



# At a Glance

## Why We Did This Review

This report addresses the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) progress toward workforce restructuring goals after EPA employees accepted payments of up to \$25,000 in 2014 to separate from federal employment. The U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) gave the EPA buyout authority through Voluntary Early Retirement Authority (VERA, or "early out") and Voluntary Separation Incentive Payment Authority (VSIP, or "buyout") so it could downsize and restructure its workforce. Once an agency's VERA-VSIP plan gets approved, the agency should administer the VERA-VSIP plan as approved by OPM.

The EPA paid \$11.3 million in incentives in 2014 to get 456 employees to voluntarily leave the agency. EPA's other VERA-VSIP goals included reducing surplus positions, decreasing the staff-per-supervisor ratio, and reducing the pay grades of targeted positions.

**This report addresses the following EPA goal or cross-agency strategy:**

- *Embracing EPA as a high-performing organization.*

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## ***EPA's 2014 Early-Out and Buyout Activities Aided Workforce Restructuring Goals, and Continued Monitoring of Progress Can Show Value of Restructuring***

### What We Found

The EPA used its VERA-VSIP authority to buy out employees in certain targeted positions. This helped the agency accomplish certain restructuring goals, including reducing the size of program and regional offices, reducing the number of highly graded positions, and eliminating surplus positions.

**Monitoring results of workforce restructuring activities informs decisions about the value and benefits of employee buyout incentives.**

Although progress has been made in filling positions designated for restructuring under VERA-VSIP, not all workforce restructuring goals had been achieved at the time we concluded our review. Two of five EPA organizations we reviewed reported that all the VERA-VSIP-vacated positions planned for restructuring had been filled. Overall, approximately 80 percent of the positions (57 of 73) in our sample targeted for restructuring had been filled.

Other VERA-VSIP goals—such as increasing the number of staff per supervisor and obtaining staff with new skill sets—were also not complete at the time we concluded our review. Further, there are limitations in determining whether goals for increasing the staff-per-supervisor ratio and changing organizational structure were met, because some EPA organizations did not specify a metric for their goals or an identifiable end point for restructuring. Specific metrics were not required by OPM.

The EPA complied with OPM's reporting requirements during and immediately after the completion of the early-outs and buyouts. In addition, the agency developed "hiring templates," which were designed to track the status of positions vacated through the buyouts, so that positions targeted for elimination were not refilled and positions targeted for restructuring were filled using different position descriptions. However, the agency did not have a system to monitor its progress in achieving all of the remaining VERA-VSIP goals. As a result, the agency could not assess the overall impact, effectiveness and value of VERA-VSIP as a workforce restructuring tool.

### Recommendations and Agency Corrective Actions

We made two recommendations to the Assistant Administrator for Administration and Resources Management to monitor the remaining VERA-VSIP activities and determine the value of VERA-VSIP as a workforce tool. The Office of Administration and Resources Management concurred with both recommendations and provided sufficient corrective actions, which have been completed.