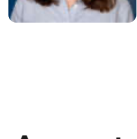


WORKFORCE

How staffing cuts in 2025 transformed the federal workforce

Across the federal workforce, the loss of hundreds of thousands of employees has led to workplace disruptions, ripple effects in U.S. communities and more.



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As a tumultuous year for the federal workforce comes to a close, many employees are in a much different position now than they were at the start of 2025.

The Trump administration's efforts to reduce staffing across agencies resulted in the loss of more than 317,000 federal employees governmentwide. It's a 13.7% decrease compared with September 2024 workforce numbers, Office of Personnel Management [data](#) shows.

At the same time, 68,000 new federal employees joined the civil service during 2025, according to OPM Director [Scott Kupor](#). Combining both attrition and hiring data, the administration's changes over the course of 2025 amounted to a net staffing decrease of about 10.8%.

Kupor touted the results as [exceeding the administration's goals](#), saying relatively few losses were due to reductions in force (RIFs) and firings of probationary employees. Out of all employees who left their jobs in the last year, "over 92% did so voluntarily," he said, mainly via the deferred resignation program (DRP).

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"None of this is to minimize the impact of anyone losing a job, but the 'mass firing' headlines do not in fact tell the full story," Kupor wrote in a [Dec. 10 post](#) on X.

But some federal workforce experts argue that the administration's reductions in 2025 amounted to a "forced exodus." Max Stier, president and CEO of the Partnership for Public Service, pointed to what he said have become "dangerous gaps" in key federal services, like food safety inspection, Social Security processing, veterans' healthcare and disaster response.

"This loss of expertise directly harms Americans' access to critical services and will take decades to repair," Stier told Federal News Network.

Rep. James Walkinshaw (D-Va.) also [pushed back](#) against the idea of the administration's DRP being "voluntary." He said many feds who left government felt they had no choice — they felt threatened they would be fired anyway, if they did not leave through the DRP.

"Federal workers were hit with DOGE, watched agencies shutter, were threatened with imminent reductions in force, demagogued and bombarded with those mindless '5 things' emails," Walkinshaw said Dec. 11. "Nothing about that was voluntary — the 'fork in the road' was coercion."

Still, the workforce cuts so far align with the Trump administration's overall goal to "downsize the federal workforce," as the Office of Management and Budget recently laid out in the new [President's Management Agenda](#). Specifically, the administration said it is targeting cuts of "unnecessary positions" and "poor performers," while emphasizing more efficiency.

"We've seen significant success in right-sizing the federal workforce and addressing performance issues," Eric Ueland, OMB's deputy director for management, said during a Dec. 9 Chief Human Capital Officers (CHCO) Council meeting.

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The workforce reductions hit some agencies harder than others. The top three agencies facing staffing reductions are the departments of Defense, Agriculture and Treasury — with Treasury's reductions mostly concentrated within the IRS, according to [research](#) from the Partnership for Public Service.

By scale, DoD has seen the largest staffing reduction across government. The department lost over 61,600 employees during 2025 — a total of about 8% of its total workforce.

Following just behind DoD, the Treasury Department lost more than 31,600 employees, yielding a staffing reduction of nearly 28%.

And at USDA, the loss of more than 21,600 employees over the last year amounted to a roughly 22% staffing decrease overall.

But other agencies, such as USAID and the Education Department, saw [even deeper cuts](#) to their workforces, despite being smaller agencies by volume.

Governmentwide, the loss of more than 300,000 federal employees has shown up in a multitude of ways. At the IRS, for instance, an agency watchdog [warned](#) there will likely be issues with the 2026 tax filing season, as a direct result of the 25% cut to the IRS workforce. And at USDA, the staffing reductions are affecting the work of some of the department's [underlying agencies](#).

The Partnership for Public Service said the cuts are harming communities as well. An [analysis](#) of more than 530 stories on the federal government throughout 2025 shows the impacts of the federal workforce reductions across the country.

"Notably, more than 45% of these stories involve harms to science-related sectors, including agricultural research, healthcare and public land management," the Partnership said. "Together, they show the direct, tangible consequences these changes are having on individuals, organizations and communities."

Over the course of 2025, the impacts also continued to spread. In a survey the Partnership conducted in [September](#), 46% of respondents said they or someone they know had been impacted by the government cuts. That's up from 29% of respondents who said the same in March.

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Still, there are many who view the Trump administration's changes positively. About 80% of those who are supportive of the federal workforce overhauls said they believe the changes will make their communities and lives better, the Partnership's September survey found. But even among those who were supportive of the changes, 41% still [expressed concerns](#) about a loss of experience and knowledge in the federal workforce in the short term.

The changes are impacting many who have stayed in their jobs as well. Federal employees are experiencing disruptions in the workplace at a rate far higher than the national average, according to a recent Gallup survey.

Close to one-third — about 29% — of federal employees say their workplace has been disrupted "to a very large extent." That's nearly triple the 10% of U.S. employees who say the same, Gallup found. Across the federal workforce, it's leading to [increases in stress and loneliness](#), as well as a decline in employee engagement.

Robert Shea, a federal workforce policy expert and former OMB official from the George W. Bush administration, said the workforce changes have had a "chilling effect" on leaders across the career civil service — something he believes will continue into 2026 and beyond.

"Many career officials are now more cautious about how, when and whether they offer professional advice," Shea told Federal News Network. "That's particularly when that advice could be perceived as resistance rather than implementation."

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