

A report to congressional committees.

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What GAO Found

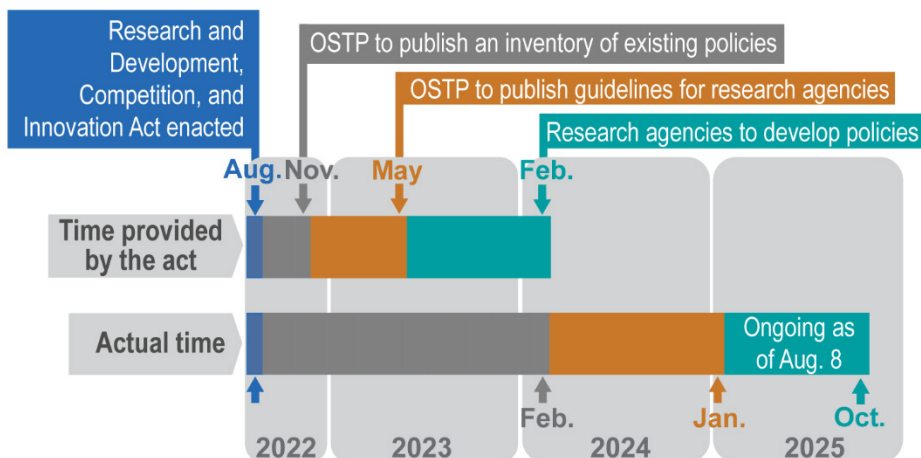
The Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) did not complete actions to address sexual harassment at federally funded research institutions within the Research and Development, Competition, and Innovation Act's time frames. For example, OSTP was 15 months late in publishing its February 2024 required inventory of research agencies' sexual harassment policies. This led to cascading delays in issuing required policy guidelines for agencies—January 2025 guidance was issued 20 months later than it should have been.

GAO's review of 17 research agencies found that none had policies that were fully consistent with the OSTP guidelines issued in January 2025. These agencies are now evaluating how to align their policies with the guidelines and expressed concern about meeting the current October 2025 deadline.

OSTP is to monitor agencies' development of policies. Such monitoring can ensure research agencies implement consistent policies, a goal specified in the act. However, OSTP does not have staff in place to lead this effort. OSTP officials stated they are recruiting to fill such positions, but the office had not yet hired staff as of July 2025, raising doubts about meeting the October deadline.

Consistent with the act's requirements, in August 2023 the National Science Foundation (NSF) announced its intention to make awards to study sexual harassment. In analyzing NSF's awards database, GAO identified four such awards. However, these four awards were terminated as of May 2025.

Timeline of Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) and Research Agency Activities



Source: GAO. | GAO-25-107750

OSTP's guidelines addressed most of the act's requirements, but did not fully address sharing of harassment reports and reporting of investigative information. OSTP staff involved in developing the guidelines departed shortly after its release, which coincided with a change in administrations. Addressing these requirements can enhance research agencies' awareness of recurring issues, a problem specified in the act.

Why GAO Did This Study

Academic science, engineering, and medicine are particularly susceptible to workplace sexual harassment, according to the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine. Amid these concerns, the Research and Development, Competition, and Innovation Act, enacted in 2022, identified various requirements for federal research agencies, OSTP, and NSF to combat sexual harassment at federally funded research institutions and increase consistency in research agencies' policies. The act includes a provision for GAO to assess federal efforts to implement policies that address sexual harassment at research institutions. This report addresses: (1) the status of actions required of OSTP, NSF, and research agencies and (2) the extent to which the policy guidelines address the act's requirements.

GAO analyzed documentation and written responses from OSTP and 17 research agencies, including NSF, on their existing sexual harassment policies and the extent to which they were consistent with the January 2025 OSTP guidelines. GAO also compared these guidelines to the act's requirements. In addition, GAO interviewed OSTP officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making two recommendations to OSTP to (1) monitor agencies' development of policies and (2) fully address sharing of reports and investigative information in its policy guidelines. OSTP responded that it did not have comments on the report.