



September 2024

FEDERAL REAL PROPERTY

Actions Needed to Better Assess Office Sharing Pilot's Broader Applicability

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-24-106919](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

The federal government spends about \$8 billion a year to operate, maintain, and lease office space. The pandemic changed how often employees use this office space, making some space underused. In response to increased telework and underuse of space, GSA launched a federal coworking pilot.

GAO was asked to review GSA's federal coworking efforts. This report examines (1) how GSA identified and addressed agencies' coworking needs, (2) the extent to which the pilot design follows leading practices, and (3) the opportunities and challenges of federal coworking and actions GSA took in response.

GAO reviewed relevant GSA documents and data and evaluated them against GAO leading practices for pilot design and key practices for managing and assessing the results of federal efforts. GAO also interviewed GSA officials and selected regional managers, federal coworking users, and agency decision-makers.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making three recommendations to GSA on federal coworking: (1) improve the quality of the pilot's usage data, (2) develop criteria for scaling the pilot, and (3) develop a system for tracking cost and space savings. GSA agreed with the recommendations and stated that it will create a plan to address them and has made progress in completing some actions.

View [GAO-24-106919](#). For more information, contact Dave Marroni at (202) 512-2834 or marronid@gao.gov.

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

Actions Needed to Better Assess Office Sharing Pilot's Broader Applicability

What GAO Found

In July 2023, the General Services Administration (GSA) launched a pilot to examine federal office sharing (also referred to as coworking). The pilot allows agencies to access shared office space in six federally owned or leased buildings across the country. In developing the pilot, GSA used surveys and focus groups to identify agencies' coworking needs. The coworking locations have Wi-Fi, meeting rooms, private workspaces, kitchens, and proximity to public transportation—features identified as important by agencies. Per GSA's data, through August 1, 2024, at least 924 users, from 59 federal entities, have visited federal coworking spaces at least 1,839 times.

GSA's coworking pilot fully aligns with three of GAO's leading practices for effective pilot program design but does not fully align with the remaining two practices (see figure). GSA established measurable objectives, communicated with key stakeholders, and developed an evaluation plan. However, collecting more accurate data on the use of coworking spaces would improve GSA's ability to develop conclusions regarding the pilot program and justify investing additional resources. In addition, developing criteria that would inform decisions on scalability and whether to integrate the pilot activities more broadly would enable GSA to assess whether a coworking service would succeed in a non-pilot setting.

Alignment of GSA Federal Coworking Pilot Program with GAO Leading Practices for Pilot Program Design

Leading practice	Description of GSA actions	Alignment
Measurable objectives	GSA established measurable objectives for the pilot, including identifying potential users and uses for federal coworking.	 Aligns
Stakeholder communication	GSA established regular communication with key stakeholders, including agency decision-makers and potential users.	 Aligns
Assessment methodology	GSA developed an assessment methodology that includes collecting and analyzing data on user satisfaction with coworking spaces, but it may not be capturing all coworking users.	 Partially aligns
Evaluation plan	GSA has outlined how it collects and analyzes data to evaluate the coworking pilot's implementation and performance.	 Aligns
Scalability criteria	GSA officials said they may expand the pilot to new locations based on interest from federal agencies, but have not defined what would constitute sufficient interest. In addition, GSA has not developed criteria that would inform decisions on scalability and whether to integrate the pilot activities more broadly into GSA's overall efforts.	 Does not align

Source: GAO analysis of General Services Administration (GSA) information. | GAO-24-106919

GSA has identified opportunities and taken steps to address the challenges of federal coworking. For example, GSA noted that coworking could help agencies achieve cost and space savings by reducing unneeded office space and improving space utilization, but that it will take time for agencies to incorporate coworking into their long-term space planning. About half of GSA's leases will expire in the next 5 years, and GSA officials told GAO that they plan to identify expiring leases near federal coworking spaces to help agencies explore coworking opportunities. However, GSA has not developed a system to track federal coworking's progress against its long-term goal of cost and space savings. Doing so would better position GSA to assess the extent to which federal coworking is meeting its long-term goal as well as demonstrate the value of federal coworking to Congress and agencies.

Contents

Letter		1
	Background	3
	GSA Designed Its Pilot Program to Identify and Address Agencies' Coworking Needs	5
	GSA's Coworking Pilot Aligns with Most Leading Practices for Pilot Design, But Does Not Identify Scalability Criteria	12
	GSA Has Identified Various Opportunities and Challenges and Taken Some Action in Response, but Has Not Taken Steps to Track Cost and Space Savings	19
	Conclusions	25
	Recommendations for Executive Action	25
	Agency Comments	25
Appendix I	Objectives, Scope, and Methodology	27
Appendix II	Comments from the U.S. General Services Administration	30
Appendix III	GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments	32
Figures		
	Figure 1: Timeline of the GSA Federal Coworking Pilot, as of May 2024	7
	Figure 2: Map of GSA Federal Coworking Pilot Locations, as of May 2024	8
	Figure 3: Examples of Coworking Needs Identified by GSA and Other Federal Agencies	10
	Figure 4: Examples of Federal Coworking Pilot Locations	11
	Figure 5: Alignment of GSA Federal Coworking Pilot Program with GAO Leading Practices for Pilot Program Design	13

Abbreviations

GSA General Services Administration
QR quick response

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September 11, 2024

The Honorable Gary C. Peters
Chairman
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
United States Senate

The Honorable James Lankford
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Government Operations and Border Management
Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs
United States Senate

The federal government owns more than 420 million square feet of office space, costing about \$2 billion annually to operate and maintain, according to General Services Administration (GSA) data. In addition, federal agencies spend about \$6 billion annually to lease office space from the private sector and federal government. Retaining excess and underused space is one of the main reasons that managing federal real property has remained on our High-Risk List since 2003.¹

During the pandemic, federal agencies operated under a maximum telework posture, with many employees working away from the office. Now that the country has emerged from the pandemic, the federal government has a unique opportunity to reduce costs by reconsidering its need for office space. We recently reported that 17 agencies used an average of 25 percent or less of their headquarters buildings' capacity in early 2023.² In addition, as of June 2024, about half of GSA's leases (3,606 out of 7,593), which account for more than 70 million square feet of space, have expiration dates scheduled for calendar years 2025 through 2029.

In response to increased telework and underuse of federal office space, GSA launched a federal coworking pilot in July 2023. Through this pilot,

¹GAO, *High-Risk Series: Efforts Made to Achieve Progress Need to Be Maintained and Expanded to Fully Address All Areas*, [GAO-23-106203](#) (Washington D.C.: Apr. 20, 2023).

²GAO, *Federal Real Property: Agencies Need New Benchmarks to Measure and Shed Underutilized Space*, [GAO-24-107006](#), (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 26, 2023). The percentages are estimates of average use, a ratio of a building's capacity, and the extent to which an agency uses that capacity.

federal agencies can share office space and services in six federally owned or leased buildings located across the country.³

You asked us to review GSA's federal coworking efforts. This report examines:

1. how GSA designed its pilot program to identify and address agencies' coworking needs;
2. the extent to which GSA's federal coworking pilot aligns with leading practices for pilot design; and
3. the opportunities and challenges GSA identified related to federal coworking spaces and actions GSA has taken in response.

For all objectives, we reviewed GSA documentation and interviewed officials from GSA's headquarters and four of its 11 regional offices, as well as federal employees from four of at least 59 federal entities that used the pilot's coworking spaces.⁴ We selected GSA regional offices across the country that had coworking locations with varying levels of use.⁵ We selected employees based on their agencies' varying use of the coworking pilot and to ensure our discussions covered work experiences at various coworking locations.⁶ We also interviewed agency officials who serve as space planning decision-makers for five randomly selected

³GSA has coworking spaces in Tacoma, Washington; San Francisco, California; Denver, Colorado; Kansas City, Missouri; Chicago, Illinois; and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. GSA also entered into contracts with five firms that would allow agencies to place specific orders for coworking spaces in privately owned buildings. According to GSA officials, as of May 2024, 69 employees of two agencies were eligible to use private coworking spaces. These private contracts cost \$1,000 as well as the costs when the contract is actually used. We did not include coworking spaces in privately owned buildings in our review given the relatively low use of those services to date.

⁴As discussed in appendix I, we assessed the reliability of GSA's data on federal employees using coworking spaces. We determined that, while GSA may not be counting all coworking users, the survey data were sufficiently reliable to describe the minimum number of users—including the federal entities for which they work—and visits to federal coworking spaces. The count of federal entities identified include department sub-agencies or components, U.S. District Courts, and legislative branch offices.

⁵We interviewed GSA officials from GSA regions three, five, eight, and nine, corresponding to GSA's coworking spaces in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Chicago, Illinois; Denver, Colorado; and San Francisco, California.

⁶We interviewed federal employees from the Centers for Disease Control, Social Security Administration, National Park Service, and Department of Homeland Security.

civilian agencies subject to the Chief Financial Officers Act.⁷ While these interviews are not generalizable, they do provide perspectives on the potential features, opportunities, and challenges of the federal government using coworking spaces. In addition, we visited and toured GSA's federal coworking space in Chicago, Illinois.

We also evaluated GSA's efforts to develop federal coworking spaces against leading practices we had previously identified. Specifically, for our second objective, we compared GSA's efforts to leading practices we identified for effective pilot program design to identify areas of alignment and any gaps.⁸ We also evaluated GSA's work against GSA's fiscal year 2024 Annual Evaluation Plan, as discussed in appendix I, which provides more information on our scope and methodology.⁹

We conducted this performance audit from June 2023 to September 2024 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Background

GSA's Public Buildings Service manages one of the nation's largest and most diverse real estate portfolios, providing workspace for nearly 1 million federal employees. It provides real estate and workspace services for federal agencies, including acquiring, designing, constructing, leasing and, when necessary, disposing of surplus federal real property. In addition, the Public Buildings Service facilitates the federal government's future of work plans and efforts to reduce the federal real property

⁷Chief Financial Officers Act of 1990, as amended (codified at 31 U.S.C. § 901(b)). We interviewed decision-makers from the U.S. Agency for International Development; the Departments of Housing and Urban Development; Justice; and Veterans Affairs; and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. The Chief Financial Officers Act of 1990, as amended, established Chief Financial Officers to, among other responsibilities, oversee financial management activities at 24 selected agencies. These 24 federal agencies occupy 98 percent of all federal real property.

⁸GAO, *Data Act: Section 5 Pilot Design Issues Need to Be Addressed to Meet Goal of Reducing Recipient Reporting Burden*, [GAO-16-438](#) (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 19, 2016).

⁹U.S. General Services Administration *FY 2024 Annual Evaluation Plan* (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 17, 2023).

inventory and is leading GSA's federal coworking pilot.¹⁰ Public Buildings Service staff work in GSA's Washington, D.C. headquarters and 11 regional offices. In GSA's regional offices, the Public Buildings Service staff liaise with federal agencies in those locations to assist with space planning and acquisition, among other things.

In addition:

- GSA's Office of Administrative Services delivers administrative services, such as on-site support for federal employees working in the federal coworking spaces.
- GSA's Office of Evaluation Sciences, within GSA's Office of Government-wide Policy, helps GSA and agencies across the federal government build and use evidence. Specifically, the office designs and conducts evaluations of existing programs and evidence-based program changes and conducts descriptive studies, such as evaluating data collected on the federal coworking pilot.

According to GSA officials, from September 2020 to October 2023, GSA conducted Workplace 2030, which was GSA's initiative to lead and support the federal government returning to the office and the future of work. As part of this initiative, GSA convened a group of government and private-sector experts to discuss various future scenarios for federal work. This dialogue helped GSA identify new workspace configurations and arrangements as the foundation of the services GSA is developing and offering to federal agencies.

GSA officials stated that, while GSA began exploring federal coworking services prior to Workplace 2030, Workplace 2030 confirmed agencies' interest in the service.¹¹ Since July 2023, GSA has operated a federal coworking pilot which consists of six coworking locations around the country. These locations provide secure spaces that are open to all federal employees and were free of charge as of April 2024. In addition, while not officially part of the coworking pilot, GSA's Workplace Innovation Lab in its Washington, D.C. headquarters has office space that

¹⁰GSA's Workplace 2030 initiative defined the future of work according to several guiding principles—including the growth of federal employees using telework and opportunities to share spaces and improve recruitment and retention—and has developed services in response to these principles.

¹¹While included as one of the initiative's services, GSA began to develop private coworking prior to Workplace 2030. In addition, GSA officials told us that GSA offered in-house and contracted services that agencies could use to inform their portfolio strategy, occupancy requirements, and change management prior to Workplace 2030.

authorized federal employees can reserve and use, similar to the coworking locations.¹²

GSA has provided coworking services before and faced challenges. Specifically, GSA created telework centers in 1993 as alternative locations for federal employees who would otherwise travel longer distances to work. GSA stopped funding the telework centers in 2011, due to the high cost of maintaining the centers and the increased, widespread use of residential telework.

We have an existing body of work on federal real property use as well as assessing federal pilot programs. For example, in October 2023, we reported that federal agencies need benchmarks to help measure and shed underutilized space.¹³ In addition, in our report assessing the Office of Management and Budget's approach to a pilot program, we found that a well-designed pilot program can help agencies make effective program and policy decisions and identified leading practices to design pilot programs accordingly.¹⁴

GSA Designed Its Pilot Program to Identify and Address Agencies' Coworking Needs

GSA Designed Its Pilot Program to Identify Agencies' Needs for Coworking Features and Flexibility

GSA has taken steps to identify agencies' needs for coworking features and flexibility throughout the design of its federal coworking pilot and, at the time of our review, continued to do so as the pilot progressed.

¹²The primary purpose of the Workplace Innovation Lab is to showcase innovative office design, furniture, and technology that can inform agencies' future purchases.

¹³[GAO-24-107006](#).

¹⁴[GAO-16-438](#).

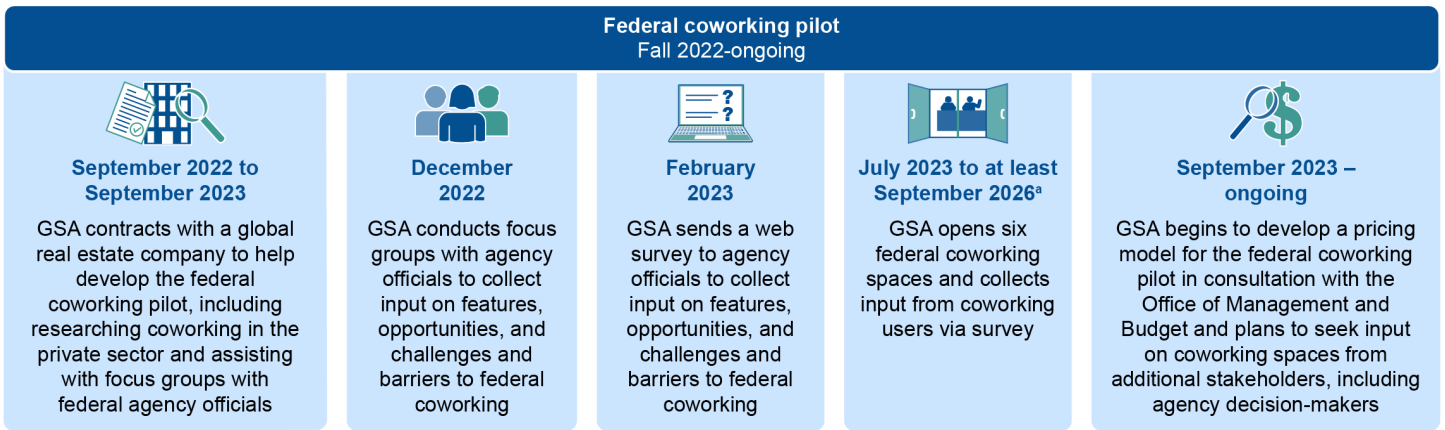
To identify agencies' coworking needs, GSA used a variety of methods both prior to and after opening the coworking spaces.¹⁵ Specifically, prior to launching the pilot in July 2023, GSA conducted focus groups, workshops, and surveys of federal employees to understand agencies' preferences and needs for coworking spaces. It also consulted with the Canadian government and private entities to collect information on operating coworking services.¹⁶ GSA conducted focus groups in December 2022 with officials from the 24 agencies subject to the Chief Financial Officers Act to discuss preferences and needs for coworking spaces.¹⁷ As discussed in more detail later in the report, GSA also surveyed federal agencies and users of the coworking space to inform its federal coworking pilot. See the timeline of the pilot as of May 2024 in figure 1.

¹⁵The interviews we conducted with selected federal coworking users and agency decision-makers generally identified the same coworking needs as those identified by GSA. Later in the report, we discuss GSA's data collection methods to identify agencies' coworking needs, including potential ways to improve the rigor of these methods as well as the importance of ensuring that the data GSA collects broadly represent the federal government.

¹⁶According to GSA officials, in September 2022, GSA awarded a 1-year \$768,664 contract to a global real estate services company to help develop the federal coworking pilot in its early stages. The company provided GSA information related to coworking services in the private sector including market research, trends in office space, pricing models, and various space types as GSA designed the federal coworking pilot. The company also assisted GSA with the December 2022 focus groups with agency officials.

¹⁷The focus groups were half-day events where agency officials visited different rooms at the Workplace Innovation Lab at GSA's headquarters. During these focus groups, GSA additionally conducted a survey asking participants about the importance of various coworking features, flexibility needs, and barriers to adoption. GSA analyzed this information and used it to inform the federal coworking pilot.

Figure 1: Timeline of the GSA Federal Coworking Pilot, as of May 2024



Source: GAO analysis of General Services Administration (GSA) documentation. | GAO-24-106919

^aWhile GSA formally opened the federal coworking pilot in July 2023, one location opened earlier in May 2023.

GSA considered various criteria to identify sites for the federal coworking pilot, including underutilized space and expiring leases for federal agencies within a 25-mile radius of existing federally owned and leased space, as well as building amenities and access to transit. GSA also targeted locations that had low to no startup costs because GSA had not requested funds specifically for the coworking pilot, instead drawing on funding and resources from existing sources to support it. In other words, GSA used resources, including staff, from other GSA sources for the pilot. See figure 2 for a map of GSA's federal coworking pilot locations.

Figure 2: Map of GSA Federal Coworking Pilot Locations, as of May 2024



Sources: GAO presentation of General Services Administration (GSA) information and Map Resources. | GAO-24-106919

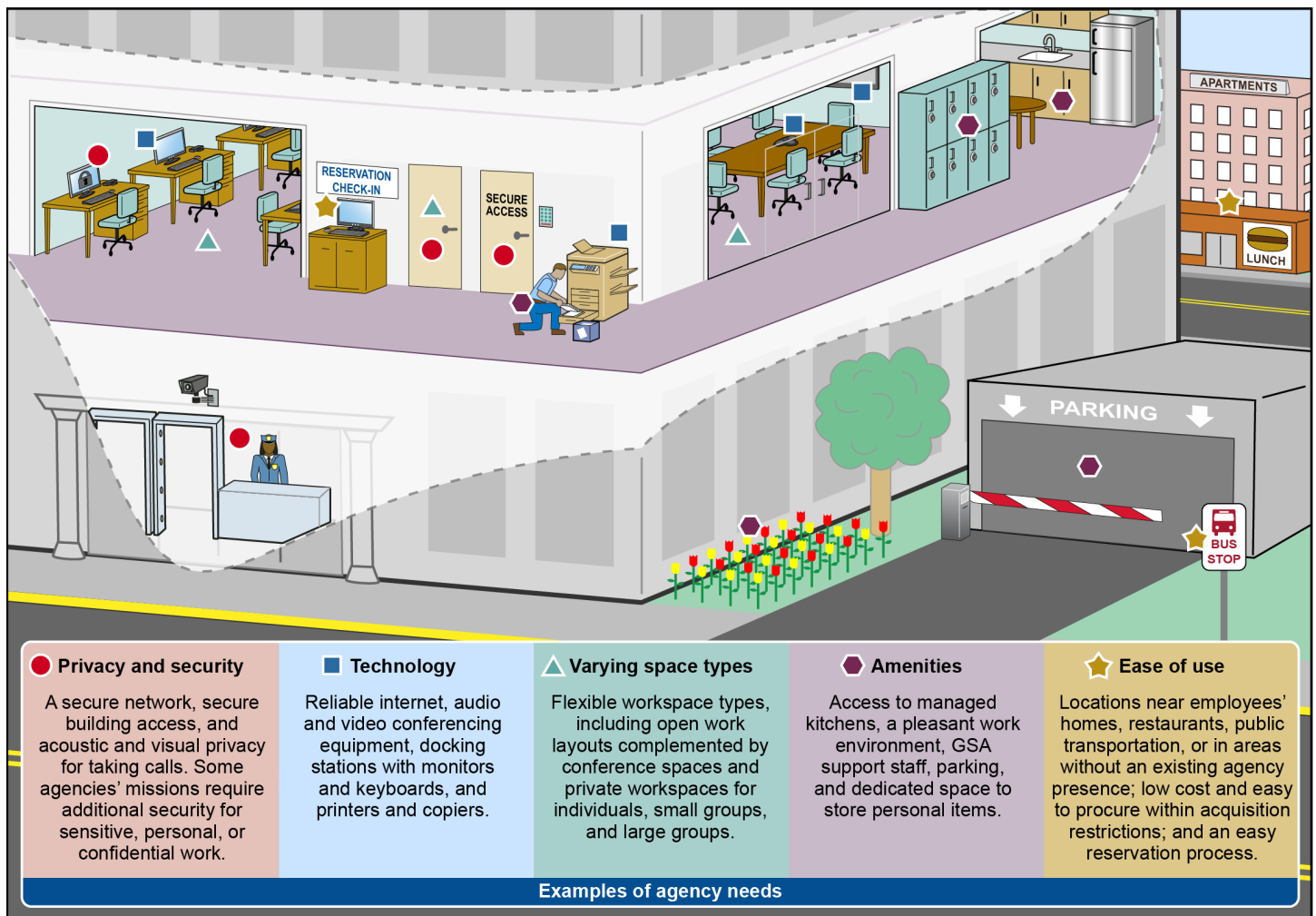
Once GSA opened the federal coworking spaces, it continued efforts to understand agency needs through monthly calls with GSA offices responsible for aspects of the pilot. During these meetings, GSA staff shared broad lessons learned from managing coworking locations. For example, the staff who manage the Philadelphia location told us that, early on, they discovered the importance of confirming prospective coworking users' laptop and IT security protocols to ensure the user can seamlessly access and use the coworking space. In addition to the monthly national calls, GSA staff from three of the coworking locations we interviewed told us they participate in separate one-on-one calls with GSA staff who manage other coworking locations. For example, GSA staff who manage the Chicago location told us they discuss a variety of topics during these calls, from the need to provide users with occupant emergency plans to how frequently GSA changes the guest Wi-Fi code.

GSA also continued its efforts to identify agencies' coworking needs by surveying federal coworking users and soliciting personalized feedback on-site. Specifically, GSA sends a survey to users who check-in to a coworking location about coworking needs and experiences at the coworking location. As discussed in more detail later in this report, GSA analyzes these data to further refine the pilot. In addition, the coworking

users we interviewed said that GSA staff solicit personalized user input on-site. GSA officials also told us that GSA regional staff have given agency decision-makers tours of the coworking spaces, providing information to the decision-makers and collecting input on agencies' needs.

The coworking needs that GSA identified generally match the coworking needs that agency decision-makers and coworking users identified in our interviews. We found that these needs fall into five broad categories: technology, varying space types, amenities, ease of use, and privacy and security. See figure 3 for examples of coworking needs identified by GSA and other federal agencies.

Figure 3: Examples of Coworking Needs Identified by GSA and Other Federal Agencies



Source: GAO analysis of General Services Administration (GSA) documents and interviews with GSA and other federal agencies; GAO (illustration). | GAO-24-106919

GSA Designed Its Pilot to Address Some Coworking Needs and Is Considering Steps to Address Others

GSA's federal coworking pilot addresses some of the needs identified by federal agencies, including needs related to technology, varying space types, amenities, and ease of use. Each federal coworking pilot location has:

- Wi-Fi and other technologies, such as video and audio-conferencing technology, printers, and monitors;

- individual workstations and meeting rooms of different capacities, including a mix of reserved and unreserved spaces and private rooms for taking calls;
- amenities that vary by location but can include kitchens, parking, and nearby childcare options; and
- proximity to public transportation and retail and accommodation options.

GSA staff are available to support users of the coworking spaces. For example, one coworking user told us that while using a federal coworking site for a training session, GSA staff checked in and solicited feedback. Two coworking users from another agency we interviewed said the GSA staff member assisted with printing. As previously mentioned, GSA staff manage customer intake and provide on-site assistance in addition to their current role within the region. See examples of federal coworking pilot locations in figure 4.

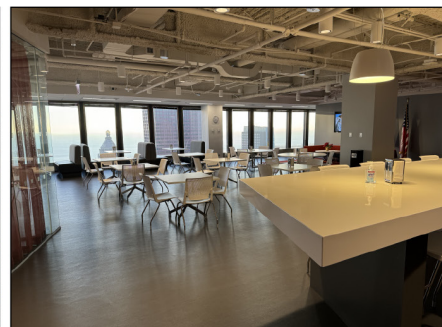
Figure 4: Examples of Federal Coworking Pilot Locations



Coworking workstations and meeting room, GSA San Francisco, California, coworking location



Training room, GSA Tacoma, Washington, coworking location



Break room, GSA Chicago, Illinois, coworking location

Sources: General Services Administration (GSA) (left and center photos); GAO (right photo). | GAO-24-106919

In addition, to help address needs related to ease of use, GSA has a reservation process for federal employees to choose workspaces based on their specific needs, such as the number of meeting attendees. Specifically, federal employees fill out a form on GSA’s website indicating which coworking location they want to use. GSA staff assigned to that location then contact the user to schedule a visit and determine what space will best meet the employee’s needs. GSA officials told us that federal employees need to complete a location-specific orientation prior to their first time working at the coworking space because each coworking

space has different security requirements. For example, everyone in the Tacoma location must have specific identification that allows access to federal facilities and systems, including the coworking space. After employees attend the orientation, they can reserve and access the space as needed.

GSA has plans to improve the reservation process and further address user needs. GSA officials said that, currently, they need to maintain controlled access to the coworking spaces because they do not have the capacity to accept walk-in users. For example, GSA officials told us that if a federal employee arrives at a coworking location without a reservation, the employee might not have access to the building, which could lead to a negative first impression of the coworking space. GSA officials told us they are implementing a new automated reservation system in fall 2024. According to GSA officials, GSA also plans to request funding in fiscal year 2026 for a dedicated concierge in one of the six coworking locations, which would allow the site to accept walk-in users.






GSA officials said that, due to the pilot's limited budget, GSA is currently focusing on low-cost solutions in response to additional coworking needs, such as providing lockers for personal items or rearranging furniture. Wi-Fi expansion, additional security capabilities, and more convenient coworking locations are changes that GSA is considering for the future. For example, GSA held a coworking workshop in June 2023 in response to agency requests to discuss secure coworking, or sharing facilities that permit working with classified information. As part of this effort, GSA worked with a consulting company to create a potential plan for a secure coworking service. However, GSA officials told us that secure coworking is in its early stages and GSA is currently focused on other priorities related to the federal coworking pilot, such as developing a future pricing structure.

GSA's Coworking Pilot Aligns with Most Leading Practices for Pilot Design, But Does Not Identify Scalability Criteria

We determined that GSA's federal coworking pilot program aligned with three of the five leading practices, partially aligned with one leading practice, and did not align with one leading practice for a well-designed

pilot program.¹⁸ We have previously reported that a well-designed pilot program that aligns with leading practices can help ensure the pilot produces the information needed for the agency to make effective program and policy decisions.¹⁹ We identified five leading practices to design pilot programs: (1) establish measurable objectives, (2) ensure two-way stakeholder communication, (3) articulate assessment methodology, (4) develop an evaluation plan, and (5) identify scalability criteria. See figure 5 for a summary of our analysis.

Figure 5: Alignment of GSA Federal Coworking Pilot Program with GAO Leading Practices for Pilot Program Design

Leading practice	Description of leading practice	Alignment
Measurable objectives	Establish well-defined, clear, measurable, and appropriate objectives.	 Aligns
Stakeholder communication	Appropriate two-way stakeholder communication and input should occur at all stages of the pilot. Relevant stakeholders should be identified and involved.	 Aligns
Assessment methodology	Articulate an assessment methodology and data gathering strategy that addresses all components of the pilot program and details the type and source of information necessary to evaluate the pilot, and methods for collecting that information.	 Partially aligns
Evaluation plan	Develop a plan that defines how the information collected will be analyzed to evaluate the pilot's implementation and performance.	 Aligns
Scalability criteria	Identify criteria to inform decisions on whether and how to integrate pilot activities into overall efforts. Criteria should relate to the similarity or comparability of the pilot to the range of circumstances expected in full implementation.	 Does not align

Source: GAO analysis of General Services Administration (GSA) information. | GAO-24-106919

Establish well-defined, clear, measurable, and appropriate objectives. We found that GSA's design aligns with this practice. GSA's objectives for the pilot are to determine: (1) potential users and uses of federal coworking spaces, (2) features that must be included in coworking options, (3) barriers and roadblocks preventing federal employees from using coworking spaces, and (4) drivers of coworking demand and adoption.

¹⁸We used a three-tier system to assess the federal coworking pilot alignment with the leading practices: aligns, partially aligns, and does not align. We determined that GSA's coworking pilot aligned with a leading practice when we saw evidence that GSA followed all aspects of the leading practice. We determined that the pilot partially aligned with a leading practice when GSA followed some, but not all, aspects of the leading practice. We determined that the pilot did not align with a leading practice when we did not see evidence of GSA following a leading practice.

¹⁹[GAO-16-438](#).

We found these objectives were well-defined and clear because GSA consistently described these objectives throughout its program documentation, including its 2023 end-of-year report and Federal Coworking Evaluation Plan. We found the objectives were measurable because GSA developed performance measures for the pilot to indicate progress in meeting its objectives. Specifically, GSA tracks performance against the objectives through user satisfaction surveys and usage data. Moreover, we found these objectives appropriate because they support GSA's broader initiative to reduce space. GSA has stated that federal coworking will provide agencies a flexible work environment in multiple locations throughout the country and increase the efficiency of GSA's assets by using shared space and services.

Ensure two-way stakeholder communication. We found that GSA's design aligns with this practice because GSA established two-way communication with stakeholders throughout the pilot and has taken steps to improve communication where needed. Specifically, GSA established monthly meetings with GSA stakeholders; GSA staff who manage coworking spaces told us that they attend these monthly meetings. GSA also collects regular feedback from users of federal coworking sites through surveys and on-site communication. In addition, GSA developed marketing materials for the federal coworking pilot, including brochures, a website landing page, and external presentations promoting the program with potential users. GSA officials stated that they also discuss coworking, among other initiatives, during existing, ongoing space planning discussions with agencies.

GSA also took steps to improve communication with agencies' decision-makers during the pilot, in part, due to our discussions. Prior to opening the coworking spaces, GSA identified agency decision-makers as key stakeholders and sent out a survey to federal employees, including decision-makers, to collect information on agencies' initial requirements for federal coworking. However, in a paper describing the survey's results, GSA identified some agencies as overrepresented in the survey and that the survey is not inclusive of all agencies. Accordingly, the survey results are not generalizable to the federal government. GSA also identified the need to collect additional input from a larger sample of decision-makers across federal agencies to improve the sample quality. During our review, we asked GSA about its efforts to solicit input from agency decision-makers because they may determine the extent to which agencies use federal coworking spaces. GSA officials said that our discussions re-emphasized the value of communicating with agency

decision-makers and, as a result, GSA officials stated that they restarted their efforts to gather input from agency decision-makers.

Specifically, in GSA's 2023 end-of-year report, GSA stated that it planned to meet with agency decision-makers and gather input on the federal coworking pilot. GSA officials told us they have selected 13 agencies to participate in discussions with GSA planned for summer 2024.²⁰ These discussions are to collect agencies' input on potential billing models and customer demand for the coworking spaces, among other things. In addition, GSA presented its federal coworking pilot to agencies' central offices at an October 2023 meeting.

Articulate an assessment methodology and data gathering strategy.

We found that GSA's design partially aligns with this practice. Specifically, GSA developed an assessment methodology that includes collecting data on coworking site use and user satisfaction via surveys. GSA analyzed this information to understand users' coworking needs and concerns.

However, GSA has identified that it may not be accurately capturing usage at the federal coworking sites. Specifically, GSA officials told us they may be missing data on some users because GSA relies on users to scan a quick response (QR) code to check in to the space when they arrive, and not all users do so.²¹ GSA officials told us that while GSA staff at the coworking spaces try to manually enter information for users who have not scanned the QR code so they receive the satisfaction survey, GSA may still not be identifying all users. Per GSA's data, from May 17, 2023, through August 1, 2024, at least 924 users, from 59 federal entities, have visited federal coworking spaces at least 1,839 times, but there may be more users and visits that GSA has not counted.²² In addition, since GSA sends satisfaction surveys only to users who check in to the space,

²⁰According to GSA officials, these agencies are the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Health and Human Services, Housing and Urban Development, Interior, Labor, State, Transportation, and Veterans Affairs; National Science Foundation; Office of Personnel Management; Social Security Administration; and U.S. Air Force Civil Engineer Center.

²¹GSA noted that the pilot program was designed to explore the potential of federal coworking at little to no cost and implementing a system to ensure every coworker was counted would have required funding or personnel to monitor the site locations.

²²While GSA formally opened the federal coworking pilot in July 2023, one location opened earlier in May 2023. The count of federal entities identified include department sub-agencies or components, U.S. District Courts, and legislative branch offices.

GSA may not be fully capturing user satisfaction with the coworking space.

GSA officials initially told us a planned new reservation system, which would automate the coworking space booking process, would improve the quality of usage data. Specifically, the reservation system will include a function for users to check into the coworking space. However, GSA officials said that, like its current QR code system, users may not check in on the reservation system when they arrive at the coworking spaces and, thus, may not be counted by GSA. As a result, GSA officials said that they are continuing to identify means of accurately capturing usage data. For example, GSA officials said they plan to request funds to add a dedicated concierge in one of the six coworking sites to, in part, help improve the quality of usage data.

GSA also plans to expand its data collection efforts beyond surveying users of the coworking spaces. For example, as previously mentioned, GSA has recognized the need to collect information from agency decision-makers and plans to conduct discussions with decision-makers from selected agencies to do so. GSA officials also identified the need to gather input from federal employees who are less inclined to use federal coworking to ensure that GSA considers all potential user input when designing the coworking sites. GSA officials said they understand that user surveys may not reflect the whole workforce including those federal employees who prefer not to use a coworking space. These officials said they are investigating new ways to collect input from those less inclined to use federal coworking spaces, including agencies surveying their own staff to ensure input from a wider range of federal employees informs the design of federal coworking.

Taking steps to collect information from decision-makers and federal employees who have not used the coworking spaces could provide GSA with important perspectives, but GSA also needs accurate data regarding use of coworking spaces. GSA has recognized the limitations of its data and has taken some steps to try to address them. However, while adding a concierge at one site may improve the quality of usage data at that specific site, GSA remains at risk of undercounting use of its other coworking sites and not developing accurate findings from the pilot. In addition, there may be other options for addressing this issue. We previously reported that GSA has explored technologies for measuring building use, some of which GSA may also be able to use for coworking

sites.²³ For example, GSA has begun testing how it can use technology to collect space usage data, including through badging, motion sensors, mobile devices, and Wi-Fi networks. More accurate usage data would enable GSA to better develop defensible conclusions regarding the pilot program and justify investing additional resources.

Develop an evaluation plan to track pilot performance and implementation. We found that GSA’s design aligns with this practice. GSA developed an evaluation plan that defines how it will analyze and evaluate information it collects on the coworking pilot’s implementation and performance. Specifically, in June 2023, GSA developed the Federal Coworking Evaluation Plan, which described the pilot’s background, design and methodology, and evaluation questions.

GSA also developed a 2023 end-of-year report which included status updates, next steps, and risks related to coworking operations. GSA officials told us they plan to develop annual end-of-year reports. In addition, GSA’s Office of Evaluation Sciences conducted a comprehensive coworking evaluation. The evaluation analyzed the data and developed key findings based on the previously mentioned user satisfaction surveys and the surveys sent to federal employees, including agency decision-makers, prior to opening the coworking spaces. This evaluation identified some needs that GSA has addressed in its coworking sites, such as videoconferencing technology, and others that it continues to consider, such as Wi-Fi expansion and additional security capabilities.

Further, the Office of Evaluation Sciences conducted three shorter evaluations during the pilot’s design and early implementation. These evaluations described customers’ coworking needs, customers’ experiences with the sites, and implementation lessons from the early rollout of the pilot. For example, one of these evaluations identified the potential value of opening federal coworking spaces in residential areas and near transit options.

Identify criteria to inform decisions on scalability and whether and how to integrate pilot activities into overall efforts. We found that GSA’s design does not align with this practice. GSA officials identified circumstances under which GSA would consider modifying the pilot, but

²³GAO. *Federal Real Property: GSA Could Further Support Agencies’ Post-Pandemic Planning for Office Space Use*, [GAO-22-105105](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 7, 2022).

GSA has not developed criteria that would inform decisions on scalability and whether to integrate the pilot activities more broadly into GSA's overall efforts. Specifically, GSA officials said they may expand the pilot to a new location based on: (1) interest from federal agencies; (2) the ability to open the location without a significant investment; and (3) whether the new location would allow GSA to collect more feedback on the pilot.²⁴ However, GSA has not defined what would constitute sufficient levels of customer interest to open a new coworking location, or at what point it might consider closing a coworking location in response to lower use.

More broadly, while the pilot thus far has focused on gathering input from coworking space users, GSA has not developed scalability criteria that would enable it to assess whether a coworking service would succeed in a broader, non-pilot setting. Currently, the pilot is operating in an environment unlike what GSA envisions long-term. For example, the pilot locations are free for agencies to use, and can be accessed by individual employees who want to use the space. However, GSA plans to eventually charge agencies to use the coworking spaces, which would likely mean that agencies would develop formal policies regarding how and whether their employees could use the spaces. As noted above, GSA has recognized that it needs to work with agency decision-makers to assess the extent to which its coworking services would meet agency needs at an organizational level, which would also factor into how well the coworking services would work in a non-pilot setting.

GSA officials stated that, at this early stage, they have not developed scalability criteria because they are using the pilot to collect input on coworking and to understand the costs of running such spaces. Further, GSA officials said that they will develop scalability criteria once they have determined the price needed to cover costs while still providing agencies an attractive coworking option. GSA also noted that agency interest in coworking may change once billing for use of the space is implemented.

As we have previously reported, the purpose of a pilot program is to inform a decision on whether and how to implement an approach in a broader context.²⁵ While GSA continues to collect information to understand demand and the operational considerations for the pilot, GSA has not developed criteria to ensure the pilot represents the range of

²⁴GSA noted that it is continuing to refine its criteria for identifying coworking locations.

²⁵[GAO-16-438](#).

circumstances expected in full implementation. We have previously found that establishing scalability criteria early in a pilot program can help organizations apply initially collected data for decision-making.²⁶ Establishing scalability criteria early in the pilot program, rather than waiting until decisions regarding pricing are complete, will better position GSA to ensure it is gathering the information needed to inform sound decisions moving forward. Moreover, developing well-defined scalability criteria that provide evidence to inform decisions on whether to integrate pilot activities into federal space planning would better position GSA to develop strong, defensible conclusions regarding the future of the pilot. Developing these criteria also supports GSA's fiscal year 2024 Annual Evaluation Plan, which identifies using pilot programs to test fundamental assumptions, operations, and outcomes, and how services operate at scale.

GSA Has Identified Various Opportunities and Challenges and Taken Some Action in Response, but Has Not Taken Steps to Track Cost and Space Savings

GSA Has Identified Cost Savings, Flexibility, and Collaboration as Opportunities

GSA's 2023 end-of-year report on the federal coworking pilot, which describes findings based on the previously discussed data collection methods, identified opportunities associated with coworking spaces for the federal government. These opportunities include (1) cost and space savings, (2) flexibility, and (3) improved collaboration between federal employees across and within agencies. Agency decision-makers and federal coworking pilot users we spoke with also identified these aspects as opportunities.

²⁶GAO, *Highway Infrastructure: Better Alignment with Leading Practices Would Improve DOT's Reconnecting Communities Pilot Program*, [GAO-23-105575](#) (Washington, D.C.: May 24, 2023).

Cost and space savings. GSA has identified cost and space savings as the long-term goal of federal coworking programs.²⁷ GSA identified scenarios under which using coworking spaces could result in cost and space savings for the federal government, as follows.

Example of cost-savings from the federal coworking pilot

The National Park Service used the San Francisco coworking space to provide office space to its employees during a gap between leases. As a result, according to GSA, the National Park Service saved approximately \$1.6 million by not undertaking a costly short-term lease extension.

Source: General Services Administration (GSA) documentation and interview with GSA officials. | GAO-24-106919

- *Swing space.* Agencies could use coworking spaces as “swing space” to bridge gaps between leases or, according to GSA officials, to temporarily relocate employees while renovating offices. This would allow agencies to access short-term space solutions instead of more costly short-term leases.
- *Surge space.* Agencies could use coworking spaces as “surge space” when they have temporary requirements for additional space in a specific geographic area. For example, according to GSA officials, the Federal Emergency Management Agency could temporarily deploy staff to a disaster area for several months, using federal coworking spaces as temporary resources. Similar to swing spaces, GSA officials told us that using the coworking spaces in such scenarios could help agencies quickly access office space instead of using more costly short-term leases. GSA officials also told us that agencies could use surge space in instances when an agency has reduced its own space due to increased telework but needs to accommodate a higher-than-average number of staff temporarily coming into the office.
- *Long-term space sharing.* Agencies could use coworking sites as a long-term solution to reduce their space and accrue cost savings. Specifically, federal agencies may choose to share certain services and spaces, such as conference rooms, meeting rooms, and videoconferencing technology. This could be an attractive solution for agencies considering the increased telework environment and lower use of agencies’ office spaces. Using less space by sharing it could lead to cost savings.

Flexibility. Federal coworking could offer agencies more flexibility to meet their mission and staff needs. Specifically, GSA identified the flexibility of federal coworking as potentially helping agencies with employee retention and recruitment. For example, officials from one agency we interviewed said that federal coworking could allow their agency to recruit staff who might be deterred from living and working in

²⁷We have previously reported on underutilized federal office space and recommended that the Office of Management and Budget lead the development and use of federal benchmarks for measuring building utilization that accounts for greater levels of telework. Once such benchmarks are established, coworking may provide one option for agencies attempting to reduce underutilized space. [GAO-24-107006](#).

expensive metropolitan areas. Specifically, if the agency had access to coworking spaces in more affordable areas of the country, it might be better able to recruit staff, while having physical workspaces to support their work.

In addition to providing federal employees with more convenient workplaces, federal coworking could also allow federal agencies to expand their presence around the country in support of their missions. Specifically, agency decision-makers from one agency we interviewed said that their staff conduct field work in northern Texas, but the agency currently does not need to maintain permanent office space in that region. However, agency staff said that they would be interested in sharing space with other agencies so that the agency could establish a continuing presence in the area.

Improved collaboration. GSA identified improved collaboration among federal employees, both within agencies and between agencies, as a potential opportunity of federal coworking. We also heard this opportunity from our interviews with coworking pilot users. For example, users from one agency told us that coworking with other agencies within their department could lead to improved communication and collaboration that could improve all agencies' results. Users from two other agencies told us that they had used the coworking locations for meetings and collaboration.

GSA Has Identified and Begun to Address Challenges to Federal Coworking, but Has Not Taken Steps to Collect and Evaluate Cost and Space Savings Information

In its 2023 end-of-year report, through input from agency decision-makers, and in discussions with us, GSA identified various challenges associated with federal coworking. These challenges include (1) coworking cost and space savings taking time to achieve, (2) some agencies' missions may not be compatible with coworking, (3) agency culture and employee preferences may not align with coworking, and (4) uncertainty about coworking. Decision-makers and coworking users from agencies we spoke with also identified some of these issues as challenges associated with coworking.

Coworking cost and space savings will take time to achieve. GSA identified as a challenge that federal coworking will not achieve cost and space savings immediately. Federal coworking is in its early stages, agencies need time to integrate coworking into their long-term space plans, and agencies may need more certainty about the details of coworking before incorporating it into those long-term plans. As a result, GSA officials told us they will not be able to fully demonstrate the value of federal coworking—cost and space savings—until federal agencies adopt

coworking as a space solution. In addition, GSA will accrue costs to operate and maintain federal coworking spaces while agencies consider adoption.

GSA officials told us they expect that cost and space savings from federal coworking may emerge over the next 2 through 5 years. As agencies reach decision points in space planning, there may be opportunities for agencies to use the coworking sites and potentially realize these savings. For example, GSA officials said that agencies may be better able to take advantage of federal coworking when their existing leases expire and they consider new space options. Based on our analysis of GSA data, as of June 2024, about half of GSA's leases (3,606 out of 7,593), which account for more than 70 million square feet of space, expire in calendar years 2025 through 2029.

To help identify and demonstrate coworking opportunities for agencies, GSA officials told us that they plan to leverage a mapping tool that allows GSA to identify expiring leases near federal coworking spaces. In addition, GSA stated that it has developed a tool to help agencies determine the potential savings they could realize if they used the coworking program in lieu of a traditional lease. GSA officials told us they plan to use the information from these tools to identify agencies best positioned to consider federal coworking and then convey the potential cost and space savings of using federal coworking to those agencies.

Some agencies' missions may be incompatible with coworking. GSA has identified the challenge that the missions of some agencies may not be compatible with coworking, such as agencies with staff working in laboratories or agencies that have certain security requirements. Agency decision-makers from one of the agencies we spoke with noted that federal employees who require classified facilities would currently not be able to use federal coworking.

As previously mentioned, GSA is assessing the possibility of coworking spaces with higher security capabilities, including the ability to process classified information. Specifically, GSA had a contractor meet with agencies with high-security missions to discuss their needs and the opportunities of and barriers to coworking and developed a report concerning how GSA could be responsive to those needs. GSA officials

told us efforts to identify solutions for high-security coworking are ongoing.²⁸

Agency culture and employee preferences may not align with coworking. GSA has noted that agency culture could be a challenge to coworking. Some federal employees may prefer to work entirely remotely; others may resist sharing space. For example, decision-makers from two agencies we spoke with said that staff may be resistant to not having their own designated workspace. In addition, one of the users we spoke with said that some employees might prefer not to work in a coworking space with employees from different agencies.

GSA continues to collect information on agencies' needs and drivers of adoption from users and agency decision-makers. This information may help GSA design coworking spaces that are more compatible with federal agencies' different work cultures. Also, as previously mentioned, GSA is discussing having agencies survey their employees on coworking, in part, to understand the perspectives of those federal employees who may have a lower propensity for using coworking spaces.

Uncertainty about coworking. GSA has identified that agencies need more certainty on key details of federal coworking to be able to consider coworking for long-term space planning. Similarly, decision-makers from one agency we interviewed said that they need to know where the long-term coworking locations will be, services offered, and the prices for use, to factor coworking into space planning. Relatedly, we identified that agencies may have limited awareness of federal coworking, which could challenge its long-term success. As noted earlier, GSA has taken various steps to promote the federal coworking pilot, including developing brochures and contacting agencies near the coworking sites that have expiring leases. However, decision-makers from two of the agencies we interviewed said they were not aware or had limited knowledge of the coworking pilot and wanted more information.

At the time of our review, GSA continued to market the federal coworking pilot to agencies, including via presentations, emails to customer

²⁸We have previously reported on the potential risks of agencies with high-security missions leasing space in buildings owned by foreign companies. Developing federal coworking options that are responsive to agencies with high-security missions could help mitigate those risks. GAO, *Federal Real Property: GSA Should Inform Tenant Agencies When Leasing High-Security Space from Foreign Owners*, [GAO-17-195](#), (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 3, 2017).

agencies, and outreach by GSA regional officials. GSA's 2023 end-of-year report identifies the need to continue to market federal coworking in the long-term to ensure agency decision-makers remain aware of it and its potential benefits. In addition, GSA is working with the Office of Management and Budget to develop a pricing structure by the end of fiscal year 2024. GSA said developing the pricing structure is an important step in providing agencies with the information they need to consider coworking as part of long-term space planning. GSA officials said that developing the coworking pricing structure is ongoing and complex; specifically, GSA is analyzing potential prices under various scenarios as well as the administrative considerations of different pricing mechanisms.

GSA has taken some actions to address challenges associated with federal coworking, but it has not developed a system to track federal coworking's progress against its long-term goal of cost and space savings. GSA officials told us that GSA will use its lease cost avoidance methodology and lessons learned from the pilot, to develop a system to identify, track, and document cost savings. GSA officials told us they have not yet developed that system because they did not expect federal agencies to make long-term commitments to federal coworking while coworking is a pilot. In its comments on this report, GSA stated that it has developed a tracker to calculate lease cost avoidance related to the coworking program.

We have previously identified key practices that can help federal agencies develop and use evidence to effectively manage and assess the results of federal efforts. These practices include assessing and communicating progress toward goals, such as GSA's long-term goal to use federal coworking to achieve cost and space savings for the federal government.²⁹ GSA has identified cost savings associated with the National Park Service's use of the coworking pilot. By developing a system now to track cost and space savings from federal coworking, GSA will be better prepared to verify that it is achieving federal coworking's long-term goal. Further, GSA will be better prepared to demonstrate the value of federal coworking to Congress or federal agencies that may be considering using federal coworking.

²⁹GAO, *Evidence-Based Policymaking: Practices to Help Manage and Assess the Results of Federal Efforts*, [GAO-23-105460](#), (Washington, D.C.: July 12, 2023).

Conclusions

Now that the country has emerged from the pandemic, the federal government has a unique opportunity to explore coworking as a way to achieve cost and space savings in its real estate portfolio. GSA has taken key steps to identify and address the opportunities and challenges presented by coworking through its federal coworking pilot. As GSA considers the future of coworking services, it would benefit by implementing practices that help ensure that the pilot is providing accurate and useful information toward determining whether coworking would succeed in a non-pilot setting.

Specifically, GSA has recognized that it may not be identifying all federal coworking users of the pilot nor has it developed criteria to assess whether or how GSA could expand coworking beyond the pilot stage. By collecting more accurate data and developing well-defined criteria that will inform decisions about whether to continue or modify the coworking pilot, GSA will be better positioned to develop strong, defensible conclusions regarding the future of coworking.

More broadly, GSA has not developed a system to track cost and space savings resulting from agencies' use of federal coworking. Developing such a system would enable GSA to verify that it is achieving cost and space savings, as well as demonstrate the value of federal coworking to Congress and agencies considering federal coworking as a space planning option.

Recommendations for Executive Action

We are making the following three recommendations to GSA:

The Administrator of the GSA should ensure that the Commissioner of the Public Buildings Service implements efforts to improve the quality of GSA's federal coworking usage data. (Recommendation 1)

The Administrator of the GSA should ensure that the Commissioner of the Public Buildings Service develops criteria to inform decisions on whether or how to scale the federal coworking pilot. (Recommendation 2)

The Administrator of the GSA should ensure that the Commissioner of the Public Buildings Service develops a system to track the cost and space savings achieved through federal agencies using federal coworking spaces. (Recommendation 3)

Agency Comments

We provided a draft of this report to GSA for review and comment. In its comments, reproduced in appendix II, GSA concurred with our recommendations and stated that it will create a plan to address them

and has made progress in completing some actions. GSA also provided technical comments, which we incorporated as appropriate.

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees, the Administrator of the GSA, and other interested parties. In addition, the report is available at no charge on the GAO website at <https://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-2834 or MarroniD@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made key contributions to this report are listed in appendix III.



David Marroni
Director, Physical Infrastructure Issues

Appendix I: Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

This report examines:

1. how the General Services Administration (GSA) designed its pilot program to identify and address agencies' coworking needs;
2. the extent to which GSA's federal coworking pilot aligns with leading practices for pilot design; and
3. the opportunities and challenges GSA identified related to federal coworking spaces and actions GSA has taken in response.

For all objectives, we reviewed GSA documentation and interviewed officials from GSA's headquarters and four of its 11 regional offices, as well as federal employees from four of at least 59 federal entities that have used the pilot's coworking spaces through August 1, 2024.¹ We selected GSA regional offices across the country that had coworking locations with varying levels of use.² We selected employees based on their agencies' varying use of the coworking pilot and to ensure our discussions covered work experiences at various coworking locations.³ We also interviewed agency officials who serve as space planning decision-makers for five randomly selected civilian agencies subject to the Chief Financial Officers Act.⁴ While these interviews are not generalizable, they do provide perspectives on the potential features,

¹We determined that GSA's user survey data was sufficiently reliable to describe the minimum number of federal entities that had employees who had used the coworking spaces. The count of federal entities identified include department sub-agencies or components, U.S. District Courts, and legislative branch offices.

²We interviewed GSA officials from GSA regions three, five, eight, and nine, corresponding to GSA's coworking spaces in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Chicago, Illinois; Denver, Colorado; and San Francisco, California.

³We interviewed federal employees from the Centers for Disease Control, Social Security Administration, National Park Service, and Department of Homeland Security.

⁴Chief Financial Officers Act of 1990, as amended, (codified at 31 U.S.C. § 901(b)). We interviewed decision-makers from the U.S. Agency for International Development; the Departments of Housing and Urban Development; Justice; and Veterans Affairs; and the National Aeronautics and Space Administration. The Chief Financial Officers Act of 1990, as amended, established Chief Financial Officers to, among other responsibilities, oversee financial management activities at 24 selected agencies. The agencies subject to the act are the Departments of Agriculture, Commerce, Defense, Education, Energy, Health and Human Services, Homeland Security, Housing and Urban Development, Interior, Justice, Labor, State, Transportation, Treasury, and Veterans Affairs, along with the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Agency for International Development, General Services Administration, National Science Foundation, Nuclear Regulatory Commission, Office of Personnel Management, Small Business Administration, and Social Security Administration. These 24 federal agencies occupy 98 percent of all federal real property.

opportunities, and challenges of the federal government using coworking spaces. In addition, we visited and toured GSA's federal coworking space in Chicago, Illinois.

To examine how GSA has identified and addressed agencies' needs for coworking, we reviewed relevant GSA documentation on the actual and potential offerings of the federal coworking pilot. Specifically, an analyst reviewed GSA documents regarding its findings about agencies' coworking needs and found that the needs fell into five broad categories; a second analyst also reviewed the evidence and concurred with or suggested changes to these categories. Any differences were then reconciled by the two analysts. We also reviewed relevant GSA documentation, such as GSA's surveys and discussions with agency decision-makers and federal employees who have used the pilot's coworking spaces.

To examine the extent to which GSA's federal coworking pilot aligns with leading practices for pilot design, we reviewed relevant GSA documentation, including information on GSA's goals for the pilot, plans to assess the success of the pilot, and time frames for the pilot. We compared GSA's work to leading practices we previously identified for effective pilot program design to identify areas of alignments and any gaps.⁵ Specifically, an analyst assessed the federal coworking pilot's alignment with the leading practices using a three-tier system: aligns, partially aligns, and does not align. A second analyst then reviewed the evidence and concurred with the assessment or suggested changes. Any differences were then reconciled by the two analysts. We determined that GSA's coworking pilot aligned with a leading practice when we saw evidence that GSA followed all aspects of the leading practice. We determined that the pilot partially aligned with a leading practice when GSA followed some but not all aspects of the leading practice. We determined that the pilot did not align with a leading practice when we did not see evidence of GSA following a leading practice. We also evaluated GSA's work against its Fiscal Year 2024 Annual Evaluation Plan, which identifies the importance of pilot programs to test fundamental

⁵GAO, *Data Act: Section 5 Pilot Design Issues Need to Be Addressed to Meet Goal of Reducing Recipient Reporting Burden*, [GAO-16-438](#) (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 19, 2016).

assumptions, operations and outcomes, and how services operate at scale.⁶

To examine the opportunities and challenges of federal coworking that GSA identified and actions GSA has taken in response, we reviewed relevant GSA documentation of the potential benefits and challenges of federal coworking. Such documentation included surveys and discussions with agency decision-makers and federal employees who used the pilot's coworking spaces. We evaluated GSA's progress developing a system to track cost and space savings from agencies' using federal coworking spaces against our key practices for managing and assessing the results of federal efforts.⁷ We also assessed the reliability of GSA's data on federal employees' use of coworking spaces. To assess the reliability of the data, we analyzed GSA data from surveys of coworking users, which GSA uses to identify the number of federal employees that use the coworking spaces and collect input on their experiences in the coworking spaces. We also reviewed GSA documentation on deploying the surveys and conducted interviews with GSA officials. We determined that the survey data were sufficiently reliable to describe the minimum number of users, the federal entities for which they work, and visits to federal coworking spaces.

⁶U.S. General Services Administration, *FY 2024 Annual Evaluation Plan* (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 17, 2023).

⁷GAO, *Evidence-Based Policymaking: Practices to Help Manage and Assess the Results of Federal Efforts*, [GAO-23-105460](#), (Washington, D.C.: July 12, 2023).

Appendix II: Comments from the U.S. General Services Administration

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The Administrator

August 20, 2024

The Honorable Gene L. Dodaro
Comptroller General of the United States
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Mr. Dodaro:

The U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) appreciates the opportunity to review and comment on the U.S. Government Accountability Office's (GAO) draft report, *Federal Real Property: Actions Needed to Better Assess Office Sharing Pilot's Broader Applicability* (GAO-24-106919).

GAO made the following recommendations to GSA:

1. The GSA Administrator should ensure that the Public Buildings Service (PBS) Commissioner implements efforts to improve the quality of GSA's federal coworking usage data.
2. The GSA Administrator should ensure that the PBS Commissioner develops criteria to inform the decisions on whether or how to scale the federal coworking pilot.
3. The GSA Administrator should ensure that the PBS Commissioner develops a system to track the cost and space savings achieved through federal agencies using federal coworking spaces.

GSA concurs with GAO's recommendations. GSA will create a plan to address GAO's recommendations, and has already made progress in completing some actions.

GSA is committed to taking action to optimize the federal real estate footprint, and our coworking pilot is one initiative we launched to do so. GSA continues to create additional tools and evaluation methodologies to measure the pilot's effectiveness as this program matures towards implementation, and we appreciate GAO's review and recommendations.

The launch of an automated reservation system is expected this fall and will enhance GSA's usage data. However, as noted in GAO's report, this system may not capture customers who do not check in. Therefore, additional personnel or technology may be needed to ensure that everyone working at the coworking site is accounted for.

U.S. General Services Administration
1800 F Street NW
Washington, DC 20405
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**Appendix II: Comments from the U.S. General
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GAO is correct in its evaluation that GSA targeted locations for the pilot program that had little to no startup costs and could utilize existing personnel to operate the site. GSA also used a variety of site evaluation criteria for assessing the pilot locations including building characteristics, site components, and expiring leases in close proximity to each site. GSA will continue to refine this criteria and has begun to assess the ability to scale in four key areas: Customer Acquisition, Site Expansion, Regional Expansion, and Market Expansion.

In addition, GSA developed a cost estimator tool that can now be utilized by the organization to compare customer agencies' current rent and the anticipated cost savings if coworking was used in lieu of a traditional lease. As the program transitions from the pilot phase GSA anticipates future cost avoidance, which will also be tracked and reported.

If you have any questions or concerns, please contact me or Kusai Merchant, Acting Associate Administrator, Office of Congressional and Intergovernmental Affairs, at (202) 501-0563.

Sincerely,


Robin Carnahan
Administrator

Enclosure: GSA Technical Comments on Draft Report

cc: Mr. David Marroni, Director, Physical Infrastructure Issues, GAO

Appendix III: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

David Marroni, (202) 512-2834 or MarroniD@gao.gov

Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to the contacts named above, the following individuals made key contributions to this report: Crystal Huggins (Assistant Director); Ethan Levy (Analyst in Charge); Laura Bonomini; Mary Crenshaw; Emily Crofford; Peter Del Toro; Clifton Douglas; Jennifer Franks; Gina Hoover; Jeffrey Knott; Terence Lam; Dawn Locke; Alicia Loucks; Sally Moino; Josh Ormond; John Sawyer; River Stone; and Alicia Wilson.

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Sarah Kaczmarek, Acting Managing Director, KaczmarekS@gao.gov, (202) 512-4800, U.S. Government Accountability Office, 441 G Street NW, Room 7149 Washington, DC 20548

Strategic Planning and External Liaison

Stephen J. Sanford, Managing Director, spel@gao.gov, (202) 512-4707
U.S. Government Accountability Office, 441 G Street NW, Room 7814,
Washington, DC 20548



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