GAO-26-109215

Coast Guard: Actions Needed to Help Ensure Effective Use of Billions in Funding for Modernization Efforts

June 30, 2026

Overview

The U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) released GAO-26-109215, *Coast Guard: Actions Needed to Help Ensure Effective Use of Billions in Funding for Modernization Efforts*, on June 30, 2026. The report is a testimony delivered by Triana McNeil, Director of Homeland Security and Justice, before the House Transportation and Infrastructure Subcommittee on Coast Guard and Maritime Transportation. It assesses Force Design 2028, the effort DHS announced in May 2025 to modernize the Coast Guard across four areas: organization, people, technology, and contracting and acquisition.

The Coast Guard considers Force Design its largest transformation since World War II, and it is funded accordingly: about **$13.5B** for fiscal year 2026, plus nearly **$25B** for fiscal year 2025 under Public Law 119-21, the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, the largest single funding commitment in service history, available until September 30, 2029. GAO's central finding is that the service has not established the goals, measures, or evaluation mechanisms needed to show whether that money is working.

Force Design 2028 Reform Framework

Announced in **May 2025**, Force Design organizes the Coast Guard's transformation around four areas of emphasis:

- **Organization** - restructuring command relationships and delegating decision authority to the appropriate level to maximize mission impact.
- **People** - increasing the workforce by 15,000 uniformed service members and reengineering training systems.
- **Technology** - delivering modern technology to equip the workforce, including incorporating AI into daily operations.
- **Contracting and acquisition** - creating program executive offices and streamlining pre-acquisition planning to award contracts faster.

Workforce Planning and Evaluation Gaps

GAO found that the human capital foundation beneath Force Design does not yet support the scale of change the effort assumes:

- As of March 2026, the service had up-to-date workforce requirements determinations for about 26 percent of its workforce, up from 6 percent in 2020.
- Officials call the 15,000-member growth goal a minimum based partly on incoming assets, but the analytic basis for the figure is not clear.
- A 2020 recommendation to set time frames and milestones for the Workforce Requirements Plan remains unresolved, as do four of five 2022 recommendations on marine inspector workforce planning.
- No performance plan exists to assess Force Design results, and personnel have no defined channel to give feedback on the reforms.

Across four prior reform efforts reviewed since 2019, GAO repeatedly found the same gap: the Coast Guard did not fully assess its workforce needs.

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What Does This Mean for Government?

The Coast Guard will face new expectations to:

- Align Force Design's foundational documents with the service's 11 statutory missions and attach measurable targets.
- Develop an evaluation plan with mechanisms for each of the four areas of reform emphasis.
- Extend workforce requirements determinations beyond the roughly one-quarter of the workforce now covered.
- Show Congress how billions in obligations are producing measurable outcomes.

The report marks a shift in oversight posture: funding is no longer the constraint on Coast Guard modernization.

Expect appropriators to tie continued Force Design funding to documented goals, measures, and evaluation mechanisms.

What Does This Mean for Industry?

For human capital and workforce technology vendors, this report is rare: a congressional initiative naming the precise capability gaps an agency must close, with the funding already appropriated.

Key takeaways for vendors:

- **Workforce requirements determination is the binding constraint.** About three-quarters of the workforce lacks current determinations, a position management and workforce analytics problem before it is a recruiting one.
- **The 15,000-member growth target needs a defensible analytic basis.** Labor market data, skills taxonomies, and talent supply modeling speak directly to GAO's "using data and evidence" finding.
- **The evaluation plan recommendation is a measurement requirement.** The Service Culture Index already draws on five separate surveys; integrating people data into outcome metrics is a named, open need.
- **Training systems are in scope, and the service already buys this work.** The execution plan commits to reengineering training systems, and the Coast Guard contracted three full-time staff to build the Service Culture Index.

In short, GAO has documented the requirement, Congress has provided the funding, and two recommendations remain open. Vendors who can connect workforce data to measurable mission outcomes are positioned against a need the service has already acknowledged.

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