

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-24-106167](#), a report to the Committee on Armed Services, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

NNSA is responsible for the nation's nuclear weapons stockpile and nonproliferation efforts. Its federal workforce of about 1,800 staff oversees the more than 55,000 management and operating contractor employees that support NNSA nationwide. In 2023, NNSA's Administrator testified before Congress that NNSA faces challenges recruiting and retaining its staff, including a limited applicant pool and high attrition.

House Report 117-397 includes a provision for GAO to review issues related to recruiting and retention at NNSA. This report examines (1) the staffing levels NNSA has identified it needs to perform its missions and the extent to which NNSA's budget requests have reflected those levels, and (2) NNSA's actions to recruit and retain federal staff and how NNSA is addressing challenges it faces.

GAO reviewed NNSA's budget requests for fiscal years 2013–2025, information on NNSA's use of hiring authorities and incentive payments, and NNSA policies. GAO also interviewed agency officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making three recommendations, including that NNSA (1) develop a process to systematically analyze and share information agencywide regarding challenges it faces recruiting and retaining staff and (2) regularly assess the results of its recruitment and retention actions using performance measures. NNSA agreed in principle with GAO's recommendations and described actions it plans to take to address them.

View [GAO-24-106167](#). For more information, contact Allison Bawden at (202) 512-3841 or bawdena@gao.gov.

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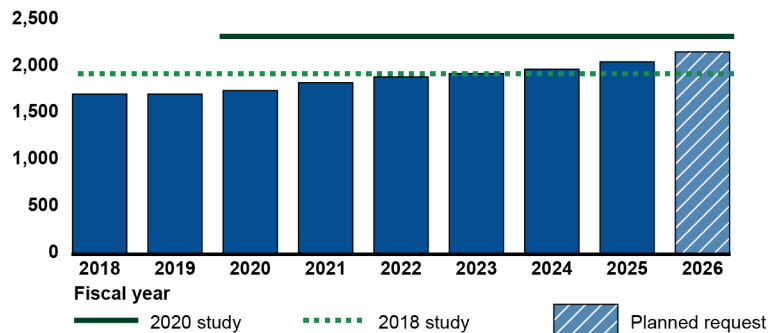
NATIONAL NUCLEAR SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

Actions to Recruit and Retain Federal Staff Could Be Improved

What GAO Found

Since 2018, the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) has completed two studies that found it needs additional federal staff to perform its missions, but these staffing levels have not been fully incorporated into the budget requests for the agency. NNSA's requested staffing levels reached the overall levels identified in its 2018 study. However, planned budget requests through fiscal year 2026— included in the fiscal year 2025 request—remain about 200 positions below the staffing levels identified in the 2020 study. This leaves a gap between NNSA's workload and the number of federal staff to manage the work. This is, among other reasons, because, according to agency officials, NNSA has not fully integrated detailed workforce planning into its budget requests. NNSA developed a workforce planning process to inform future budget requests. NNSA officials expect the process will allow the agency to make a stronger business case for staffing needs, with the goal of having future budget requests better reflect identified needs.

NNSA's Requested Staffing Levels Compared with Staffing Needs Identified in Two Studies
Number of federal full-time equivalents



Source: GAO analysis of National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) data and staffing studies. | GAO-24-106167

NNSA has taken a number of actions to address challenges it faces recruiting and retaining staff, such as increasing its participation in recruiting and outreach events and offering incentive payments to both recruit and retain staff. However, the actions NNSA has taken do not fully address its recruiting and retention challenges. NNSA's actions to recruit and retain staff could be hindered because:

- NNSA has not established a continuing process to systematically analyze and share information about its recruitment and retention challenges to inform its actions. By systematically analyzing information, such as the reasons why staff leave the agency, and sharing it agencywide, NNSA would be better positioned to understand its recruitment and retention challenges and address them.
- NNSA has not regularly assessed the outcomes of its actions to address its recruitment and retention challenges. For example, NNSA has not assessed which recruiting and outreach events yield the most candidates. Regularly assessing the results of the agency's actions could help decision-makers determine whether NNSA's actions are achieving the desired results or whether other actions are needed.