grade 13 or above.

VOA personnel officials stated that the differences in grades stemmed from the use of the Office of Personnel Management's (OPM) classification criteria and standards, which require that more weight be given to original writing than to translations. News items are written by the News and English Broadcasts Divisions and then translated by the 42 language services for use on their news programs. Our review indicated that in some of the larger foreign language services, personnel were performing extensive original writing. VOA officials believed that they had recognized those individuals who had done extensive writing

in the language services by promoting them above the journeyman level of grade 11.

A VOA management training consultant told us that from his observations and discussions with employees and managers he believed that language service employees were frustrated because their careers peak at the lower grade levels. He stated that because most language service employees were foreign born and educated, their broadcasting skills were not as transferrable to the U.S. commercial radio, which limited their opportunities for other employment in the field. Also, he believed that the lack of turnover among the staff aggravated interpersonal problems and increased job stress. VOA's Office of Personnel maintained that the law allowing VOA to employ noncitizens restricts their use to the Regional Language Broadcast Divisions.

---

## VOA Initiatives

VOA's management told us that several initiatives were being taken to improve the compensation of foreign language broadcasters. One initiative was the establishment of an impact promotion program to recognize especially talented broadcasters. Several foreign language broadcasters, some of whom were noncitizens, received talent promotions (generally to grade 13) in 1988. VOA officials told us that they had initiated a study of pay system alternatives for VOA broadcasters that would replace the general schedule grade levels with broad pay bands and recognize performance and contributions to the pay-setting process. VOA management stated that to adopt such a pay for performance system would require congressional approval.

---

## Role of Women and Minorities

In November 1984, a U.S. District Court found that USIA had significantly discriminated against women as a class with regard to hiring in six occupational categories: (1) international radio broadcaster, (2) foreign information specialist, (3) writer/editor, (4) production specialist, (5) radio electronic technician, and (6) radio broadcast technician. With the exception of the foreign information specialist and the writer/editor categories, these occupations apply exclusively to VOA operations.

In a 1988 order, the District Court set criteria for determining the membership of the class eligible for relief and defined the types of relief available to class members, including back pay, front pay, and hiring priorities. The Court declined to order USIA to take affirmative action in the recruitment and hiring areas, finding that since 1984 the agency had

made “a successful, good-faith effort to end discriminatory treatment of women . . . .”

Since 1984, the percentage of women and minorities has increased to some degree, but VOA is still short of its affirmative action goals for broadcasters, radio broadcast technicians, and radio electronic technicians. The changes in some of the categories are shown below.

- Women in the production specialist occupation increased from 28 percent to 42 percent. Minorities in the production specialist occupation increased from 26 percent to 28 percent. VOA met or exceeded the 1984 goals in these occupations.
- Women broadcasters increased from 24 to 27 percent; however, women radio broadcast technicians decreased from 5 to 3 percent, and women radio electronic technicians decreased from 1 to zero percent. The 1984 goal for women in these categories was between 42 and 43 percent.
- Minority English language broadcasters increased from 6 to 10 percent, minority radio broadcast technicians increased from 7 to 10 percent, and radio electronic technicians increased from 2 to 5 percent. The 1984 goal for minority English broadcasters and radio electronic technicians was 17 percent and for minority radio broadcast technicians was 28 percent.

Women and minorities were not evenly distributed throughout the grade structure. Our analysis of the grade structure for the 2,164 employees in the United States and Americans overseas showed that women and minorities represented 47 percent of the staff. Yet only 18 percent of the grade 13 and above positions were filled by women and minorities. Women filled only 3 of the 42 foreign language service chief positions. According to VOA officials, women filled 80 of the remaining 329 managerial and supervisory positions.

---

## VOA Initiatives

VOA officials acknowledged that improvement was needed in the area of merit promotions for women. VOA management told us that they have taken the following steps to improve their affirmative action program:

- Through the English Intern Program, VOA hired in 1988 five entry-level broadcasters, four of whom were minority and/or female interns.
- Forty-seven managers attended USIA executive equal employment opportunity (EEO) seminars in 1988, and all managers will be required to attend future sessions.

- Several managers who demonstrated significant insensitivity toward EEO and other management issues were reassigned into nonsupervisory positions.
- Senior management regularly emphasizes supervisors' responsibility for EEO and affirmative action in regular meetings with first- and second-line managers.

---

## Use of Noncitizen Employees

VOA is authorized by law to employ foreign nationals in the United States, without regard to the civil service and classification laws, for positions requiring special talent when suitably qualified U.S. citizens are not available. VOA employs about 300 noncitizens to work within the United States. VOA recruits these noncitizens from overseas as well as from the domestic work force (typically, permanent resident aliens). VOA sponsors the noncitizens recruited overseas for entry into the United States under the nonimmigrant exchange visa (J-1 visa). Since the sponsorship and visa are tied directly to VOA employment, an employee may lose authorization to remain in the United States if VOA employment ceases.

Since noncitizen employees are excepted from the competitive civil service, civil service law affords them fewer job rights than it does their U.S. citizen (competitive service) counterparts and limits their avenues of redress from adverse or disciplinary action. Many of the noncitizens we interviewed see themselves as being vulnerable to abusive personnel practices. A number of other VOA employees also expressed concern about the noncitizens' vulnerability to mistreatment by their supervisors without adequate means to seek a remedy.

Several noncitizens told us that they went to work for VOA without a clear idea of the nature of the work or their employment status. The noncitizen employees said the confusion was engendered by recruiters and U.S. consular officials overseas who were unable or unwilling to spell out the terms of employment to newly hired noncitizens. Discussions with VOA officials indicated that the problem was compounded by managers who were themselves unsure of the noncitizens' rights.

VOA personnel officials told us that in hiring a noncitizen from abroad, VOA routinely sends a detailed offer cable to the prospective employee via the post. These officials believed that the cable was quite explicit in describing the terms of employment as well as conditions of work and

living and economic conditions in the Washington, D.C., area. Furthermore, they noted that specific information concerning J-1 visa restrictions has recently been added to the cable to augment the information on the visa application. VOA officials further noted that preemployment orientation packets are also sent to the employee before arrival in the United States.

However, a few noncitizens told us that they had not realized the conditional status of their residency as they expected their positions to be permanent and that after they arrived in the United States, they learned how tenuous their jobs were. They said the restrictions and implications of the J-1 visa were not explained to them by the recruiter or the U.S. consular official. In addition, in some cases the terms and conditions of their contracts were not fully explained to them until after they had arrived in the United States. For example, a noncitizen explained that she did not see or sign her contract until 4 days after arriving. She explained that had she been aware of the 180-day probationary period and the annual renewal of the contract, she would have been reluctant to accept the position.

Several noncitizen employees told us that they have also encountered problems in obtaining permission for their spouses or dependents to obtain work permits. VOA officials stated that the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) must give approval for the J-1 visa holder's spouse and dependent children under 21 to work in the United States. The officials noted that, when asked, VOA tries to assist the employee in obtaining INS approval. In addition, several noncitizen employees told us that although they paid taxes to both the United States and their homeland, their dependent children were considered foreign students when they enrolled in colleges and thus they paid higher tuition. VOA officials stated that they had interceded directly in a number of cases and had some success in obtaining lower tuition rates. Furthermore, these officials stated that VOA is continuing to search for a systematic solution to this problem.

Noncitizens cannot directly appeal adverse actions against them, such as firings or nonrenewal of their contracts, whether they occur during their 6-month probationary period, their initial 18-month limited appointment, or their subsequent annual renewals. They can appeal such decisions only by filing complaints of discrimination, complaining to the special counsel of the Merit System Protection Board, or writing to congressional representatives. A federal arbitrator determined in 1987 that

a noncitizen employee who alleged his termination was retaliatory was entitled to have his grievance decided by an arbitrator.

---

## VOA Sponsorship for Permanent Resident Status

USIA regulations require that noncitizens serve a 180-day probationary period upon initial appointment to VOA. If their performance is satisfactory, they may be offered an excepted appointment for 18 months. Thereafter, the Director of USIA can extend the appointment of a J-1 visa holder for up to 10 years, based on the employee's performance and conduct and on VOA's continued need for the employee's services. If at any time the need for maintaining the J-1 visa in a current status ceases to exist (that is, VOA employment is terminated), VOA's sponsorship ends, and the J-1 visa holder is required by law to spend at least 2 years in his or her home country before becoming eligible for an immigrant visa. VOA may petition the Attorney General to waive the 2-year requirement. In making the request, VOA considers the availability of equally or better qualified citizens, the staffing needs of the service, and the skills, experience, and past performance of the noncitizen employee.

VOA personnel officials told us that the permanent U.S. work force does not have a sufficient number of well-qualified candidates with the combination of area and language expertise to produce some of VOA's foreign language broadcasts. They further noted that for many languages the overseas sources are also inadequate. VOA officials stated that in light of these shortages and in determining long-term staffing needs, VOA will pursue permanent resident status for some noncitizen employees who hold a J-1 visa.

A VOA personnel official estimated that over 50 percent of the noncitizen employees receive a waiver and are sponsored by VOA to become permanent resident aliens. According to VOA officials, program quality is the driving force behind VOA's sponsorship for permanent residency, but they also stated that it is expensive to replace noncitizens. They estimate that the average cost to bring a noncitizen and his/her family to the United States is between \$10,000 and \$15,000, and it costs about the same to return them home. Therefore, although the J-1 visa is designed to bring people into the United States on a temporary basis, VOA officials are routinely using it as a vehicle to hire permanent employees. The selective use of the waiver has created a perception among a few noncitizen employees that favoritism, rather than any objective criteria, determines who will obtain VOA sponsorship.

---

## VOA's Efforts to Address Noncitizens' Concerns

VOA officials said that they (1) obtained an increase in settling-in, transportation, and health insurance allowances; (2) promoted several noncitizens under the promotion for talent program; (3) implemented a five-level performance award rating system for noncitizens that parallels the system for U.S. citizens; and (4) obtained an agreement for the INS to give preferential treatment to VOA noncitizen employees applying for immigrant status, as it does for professionals in the sciences and the arts.

In March 1988, the Director of VOA also issued instructions to the language service chiefs on their responsibilities towards newly arrived noncitizen employees. A personnel official stated that other improvements were made in the recruitment process for foreign nationals. Starting in June 1988, the letter offering employment included more information concerning the restrictions of the J-1 visa. Recruits are required to sign a letter affirming that they understand the restrictions. VOA has also recently revised its briefing kit to familiarize new employees with life in the United States, and the Personnel Director stated that VOA is now looking for other ways to ease the future arrivals of noncitizens.

---

## The Grievance Process

At least 70 employees complained to us that the grievance process is not neutral, timely, and/or efficient. They perceived that management had a philosophy of retaliating against persons considered to be troublemakers. Management officials, on the other hand, believed that the mix of personalities in what they described as a creative and culturally diverse staff at VOA has led to a high degree of friction in the management-employee relationship. According to Labor Relations officials, the lack of understanding of personnel regulations by some managers and staff has frequently led to a quick escalation of disagreements.

The labor-management environment at VOA is governed by collective bargaining agreements. These agreements define the conditions of employment; contain the rights of employees, labor organizations, and management; and outline a negotiated grievance procedure. The grievance process basically gives an employee the right to request that an official within USIA/VOA review the employee's complaint or problem. The employee activates the process initially through an informal discussion with responsible officials, and if the issue cannot be resolved, a more formal process is initiated, as prescribed by contract or USIA regulations. The negotiated grievance procedures include outside arbitration as a final step.

Many of the 70 employees believed that the normal channels of resolving disputes are effectively closed. Because of the perception of a biased grievance process, many who might have filed a complaint did not: only 42 of the 178 employees we interviewed had filed formal complaints; 46 others took informal steps to redress their grievances. As a result, some went outside the process by appealing to higher authority in both VOA and USIA, the White House, or Congress. Others reportedly have not pursued their cases out of fear of reprisal or because they believed the process would not work.

Some employees felt that the effectiveness of the grievance process was further weakened by employees' distrust of top management, Labor Relations and Personnel Offices, and the Office of the Inspector General, according to dozens of employees. These employees believed that the Labor Relations Office was biased against them and did not investigate their side of problems with managers. Furthermore, they believed that the Inspector General generally did not respond to their legitimate concerns.

The Labor Relations Office was perceived by these employees as an arm of management, and that was how some Labor Relations staff saw their role. Labor Relations officials told us that some employees have a misperception of their role and that while the Labor Relations Office plays the mediator in disputes, its first responsibility is to be management's advocate in labor disputes, support management in adverse actions, and represent management in unfair labor practice suits.

VOA regulations give the Labor Relations Office a dual responsibility in the grievance process: it represents management's position in each case but is responsible for ensuring that managers comply with all legal and regulatory requirements regarding disciplinary or adverse actions against employees. It must also ensure that the contemplated adverse action or penalty is appropriate and consistent with the offense.

VOA officials stated that since the transfer of personnel functions to VOA in 1981, VOA has taken a tougher stance in dealing with disciplinary problems but that disciplinary action had never been taken for other than cause and only after adequate investigation. However, a former personnel specialist told us that there was a perception among employees that Labor Relations had embarked on a concerted effort to rid VOA of troublemakers. The specialist told us that the Labor Relations Office had increased its issuance of letters of admonishment at the behest of

managers even though it had not fully investigated employees' side of the story.

In 1988, the number of letters of admonishment issued increased from prior years. We also found examples of disciplinary actions' having been taken or contemplated without a thorough investigation of the issues.

In response to allegations that complaints are not investigated, an official of the Office of Inspector General acknowledged that limited investigative resources and a heavy work load have precluded the Office from acting on all but the most serious (that is, criminal) or high visibility cases. The official confirmed that allegations of administrative problems are referred to VOA management.

---

## VOA's Initiatives

VOA has taken steps to address some concerns regarding the grievance process. In March 1988, the Personnel Office shifted more of the burden of taking disciplinary action and documenting poor performance from Labor Relations to first-line managers. VOA also employed an ombudsman, who is intended to serve as an informal channel through which employees' problems can be settled or to informally mediate disputes with management. Several employees saw the position solely as management's response to our review and that the position would not improve management-employee relationships. According to VOA personnel officials, the ombudsman has helped to defuse problems before they escalated. VOA officials stated that VOA management generally supports informal resolution of problems as an effective corrective mechanism.

---

## VOA Management's Views on Employees' Concerns

We talked with 65 VOA officials and managers in the administrative and program areas regarding personnel issues. When we asked them why some employees have such a negative perception of certain aspects of VOA management, these officials' opinions generally were that unrealistic employee expectations, breakdowns in communication between employees and managers, and cultural differences may be contributing factors. In their opinion, some misconceptions might be dispelled if employees and managers were willing to talk with one another. Furthermore, they believed that one reason for poor communication in the language services was that many foreign-born managers come from totalitarian, autocratic governmental systems under which the manager was the ultimate authority and employees did not question any aspect of managers' actions.

A VOA training consultant believed that VOA suffers from the foreign staff's alienation from the U.S. culture, cultural differences within the foreign language services, and a lack of professional journalists in some language services. A personnel specialist also indicated that VOA's personnel management was complicated by the many categories of employees: citizens covered by civil service, noncitizens covered by an excepted service, Radio Marti staff authorized under Schedule B, foreign service employees, purchase order or talent vendors, and wage board employees.

In addition to the initiatives previously discussed, VOA senior management informed us of the following efforts to improve communication within VOA:

- The Deputy Director conducts monthly briefings, which are open to all staff members to inform them of issues affecting VOA and to answer questions from employees on any matter.
- Language service chiefs are required to hold weekly meetings with their staffs to keep them abreast of management and programming matters.
- A series of planning groups involving first-line managers has been set up to provide an input to management decisions and a sounding board for employees.
- Model performance requirements and standards for VOA's broadcasters (English and foreign language) have been established to ensure that job expectations are being communicated.
- Open discussion groups called Managers' Roundtables have been established to discuss such topics as performance appraisals, time and attendance, selection of the best candidate for job openings, supervision of noncitizen employees, and positive steps toward EEO.

---

## Radio Marti's Use of Schedule B Hiring Authority

Radio Marti has not evaluated the 117 positions currently filled that have been designated as Schedule B excepted service positions to determine whether Cuban expertise was essential. In staffing Radio Marti, VOA determined that most positions would require expertise in Cuban affairs. In 1983, OPM granted a Schedule B hiring authority (excepted service)<sup>1</sup> to Radio Marti for staffing designated positions. The justification for requesting such authority was that

---

<sup>1</sup>Most federal civilian jobs are in the competitive service, which means they are filled under uniform competitive procedures. Some jobs, however, are excluded from all or part of these procedures and are put in what is called the excepted service. Schedule B includes those jobs in the excepted service that OPM has found impracticable to fill competitively.

"a significant number of the new positions will require Cuba area expertise. In the view of our Congressional mandate to broadcast Cuban oriented information to Cuba to promote freedom in that country, when evaluating candidates we must draw a fine distinction between Cuban area knowledge and a broader expertise in, for example, Central American or Caribbean areas. The area expertise we will recruit for typically will have been gained as a native Cuban, although we foresee limited instances when the qualifications may have been acquired by non-natives through education or other means. This qualification requirement will make the use of competitive civil service examining procedures impracticable."

Radio Marti has an authorized staffing level of 165 positions, of which no more than 150 may be placed into the excepted service. As of September 1988, 117 excepted service positions had been filled.

A May 1987 VOA report on alleged administrative irregularities within Radio Marti concluded that

"while recruitment of qualified candidates continues to be a problem for some positions, the [reviewing] committee is not sure that this problem is so unique as to still justify the type of excepted authorities still vested (sic) Radio Marti."

The report recommended that USIA review the need for the Schedule B authority and determine whether the authority should be modified.

Use of Schedule B authority has not been reviewed by USIA. In a memorandum to the Director of VOA, the Director of Radio Marti rejected the report's recommendation: "The report fails to identify any problem encountered in this area, so it is difficult to see what purpose would be served by a 'review.'" The memorandum went on to say, "It is important . . . that our staff have knowledge of Cuba. OPM has said that this qualification requirement makes the use of the competitive service procedure impracticable. . . Even though the Radio Marti Program is established and functioning, the need for people with knowledge of Cuba has not gone away."

Although division heads believed that a limited Schedule B authority is needed, our review of 35 personnel records of excepted service employees showed that 5 applicants were hired under the authority without the requisite expertise in Cuban affairs. One division head stated that he is always shorthanded and that he sometimes hires qualified professionals who are not knowledgeable in Cuban affairs. He said that he tries to provide these professionals with training in Cuban history and culture. Moreover, he said that finished products are always reviewed by an expert in Cuban affairs before being broadcast.

---

**Appendix I  
Evaluation of VOA and Radio Marti  
Personnel Issues**

---

While the Director of Radio Marti and its Chief of Personnel told us that knowledge of Cuba for many of the positions is of vital importance, no documentation has been developed to support the continued need for this designation on a position-by-position basis. Some mid-level managers told us that the excepted service status of employees reduces their morale, prevents them from laterally moving elsewhere in the government, and provides no job security. They believed that a specialized knowledge of Cuba is not a requisite for most of the 117 designated Schedule B staff positions.

---

# Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

---

The Chairman, Subcommittee on International Operations, House Foreign Affairs Committee, requested that we review the personnel management of USIA's Voice of America and Radio Marti. The specific objectives of our review were to (1) determine whether VOA and Radio Marti were fair to their employees and abided by applicable laws and regulations in their disposition of personnel matters, (2) listen to VOA employees' concerns on personnel issues, and (3) review any irregularities in personnel management, especially those concerning noncitizens.

We provided opportunities for employees to air their complaints or concerns by dedicating a telephone line to receive calls and by opening an office at VOA. We obtained the Chairman's permission to pledge confidentiality to those requesting it. One hundred seventy-eight VOA and Radio Marti employees made over 800 allegations, of which over 680 concerned personnel issues.

Some allegations were beyond the scope of our review and were referred to others for action. Cases involving alleged threats to national security were referred to the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Allegations that employees were conducting private business activities on government time or at government facilities were referred to USIA's Office of the Inspector General. Other allegations, such as those related to operational problems and program quality, will be considered as we plan future reviews.

Our goal was to determine if there were systemic personnel problems that management should address. Because some of the employees requested confidentiality, some of the allegations were generalizations of problems, and clear documentation was lacking in some cases, we did not try to pursue individual cases. Instead, we used the information provided to examine the processes concerning each of the areas addressed to determine if there was compliance with legal requirements and VOA and federal regulations. We did not attempt to determine if the best qualified employees were selected in promotions, awards, hiring, or whether the performance evaluations were correct. We reviewed POV contracts only as they related to personnel issues.

We discussed the employees' concerns with management officials, the unions at VOA and Radio Marti, former and current employees, and lawyers of employees. We examined VOA's personnel records and other pertinent documents and records, USIA's equal employment opportunity records, Office of Inspector General reports, and VOA internal studies on personnel issues.

---

**Appendix II**  
**Objectives, Scope, and Methodology**

---

We conducted our review at the VOA and Radio Marti headquarters in Washington, D.C., and Radio Marti's News Bureau in Miami, Florida, and the Relay Station in Marathon, Florida, between December 1987 and January 1989 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

# Comments From the U.S. Information Agency

Note: GAO comments supplementing those in the report text appear at the end of this appendix.

**United States  
Information  
Agency**

Washington, D.C. 20541

Office of the Director



April 27, 1989

Dear Mr. Conahan:

This responds to your letter of March 29 and subsequent discussion among members of our staffs concerning the draft report of the General Accounting Office's (GAO) study of personnel management issues in the Voice of America (VOA).

See comment 1.

GAO and VOA staff members have exchanged views on both the substance and style of the draft and have agreed on a number of clarifications and other revisions. For example, the original draft did not adequately recognize VOA's authorities and obligations or other constraints under which it operates.

We were pleased, however, to find that GAO identified issues already of concern to VOA management. The VOA Office of Personnel, with the support of Agency management, has a number of significant personnel programs and approaches tailored to meet the needs of VOA's highly-talented, multi-cultural workforce. We are committed to continuing these efforts and pursuing additional improvements. Since we have not had an opportunity to review the current draft, this response covers, in broad terms, the main issues addressed in the report.

See comment 2.

The GAO auditors noted employee concerns with personnel management programs which are regulated by civil service law and regulation. VOA's non-U.S. citizen employees and Radio Marti's employees hired under Schedule B authority are excepted from the competitive service. Civil service law generally affords these excepted service employees fewer job rights and less protection from adverse or disciplinary action than their competitive service colleagues. Accordingly, these employees see themselves as being more vulnerable and their job tenure less certain. We are concerned over employee perceptions in this area and will continue to enforce a policy of fair treatment for all employees, regardless of status, and afford employees all rights and protections prescribed by law and regulation.

See comment 3.

Also, as required by law, the grade levels of positions in VOA are based on the level of difficulty and responsibility, and qualification requirements associated with the work of the position. In determining these grades, VOA personnel officials apply OPM classification criteria and standards. A major factor upon which higher grades are based is complexity and originality of writing, and editing of scripts. While original writing is done by the foreign language staff and has been considered in arriving at the present grade structure (resulting in numerous promotions from GS-11 to GS-12), under the classification system we currently are required to use, career ladders comparable to those in News and English Broadcasts are not possible.

The Honorable  
Frank C. Conahan  
Assistant Comptroller General  
General Accounting Office

**Appendix III**  
**Comments From the U.S. Information Agency**

- 2 -

See comment 4.

In a significant effort to provide greater opportunities for Regional Language Broadcast employees, VOA initiated a promotion for talent program which has provided promotions to numerous foreign language broadcasters under the current classification system. VOA is also pursuing classification and compensation alternatives which would move the emphasis toward performance in making pay determinations and away from the OPM criteria.

See comment 5.

In 1983 the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) excepted Radio Marti positions which required the incumbents to possess Cuban area expertise from the competitive civil service under Schedule B. In excepting these positions, OPM determined that the requirement for Cuban area expertise made use of competitive service examining procedures impracticable. Knowledge of Cuba remains an important qualification requirement for many positions at Radio Marti. The impracticability of competitive examining for knowledge of Cuba, as determined by OPM, remains. Radio Marti management will take added measures to ensure the Schedule B authority continues to be used for the purposes for which it was granted.

See comment 6.

GAO has identified time and attendance as a matter requiring corrective attention. VOA has long been aware that enforcement of civil service laws and regulations governing time and attendance is particularly difficult at VOA, with our 24-hour-a-day, 7-day-a-week schedule and our fast-paced, deadline-oriented environment. During the past several years, we have instituted controls such as sign-in/sign-out sheets in the work area, critical performance requirements for supervisors concerning their responsibility for enforcing time and attendance rules, and periodic briefings of supervisors and timekeepers on this issue. Nonetheless, we agree that continued attention may be needed to ensure compliance with these rules.

See comment 7.

Another area identified by GAO as one in need of improvement is VOA's use of talent vendors/purchase order vendors. VOA agrees that better centralized control is needed. Since 1985, VOA has continued efforts to implement policies and procedures for ensuring proper management of these purchase orders. It should be noted that contracting for foreign language broadcasters, script writing/adaptation, and production services worldwide in over 40 broadcast languages is distinctly different from contracting for other types of services routinely required in the Federal government. VOA's unique contracting requirements may require the establishment of innovative methods for applying Federal Acquisition Regulations. VOA is taking appropriate action to address the findings of GAO in this area.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide these comments and welcome any further opportunity to discuss the report.

Sincerely,

  
Marvin L. Stone  
Acting Director

The following are our comments on USIA's letter dated April 27, 1989.

---

## GAO Comments

1. VOA officials informally provided us with a number of specific technical clarifications and editorial comments. VOA officials were concerned that our draft report did not adequately recognize the authorities, obligations, and constraints under which VOA operates. Their comments have been incorporated in the report, where appropriate, to help ensure the clarity of the report.
2. We discuss this on pages 4 and 5.
3. The report has been revised to describe VOA's basis for position classification.
4. The report reflects this initiative on pages 4 and 19.
5. The report reflects the reason for Radio Marti's excepted service on pages 5 and 27-29.
6. Time and attendance issues are discussed on pages 2 and 13-17.
7. The use of purchase order vendors is discussed on pages 3, 17, and 18.

---

# Major Contributors to This Report

---

**National Security and  
International Affairs  
Division, Washington,  
D.C.**

Joseph E. Kelley, Director, Security and International Relations Issues,  
(202) 275-4128

Joseph F. Murray, Assistant Director

Paul G. Atkins, Evaluator-in-Charge

Jeffery K. Harris, Evaluator

B. Patrick Hickey, Evaluator

Lynda M. Kyte, Evaluator



---

**Requests for copies of GAO reports should be sent to:**

**U.S. General Accounting Office  
Post Office Box 6015  
Gaithersburg, Maryland 20877**

**Telephone 202-275-6241**

**The first five copies of each report are free. Additional copies are \$2.00 each.**

**There is a 25% discount on orders for 100 or more copies mailed to a single address.**

**Orders must be prepaid by cash or by check or money order made out to the Superintendent of Documents.**