

Actions Needed to Help Ensure Effective Use of Billions in Funding for Modernization Efforts

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What GAO Found

The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and Coast Guard leadership have made a case that the service needs transformation. Since 2019 GAO has reviewed four Coast Guard reform efforts and identified steps the service took to incorporate leading practices as well as gaps in key areas. For example, in prior reviews of Coast Guard sexual misconduct and modernization of mission planning and reserve component reform efforts, GAO found that the Coast Guard did not fully assess its workforce needs. Additionally, for two of the reform efforts, the Coast Guard did not fully establish goals and outcomes, making it difficult to determine if the reforms had the intended effects.

According to GAO’s review of Force Design 2028 foundational documents, the Coast Guard has taken some steps to implement leading practices in its current reform effort but gaps remain. For example, the service has assigned leaders to its reform efforts and focused on addressing long standing challenges, including workforce and technology and contracting and acquisitions. However, GAO’s review also found that certain goals are not well-defined. For example, the execution plan states that the service will delegate decision-authority to maximize mission impact. However, the document does not describe how the Coast Guard will measure this effort or know when it achieves its reform goals. Further, how proposed reforms align with Coast Guard missions is unclear, and there is no performance plan or other mechanism to assess the results.

Coast Guard Force Design 2028 Foundational Documents and Initial Update



Source: United States Coast Guard. | GAO-26-109215

The Coast Guard has received significant funding to carry out its modernization reform efforts. Therefore, incorporating leading practices throughout the duration of the Coast Guard’s reform efforts is important. Specifically, updating its foundational modernization documents and developing an evaluation plan and mechanisms for assessing the effectiveness of its actions would better ensure that Coast Guard management, Congress, and the public has the information needed to evaluate whether its actions—which are using billions of taxpayer dollars—are helping to mitigate identified challenges pertaining to the service’s organization, people, technology, and contracting and acquisitions.

Why GAO Did This Study

The U.S. Coast Guard—a multi-mission military service—is facing a readiness crisis, according to DHS and Coast Guard leadership. In May 2025, DHS announced an effort called Force Design 2028 to modernize operations and capabilities. The effort aims to transform the Coast Guard into a more capable and agile force to meet future challenges across four areas—organization, people, technology, and contracting and acquisition.

For fiscal year 2026, Congress appropriated about \$13.5 billion to the service. Congress also included nearly \$25 billion in Coast Guard funding for fiscal year 2025 in the law commonly known as the One Big Beautiful Bill Act—the largest single commitment of funding in Coast Guard history. The service has stated that this funding supports the intent of Force Design 2028.

This statement focuses on (1) key themes from GAO work evaluating prior Coast Guard reform efforts, and (2) our assessment of the Coast Guard’s recent modernization reform efforts.

This statement is based on reports GAO has issued since 2018 on prior Coast Guard reform efforts and some of its mission and management activities. GAO also analyzed Coast Guard Force Design 2028 documentation and compared them to selected leading practices for agency reform.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making two recommendations that the Coast Guard (1) update its foundational modernization documents as necessary to ensure strategic alignment with Coast Guard missions, desired outcomes, and measurable targets, and (2) develop an evaluation plan with mechanisms for each of the four areas of reform emphasis.