

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-25-107418](#), a report to congressional committees

## Why GAO Did This Study

ARPA-H is a research agency within the Department of Health and Human Services. Congress established ARPA-H to advance biomedical and health research that may not be easily accomplished through traditional research activities for cancer prevention and treatment and other chronic health challenges. The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023, permits hiring up to 210 personnel, unless Congress is notified that additional hires are needed.

The act includes a provision for GAO to report on ARPA-H's workforce and use of its hiring authorities. This report examines (1) whether ARPA-H has a workforce planning process to guide its recruiting and hiring efforts for its scientific workforce and (2) challenges ARPA-H has faced in recruiting and hiring its scientific workforce and the extent to which the agency has applied selected leading human capital practices to address the challenges.

GAO analyzed ARPA-H workforce data for the period April 1, 2022, through July 1, 2024. GAO also analyzed data on ARPA-H's use of its hiring authorities and pay flexibilities and interviewed officials about ARPA-H's recruiting and hiring efforts. GAO assessed ARPA-H's efforts against leading human capital practices.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is making three recommendations, including that ARPA-H develop a workforce planning process and assess scientific personnel data to help ensure its recruitment efforts are effective. ARPA-H concurred with our recommendations.

View [GAO-25-107418](#). For more information, contact Candice N. Wright at (202) 512-6888 or [wrightc@gao.gov](mailto:wrightc@gao.gov).

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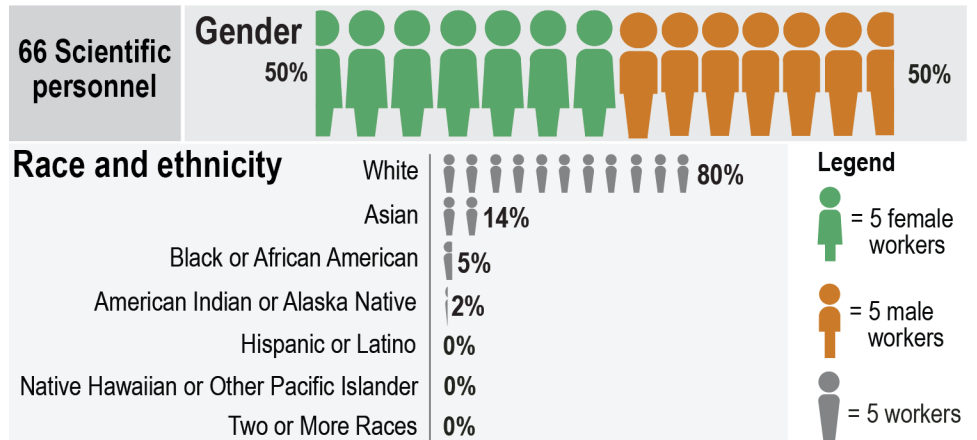
## BIOMEDICAL RESEARCH

### Strategic Workforce Planning Needed to Address Recruitment and Hiring Challenges at ARPA-H

## What GAO Found

Since it was established in 2022, the Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health (ARPA-H) has hired 66 scientific personnel—more than half of its total workforce of 118. The most common scientific positions include program managers, who are generally term-limited to three years, have experience in biomedical sciences and engineering, and direct ARPA-H's funded projects. GAO found that ARPA-H does not have a workforce planning process to guide its recruitment and hiring efforts. GAO's prior work found that a strategic workforce planning process is important for agencies with science and technology missions, which must compete for talent with the private sector, and keep pace with scientific advancements. A workforce planning process would help ensure the agency avoids skills gaps.

ARPA-H Scientific Workforce Demographic Composition, as of July 1, 2024



Source: GAO analysis of Advanced Research Projects Agency for Health (ARPA-H) data; GAO (icons). | GAO-25-107418

Note: Due to rounding, the total percentages may not add to 100 percent.

The Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2023, states that ARPA-H shall make efforts to recruit a diverse workforce. ARPA-H officials told GAO that the agency is experiencing challenges recruiting and hiring diverse candidates with highly specialized skills for its scientific workforce because of a small talent pool. The agency has taken steps such as visiting Historically Black Colleges and Universities and Hispanic-serving institutions, but it has not assessed the effectiveness of its recruiting efforts for its scientific workforce. GAO's leading practices on human capital management state that to help achieve an agency's desired diversity outcomes it is critical to collect data and track progress toward outcomes. Understanding whether the recruitment activities are effective would better position ARPA-H to make additional progress in meeting its workforce goals. ARPA-H officials also cited competing with the higher salaries offered by the private sector as a challenge. While the agency has used multiple hiring authorities to hire scientific personnel, it has not assessed data on the pay incentives it uses. Doing so would be a critical first step in helping the agency use its flexibilities more strategically and effectively to meet its hiring needs.