

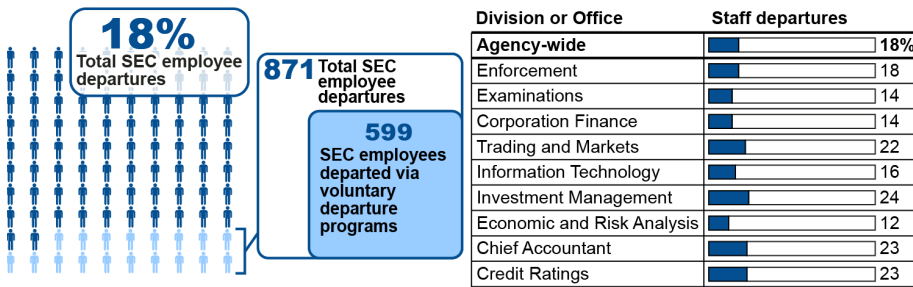
A report to congressional committees.

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**What GAO Found**

Since January 2025, the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) has implemented significant personnel management changes in response to executive orders and other direction from the administration. Key changes include offering voluntary departure incentives, requiring employees to work in the office full time, and removing references to diversity, equity, and inclusion from SEC policies and procedures. About 18 percent of employees left SEC during the fiscal year ending September 30, 2025. Most employees who departed took a voluntary departure incentive, and according to SEC, it did not conduct any involuntary terminations in response to executive actions in 2025. SEC also paused its leadership development program in 2025, in part due to uncertainty about the availability and timing of future advancement opportunities.

**SEC Employee Departures, Fiscal Year 2025**



Source: GAO summary of Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) data. | GAO-26-107813

SEC's 2024 Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey results were positive overall and showed improvement in prior challenge areas, such as performance management and communication across divisions and offices. GAO interviews with SEC employees in May and June 2025 highlighted positive practices in these areas, such as supervisors' use of formal and informal feedback to recognize performance. However, employees GAO spoke with raised concerns about the effect of workforce reductions (48 of 61 employees) and the cancellation of routine telework (43 of 61 employees). For example, 33 of the 61 said that departing employees had either unique knowledge or specific subject-matter expertise, resulting in a loss of institutional knowledge. A few employees (8 of 61) stated that as of the time of the interviews, they believed SEC had not yet experienced the full effects of these departures.

SEC has made efforts to manage and assess the effects of its 2025 workforce changes. For example, it has taken steps to manage the effects of staff departures, including holding meetings with division and major office heads to identify skill and resource gaps and adjusting the targeted ratio of employees per senior officer. In December 2025, SEC also submitted a staffing plan that identified positions for potential hiring for each division and office. As SEC continues to address the effects of recent workforce changes, GAO will monitor its efforts through its triennial reports.

**Why GAO Did This Study**

SEC relies on a highly skilled workforce to carry out its mission as the primary regulator of the U.S. securities markets. That mission is to protect investors; maintain fair, orderly, and efficient markets; and facilitate capital formation. The Dodd-Frank Wall Street Reform and Consumer Protection Act contains a provision for GAO to report triennially on the quality of SEC's personnel management. GAO's previous four reports ([GAO-13-621](#), [GAO-17-65](#), [GAO-20-208](#), and [GAO-23-105459](#)) identified several challenges and included 11 recommendations, all of which SEC has addressed.

This report addresses (1) key personnel management changes SEC has implemented since GAO's 2022 report, (2) employees' views on SEC's personnel management, and (3) steps SEC has taken to manage and assess the effects of recent personnel management changes on its mission.

GAO reviewed SEC documents and workforce data and interviewed SEC officials. GAO also analyzed SEC employee responses to the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey from 2022 through 2024 (the latest available) and interviewed a nongeneralizable sample of 61 SEC employees in nine mission-critical divisions and offices.