

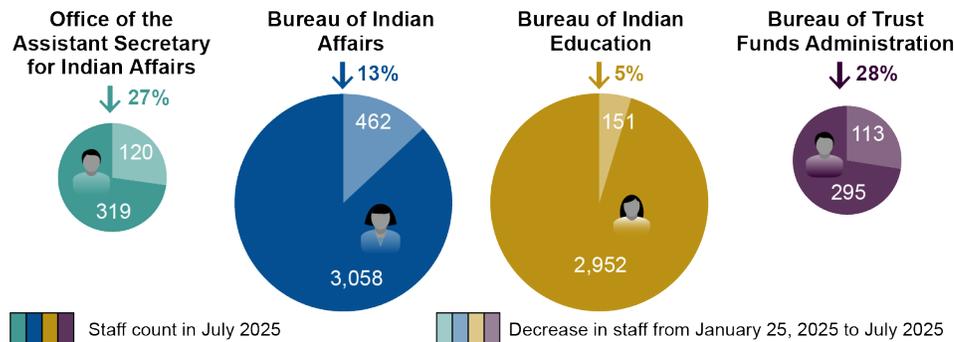
A report to the Vice Chairman, Committee on Indian Affairs, U.S. Senate

For more information, contact: Anna Maria Ortiz at OrtizA@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

The Department of the Interior’s Indian Affairs took actions to reduce its workforce in 2025 after presidential directives, executive branch-wide guidance, and directives from the Secretary of the Interior. Its total workforce, which was 7,470 in January 2025, decreased by a net 11 percent (846 staff) to 6,624 as of July 2025.

Net Decrease in Staff Across Indian Affairs Components Since January 2025



Source: GAO analysis of Department of the Interior data. | GAO-26-108673

Staff separations through two deferred resignation programs accounted for most of the decrease. Indian Affairs implemented the first program, as directed by the Office of Personnel Management for executive agencies, in January and February 2025. Indian Affairs offered another program in May to (1) comply with executive direction and (2) offer voluntary separation to staff concerned about potential involuntary reductions in force. Some positions were excluded from the May program—such as positions in law enforcement, social work, and permitting—because of the nature of their job functions and responsibilities.

Indian Affairs officials said they had not yet analyzed projected cost savings or operational impacts from these staff reductions. However, officials observed that many staff who separated through the two programs were already eligible for retirement. Some remaining staff took on additional responsibilities to mitigate the effects of reductions. Some Indian Affairs staff said the reductions would exacerbate preexisting staffing limitations in their offices and make it more difficult to carry out their responsibilities serving Tribes.

Tribal leaders voiced concerns about the effects of the staff reductions. Some stated that Indian Affairs already did not have adequate staff to effectively carry out U.S. trust responsibilities and that service delivery was impaired. GAO has previously reported on the effect of long-standing shortcomings in workforce capacity at Indian Affairs and has several open recommendations to the agency to improve workforce planning.

Indian Affairs officials said there were no plans to reorganize or further reduce the workforce as of December 2025, but existing functions might need to be restructured or realigned to achieve administration priorities. Officials said they would develop supporting plans, if needed, to satisfy future policy decisions. Indian Affairs did not provide any comments on this report.

Why GAO Did This Study

The U.S. has undertaken a unique trust responsibility to protect and support Tribes and their members through treaties, statutes, and historical relations with Tribes. Federal laws require federal agencies to provide a variety of services and benefits to Tribes and their members. Indian Affairs provides services directly to Tribes or funding for tribally administered programs, including support for tribal government operations, law enforcement, and natural resources management.

GAO was asked to review Indian Affairs’ actions to downsize its workforce since January 2025. This report describes actions taken by Indian Affairs to reduce the size of the workforce, the number of staff reductions in 2025, initial observations from Tribes and Indian Affairs employees, and any Indian Affairs plans for additional workforce reductions.

GAO reviewed statutes, regulations, executive orders, guidance, and information from ongoing and prior work on Indian Affairs’ capacity and workforce planning. GAO reviewed workforce data from January 25, 2025, through July 31, 2025. GAO interviewed officials from Indian Affairs about actions, data, observations, and plans for downsizing its workforce and reviewed published comments that Tribes provided at tribal consultations.