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The Honorable Rand Paul, M.D.
Chairman

The Honorable Gary C. Peters

Ranking Member

Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

United States Senate

The Honorable James Comer
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The Honorable Robert Garcia

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Committee on Oversight and Government Reform

House of Representatives

Cyber Workforce: Federal Agencies Did Not Widely Adopt Rotational Program

A resilient, skilled, and dedicated cybersecurity workforce is essential to protecting federal information technology (IT) systems as well as enabling the government's day-to-day functions. The ability to secure these systems depends on the knowledge, skills, and abilities of the federal cybersecurity workforce that uses, implements, and maintains them. Building and maintaining the IT workforce by addressing mission-critical skill gaps is one of the federal government's most important challenges as well as a national security priority. We and other organizations have previously reported that agencies faced challenges ensuring they have an effective cybersecurity workforce.¹

¹GAO, *Information Technology: Biannual Scorecards Have Evolved and Served As Effective Oversight Tools*, [GAO-22-105659](#) (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 20, 2022); *Federal Management: Selected Reforms Could be Strengthened by Following Additional Planning, Communication, and Leadership Practices*, [GAO-20-322](#) (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 23, 2020); National Academy of Public Administration, *A Call to Action-The Federal Government's Role in Building a Cybersecurity Workforce for the Nation* (Washington D.C.: January 2022); and Cyberspace Solarium Commission, *Workforce Development Agenda for the National Cyber Director* (June 2022).

The Federal Rotational Cyber Workforce Program is a government-wide program developed in accordance with the Federal Rotational Cyber Workforce Program Act of 2021 (the act).² The program allows for 6-month to 12-month voluntary reassignments of cyber employees between agencies, with the intent that participating employees develop knowledge and skills that they can bring back to their home agencies.³ The act also includes a provision for GAO to assess the operation and effectiveness of the program. The objectives of this review are to determine (1) the extent to which agencies have participated in the Federal Rotational Cyber Workforce Program and (2) the extent to which OPM identified opportunities to improve program performance.

To address our first objective, we interviewed Office of Personnel Management (OPM) officials to identify which of the 24 Chief Financial Officers (CFO) Act agencies participated in the program.⁴ We collected and analyzed OPM data to determine what positions were made available in the program, and how many employee applications were made and approved. We assessed the reliability of this data by reviewing existing information about the data, and interviewing agency officials knowledgeable about the data. We determined the data were sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this report.

To address the second objective, we reviewed OPM's lessons learned report to identify the challenges facing the program, summarize lessons learned as identified by OPM, and describe what actions OPM took to address identified program weaknesses. We also interviewed OPM officials to identify program successes and shortfalls.

We conducted this performance audit from September 2025 to July 2026 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

²*Federal Rotational Cyber Workforce Act of 2021*, Pub. L. No. 117-149, 136 Stat. 1289 (2022).

³Cyber employees are those assigned to an OPM cyber-coded position or work role assigned signifying the position has IT, cybersecurity, or other cyber-related functions.

⁴The 24 CFO Act agencies are the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Defense, Education, Energy, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, Housing and Urban Development, Justice, Labor, State, the Interior, the Treasury, Transportation, and Veterans Affairs; the Environmental Protection Agency; the General Services Administration; the National Aeronautics and Space Administration; the National Science Foundation; the Nuclear Regulatory Commission; the Office of Personnel Management; the Small Business Administration; the Social Security Administration; and the U.S. Agency for International Development. 31 U.S.C. § 901(b).

Background

Federal agencies depend on information systems to carry out operations and to process, maintain, and report essential information. The information systems and networks that support federal operations are highly complex and dynamic, technologically diverse, and often geographically dispersed. A resilient, well-trained, and dedicated cybersecurity workforce is essential to protecting federal IT systems. However, both the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and our own past reports have noted that the federal government and private industry face a persistent shortage of cybersecurity and IT professionals to implement and oversee information security protections to combat cyber threats.⁵

To help address this skills shortage, Congress has enacted several laws. In addition, OPM and the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) have issued guidance documents and a cyber position coding structure to define cyber workforce positions and implement workforce planning processes across the federal government. These efforts are critical for identifying positions that require cyber-related functions and establishing common terminology used between agencies to describe cyber-related positions. For example:

- In December 2015, the Federal Cybersecurity Workforce Assessment Act of 2015, passed as part of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2016, required OPM, with support from NIST, to establish a coding structure to be used in identifying all federal civilian and non-civilian positions that require the performance of IT, cybersecurity, or other cybersecurity-related functions.⁶
- In October 2017, OPM issued guidance explaining the implementation of the coding structure required by the Federal Cybersecurity Workforce Assessment Act of 2015, for cyber-related federal positions.⁷
- In November 2020, NIST released an updated version of its Workforce Framework for Cybersecurity. This guide included a common lexicon that categorizes and describes cybersecurity-related work roles and functions.⁸

As previously mentioned, Congress also established the Federal Rotational Cyber Workforce Program for the federal cyber workforce in 2022. The program, managed by OPM, provides opportunities for members of the cyber workforce to gain experience in related information technology, cybersecurity, and other cyber-related positions. Rotational assignments under the program can last between 6 months and a year. Participating in the program is voluntary, and the employee is provided with rights to return to their position at their home agency at the conclusion of their rotation. As prescribed by the act, the program will sunset in June 2027.

⁵Office of Management and Budget, *Federal Cybersecurity Workforce Strategy*, Memorandum M-16-15 (July 12, 2016); GAO, *Cybersecurity Workforce: Agencies Need to Accurately Categorize Positions to Effectively Identify Critical Staffing Needs*, [GAO-19-144](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 12, 2019); and *Cybersecurity Workforce: National Initiative Needs to Better Assess Its Performance*, [GAO-23-105945](#) (Washington, D.C.: July 27, 2023).

⁶*Federal Cybersecurity Workforce Assessment Act of 2015*, Pub. L. No. 114-113, Div. N, Title III (Dec. 18, 2015). 5 U.S.C. § 301 note.

⁷Office of Personnel Management, *Federal Cybersecurity Coding Structure*, Version 2.0 (Washington, D.C.: October 2017).

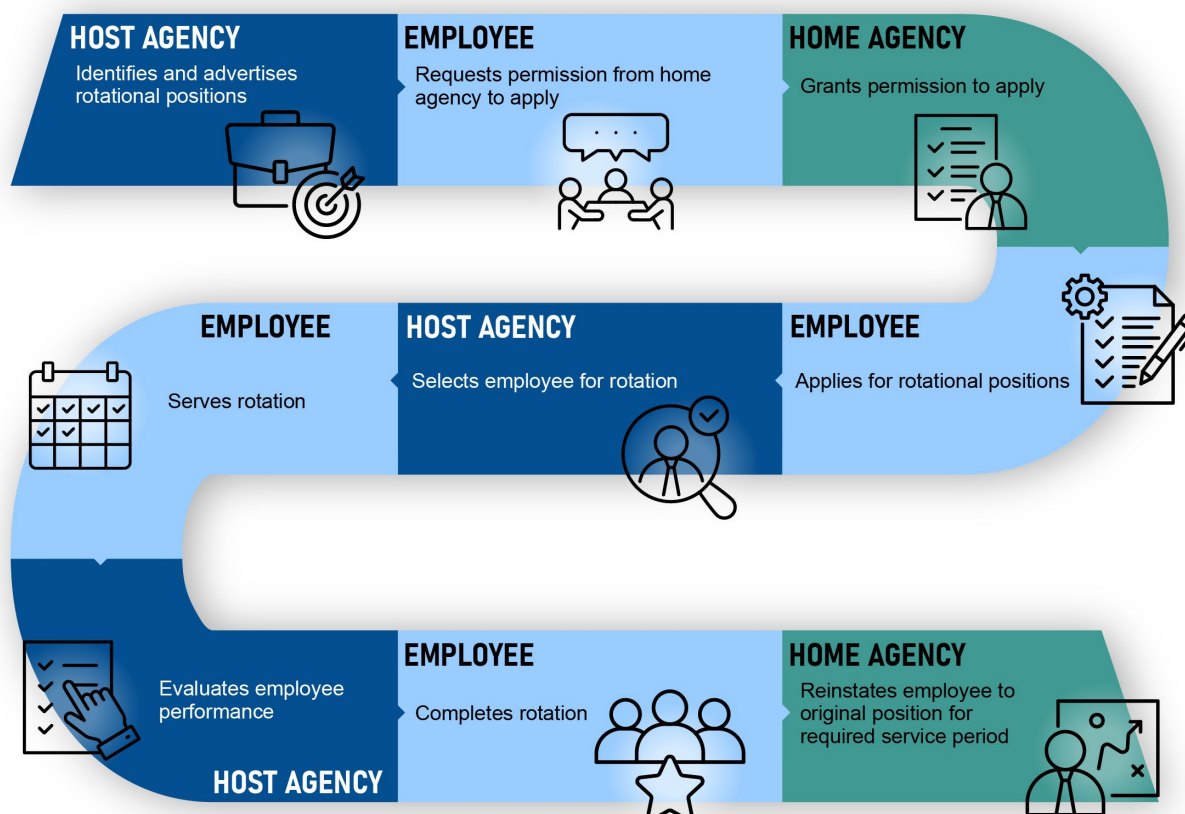
⁸National Institute of Standards and Technology, *Workforce Framework for Cybersecurity (NICE Framework)*, Special Publication 800-181 revision 1 (Gaithersburg, MD: November 2020). This version replaced an earlier version that was published in August 2017. See <https://csrc.nist.gov/pubs/sp/800/181/r1/final>.

The program has two goals: 1) for program participants to achieve a higher skill level, or attain a skill level in a different area, with respect to IT, cybersecurity, or other cyber-related functions; and 2) for rotations under the program to promote intra-agency and interagency integration and coordination of cyber practices, functions, and personnel management.

The act required OPM to create an operational plan that would identify agencies for participation in the program, establish procedures for participation, and define eligibility to participate, among other things. In March 2023, OPM published this operational plan in conjunction with supplemental materials and guidance to facilitate participation.

According to OPM's operational plan, agencies participate in the program by identifying positions eligible for rotations and advertising rotation opportunities. Employees then identify rotation opportunities that interest them. For employees to participate in the program, they must first receive approval from their home agency to apply and to serve in a rotational position. The employee then submits unique applications for each opportunity. Agencies review applications and select qualified applicants. If selected by the host agency, an employee serves the rotational position and is evaluated based on their performance throughout the rotation. Employees are then required to return to their original position at their home agency and complete a period of service equal to the length of the rotational position held. Figure 1 describes the required steps to participate in the program.

Figure 1: Required Steps to Participate in the Federal Rotational Cyber Workforce Program



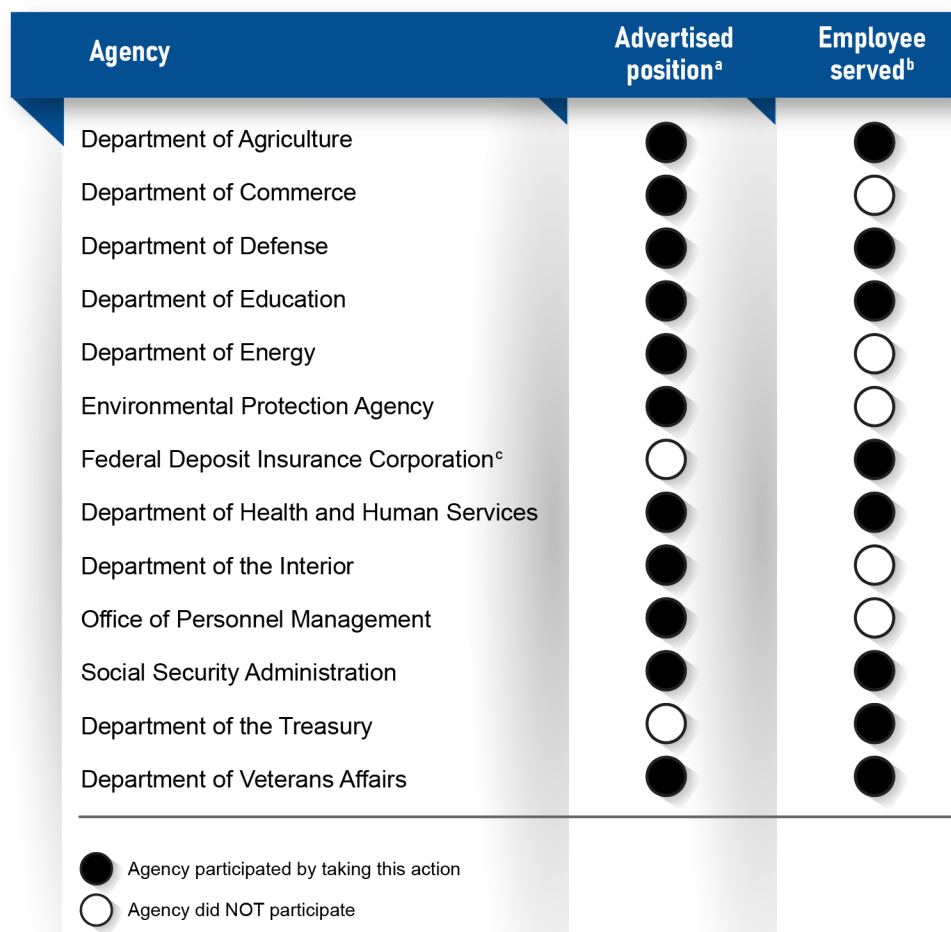
Sources: GAO summary of Office of Personnel Management documentation; Cetacons/stock.adobe.com (all icons). | GAO-26-108736

OPM’s operational plan for the rotational cyber workforce program also established criteria for employee participation. Specifically, an employee is eligible to apply for an advertised position if they meet the following criteria:

- assigned to a cyber-coded position in an agency,
- approved for participation by the head (or a designee) of their home agency,
- rated positively on the most recent annual appraisal, and
- maintains security clearance at the level required for the position.

Agencies Advertised at Least 106 positions, and Eight Employees Served Rotations
 As of May 2026, 13 agencies participated in the program, either by advertising a position or having an employee serve in a position outside the agency, or both (see figure 2). In total, 11 agencies advertised at least 106 positions.⁹

Figure 2: Agencies Participating in the Federal Rotational Cyber Workforce Program, as of January 2026



Source: GAO summary of Office of Personnel Management information. | GAO-26-108736

⁹Some postings contained a range of available positions (i.e., two to five positions) or were described as “multiple” positions. For our purposes, we defaulted to using the lowest count in the range or two if described as “multiple”. This methodology provided us the ability to accurately describe the lowest range of total advertised positions.

^a“Advertised position” indicates that agencies posted rotational positions to which employees could apply.

^b“Employee served” indicates that agencies had employees who completed rotations at an outside agency as part of the program.

^cThe Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC) is not a Chief Financial Officers Act agency listed in 31 U.S.C. § 901 (although it is subject to other provisions of the Act. See 31 U.S.C. § 9105 (audits of government corporations)). However, OPM stated that FDIC employees were allowed to participate in the Federal Rotational Cyber Workforce Program.

Two Key Factors Limited Program Participation

Since the program began advertising positions in 2023, two key factors affected the extent to which the program was utilized. These include a declining number of advertised positions and low approval rates.

The Number of Advertised Positions Declined Over the Life of the Program

OPM is responsible for advertising rotation opportunities and sharing a comprehensive list of available positions at least annually. Agencies were directed to post rotational assignments to the Open Opportunities platform, a website under USAJOBS that hosts government-wide or agency-specified development opportunities for current federal employees.¹⁰

OPM and agencies advertised at least 106 positions in the program’s first two years but did not advertise positions in 2025 and 2026. Specifically:

- In 2023, 10 agencies posted at least 75 available opportunities to serve in a rotational position at the specified agency.
- In 2024, seven agencies posted at least 31 positions.
- In 2025, agencies did not post any positions. Moreover, in December 2025, OPM officials stated that the Open Opportunities site was no longer active and that OPM planned for rotational positions to be advertised via Connect.gov.¹¹
- In 2026, agencies did not post any positions, and OPM does not anticipate that the agencies will offer any positions. OPM officials stated that, due to budgetary constraints, the agency did not obtain a Connect.gov account. OPM officials stated that they do not anticipate any agencies offering positions in 2026, and that OPM does not intend to invest resources in advertising and managing the program going forward. As a result, OPM officials stated that the agency does not intend to post advertised positions in 2026.

Agencies Received 634 Applications to Participate in the Program, and Eight Were Approved

According to OPM officials, between 2023 and 2026, agency employees submitted 634 applications to their home agency to participate in the program.¹² Eight applicants were approved to serve in a rotation (see figure 3). OPM identified four reasons for the low approval rate:

- While applicants were required to obtain approval before submitting their applications, many did not do so.
- Applicants were underqualified for the positions.

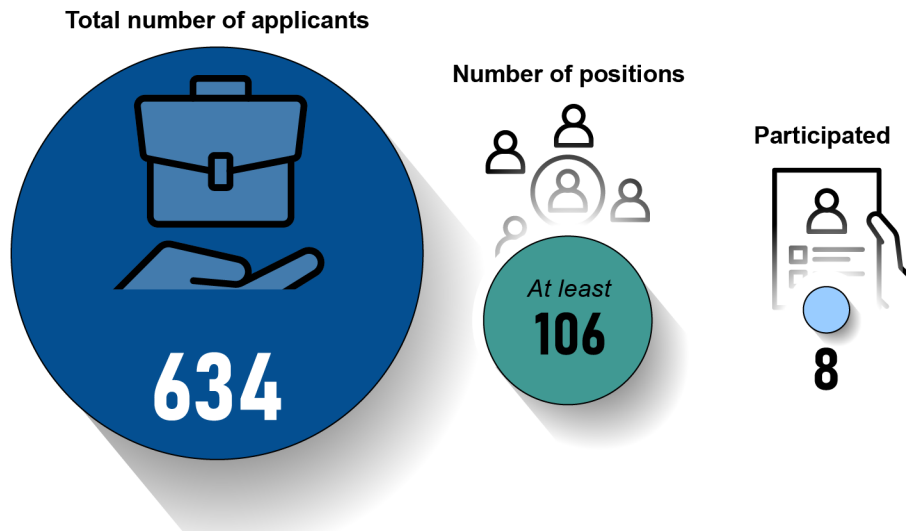
¹⁰USAJOBS is the federal government’s official employment site and is managed by OPM.

¹¹Connect.gov is a government-wide collaborative environment used by agencies for a host of services including partnership and collaboration.

¹²As previously noted, OPM did not advertise rotational positions in 2025 or 2026.

- Contractors inappropriately applied for rotation opportunities, resulting in denied applications.
- It was often easier for agencies to allow employees to serve cyber rotations within their own agency.

Figure 3: Number of Applicants, Positions, and Approved Employees in the Federal Rotational Cyber Workforce Program, 2023-2025



Sources: GAO summary of Office of Personnel Management information; Cetacons/stock.adobe.com (icons). | GAO-26-108736

OPM Identified Opportunities to Improve Rotational Program Performance but Has Not Taken Corrective Actions

In October 2024, as part of an internal program evaluation, OPM reported on the challenges it experienced in implementing the rotational program. Specifically, according to OPM, the two main program challenges were a lack of applicants deemed qualified for cyber rotations and limited awareness of the program among managers and human resources (HR) staff, which contributed to an unwillingness to support the rotational program. Additionally, OPM officials acknowledged that the selection criteria to participate in the program limited the number of qualified applicants. For example, employees must be approved by the head of their home agency (or a designee) to participate in the program. Further, employees experienced a qualification barrier to participation due to many position descriptions including higher General Schedule (GS) levels and significant experience requirements. Specifically, only five rotational positions posted across all participating agencies were graded GS-9, while 104 positions were graded GS-12 and above.¹³

Additionally, OPM reported that managerial personnel at home agencies, including workforce managers and HR staff, were unaware of the program and points of contact. Therefore, HR staff were unclear how to support employees who applied for rotations. Additionally, an OPM official stated that home agency workforce managers and HR staff considered it easier to host internal rotational opportunities rather than support the rotational program by sending their internal cyber talent elsewhere.

Further, OPM identified the following key lessons learned, among others:

- Applicants did not always provide required eligibility documentation up front, resulting in delayed supervisor approval.
- Home agencies were not always aware of the program or had not established formal policies governing participation, impeding the approval process.
- Contractors were applying to participate in the program but were not eligible to apply.
- Agencies experienced administrative burden to process selections for the program.

As part of its program evaluation, OPM made recommendations to itself to improve program performance. These recommendations included incentivizing home agencies to send employees on rotation and developing and distributing common guidance for participating agencies, among others. Specifically, OPM recommended that it

- encourage agencies to create and advertise lower-graded cyber rotations, create rotations with training and development opportunities in mind, and promote rotation opportunities to increase the size of the applicant pool;
- suggest the approval process be delegated to various organizational levels and field offices, and directly encourage participation among employees and managers through everyday contacts within the cyber workforce community;
- identify areas with skill gaps or deficiencies for host agencies to assign visiting employees on rotation, identify strength areas at host agencies to attract employees, and partner home and host agencies to identify mutually beneficial rotational opportunities;

¹³While OPM posted at least 106 positions, some offerings were for multiple GS levels. In these cases, we counted each unique GS level offered as a position.

- develop and distribute common guidance for participating agencies to streamline processes and information for managers and HR staff; and
- inform managers at participating agencies about the program and participating employees.

OPM reported that it had not taken steps to address the recommendations because it was reassessing resource allocation and strategic focus related to shifting government-wide priorities. Further, OPM has effectively halted the program. Specifically, the program did not advertise any rotational positions in 2025 or 2026. In addition, as noted earlier, the program is slated to end in June 2027.

Agency Comments

We provided a draft of this report to OPM for review and comment. OPM provided technical comments, which we incorporated as appropriate.

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees, the Director of OPM, and other interested parties. In addition, the report is available at no charge on the GAO website at <https://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at hinchmand@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Media Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made key contributions to this report included Rosanna Guerrero (Assistant Director), Alan Daigle (Analyst-in-Charge), Amanda Andrade, Chris Businsky, Destin Hinkle, Jess Lionne, and Shannon Murphy.

Sincerely,

//SIGNED//

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Director, Information Technology and Cybersecurity