U.S. Government Accountability Office

National Nuclear Security Administration: Reductions to Federal Workforce

GAO-27-109127
Q&A Report to the Ranking Member, Committee on Energy and Commerce, House of Representatives
October 15, 2026 Accessible Version

Why This Matters

The National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA)—a separately organized agency within the Department of Energy (DOE)—is responsible for the nation's nuclear weapons stockpile and nonproliferation efforts. NNSA has a current workload at its highest level since the Cold War as it oversees a $200 billion, 2-decades-long nuclear weapons and related infrastructure modernization effort. NNSA relies on a federal workforce of about 1,750 federal employees responsible for overseeing a $25 billion annual budget, and approximately 70,000 management and operating contractor personnel.

NNSA has faced challenges managing its human capital from late 2014 through late 2022 as statutory limits constrained NNSA's number of agency employees. In fiscal year (FY) 2023, the statutory limit on the number of the agency's employees was eliminated. However, in May 2024 (GAO-24-106167), we reported that NNSA continued to face challenges recruiting and retaining federal staff to meet the agency's mission needs.

In response to its increased workload and workforce challenges, NNSA began hiring additional employees and committed to developing a workforce planning process intended to inform future budget requests. However, according to NNSA officials, NNSA halted workforce planning in response to presidential directives in early 2025.

We were asked to examine the impacts of NNSA's retirements, resignations, terminations, and other voluntary or involuntary workforce reductions since January 2025. This report describes the changes to NNSA's workforce since the beginning of FY 2023—when the statutory limit was eliminated—through the middle of FY 2026.

Key Takeaways

- As of the second quarter in FY 2026, the number of NNSA's employees had decreased to 1,755 from nearly 2,000 federal employees in the first quarter of FY 2025.
- NNSA curtailed its hiring activities during a federal government hiring freeze, which was imposed from the second quarter of FY 2025 through the first quarter of FY 2026. The hiring freeze included an exception for national security personnel, allowing NNSA to hire 35 federal employees during this time.
- Reductions in the number of NNSA federal employees varied in terms of NNSA's mission-critical employees, programs, offices, and locations. For example, NNSA lost nearly 14 percent of its mission-critical employees from the first quarter of FY 2025 to the second quarter of FY 2026. Furthermore, NNSA's Office of Environment, Safety, and Health and its Office of Management and Budget were the most heavily impacted offices, losing approximately 24 and 22 percent of their respective federal workforces. With respect to NNSA locations, the Nevada Field Office and the Los Alamos Field

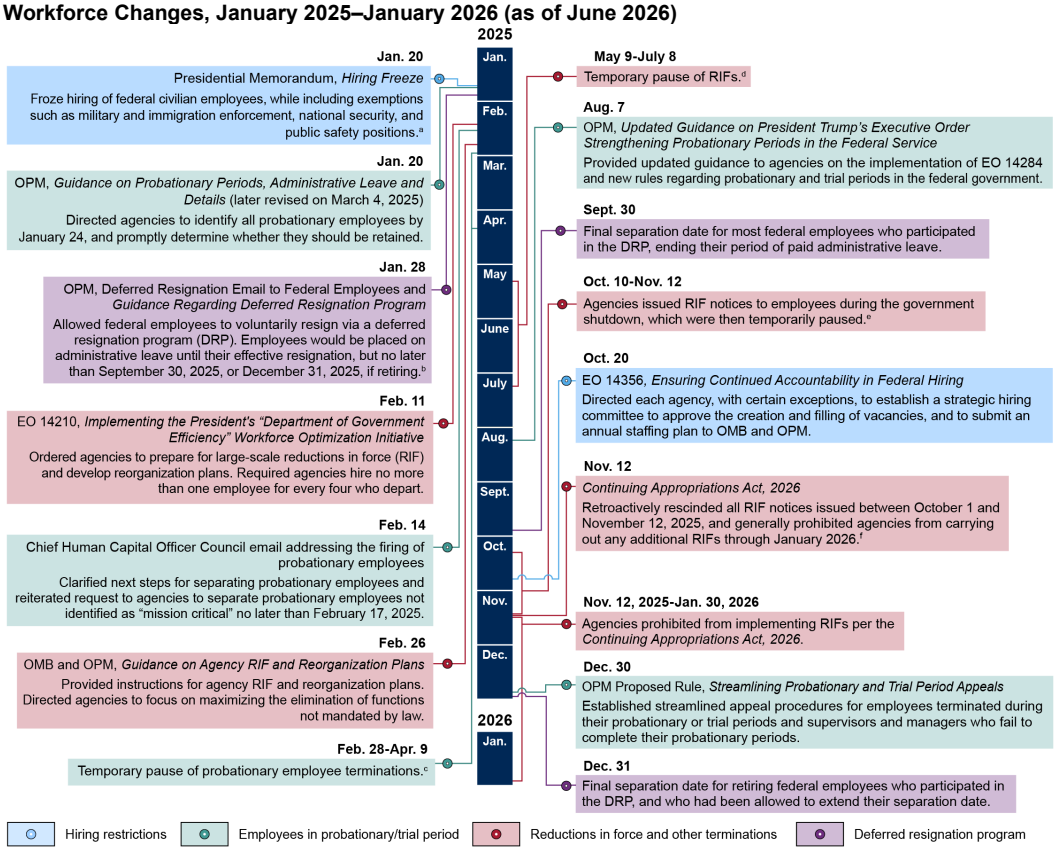
Office lost approximately 22 percent and 18 percent of their federal workforces.

What actions has NNSA taken in response to presidential directives to reduce the size of its workforce?

Federal government agencies, including NNSA, took steps to reduce the size of their workforces in response to presidential directives. Figure 1 shows these directives, government-wide guidance, and related actions.[1] These steps included offering incentives for employees to voluntarily resign, terminating employees in probationary or trial periods, implementing reductions in force (RIF), and restricting hiring for most federal positions.

The U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM), whose mission is to lead federal agencies in building merit-based, accountable, and modern workforces, has issued guidance on January 28, 2025, with detailed instructions on how agencies should reduce the size of their workforces. This guidance included details on the creation of the deferred resignation program (DRP).[2] OPM established a government-wide DRP that allowed federal employees who agreed to resign or retire by September 30, 2025, to be placed on administrative leave, retaining their salary and benefits in the interim until their official separation date. Under the DRP, if an employee was scheduled to retire between October 1, 2025, and December 31, 2025, they could request to extend their resignation date to match their retirement date.[3]

Figure 1: Timeline of Selected Directives, Government-Wide Guidance, and Related Actions on Federal Workforce Changes, January 2025–January 2026 (as of June 2026)



Source: GAO review of selected Presidential memorandums; executive orders (EO); Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and Office of Personnel Management (OPM) guidance; and relevant statutes, court filings, and opinions. | GAO-27-109127

Accessible Data for Figure 1: Timeline of Selected Directives, Government-Wide Guidance, and Related Actions on Federal Workforce Changes, January 2025–January 2026 (as of June 2026)

Date	Workforce Action
Jan. 20 (Hiring restrictions)	Presidential Memorandum, *Hiring Freeze* Froze hiring of federal civilian employees, while including exemptions such as military and immigration enforcement, national security, and public safety positions.[a]
Jan. 20 (Employees in probationary/trial period)	OPM, *Guidance on Probationary Periods, Administrative Leave and Details* (later revised on March 4, 2025). Directed agencies to identify all probationary employees by January 24, and promptly determine whether they should be retained.
Jan. 28 (Deferred resignation program)	OPM, Deferred Resignation Email to Federal Employees and, *Guidance Regarding Deferred Resignation Program* Allowed federal employees to voluntarily resign via a deferred resignation program (DRP). Employees would be placed on administrative leave until their effective resignation, but no later than Sept. 30, 2025 or Dec. 31, 2025, if retiring.[b]
Feb. 11 (Reductions in force and other terminations)	EO 14210*, Implementing the President's "Department of Government Efficiency" Workforce Optimization Initiative* Ordered agencies to prepare for large-scale reductions-in-force (RIF) and develop reorganization plans. Required agencies hire no more than one employee for every four that depart.
Feb. 14 (Employees in probationary/trial period)	Chief Human Capital Officer Council email addressing the firing of probationary employees Clarified next steps for separating probationary employees and reiterated request to agencies to separate probationary employees not identified as "mission critical" no later than Feb. 17, 2025.
Feb. 26 (Reductions in force and other terminations)	OMB and OPM, *Guidance on Agency RIF and Reorganization Plans* Provided instructions for agency RIF and reorganization plans. Directed agencies to focus on maximizing the elimination of functions not mandated by law.
Feb. 28-Apr. 9 (Employees in probationary/trial period)	Temporary pause of probationary employee terminations.[c]
May 9- Jul. 8 (Reductions in force and other terminations)	Temporary pause of RIFs.[d]
Apr. 7 (Employees in probationary/trial period)	OPM, Updated Guidance on President Trump's Executive Order Strengthening Probationary Periods in the Federal Service Provided updated guidance to agencies on the implementation of EO 14284 and new rules regarding probationary and trial periods in the federal government.
Sept. 30 (Deferred resignation program)	Final separation date for most federal employees who participated in the DRP, ending their period of paid administrative leave.
Oct. 10-Nov. 12 (Reductions in force and other terminations)	Agencies issued RIF notices to employees during the government shutdown, which were then temporarily paused..[e]
Oct. 20 (Hiring restrictions)	EO 14356*, Ensuring Continued Accountability in Federal Hiring* Directed each agency, with certain exceptions, to establish a strategic hiring committee to approve the creation and filling of vacancies, and to submit an annual staffing plan to OMB and OPM.
Nov. 12	*Continuing Appropriations Act, 2026* Please edit this box with edit made in teal: Retroactively rescinded all RIF notices issued between October 1 and November 12, 2025, and generally prohibited agencies from carrying out any additional RIFs through January 2026.[f]
Nov. 12-Jan. 30, 2026 (Reductions in force and other terminations)	Agencies prohibited from implementing RIFs per the *Continuing Appropriations Act, 2026*.
Dec. 30 (Employees in probationary/trial period)	OPM Proposed Rule, *Streamlining Probationary and Trial Period Appeals* Establishes streamlined appeal procedures for employees terminated during their probationary or trial periods and supervisors and managers who fail to complete their probationary periods.
Dec. 31	Final separation date for retiring federal employees who participated in the DRP, and who had been allowed to extend their separation date.

Source: GAO review of selected Presidential memorandums; executive orders (EO); Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and Office of Personnel Management (OPM) guidance; and relevant statutes, court filings, and opinions. | GAO-26-109127

[a]At the time of the issuance of this report, some federal agencies have resumed some limited hiring.
[b]Some agencies, including the Departments of Agriculture, Defense, Housing and Urban Development, and others, also offered agency-specific DRPs.
[c]Two federal district courts issued orders temporarily pausing the termination of probationary employees and required their reinstatement at approximately 20 agencies. Maryland v. U.S. Dep't of Agric., 777 F. Supp. 3d 432 (D. Md. 2025); American Fed'n of Gov't Emp., AFL-CIO v. U.S. Off. of Pers. Mgmt., 770 F. Supp. 3d 1215 (N.D. Cal.2025). These orders were stayed, respectively, by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit and the U.S. Supreme Court. In September 2025, the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit found that the states lacked standing in *Maryland v. U.S. Department of Agriculture* and the district court subsequently dismissed the lawsuit. 151 F.4th 197 (4th Cir. 2025). Also in September, the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California issued an order in *American Federation of Government Employees, AFL-CIO v. U.S. Office of Personnel Management* (OPM) that OPM lacked the authority to direct other agencies to terminate their probationary employees and violated the Administrative Procedure Act. 799 F. Supp. 3d 967 (N.D. Cal. 2025). The government subsequently filed a notice of appeal. No. 25-5875 (9th Cir. Sept. 18, 2025).

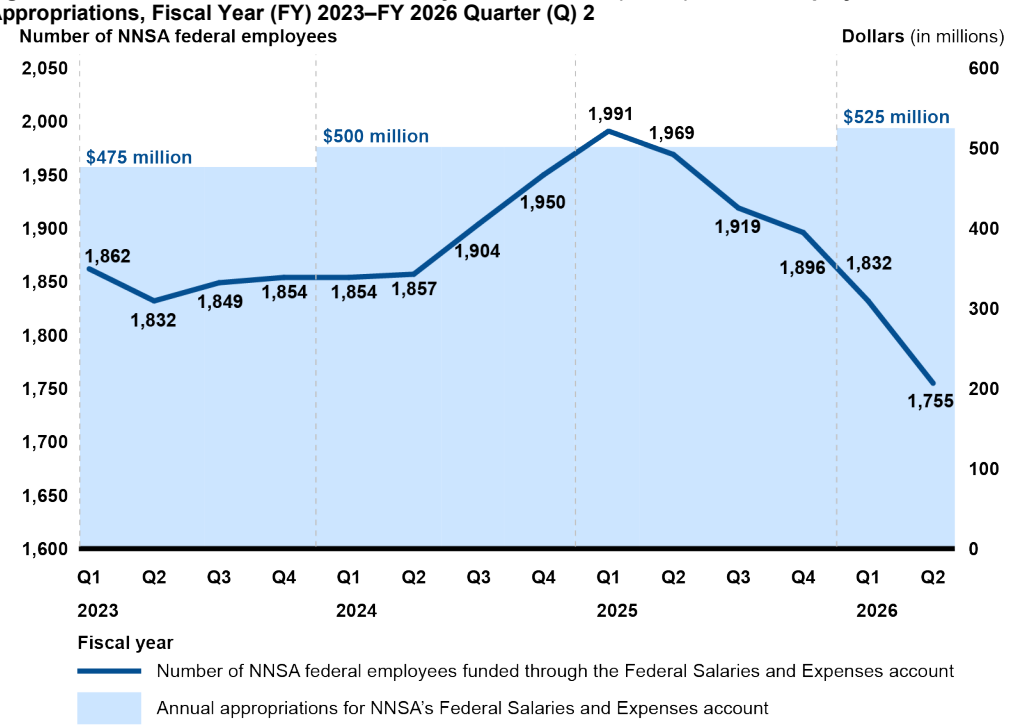
[d]A federal district court issued an order temporarily pausing large-scale reductions in force at approximately 20 agencies. American Fed'n of Gov't Emp., AFL-CIO v. Trump, 784 F. Supp. 3d 1316 (N. D. Cal. 2025). This order was subsequently stayed by the U.S. Supreme Court. In September 2025, the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California granted in part and denied in part the administration's motion to dismiss the lawsuit.
[e]On October 15, 2025, the U.S. District Court for the Northern District of California issued a temporary restraining order (later supplemented by a preliminary injunction on October 28) that paused the implementation of RIFs initiated in October 2025. American Fed'n of Gov't Emp., AFL-CIO v. U.S. Off. of Mgmt.& Budget, 806 F. Supp. 3d 1093 (N.D. Cal. 2025); American Fed'n of Gov't Emp., AFL-CIO v. U.S. Off. of Mgmt. & Budget, 807 F. Supp. 3d 1004 (N.D. Cal. 2025). The government subsequently filed a notice of appeal. No. 25-7998 (9th Cir. Dec. 22, 2025); Continuing Appropriations Act, 2026 in Continuing Appropriations, Agriculture, Legislative Branch, Military Construction and Veterans Affairs, and Extensions Act, 2026, Pub. L. No. 119-37, § 120, 139 Stat. 495, 500-501 (2025).
[f]The Continuing Appropriations Act, 2026, generally prohibited federal funds from being used to initiate, notice, or carry out RIFs from November 12, 2025, through January 30, 2026. It also invalidated RIF actions and notices issued between October 1 and November 12, 2025. Pub. L. No. 119-37, § 120, 139 Stat. 495, 500-501 (2025).

Prior to the actions taken by the current administration to reduce the overall size of the federal government, NNSA's personnel had been limited by statute. For several years starting with FY 2015, federal law capped the number of NNSA employees unless the Administrator specifically justified a larger workforce to Congress.[4] The cap was set by statute at 1,825 employees for FY 2015, reduced to 1,690 for FY 2016, and increased again to 1,890 for FY 2020 and beyond.[5] The cap was eliminated in FY 2023.[6]

How did NNSA's federal workforce change from FY 2023 through the middle of FY 2026?

After hiring additional employees in FYs 2023 and 2024, NNSA reduced, following presidential directives, the size of its workforce from 1,991 to 1,755 in second quarter of FY 2026. This reduction of 236 employees more than erased NNSA's addition of 129 employees in prior FYs.[7] In addition, this reduction in the number of federal employees occurred while NNSA received increased funding through the Federal Salaries and Expenses appropriations account, as shown in figure 2.

Figure 2: Number of National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) Federal Employees and Annual Appropriations, Fiscal Year (FY) 2023–FY 2026 Quarter (Q) 2



Source: GAO analysis of NNSA data. | GAO-27-109127

Accessible Data for Figure 2: Number of National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) Federal Employees and Annual Appropriations, Fiscal Year (FY) 2023–FY 2026 Quarter (Q) 2

Quarter	Number of NNSA federal employees funded through the Federal Salaries and Expenses account	Annual appropriations for NNSA's Federal Salaries and Expenses account
FY23 Q1	1862	$ 475,000
FY23 Q2	1832	$ 475,000
FY23 Q3	1849	$ 475,000
FY23 Q4	1854	$ 475,000
FY24 Q1	1854	$ 500,000

FY24 Q2	1857	$	500,000
FY24 Q3	1904	$	500,000
FY24 Q4	1950	$	500,000
FY25 Q1	1991	$	500,000
FY25 Q2	1969	$	500,000
FY25 Q3	1919	$	500,000
FY25 Q4	1896	$	500,000
FY26 Q1	1832	$	525,000
FY26 Q2	1755	$	525,000

Source: GAO analysis of NNSA data. | GAO-27-109127

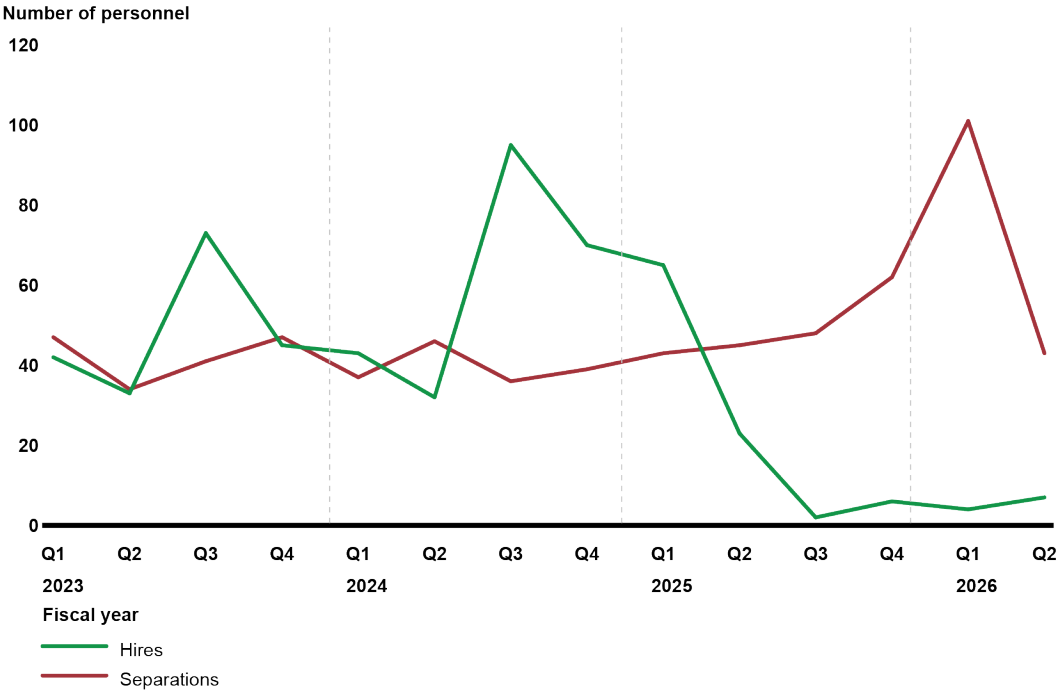
Note: This figure is based on the number of employees funded through the Federal Salaries and Expenses appropriation account, which funds the salaries, benefits, and other related expenses for most of NNSA's federal workforce. This analysis does not include employees at the Savannah River Field Office (SRO) because SRO employees transferred from the Department of Energy's Office of Environmental Management to NNSA during the same period in which workforce reductions were occurring, which makes the reported workforce data difficult to interpret. According to NNSA employees, these workforce data do not include the February 2025 terminations of 163 probationary or trial period NNSA employees and the subsequent March 2025 rescission of terminations. Almost all employees returned after the terminations were rescinded.

Employees both separated from and were hired by NNSA from FY 2023 through the second quarter of FY 2026.

- **Separations:** NNSA reported that a total of 669 NNSA employees separated from the agency from FY 2023 to the second quarter of FY 2026. Separations resulted in approximately 36 percent of the federal workforce at NNSA leaving the agency during this 3½ year period.[8] Separations have been both voluntary and involuntary. Voluntary separations occur through retirements or when an employee accepts an early retirement incentive or resigns. Involuntary separations occur when employment ends due to performance or conduct issues or an agency institutes a RIF. According to NNSA officials, of the 669 NNSA separations, there were 45 that left the agency involuntarily. According to NNSA officials, the agency also terminated 163 probationary or trial period NNSA employees in February 2025 and then rescinded those terminations in March 2025. Almost all employees returned after the terminations were rescinded.
- **Hires:** NNSA reported that it hired a total of 540 employees from FY 2023 through the second quarter of FY 2026.[9] However, NNSA curtailed its hiring activities during a federal government hiring freeze, which was imposed from the second quarter of FY 2025 through the first quarter of FY 2026.[10] The hiring freeze included an exception for national security personnel, allowing NNSA to hire 35 federal employees during this time. To continue to address employee shortfalls, NNSA officials told us it has initiated limited hiring since the end of the second quarter of FY 2026. For example, NNSA officials told us they plan to hire additional human capital specialists to help identify and interview candidates for federal employment.

Figure 3 and table 1 provide additional details on the number of hires and separations at NNSA for each quarter from FY 2023 through the second quarter of FY 2026.

Figure 3: National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) Hires and Separations, Fiscal Year (FY) 2023–FY 2026 Quarter 2



Source: GAO analysis of NNSA annual appropriations and workforce data. | GAO-27-109127

Accessible Data for Figure 3: National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) Hires and Separations, Fiscal Year (FY) 2023–FY 2026 Quarter 2

Quarter	Hires	Separations
FY23 Q1	42	47
FY23 Q2	33	34
FY23 Q3	73	41
FY23 Q4	45	47
FY24 Q1	43	37
FY24 Q2	32	46
FY24 Q3	95	36
FY24 Q4	70	39
FY25 Q1	65	43
FY25 Q2	23	45
FY25 Q3	2	48
FY25 Q4	6	62
FY26 Q1	4	101
FY26 Q2	7	43

Source: GAO analysis of NNSA annual appropriations and workforce data. | GAO-27-109127

Table 1: National Nuclear Security Administration's (NNSA) Hires and Separations, Fiscal Year (FY) 2023–FY 2026 Quarter (Q) 2

	Separations (including temporary employees)	Separations as a percent of workforce	Hires (including temporary employees)	Hires as a percent of workforce
FY 2023 Q1	47	2.52%	42	2.26%
FY 2023 Q2	34	1.86%	33	1.80%
FY 2023 Q3	41	2.22%	73	3.95%
FY 2023 Q4	47	2.54%	45	2.43%
FY 2024 Q1	37	2.00%	43	2.32%
FY 2024 Q2	46	2.48%	32	1.72%
FY 2024 Q3	36	1.89%	95	4.99%

	Separations (including temporary employees)	Separations as a percent of workforce	Hires (including temporary employees)	Hires as a percent of workforce
FY 2024 Q4	39	2.00%	70	3.59%
FY 2025 Q1	43	2.16%	65	3.26%
FY 2025 Q2	45	2.29%	23	1.17%
FY 2025 Q3	48	2.50%	*	*
FY 2025 Q4	62	3.27%	*	*
FY 2026 Q1	101	5.51%	*	*
FY 2026 Q2	43	2.45%	*	*

Legend: * = In instances where the number of employees in a specified group is fewer than 10, we mark this with an asterisk. In certain cases, when only one value is 10 or less, we mark an additional group of employees with an asterisk to ensure privacy.
Source: GAO analysis of NNSA workforce data. | GAO-27-109127

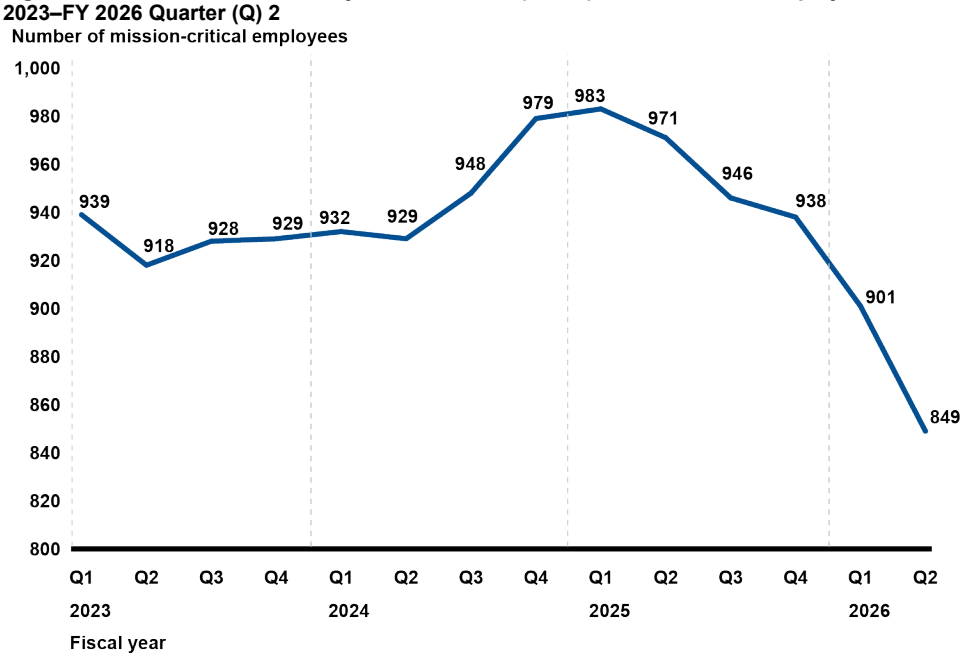
Notes: Temporary employees are those hired by agencies to fill short-term positions not expected to last longer than 1 year. Separations reflect the number of employees who retired or resigned, were terminated or removed from their positions, were separated through a reduction in force, who transferred to another agency, or who died. Separations and hires as a percent of NNSA's workforce were calculated using the average of total staff from FY 2023 through the second quarter of FY 2026. Because the overall size of the workforce varied over time, we accounted for this by taking the average of the workforce at the beginning and end of that period. In some instances during this period, employees could have been rehired by NNSA after being separated. However, we did not use individual employee-level data for this analysis and are unable to determine how many of the total employees hired were rehires. According to NNSA employees, these workforce data do not include the February 2025 terminations of 163 probationary or trial period NNSA employees and the subsequent March 2025 rescission of terminations. This analysis is based on the number of employees funded through the Federal Salaries and Expenses appropriation account, which funds the salaries, benefits, and other related expenses for most of NNSA's federal workforce. This analysis does not include employees at the Savannah River Field Office (SRO) because SRO employees transferred from the Department of Energy's Office of Environmental Management to NNSA during the same period in which workforce reductions were occurring, which makes the reported workforce data difficult to interpret.

How did the number of NNSA's mission-critical employees change between FY 2023 and the middle of FY 2026?

The number of NNSA employees working in mission-critical occupations grew slightly during FYs 2023 and 2024, reaching its peak of 983 employees for this period during the first quarter of FY 2025. However, by the second quarter of FY 2026, the number of mission-critical employees had been reduced to 849—a reduction of 134 people, or 13.6 percent over five quarters.

Overall, NNSA reduced its number of employees working in mission-critical positions from 939 in the first quarter of FY 2023 to 849 in the second quarter of FY 2026—approximately a 9.6 percent decrease—as shown in figure 4. During those 14 fiscal quarters, employees working in mission-critical occupations constituted 48 to 50 percent of NNSA's federal workforce for the specific offices we reviewed. DOE determined NNSA mission-critical occupations based on guidance from the U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM).[11] OPM defines mission-critical occupations as occupations agencies consider core to carrying out their missions. Such occupations usually reflect the primary mission of the organization, without which mission-critical work cannot be completed.

Figure 4: National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) Mission-Critical Employees, Fiscal Year (FY) 2023–FY 2026 Quarter (Q) 2



Source: GAO analysis of NNSA data. | GAO-27-109127

Accessible Data for Figure 4: National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) Mission-Critical Employees, Fiscal Year (FY) 2023–FY 2026 Quarter (Q) 2

Quarter	Number of Mission- Critical Employees
FY23 Q1	939
FY23 Q2	918
FY23 Q3	928
FY23 Q4	929
FY24 Q1	932
FY24 Q2	929
FY24 Q3	948
FY24 Q4	979
FY25 Q1	983
FY25 Q2	971
FY25 Q3	946
FY25 Q4	938
FY26 Q1	901
FY26 Q2	849

Source: GAO analysis of NNSA data. | GAO-27-109127

Notes: This figure is based on the number of employees funded through the Federal Salaries and Expenses appropriation account, which funds the salaries, benefits, and other related expenses for most of NNSA's federal workforce. According to NNSA, the reported data represent the number of employees who work in an occupational series that is deemed to be mission-critical. However, according to NNSA, there are additional employees in other occupational series that could also be deemed mission-critical. This analysis does not include employees at the Savannah River Field Office (SRO) because SRO employees transferred from the Department of Energy's Office of Environmental Management to NNSA during the same period in which workforce reductions were occurring, which makes the reported workforce data difficult to interpret.

Of NNSA's federal staff at the end of the second quarter of FY 2026, 48 percent were in mission-critical occupations, which are identified by series number and can include a variety of position types (see table 2).[12] For example, the engineering and architecture occupation group can include a general engineer or program manager, among other positions. From FY 2023 through the second quarter of FY 2026, mission-critical staff levels decreased the most in the engineering and architecture occupation group, which lost 63 employees or 12.4 percent.

Table 2: Number of Employees in Mission-Critical Occupations at the National Nuclear Security Administration, by Fiscal Year (FY) and Quarter (Q)

Series numbers	Occupation group	FY 2023 Q1 total mission-critical employees	FY 2025 Q1 total mission-critical employees	FY 2026 Q2 total mission-critical employees	Examples of position type
00201	Human Resources Management	53	65	51	Human Resources Specialist
00560	Accounting and Budget	61	66	52	Budget Analyst
00801	Engineering and Architecture	500	508	439	General Engineer, Facility Representative, Program Management, Safety Basis, Manager
00840	Engineering and Architecture	*	*	*	Nuclear Engineer
00850	Engineering and Architecture	*	*	*	Electrical Engineer
01102	Business and Industry	120	133	128	Contract Specialist
01301	Physical Sciences	136	143	120	Physical Scientist, Manager
02210	Information Technology	61	59	53	Information Technology Specialist
00110	Social Science, Psychology, and Welfare	0	0	0	Economist
00511	Accounting and Budget	0	0	0	Auditing
05407	Industrial Equipment Operation Family	0	0	0	Electric Power Controlling
Overall		**939**	**983**	**849**	

Legend: * = In instances where the number of employees in a specified group is fewer than 10, we mark this with an asterisk. In certain cases, when only one value is 10 or less, we mark an additional group of employees with an asterisk to ensure privacy.
Source: GAO analysis of National Nuclear Security Administration workforce data. | GAO-27-109127.

How many NNSA employees participated in NNSA's DRP?

Of the 256 NNSA federal employees who separated from the agency from the second quarter of FY 2025 through the first quarter of FY 2026, 112 of them accepted the DRP.[13] Since NNSA did not offer agency-specific DRPs and did not participate in the DOE-specific DRP, all its DRPs were a result of the government-wide offer, according to agency officials. Of those 112 federal DRPs, 84 were retirements, while 28 employees resigned. DRP separations during the period represent an overall decrease of 5.63 percent of NNSA's federal employees from the second quarter of FY 2025.

Outside of the 112 employees who accepted the DRP, the remainder of the separations were due to retirements, other resignations, and terminations. NNSA reported fewer than 10 terminations of probationary employees (after initial terminations were rescinded).

See table 3 for additional information on the number of separations, including separation types, for NNSA federal employees.

Table 3: Number of Separations by Type of Separation, Fiscal Year (FY) 2025 Quarter (Q) 2–FY 2026 Q1

Type of separation	FY 2025 Q2	FY 2025 Q3	FY 2025 Q4	FY 2026 Q1
Deferred resignation program recipients who separated	*	*	38	70
Employees terminated during probationary or trial period[a]	0	0	0	*
Employees separated through a reduction in force (RIF)[b]	0	0	0	0
All other terminations/removals, including for unacceptable performance, conduct, or the expiration of a temporary appointment	*	*	*	*
Employees who resigned or retired in lieu of involuntary action or separation, such as demotion or termination	0	0	0	0
Employees who took early retirement due to an agency RIF or reorganization	0	0	0	0
Other retirements[c]	13	14	12	18
Other resignations[d]	20	25	*	*
All other separations, including when an employee died or transferred to another agency	*	*	*	*
Total separations	45	48	62	101

Legend: * = Where the number of employees in a specified group is 10 or less, or the number in another group needs to be concealed to ensure privacy, we mark this with an asterisk.
Source: GAO analysis of National Nuclear Security Administration workforce data. | GAO-27-109127.
Notes: This figure is based on the number of employees funded through the Federal Salaries and Expenses appropriation account, which funds the salaries, benefits, and other related expenses for most of NNSA's federal workforce. According to NNSA employees, these workforce data do not include the February 2025 terminations of 163 probationary or trial period NNSA employees and the subsequent March 2025 rescission of terminations.

[a]Employees in a probationary or trial period are those who have not yet completed the service requirements necessary to finalize their appointments, either after being newly hired, or appointed as a supervisor or manager. With the data available, we are unable to distinguish the number of newly hired employees who were terminated during their probationary or trial period from those terminated after initially being appointed as a supervisor or manager.
[b]A RIF is the federal government's process for eliminating positions due to agency reorganization, reduced funding, or reduced workload.
[c]This includes situations in which employees took mandatory or voluntary retirement unrelated to RIFs or reorganizations, retired due to disability, or moved to full retirement status.
[d]This includes all other voluntary resignations, including when an employee entering duty with the uniformed services has provided notice they do not intend to return to the agency.

In June 2026, according to information reported by federal agencies we reviewed, we reported that some employees who had initially been approved for a DRP ultimately did not separate under the program because they decided to rescind their application, the agency subsequently canceled their approval to avoid critical staff vacancies, or the agency later determined the employee was ineligible.[14] Agencies also reported that in some cases employees ultimately separated under a different authority, such as a voluntary early retirement program.[15] NNSA officials confirmed that there were several DRP applications deemed ineligible and that employees were not placed on administrative leave in advance of a DRP determination. Agency officials also noted that in FY 2025, most people on administrative leave were DRP participants.

What NNSA programs, offices, and locations were affected by recent personnel changes?

NNSA programs, offices, and locations were affected to varying degrees, as shown in table 4.

Table 4: Number of NNSA Federal Employees by Programs and Offices and Locations, Fiscal Year (FY) 2025–FY 2026 Quarter (Q) 2

Programs and offices	FY 2025 Q1	FY 2025 Q2	FY 2025 Q3	FY 2025 Q4	FY 2026 Q1	FY 2026 Q2	FY 2025 Q1–FY 2026 Q2 percent change
Environment, Safety, and Health	79	76	76	71	63	60	**-24.1%**

Programs and offices	FY 2025 Q1	FY 2025 Q2	FY 2025 Q3	FY 2025 Q4	FY 2026 Q1	FY 2026 Q2	FY 2025 Q1–FY 2026 Q2 percent change
Management and Budget	277	267	256	253	242	217	**-21.7%**
Office of the Under Secretary for Nuclear Security and Administrator	62	58	61	58	53	49	**-21.0%**
Infrastructure	122	124	117	115	111	105	**-13.9%**
Defense Nuclear Nonproliferation	190	188	184	177	174	164	**-13.7%**
Emergency Management	40	42	38	38	36	35	**-12.5%**
Office of General Counsel	38	38	36	35	34	34	**-10.5%**
Naval Reactors	171	166	164	165	164	155	**-9.4%**
Information Management and Chief Information Officer	47	46	45	45	44	43	**-8.5%**
Defense Nuclear Security	103	103	103	102	98	95	**-7.8%**
Defense Programs	277	275	264	271	264	257	**-7.2%**
Partnership and Acquisition Services	125	125	122	125	125	122	**-2.4%**
Office of Secure Transportation	486	492	484	477	468	478	**-1.7%**
Counterterrorism and Counter-proliferation	67	68	69	68	70	69	**3.0%**
Congressional and Intergovernmental Affairs	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Office of Communication	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
Locations							
Nevada Field Office	75	72	72	69	63	59	**-21.3%**
Naval Reactors Laboratory Field Office	75	75	74	72	69	61	**-18.7%**
Los Alamos Field Office	88	85	85	83	78	72	**-18.2%**
Y-12 Field Office	85	88	81	78	77	72	**-15.3%**
Pantex Field Office	78	75	73	73	70	68	**-12.8%**
Livermore Field Office	73	75	73	69	67	64	**-12.3%**

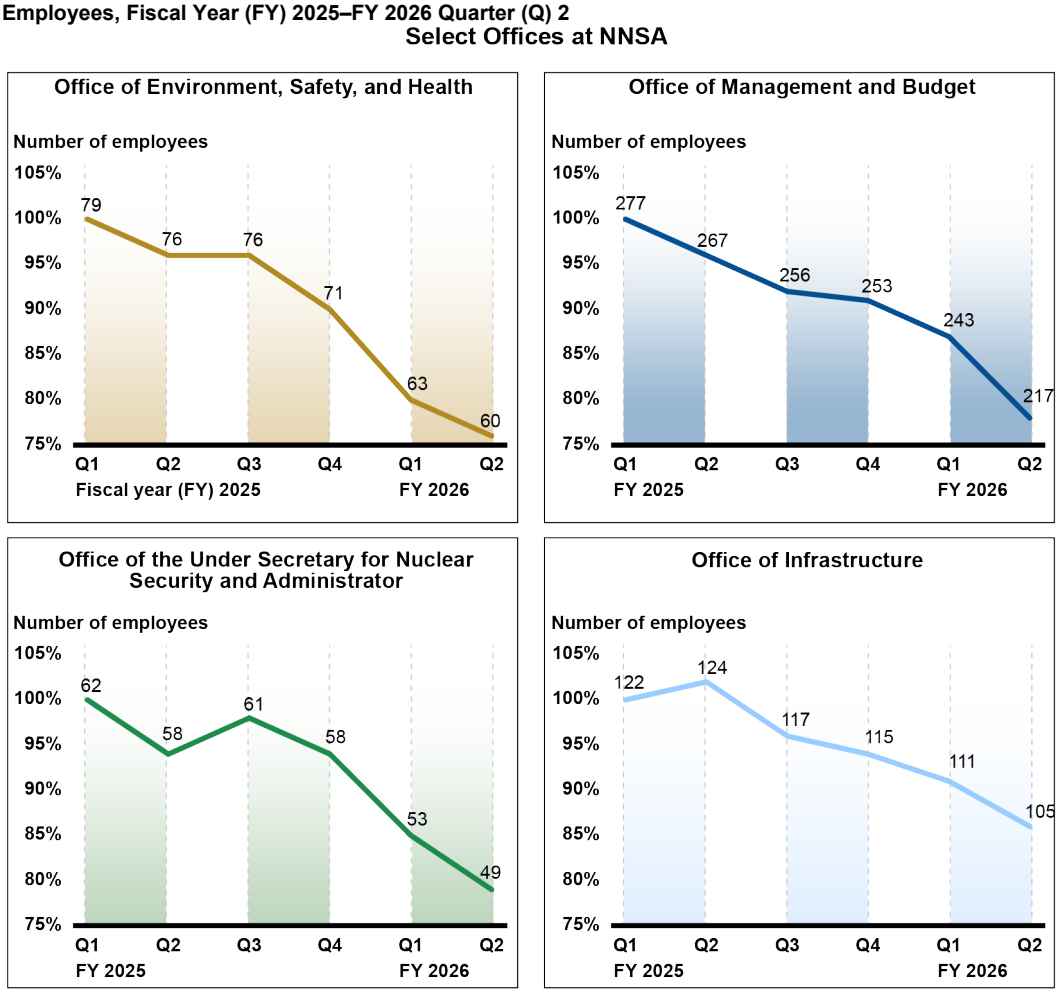
Programs and offices	FY 2025 Q1	FY 2025 Q2	FY 2025 Q3	FY 2025 Q4	FY 2026 Q1	FY 2026 Q2	FY 2025 Q1–FY 2026 Q2 percent change
Sandia Field Office	88	89	89	90	89	82	**-6.8%**
Kansas City Field Office	44	46	45	45	46	45	**2.3%**
Total	**2,716**	**2,697**	**2,634**	**2,603**	**2,529**	**2,427**	**-10.6%**

Legend: * = In instances where the number of employees in a specified group is fewer than 10, we mark this with an asterisk. In certain cases, when only one value is fewer than 10, we mark an additional group of employees with an asterisk to ensure privacy.
Source: GAO analysis of National Nuclear Security Administration workforce data. | GAO-27-109127.

Notes: The totals within this table will differ from the rest of the report because this table also includes workforce data from Naval Reactors, the Office of Secure Transportation, and the Naval Reactors Laboratory Field Office, which are funded through separate appropriations. However, this analysis does not include employees at the Savannah River Field Office (SRO) because SRO employees transferred from the Department of Energy's Office of Environmental Management to NNSA during the same period in which workforce reductions were occurring, which makes the reported workforce data difficult to interpret. According to NNSA employees, these workforce data do not include the February 2025 terminations of 163 probationary or trial period NNSA employees and the subsequent March 2025 rescission of terminations.

Programs and offices with largest decrease in workforce: The Office of Environment, Safety, and Health (-24.1%); the Office of Management and Budget (-21.7%); the Office of the Under Secretary for Nuclear Security and Administrator (-21.0%); and the Office of Infrastructure (-13.9%) experienced the largest percentage decreases in their workforce from FY 2025 through the second quarter of FY 2026, as shown in figure 5.[16] According to NNSA officials, they are now attempting to find efficiencies using technology, artificial intelligence, and through changes to their recruiting and hiring practices. However, officials noted that the reductions in staff and loss of institutional knowledge have created operational challenges and increased workloads for the staff that remained. In addition, officials noted that there are limitations on how artificial intelligence can currently be used based on staff expertise and limitations on using the technology in classified settings.

Figure 5: National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) Offices with the Greatest Reductions of Employees, Fiscal Year (FY) 2025–FY 2026 Quarter (Q) 2



Source: GAO analysis of NNSA workforce data. | GAO-27-109127

Accessible Data for Figure 5: National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) Offices with the Greatest Reductions of Employees, Fiscal Year (FY) 2025–FY 2026 Quarter (Q) 2

Office of Environment, Safety, and Health

Fiscal year	Number of Employees	Percentage
FY25 Q1	79	100%
FY25 Q2	76	96%
FY25 Q3	76	96%
FY25 Q4	71	90%
FY26 Q1	63	80%
FY26 Q2	60	76%

Office of Management and Budget

Fiscal year	Number of Employees	Percentage
FY25 Q1	277	100%
FY25 Q2	267	96%
FY25 Q3	256	92%
FY25 Q4	253	91%
FY26 Q1	242	87%
FY26 Q2	217	78%

Office of the Under Secretary for Nuclear Security and Administrator

Fiscal year	Number of Employees	Percentage
FY25 Q1	62	100%
FY25 Q2	58	94%
FY25 Q3	61	98%
FY25 Q4	58	94%
FY26 Q1	53	85%
FY26 Q2	49	79%

Office of Infrastructure

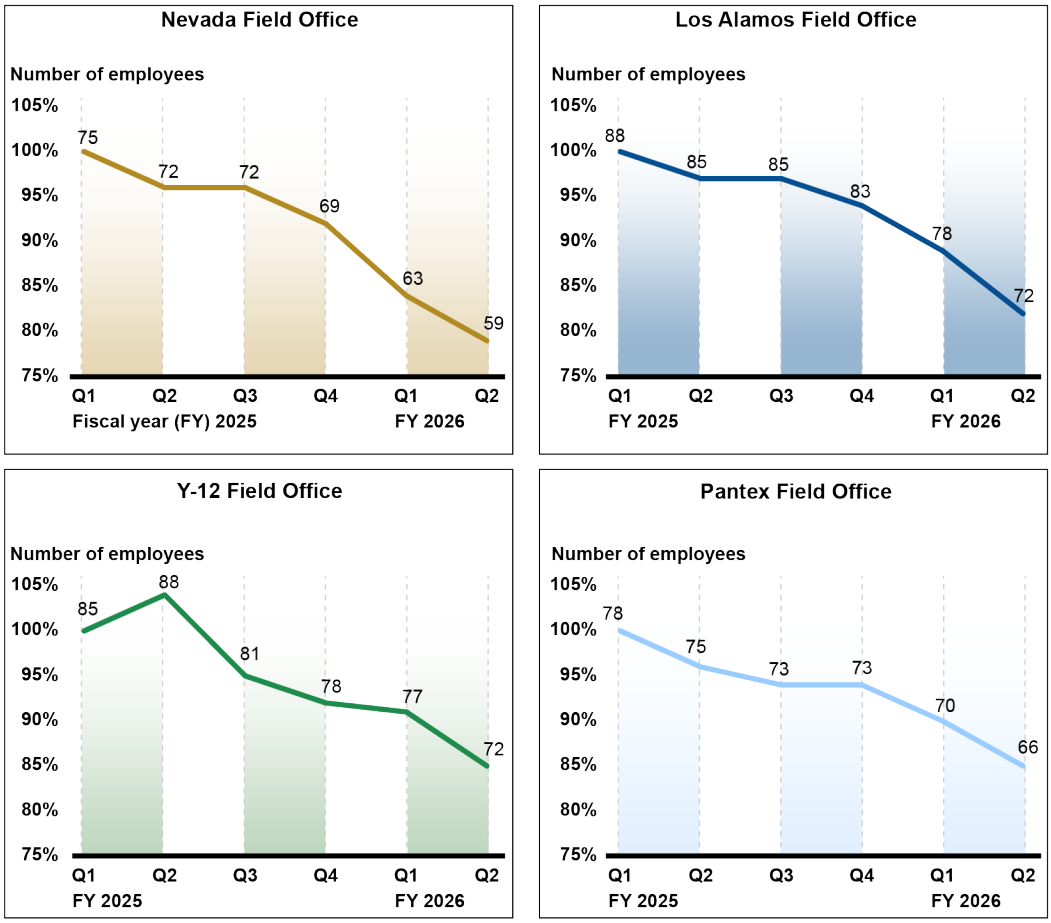
Fiscal year	Number of Employees	Percentage
FY25 Q1	122	100%
FY25 Q2	124	102%
FY25 Q3	117	96%
FY25 Q4	115	94%
FY26 Q1	111	91%
FY26 Q2	105	86%

Source: GAO analysis of NNSA data. | GAO-27-109127

Note: According to NNSA employees, these workforce data do not include the February 2025 terminations of 163 probationary or trial period NNSA employees and the subsequent March 2025 rescission of terminations. The percent of employees in each program or office is based on the total number of employees in the program or office at the end of the first quarter of FY 2025.

Locations with largest decrease in workforce: The Nevada Field Office (-21.3%); Los Alamos Field Office (-18.2%); Y-12 Field Office (-15.3%); and Pantex Field Office (-12.8%) experienced the largest percentage decreases in their workforces from FY 2025 through the second quarter of FY 2026, as shown in figure 6. During this same period, each location hired fewer than 10 employees. According to officials, the agency had to reduce some areas of federal oversight due to a lack of staff, including oversight of the security of nuclear materials. Specifically, officials told us that the security office at one field office lost approximately 40 percent of its staff that provides oversight of nuclear material security.

Figure 6: National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) Locations with the Greatest Reductions of Employees, Fiscal Year (FY) 2025–FY 2026 Quarter (Q) 2



Source: GAO analysis of NNSA workforce data. | GAO-27-109127

Accessible Data for Figure 6: National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) Locations with the Greatest Reductions of Employees, Fiscal Year (FY) 2025–FY 2026 Quarter (Q) 2

Nevada Field Office

Fiscal year	Number of Employees	Percentage
FY25 Q1	75	100%
FY25 Q2	72	96%
FY25 Q3	72	96%
FY25 Q4	69	92%
FY26 Q1	63	84%
FY26 Q2	59	79%

Los Alamos Field Office

Fiscal year	Number of Employees	Percentage
FY25 Q1	88	100%
FY25 Q2	85	97%
FY25 Q3	85	97%
FY25 Q4	83	94%
FY26 Q1	78	89%
FY26 Q2	72	82%

Y-12 Field Office

Fiscal year	Number of Employees	Percentage
FY25 Q1	85	100%
FY25 Q2	88	104%
FY25 Q3	81	95%

FY25 Q4	78	92%
FY26 Q1	77	91%
FY26 Q2	72	85%

Pantex Field Office

Fiscal year	Number of Employees	Percentage
FY25 Q1	78	100%
FY25 Q2	75	96%
FY25 Q3	73	94%
FY25 Q4	73	94%
FY26 Q1	70	90%
FY26 Q2	66	85%

Source: GAO analysis of NNSA data. | GAO-27-109127

Note: According to NNSA employees, these workforce data do not include the February 2025 terminations of 163 probationary or trial period NNSA employees and the subsequent March 2025 rescission of terminations. The percentage of employees in each program or office is based on the total number of employees in the program or office at the end of the first quarter of FY 2025.

Agency Comments

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

How GAO Did This Study

We analyzed NNSA data for workforce and personnel actions from FY 2023 through the second quarter of FY 2026.[17]

We assessed the reliability of the data for our reporting purposes by (1) reviewing information NNSA provided on the policies and procedures in place to ensure the reliability of data they reported and (2) performing electronic testing of data that NNSA submitted to identify missing or potentially incorrect values. Where we identified potential errors, we notified NNSA and asked them to clarify or make corrections. We determined the data NNSA provided to us were sufficiently reliable for our reporting purposes.

We also reviewed NNSA's budget justifications and appropriations laws for fiscal years 2023 through 2026, interviewed agency officials to gain their perspectives on changes to NNSA's federal workforce, and reviewed our past and NNSA reports related to workforce issues. We are also separately reviewing NNSA's long-term workforce planning efforts and plan to issue a product in early 2027.

We conducted this performance audit from May 2026 to October 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.

List of Addressees

The Honorable Frank Pallone, Jr.
Ranking Member
Committee on Energy and Commerce
House of Representatives

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Endnotes

[1]See, for example, Exec. Order No. 14210, 90 Fed. Reg. 9,669 (Feb. 14, 2025) (Implementing the President's "Department of Government Efficiency" Workforce Optimization Initiative). This executive order directs agency heads to undertake preparations to initiate large-scale reductions in force (RIFs) and to separate from federal service temporary employees and reemployed annuitants working in areas that would likely be subject to the RIFs.

[2]On January 28, 2025, OPM released information allowing federal employees to voluntarily resign via the DRP. U.S. Office of Personnel Management, Deferred Resignation Email to Federal Employees (Jan. 28, 2025). Deferred resignation was available to full-time federal employees, except for military personnel of the armed forces, employees of the U.S. Postal Service, those in positions related to immigration enforcement and national security, those in positions related to public safety, and those in positions specifically excluded by the employing agency. The DRP is currently subject to legal challenge. Am. Fed'n of Gov't Employees v. Kupor, No. 25-1959 (1st Cir.).

[3]See U.S. Office of Personnel Management, *Guidance Regarding Deferred Resignation Program* (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 28, 2025); and "Frequently Asked Questions," last accessed March 9, 2026, https://www.opm.gov/about-us/fork/faq/.

[4]Specifically, NNSA was prohibited from exceeding the total number of employees specified by law unless the Administrator submitted to the congressional defense committees a report justifying such excess. The Administrator did not submit such a justification during the time frame relevant to our review.

[5]National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2013, Pub. L. No. 112-239, div. C, tit. XXXI, § 3111(a)(1), 126 Stat. 1632, 2168 (2013); Carl Levin and Howard P. 'Buck' McKeon National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2015, Pub. L. No. 113-291, div. C, tit. XXXI, § 3116, 128 Stat. 3292, 3888 (2014); National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020, Pub. L. No. 116-92, div. C, tit. XXXI, § 3111(a), 133 Stat. 1198, 1949 (2019).

[6]James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023, Pub. L. No. 117-263, div. C, tit. XXXI, § 3117, 136 Stat. 2395, 3054 (2022).

[7]This analysis is based on the number of employees funded through the Federal Salaries and Expenses appropriation account, which funds the salaries, benefits, and other related expenses for most of NNSA's federal workforce. This analysis does not include employees at the Savannah River Field Office (SRO) because SRO employees transferred from DOE's Office of Environmental Management to NNSA during the same period in which workforce reductions were occurring, which makes the reported workforce data difficult to interpret. In addition to NNSA's employees funded under the Federal Salaries and Expenses appropriations account, NNSA has employees in other offices that help the agency meet its mission but that are funded through other accounts. As a result of this difference, we did not include them in our figures and tables, as our analysis there focused on those employees funded through the Federal Salaries and Expenses appropriation account. For example, NNSA's Office of Secure Transportation (OST) is responsible for the safe and secure transport of government-owned special nuclear material in the contiguous United States and is not funded through the Federal Salaries and Expenses appropriation account. However, we obtained the FY 2023 through the second quarter of FY 2026 employee data for this office, and it experienced a decrease of 23 employees (4.6 percent) from 501 to 478.

[8]Percentage is based on the average number of total employees from the first quarter of FY 2023 through the second quarter of FY 2026.

[9]In some instances during this period, employees may have been rehired by their agencies after being separated. However, with the data currently available, we are unable to determine how many of the total employees hired were rehires.

[10]On January 20, 2025, the Presidential Memorandum, *Hiring Freeze,* initiated a freeze on federal civilian hiring. The memorandum ordered that no vacant federal civilian positions were to be filled, and that no new positions were to be created. The memorandum did not apply to military personnel of the armed forces or to positions related to immigration enforcement, national security, or public safety, and the Director of the Office of Personnel Management was authorized to grant other necessary exemptions. The hiring freeze was extended in April and July of 2025. The freeze expired in October 2025, but in that month an Executive Order also instituted new parameters on federal hiring. Exec. Order No. 14356, 90 Fed. Reg. 48387 (Oct. 20, 2025).

[11]According to NNSA, the reported data represent the number of employees who work in an occupational series that is deemed to be mission-critical. However, according to NNSA, there are additional employees in other occupational series that could also be deemed mission-critical.

[12]NNSA's Office of Secure Transportation (OST) employees are not funded through the Federal Salaries and Expenses appropriation account and thus not represented in our figures and tables in this report. However, roughly 62 percent of OST's 478 employees are considered mission-critical as of the second quarter of FY 2026—almost the same percentage as it was at the beginning of FY 2023. However, the number of mission-critical employees in OST increased by 13 (4.6 percent) from the first quarter of FY 2025 though the second quarter of FY 2026, bringing the number back to the same levels as at the beginning of FY 2023.

[13]According to NNSA officials, NNSA employee separations increased significantly in the fourth quarter of FY 2025, in part, because some employees who accepted the DRP were placed on administrative leave until that time.

[14]GAO, *Federal Agency Workforce Changes: Update for July 2025 to January 2026*, GAO-26-108583 (Washington, D.C.: June 17, 2026).

[15]GAO-26-108583.

[16]According to NNSA officials, NNSA's Office of Management and Budget was being reorganized as of August 2026.

[17]NNSA workforce data were collected from the agency's WorkDay human capital database. This data collection only requested information on federal employees and did not include federal contractors. Furthermore, our data represent the number of employees funded through the Federal Salaries and Expenses appropriations account, which funds salaries, benefits, and other related expenses for most of NNSA's federal workforce. We also collected data on OST, which is responsible for the safe and secure transport of government-owned special nuclear material in the contiguous United States, but is not funded through the Federal Salaries and Expenses appropriations account.