

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-25-106527](#), a report to congressional requesters

## Why GAO Did This Study

Federal agencies' ability to address the nation's social, economic, and security challenges relies on a workforce that can ensure service delivery to the public across the country, including areas distant from the mainland in Alaska, Hawaii, and the U.S. territories.

GAO was asked to review recruitment, hiring, and retention of federal employees in the noncontiguous states and territories. This report examines (1) federal employment trends in the noncontiguous U.S. compared to the contiguous U.S., and (2) challenges and successes selected federal agencies experience, and opportunities to enhance existing efforts.

GAO analyzed Office of Personnel Management data from 2018 to 2023 to identify trends, reviewed related documents and interviewed agency officials. GAO interviewed officials from FEMA, FWS, NPS, SSA, and TSA about their efforts to recruit, hire, and retain employees in Alaska, Hawaii, and five U.S. territories. GAO selected these agencies to represent a range of agency size and mission. GAO conducted site visits to Alaska, Hawaii, American Samoa, and Puerto Rico.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is making 12 recommendations, including that selected agencies evaluate their strategies and efforts on hiring, recruitment, and retention to make any needed improvements; and ensure access to live training. FWS, NPS, SSA, and TSA agreed. FEMA agreed with the training recommendation and stated that no further action is needed for two recommendations related to recruitment. GAO maintains that these actions are needed.

View [GAO-25-106527](#). For more information, contact Dawn G. Locke at (202) 512-6806 or [LockeD@gao.gov](mailto:LockeD@gao.gov).

October 2024

## FEDERAL WORKFORCE

# ACTIONS NEEDED TO IMPROVE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION IN ALASKA, HAWAII, AND U.S. TERRITORIES

## What GAO Found

Overall federal government employment trends between 2018 and 2023 were similar across the U.S. but varied by noncontiguous location. For instance, during fiscal year 2022, more federal hiring occurred in the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, Hawaii, and Alaska than in American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. Attrition rates slightly increased during the period, with attrition rates in the noncontiguous U.S. being higher than the mainland. Retention rates for federal employees were generally similar in both the noncontiguous U.S. and the mainland.

Five selected agencies described a variety of socioeconomic, administrative, and geographic challenges that affect recruitment, hiring, and retention of employees in the noncontiguous locations. **Socioeconomic challenges** include the high costs of living and relocation, limited opportunities for local career growth, and lack of quality services and infrastructure. **Administrative challenges** commonly cited include difficulty with the federal application process, the effective use of hiring authorities and incentives, and headquarters' staff understanding the needs of staff involved with hiring in these areas. **Geographic challenges** included limited local candidate pools and limited access to training in Hawaii and the Pacific territories.

### Bethel, Alaska



#### Bethel, Alaska

View flying into Bethel, Alaska. Bethel is a city with a population of 6,500 that is not connected to Alaska's road system and is only accessible by airplane or boat. The photo shows the edge of Bethel's road system.

Source: GAO. | [GAO-25-106527](#)

Selected agencies have made efforts to overcome these challenges. However, GAO identified many instances where the agencies' actions could be improved. For example, staff involved with hiring for the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), National Park Service (NPS), and Transportation Security Administration (TSA) cited challenges with their mainland offices understanding the needs in these geographic areas. By examining how they solicit and use information on staff experiences, agencies will be better positioned to resolve their concerns. Also, FEMA, NPS, and the Social Security Administration (SSA) commonly cited challenges with access to live virtual training at a reasonable time for employees in Hawaii and the Pacific territories. Without reasonable access to training, agencies may be limiting meaningful and engaging opportunities for their staff, which could affect staff job performance.