

### Additional Actions Needed to Plan for Science, Technology, and Engineering Facilities and Workforce Investments

GAO-26-107904

July 2026

A report to congressional committees

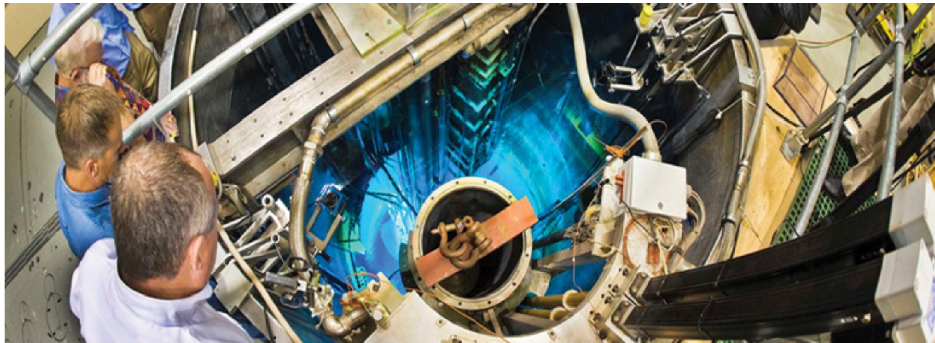
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#### What GAO Found

In July 2024, the National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) released an internal Integrated Science, Technology, and Engineering (ST&E) Plan documenting investments needed for ST&E capabilities over the next 20 years. NNSA's plan identified and prioritized 46 ST&E facility investments across the nuclear security enterprise that support stewardship of the nuclear weapons stockpile and other NNSA missions. The investments were prioritized by mission importance and mission need time frame. They included sustainment and enhancement of existing facilities and construction of new facilities.

NNSA also collected initial estimates of related ST&E workforce and programmatic investment needs—such as needed equipment and materials—from the nuclear security enterprise sites for the 20-year period. However, NNSA did not fully assess these funding needs and has no plans to do so. NNSA officials said that the plan focused on facility investments due to a deadline to provide that information for the agency's Enterprise Blueprint, which was publicly released. Completing a comprehensive analysis of the ST&E workforce and programmatic investment needs would allow NNSA to better understand the total funding needs for stockpile stewardship and proactively plan for those needs.

#### Annular Core Research Reactor, a National Nuclear Security Administration Facility Requiring Sustainment Investment



Source: Sandia National Laboratories. | GAO-26-107904

NNSA provided the most detailed cost information on seven high mission importance, near-term ST&E facility investment projects in the Department of Energy's fiscal year 2026 budget justification. Cost information on other proposed facility investments was limited because the projects are in early planning phases or are sustainment investments.

NNSA officials said they have not updated their integrated assessment of future ST&E facility investment needs. NNSA's ST&E facility priorities have already evolved and may further change over time to reflect changes in congressional priorities or new technologies in areas such as high energy density physics, artificial intelligence, or production. Regularly updating the agency's integrated assessment of its ST&E facility needs would help guide future investment decisions to support stockpile stewardship and modernization.

#### Why GAO Did This Study

NNSA relies on unique science, technology, and engineering facilities and a skilled contractor workforce across the nuclear security enterprise to maintain and modernize the nuclear weapons stockpile without relying on nuclear explosive testing. According to NNSA, many ST&E facilities are decades old. A 2022 major review recommended that NNSA develop an enterprise-wide plan to revitalize its ST&E facilities and workforce.

Senate Report 118-58 accompanying a bill for the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2024 includes a provision for GAO to review NNSA's plans for ST&E capabilities. This report examines (1) the extent to which NNSA's Integrated ST&E Plan identified and prioritized the ST&E facilities, workforce, and programmatic investments needed to support stockpile stewardship; (2) the information available about estimated costs of these investments; and (3) the extent to which NNSA is regularly updating its integrated assessment of ST&E facility investment needs.

GAO reviewed agency and national security laboratory contractors' documents related to the Integrated ST&E Plan and budget documents; made site visits to facilities at NNSA's Los Alamos and Sandia National Laboratories in New Mexico; and interviewed NNSA officials and laboratory contractors.

#### What GAO Recommends

GAO is making two recommendations to NNSA to analyze ST&E workforce and programmatic investment needs and to regularly update its integrated assessment of ST&E facility investment needs. NNSA's comments outline actions it plans to take to address both recommendations.