

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-25-106658](#), a report to congressional requesters

## Why GAO Did This Study

Pathways Programs (Pathways) can provide an early career pipeline for students and recent graduates to the federal government. According to the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), Pathways are the primary vehicle for recruiting and placing students and recent graduates into federal internship and fellowship positions.

GAO was asked to review federal internship programs. This report examines the extent to which OPM has (1) increased internship and fellowship opportunities through Pathways, (2) collected information on any challenges from agencies and participants that could be used to improve Pathways, and (3) established a lessons-learned process for recruitment and outreach. GAO reviewed federal statutes, regulations, and guidance on Pathways. GAO also analyzed OPM data on Pathways hires from fiscal years 2013 to 2023—the most recent years of data—to identify demographic and other information on Pathways hires. GAO also interviewed OPM officials and organizations knowledgeable about students' advancement to obtain their views on OPM's efforts to increase internships and fellowships through Pathways.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that OPM develop and implement plans to collect and assess evidence to understand Pathways hiring trends, collect and evaluate feedback data from Pathways participants, and collect and share lessons learned associated with recruitment and outreach for Pathways. OPM concurred with all three recommendations.

For more information, contact Dawn G. Locke at (202) 512-6806 or [locked@gao.gov](mailto:locked@gao.gov).

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## FEDERAL WORKFORCE

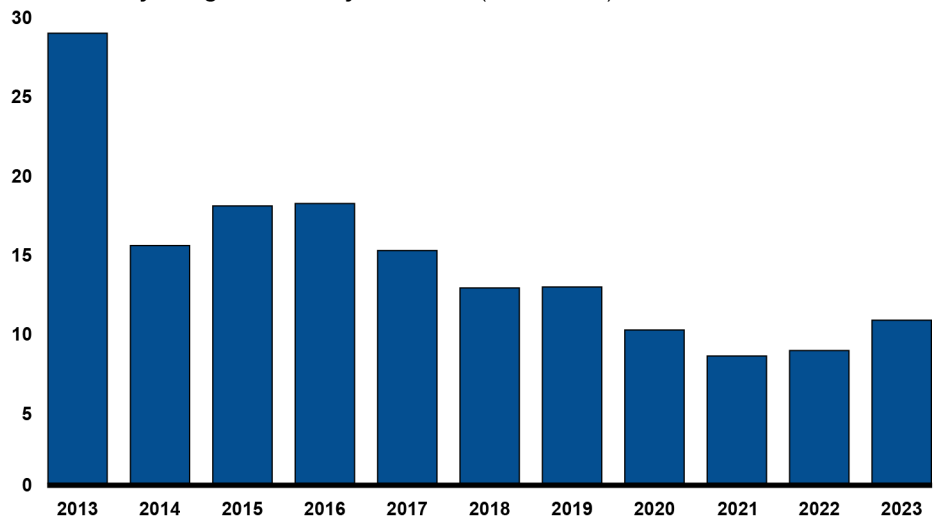
### OPM Needs to Take Additional Actions to Improve the Federal Early Career Talent Pipeline

## What GAO Found

When it was established in 2010, Pathways consisted of (1) an internship program for current students, (2) a recent graduates program, and (3) the Presidential Management Fellows (PMF) program for individuals who obtained advanced degrees within the preceding 2 years. On Feb. 19, 2025, President Trump signed Executive Order (EO) 14217, which began the process of terminating the PMF program. The EO did not address the internship or recent graduates program that remain part of Pathways and include the majority of program participants.

GAO's analysis of OPM's data found that the overall hiring trend has shown a 64 percent decrease since the implementation of the programs in fiscal year 2013 but has fluctuated within that timeframe. OPM has analyzed and reported on hiring trends. But OPM has not determined the information needed to identify factors that impact hiring trends or developed a plan to collect and assess that information, which would better position it to understand hiring fluctuations.

Total Pathways Programs Hires by Fiscal Year (in thousands)



Source: GAO analysis of Enterprise Human Resources Integration data. | GAO-25-106658

While OPM has taken steps to collect feedback from agencies on the challenges of Pathways, it did not collect feedback from its participants. Without a plan to collect and evaluate feedback data from all participants, OPM is unable to determine whether participants are satisfied with the programs or faced challenges.

OPM has not established a lessons-learned process for Pathways. OPM identified agency successes in recruitment and outreach that may be used to improve Pathways hiring. Although OPM meets with agency officials about using Pathways, agencies continue to request additional information on making Pathways more effective. Without a process in place to collect and share lessons learned, OPM is missing an opportunity to leverage stakeholders' knowledge to improve the government's ability to recruit, hire, retain, and manage its early career talent pipeline.