

Additional Actions Needed to Address Workforce Challenges

GAO-26-107868

July 2026

A report to congressional committees.

Contact: Alissa H. Czyz at CzyzA@gao.gov.

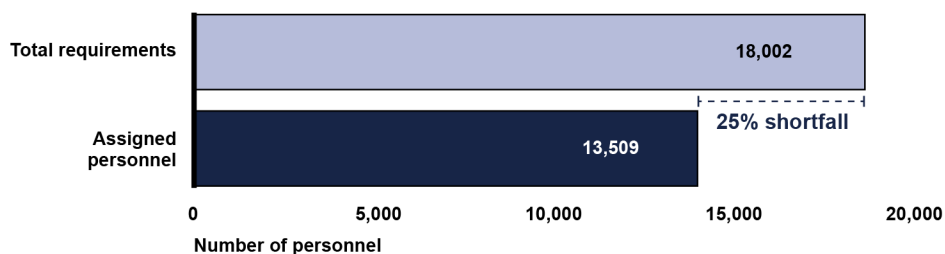
What GAO Found

The Space Force is the smallest military service, with about 15,400 total personnel in fiscal year 2025. The Space Force largely inherited its workforce from other services and has completed some assessments as it seeks to right-size its force to meet growing missions. However, it determines personnel requirements based on a mix of analyses that are not consistent across Space Force units. Further, some units operate under personnel requirements that are outdated and do not reflect mission growth. The Space Force has not established a process or guidance to consistently and accurately determine its personnel needs to accomplish its missions.

Relatedly, although it has estimated the number of contractor personnel supporting it, the Space Force does not have a process or guidance to accurately measure the number of contractor personnel and the nature of work they perform. Establishing such processes would help the Space Force better account for personnel needed to meet its evolving missions.

Even as the Space Force has continued to grow its workforce, officials have identified personnel shortfalls as a primary workforce challenge. GAO's analysis found a 25 percent shortfall when comparing assigned personnel with total personnel requirements for fiscal year 2025. GAO also found that the Space Force is partly addressing personnel challenges, but its efforts are not guided by a comprehensive strategic workforce plan. Without such a plan, the Space Force may not be able to systematically plan for and manage a workforce that meets current and future mission needs.

Total Space Force Personnel Requirements and Assigned Personnel in Fiscal Year 2025



Source: GAO analysis of Space Force data. | GAO-26-107868

GAO's analysis found a 22 percent shortfall in the number of support personnel the Air Force provides to the Space Force, which may increase risk to Space Force missions. Comprehensively evaluating, and revising as needed, the current arrangement of Air Force-provided support to the Space Force would help the Department of the Air Force make informed changes to address challenges and more effectively manage risks to space operations.

Why GAO Did This Study

In December 2019, the Space Force was established as a separate military service. It was created in recognition of the need to gain and maintain U.S. superiority in the increasingly contested space domain. In the 6 years since its establishment, the Space Force has been steadily growing and reorganizing its workforce as space-based threats grow and its missions increase.

Senate Report 118-188 includes a provision for GAO to assess the Space Force's workforce planning. GAO's report addresses, among other objectives, the extent to which the Space Force has determined its personnel needs; the Space Force has identified and addressed challenges in meeting them; and the Air Force has provided adequate personnel to support the Space Force.

GAO analyzed Space Force personnel data, reviewed applicable guidance, and conducted site visits to five Space Force bases.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making four recommendations to the Department of the Air Force for the Space Force to establish processes to accurately determine personnel requirements and track contractor personnel; develop a strategic workforce plan; and evaluate and revise the Air Force-Space Force support arrangement. DOD concurred with the recommendations.