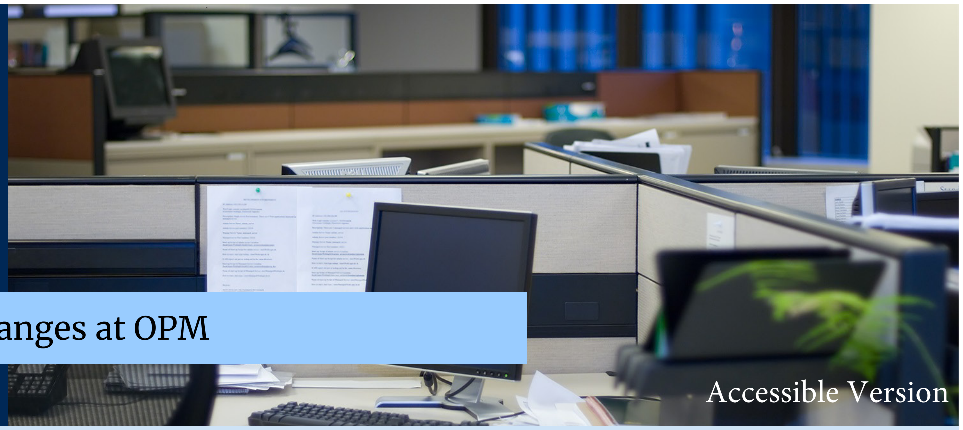
GAO
U.S. GOVERNMENT
ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE

GAOverview



Recent Federal Workforce Changes at OPM

GAO-26-108916 · July 2026

Accessible Version

OPM's headcount decreased by 35 percent between December 2024 and March 2026. These changes risk worsening pre-existing skills gaps that GAO previously recommended OPM address.

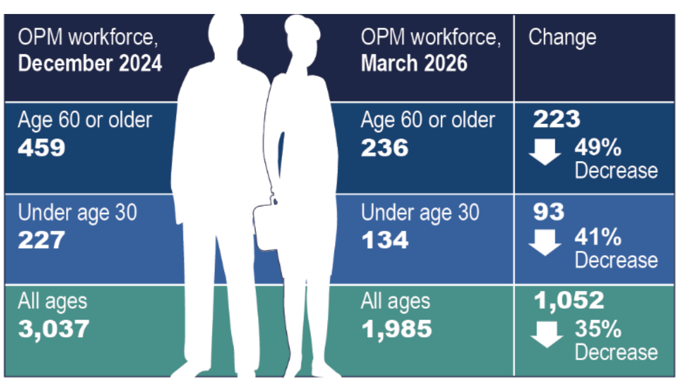
Why This Matters

The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) is the federal government's central agency for human resources and workforce management. Since December 2024, in alignment with presidential directives on the closure of certain offices and the reduction of the size of the federal workforce, OPM has undergone significant workforce and organizational structure changes. These actions have reduced institutional knowledge and operational capacity at the agency.

OPM's Headcount Decreased by 35 Percent Between December 2024 and March 2026

GAO analysis of OPM's Federal Workforce Data (FWD) found that OPM's headcount decreased by 1,052 people (35 percent) between December 31, 2024 and March 31, 2026, with those 60 years and older particularly affected (see fig. 1).

Figure 1: OPM Headcount by Age, December 31, 2024–March 31, 2026



Source: GAO analysis of the Office of Personnel Management's (OPM) Federal Workforce Data. | GAO-26-108916

Note: Data obtained from OPM website in June 2026. Workforce statistics may not reflect updates made after that date.

Looking back, OPM's headcount increased by 450 people (17 percent) between 2019 and 2024. Even so, OPM's March 2026 headcount is down 602 people (23 percent) from 2019 levels.

Of those who separated between December 2024 and March 2026, 59 percent did so through a deferred resignation program and 10 percent through a reduction in force, according to analysis of FWD. Separations particularly affected older and younger employees at OPM. The number of employees aged 60 or older decreased by 49 percent from December 2024 to March 2026. Also, among employees under age 30 who separated, 60 percent were within their probationary period. For all separating employees, only 23 percent were within their probationary period.

OPM also reduced and eliminated certain offices. In its fiscal year (FY) 2026 Congressional Budget Justification, OPM reported that it eliminated 10 offices, such as the Office of Procurement Operations. These offices covered a range of responsibilities both within OPM and across the federal government. From FYs 2024 to 2026, only two offices had an increase in full-time equivalents (FTE) (see table 1). For example, the Office of the Chief Information Officer manages OPM's IT and Retirement Services administers the federal civilian retirement systems. OPM reported that it experienced a historic surge of retirements in 2025 and responded by expanding the team. However, overall, Retirement Services shrunk 16 percent from FYs 2024 to 2026. The two offices with FTE increases assumed functions from other offices.

Table 1: Changes in OPM-Reported Full-Time Equivalents (FTE) at Selected OPM Offices, Fiscal Years 2024–2026

Office	Change in FTEs	Percent Change
Human Resources Solutions	-189	-36%
Office of the Chief Information Officer	-167	-49%
Retirement Services	-165	-16%
Workforce Policy and Innovation	-102	-45%
Merit System Accountability & Compliance	-38	-41%
Office of the General Counsel	8	21%
Office of the Director	23	79%

Source: GAO analysis of the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) Congressional Budget Justifications. | GAO-26-108916

Despite the reductions, some offices are assuming additional responsibilities. For example, while Merit System Accountability & Compliance experienced a 41 percent decline in FTEs from FYs 2024 to 2026, OPM has proposed transferring appeals of employees who have been separated by a reduction in force from the Merit Systems Protection Board to OPM, stating that the change is meant to improve efficiency. In its FY 2027 Congressional Budget Justification, OPM proposed using AI tools and modernizing its IT systems in offices with fewer staff. For example, the agency proposed exploring opportunities to leverage AI to enhance financial reporting and internal customer experience in the Office of the Chief Financial Officer.

OPM's Workforce Reductions Risk Contributing to OPM's Existing Skills Gaps

GAO and OPM have identified skills gaps as a long-standing challenge. The federal government's efforts to address government-wide and agency-specific skills gaps have been on GAO's High-Risk List since 2001. In March 2022, an OPM-sponsored assessment found that OPM had skills gaps that could compromise its ability to implement its strategic plan. In February 2023, GAO recommended that OPM establish an action plan to address these gaps (see GAO-23-105528). According to agency officials responding to that open GAO recommendation, OPM has not implemented the recommendation because it is prioritizing making workforce changes to align with its FY 2026–2030 strategic plan.

In November 2025, the OPM Office of the Inspector General (OIG) identified OPM's workforce reduction as a top management challenge for 2026 (see OPM OIG annual report). The report says that staff reductions have created immediate gaps in operational capacity at the agency.

GAO and OPM have both reported that it is important to build a stronger pipeline of talent into mission-critical roles across government (GAO-19-181). In March 2026, OPM launched a new initiative to connect emerging professionals with career opportunities across the federal government. Leading up to this, from December 2024 to March 2026, 41 percent of OPM's staff under age 30 separated.

Additionally, GAO's analysis of FWD found that of those who separated from OPM from December 2024 to March 2026, 18 percent had at least 31 years of service and 57 percent had 11 or more years of service, representing a significant loss of institutional knowledge (see table 2). GAO has previously reported that if turnover is not strategically managed and succession plans are not in place, gaps can develop in an agency's institutional knowledge and leadership as experienced employees retire (see GAO-19-181).

Table 2: Length of Service of Employees Separated from OPM, December 2024–March 2026

Length of service in years	Less than 2	2-5	6-10	11-20	21-30	31 or more
Number of employees	185	199	149	271	205	226
Percent	15%	16%	12%	22%	17%	18%

Source: GAO analysis of the Office of Personnel Management's (OPM) Federal Workforce Data. | GAO-26-108916

To supplement GAO's analysis of publicly available data, GAO requested documentation from OPM regarding changes made to offices or programs since 2025, the rationale behind the closure or consolidation of offices, and processes for strategic workforce planning, among other information. Other than comments on a preliminary draft of this report, OPM did not provide any requested documents or information, nor did it agree to meet with GAO or respond to written questions. As a result, in this report, GAO is unable to provide complete information on what changes OPM made, its rationale, the expected costs and benefits, and any effect on OPM's ability to fulfil its mission.

Contact Us:

For more information, contact: Dawn G. Locke, LockeD@gao.gov.

Media Relations: Sarah Kaczmarek, Managing Director, Media@gao.gov.

Congressional Relations: David A. Powner, Acting Managing Director, CongRel@gao.gov.

Contributors: Jason Vassilicos (Assistant Director), Melissa King (Analyst in Charge), Nicole Annunziata, Pamela Davidson, Amy Konstas, Krista Loose, Julie Scarano, Alicia White, and Mercedes Wilson-Barthes.

Source (cover photo): Zina Seletskaya/stock.adobe.com