

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-24-107006](#), a report to congressional committees

## Why GAO Did This Study

The federal government owns over 460 million square feet of office space that costs billions annually to operate and maintain. The pandemic changed how people work providing the federal government with a unique opportunity to reconsider how much and what type of office space it needs.

GAO was asked to review agency use of federal buildings. This report 1) assesses the extent to which agencies utilized their headquarters buildings in selected weeks of early 2023, and 2) discusses challenges agency officials identified to increasing the utilization of their headquarters buildings, among other objectives.

GAO collected building size and attendance data from the 24 agencies in the Federal Real Property Council for 1 week each in January, February, and March of 2023. GAO calculated the utilization of each headquarters building by dividing its in-office attendance for the sample period by the building's capacity. Capacity was calculated by dividing usable square footage by a per-person benchmark used by the General Services Administration. GAO interviewed agency officials and gathered information at Federal Real Property Council meetings in 2023.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is recommending that the Office of Management and Budget, as the Chair of the Federal Real Property Council, leads the development and use of benchmarks for measuring building utilization that account for greater levels of telework. The Office of Management and Budget agreed with this recommendation.

View [GAO-24-107006](#). For more information, contact David Marroni at (202) 512-2834 or [MarroniD@gao.gov](mailto:MarroniD@gao.gov).

October 2023

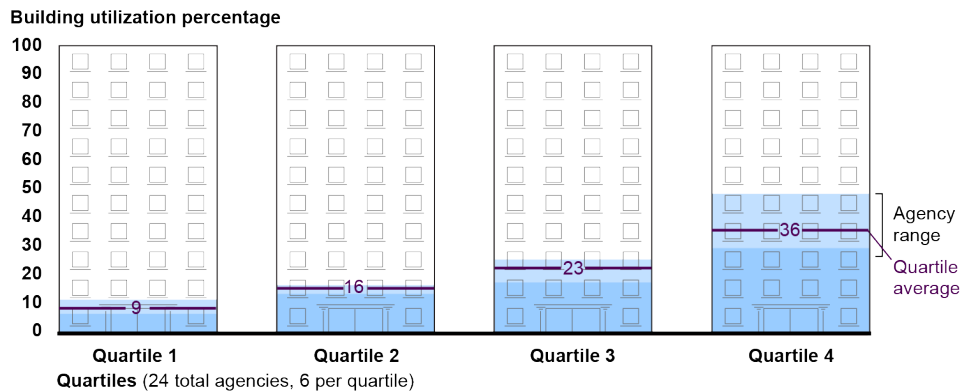
## FEDERAL REAL PROPERTY

### Agencies Need New Benchmarks to Measure and Shed Underutilized Space

## What GAO Found

Federal agencies have long struggled to determine how much office space they need to fulfill their missions. Retaining excess and underutilized space is one of the main reasons that federal real property management has remained on GAO's High-Risk List since 2003. Seventeen of the 24 federal agencies in the Federal Real Property Council used an estimated average 25 percent or less of their headquarters building's capacity for 1 week in each of January, February, and March of 2023. Agencies at the higher end of the range, used an estimated 40 to 49 percent of the capacity of their headquarters on average during these weeks.

### Estimated Weekly Averages of Utilization of Federal Headquarters Buildings across Three-Week Sample (1 week in each of January, February, and March 2023), by Quartile



Source: GAO analysis of data from 24 federal agencies; GAO (illustrations). | GAO-24-107006

Agency officials identified challenges to increasing utilization, including a lack of benchmarks for:

- how agencies measure utilization, and
- full utilization that accounts for increased telework.

In 2021, the Office of Management and Budget instructed agencies to consider using evidence of building utilization to support space planning and allowed each agency to establish utilization measures and benchmarks. Agency officials GAO spoke with said that they had not developed utilization benchmarks that account for increased telework. At a Federal Real Property Council meeting held in July 2023, most agency officials agreed that the Office of Management and Budget and the Council were best positioned to develop measures and benchmarks. Differences in agencies' measures, calculations, and benchmarks can contribute to differences in capacity and utilization measures across the government. A standard for measuring utilization and a benchmark that accounts for higher levels of telework could help the federal government more consistently identify underutilized space within and across agencies. This information could support better alignment of the federal real property portfolio with future needs and cost reductions from releasing unneeded space.