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House of Representatives
COMMITTEE ON SCIENCE, SPACE, AND TECHNOLOGY
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May 1, 2026

The Honorable Orice Williams Brown
Acting Comptroller General
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Ms. Brown,

The National Science Foundation is one of the flagship U.S. research agencies for STEM education and workforce activities. Through its awards and programs, NSF supports many types of people in the science enterprise: K-12 students, undergraduate students, graduate students, postdoctoral researchers, early career researchers (such as assistant professors), teachers, entrepreneurs, the skilled technical workforce, and more.

There is a spectrum of intended outcomes for these awards and programs. On one end, awards fund individuals or teams focused on discovery-based research without a distinct outcome or industrial need in mind; on the other end, awards and programs fund individuals, cohorts, or institutions with the specific intention of building a domestic workforce or enhancing talent to more effectively develop and/or use a specific emerging technology, industrial application, or other societal outcome. The full spectrum of awards supports domestic STEM talent development in myriad other ways. NSF's progress on building capacity across this spectrum is integral to the United States' technological competitiveness and ability to meet future research challenges.

Congress repeatedly raises questions on the adequacy of the U.S. science and engineering workforce. As the Congressional Research Service has reported, there is not a consensus on whether a shortage of scientists and engineers exists in the United States, what the nature of such a shortage might be (e.g., too few people with S&E degrees, mismatched skills and needs), and whether the federal government should undertake policy interventions to address such a putative

shortage or to allow market forces to work in this labor market.[1] GAO has, however, previously reported that in certain industries, including quantum computing, vaccine and medical manufacturing, and water and wastewater treatment, it can be challenging to recruit skilled technical workers.[2][3]

We are interested in learning more about how NSF is gathering information on the STEM workforce needs of the country. We request that GAO study the following:

1. What is known about the extent to which there are current or future U.S. STEM workforce shortages and what information sources are available to track U.S. STEM workforce trends?

2. What resources or tools does NSF use to collect data across the landscape of the U.S. STEM workforce and to what extent are there information gaps in NSF's data?

3. To what extent does NSF collaborate with federal and state agencies, academic institutions, nonprofits, or private entities to better understand current and future domestic workforce needs in emerging technology fields?

4. To what extent is NSF incorporating information on current and future U.S. STEM workforce needs in creating new STEM education and workforce programs and informing decision-making in existing STEM education and workforce programs?

Thank you for your attention to this request. If you have any questions, please contact Albert Hinman (albert.hinman@mail.house.gov).

Sincerely,

Zoe Lofgren
Ranking Member
House Committee on Science, Space, and Technology

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[1] Congressional Research Service, *The U.S. Science and Engineering Workforce: Recent, Current, and Projected Employment, Wages, and Unemployment*, R43061 (Nov. 2, 2017).

[2] See GAO, *Brain-Computer Interfaces, Applications, Challenges, and Policy Options,* GAO-25-106952 (Washington, D .C.: Dec. 17, 2024); GAO, *Quantum Computing and Communications: Status and Prospects*, GAO-22-104422 (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 19, 2021); GAO, *Operation Warp Speed: Accelerated COVID-19 Vaccine Development Status and Efforts to Address Manufacturing Challenges* GAO-21-319 (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 11, 2021); and GAO, *Water and Wastewater Workforce: Recruiting Approaches Helped Industry Hire Operators, but Additional EPA Guidance Could Help Identify Future Needs*, GAO-18-102 (Washington, D.C.: Jan. 26, 2018).

[3] See GAO, *National Institute of Standards and Technology: Improved Workforce Planning Needed to Address Recruitment and Retention Challenges*, GAO-23-105521 (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 28, 2023) and GAO, *Science and Technology: Strengthening and Sustaining the Federal Science and Technology Workforce*, GAO-21-461T (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 17, 2021)