GAO Highlights

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NASA

Assessments of Major Projects

A report to congressional committees

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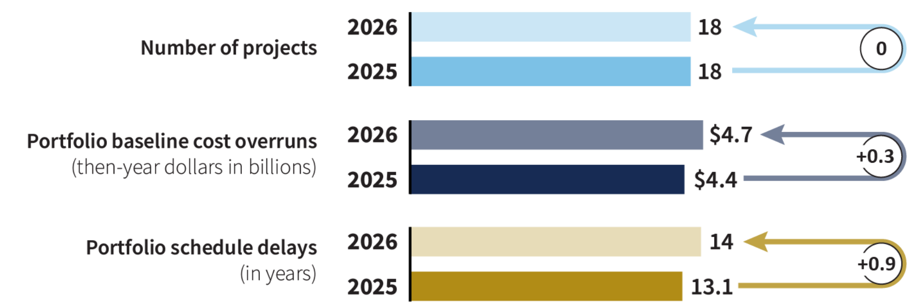
What GAO Found

Most of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration's (NASA) major projects in development reported no schedule delays or cost overruns in the last year. These projects are in the phase of building and testing their designs. Two of these 18 projects reported annual schedule delays (totaling 2 months) and three reported cost overruns (totaling $501.4 million). Similarly, the portfolio's cumulative costs and delays increased slightly, from $4.4 billion to nearly $4.7 billion and from 13.1 years to 14 years, respectively. The Orion crew capsule accounts for over half of the major projects' annual cost overruns and almost 75 percent of their cumulative cost overruns.

Cost and Schedule Performance for NASA's Major Projects Portfolio, 2025–2026



Source: GAO analysis of NASA data. | GAO-26-108556

In February and March 2026, NASA announced significant changes to its Artemis missions—its effort to create a sustained lunar operations. The changes included revising the focus of the planned Artemis III, IV, and V missions, and pausing work on three Artemis projects. These projects include the Gateway, a small space station in lunar orbit that would have supported lunar missions. Under its new plan, NASA plans to shift its focus to infrastructure that enables sustained lunar surface operations.

Implementing changes to the Artemis missions will create acquisition management challenges for NASA as each Artemis-related project adjusts to the new plans. For example, two Artemis projects were reporting technical and programmatic risks that were likely to delay their schedules. Acting on GAO's prior recommendations to improve cost transparency, establish cost and schedule controls, and better manage acquisition risk could provide opportunities for NASA to strengthen its acquisition management.

In response to the administration's directive to reduce the size of the federal workforce, NASA reduced its civil servant workforce by 4,000 staff—or nearly 22 percent—in 2025. To date, 25 of 36 projects have reported effects from the reduced staffing. Subsequently, in February 2026, the NASA Administrator announced plans to resume hiring and address skill gaps. The President's fiscal year 2027 budget request, however, proposes to reduce funding for NASA by more than 20 percent. This request contributes to the ongoing uncertainty as to whether NASA will be able to hire the workforce needed to address skills gaps.

GAO will continue to closely monitor NASA's management of the Artemis projects, as well as the agency's efforts to address workforce challenges.

Why GAO Did This Study

NASA plans to invest at least $70 billion in estimated life-cycle costs for its portfolio of major projects (those with costs over $250 million). These projects aim to explore the solar system, return U.S. astronauts to the lunar surface, and advance aeronautic technologies. House explanatory statements have included provisions for GAO to prepare status reports on these projects. This is GAO's 18th annual report in response to those provisions.

GAO assessed (1) the cost and schedule performance of NASA's major projects in development; (2) the risks that could affect major project performance in the future; and (3) how NASA's workforce reductions since March 2025 have impacted its ability to manage its portfolio of major projects. This report also includes summaries of NASA's 36 major projects.

GAO collected and analyzed data on the 36 current NASA major projects; visited NASA facilities; interviewed officials; analyzed cost and schedule performance for the 18 projects in development; reviewed NASA's recent changes to the Artemis missions; analyzed workforce data; and reviewed documents and reports.

What GAO Recommends

In its prior work, GAO made multiple recommendations to improve NASA's management of major projects. NASA has generally agreed with these recommendations, but has not yet addressed some in the areas of cost transparency and program cost and schedule controls. As of May 2026, NASA also had not yet fully implemented two recommendations to improve its acquisition management, which GAO identified as high priority.