NATIONAL SCIENCE FOUNDATION

A Workforce Strategy and Evaluation of Results Could Improve Use of Rotating Scientists, Engineers, and Educators

What GAO Found

The numbers of rotators—outside scientists, engineers, and educators on temporary assignment—at the National Science Foundation (NSF) and their costs in proportion to other staff remained relatively stable in fiscal years 2008 through 2017. Most rotators joined NSF under its Intergovernmental Personnel Act (IPA) mobility program. IPA rotators comprised about 12 percent of NSF’s workforce and 17 percent of staff costs on average and were not subject to a federal salary cap. They remain employees of their home institutions, with NSF reimbursing the institutions for most of their salaries and benefits. The remaining rotators are considered temporary federal employees under the Visiting Scientist, Engineer, and Educator (VSEE) program; their salaries could not exceed the federal maximum for their positions.

National Science Foundation (NSF) Average Workforce Composition, Fiscal Years 2008 through 2017

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that NSF develop an agency-wide strategy for balancing the agency’s use of rotators with permanent staff and evaluate the contributions of its rotator programs toward NSF’s human capital goals and programmatic results. NSF agreed with GAO’s recommendations.