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Federal Workforce Statistics Sources: OPM and OMB

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Summary

This report describes online tools, reports, and data compilations created by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) that contain statistics about federal employees and the federal workforce.

The report also describes key characteristics of each resource and briefly discusses selected methodological differences, with the intention of facilitating the selection of appropriate data for specific purposes. This report is not intended to be a definitive list of all information on the federal workforce. It describes significant and recurring products that contain data often requested by Members of Congress or congressional staff.

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Introduction

According to the Office of Personnel Management (OPM), the federal workforce is composed of an estimated 2.1 million civilian workers.¹ Several federal agencies collect, compile, and publish statistics about this workforce. Sources may vary in their totals due to differences in the methods used to compile these statistics.

For example, some sources rely on “head counts” of employees (OPM), some on total hours worked (such as the Office of Management and Budget [OMB]), some on surveys of employing agencies, and others on self-identification by workers surveyed in their homes.

In addition, federal civilian employee databases may exclude particular departments, agencies, or branches of government. Some may also account for temporary or seasonal employees (such as those employed by the U.S. Census) depending on the time of year the statistics are generated.

This report describes OMB and OPM sources and identifies key differences in methodologies, including data collection. Understanding these sources and their differences will facilitate selecting appropriate data for specific purposes.

Comparing Methodologies: On-Board Personnel Versus Full-Time Equivalents²

One example of a key methodological distinction is the difference between *full-time equivalents* (FTEs) and on-board personnel. The following two examples illustrate how the FTE and on-board methods can be used to derive different federal workforce totals.

Method 1: Full-Time Equivalent Employment (OMB)

The term *full-time equivalent employment* (FTE) is used to quantify employment as a function of hours worked rather than by the number of individual employees. One FTE is also known as one work year. The number of FTEs in an agency is calculated by determining the total number of regular straight time hours (i.e., not including overtime or holiday hours) worked by employees and dividing that figure by the number of compensable hours applicable to each fiscal year. One work year, or one FTE, is equivalent to 2,080 hours³ of work.

Table 1 offers examples in which there is a difference between the actual number of employees and the number of FTEs working the same number of total hours. It also illustrates how measuring employment by hours can substantially change the perception of the number of employees it takes to accomplish the work.

¹ U.S. Office of Personnel Management (OPM), March 2023, available at <http://www.fedscope.opm.gov/>. This estimate does not include the agencies and departments listed at http://www.fedscope.opm.gov/datadefn/aehri_sdm.asp#cpdf3.

² This section was created with assistance from Barbara Schwemle, Analyst in American National Government.

³ The figure of 2,080 hours in the work year is derived as follows: 8 hours per day multiplied by 10 days (in a 2-week pay period) equals 80 hours; 80 hours multiplied by 26 pay periods (in a year) equals 2,080 work hours.

Table 1. Measuring Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) Employment

Number of Actual Employees	Work Schedule	Normal Hours Worked Per Week	Total Number of Weeks	Total Compensable Hours	FTEs ^a
1	Full-time	40	52	2,080	1
2	Part-time	20	52	2,080	1
5	Full-time	40	52	10,400	5
10	Part-time	20	52	10,400	5
17	Part-time	20	52	17,680	8.5
163	Part-time	20	52	168,520	81.5

Source: Congressional Research Service (CRS) calculations based on guidelines located in Section 85 of OMB Circular No. A-11.

a. FTE equals the total number of compensable hours worked divided by 2,080 hours.

FTE employment numbers are used by OMB to manage employment in departments and agencies. The requirements for reporting FTE employment in the President’s Budget are prescribed in Section 85 of OMB Circular No. A-11 on “Estimating Employment Levels and the Employment Summary (Schedule Q).”⁴

FTE data are published annually in OMB’s *Budget of the United States Government* under the individual department and agency accounts in the *Appendix* as well as in the *Analytical Perspectives* and *Historical Tables* volumes.⁵

Method 2: On-Board Employment (OPM)

OPM defines *on-board employment* as the number of employees in pay status at the end of the quarter. Data for on-board employment provide individual employee *head counts* in most departments and agencies as of a particular date, including full-time, part-time, and seasonal employees. For example, OPM’s *Employment and Trends* report⁶ and OPM’s FedScope database⁷ contain on-board employment head counts.

⁴ U.S. Executive Office of the President (EOP), Office of Management and Budget (OMB), *Preparation, Submission, and Execution of the Budget* (Washington: GPO, August 2023), available at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/a11.pdf>. See Section 85.5 (c) for a detailed explanation of how FTEs are calculated.

⁵ For example, see EOP, OMB, *Budget of the United States Government, Analytical Perspectives Fiscal Year 2022* (Washington: GPO, 2021), pp. 43-44, and EOP, OMB, *Budget of the United States Government, Historical Tables Fiscal Year 2022* (Washington, GPO, 2021), Section 16 - Executive Branch Civilian Full-Time Equivalent Employment (available in Excel format only).

⁶ OPM, *Federal Civilian Workforce Statistics, Employment and Trends* (Washington: OPM). The January 2009 to September 2013 reports are available at <http://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/data-analysis-documentation/federal-employment-reports/#url=Employment-Trends>.

⁷ OPM, FedScope database, at <http://www.fedscope.opm.gov/>. The database includes all executive branch agencies except the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System, the Central Intelligence Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency, foreign service personnel at the State Department, the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence, the Office of the Vice President, the Postal Regulatory Commission, the Tennessee Valley Authority, the White House Office, and the U.S. Postal Service. It does not include the Foreign Service. For more information, see EHRI-SDM’s “Coverage” section at http://www.fedscope.opm.gov/datadefn/ae_hri_sdm.asp.

When calculating on-board personnel, each full-time, part-time, and seasonal worker is counted separately. When calculating FTEs, the collective hours those personnel work is counted. For example, an agency reporting 10 FTEs could conceivably report 20 *on-board* employees, depending on employees' work schedules.

In addition, depending on the specific date the employees are counted, an *on-board* headcount may result in wider variances in employment numbers than a count of FTEs. For example, the Census Bureau planned to hire 500,000 Census enumerators leading up to the 2020 Census,⁸ many of whom were likely to be part-time employees. A count of federal *on-board employees* calculated during the employment of these Census enumerators will likely result in a substantially higher number than a count of federal FTEs during the same time period. The reason being that an FTE count examines hours worked rather than individual employee numbers.

Office of Personnel Management

OPM is an independent agency that functions as the central human resources department of the executive branch.⁹ In fulfilling its mission, OPM collects, maintains, and publishes data on a large portion of the federal civilian workforce.

In FY2010, OPM established the Enterprise Human Resources Integration-Statistical Data Mart (EHRI-SDM). This automated system provides access to personnel data for 96% of nonpostal federal civilian executive branch employees. The database does have exclusions; for example, not all executive branch agencies submit their personnel data to OPM. These exclusions include some national security and intelligence agencies, much of the legislative and judicial branches, and the Postal Service. Even with these exclusions, the EHRI-SDM is widely regarded as the most comprehensive resource available on the size and scope of the federal workforce.

More than 100 data elements are collected for each federal employee within the EHRI-SDM. These data are aggregated by OPM and published in the resources described below.

FedScope

FedScope is the OPM website that provides public access to the EHRI-SDM, covering the most recent five years of employment, accession, and separation data provided by over 500 federal agencies and their components.¹⁰ It is available at <http://www.fedscope.opm.gov/>.

FedScope data are presented in five subject categories, called “cubes,” each covering a different subject and time span.¹¹ The following are descriptions of the data cubes available through FedScope:

- **Employment.** This set of cubes contains the total number of federal employees of the participating agencies, including employee age, gender, length of service, occupation, occupation category, pay grade, salary level, type of appointment, work schedule, agency, and location. Data are published quarterly (March, June,

⁸ U.S. Census Bureau, “2020 Census Nationwide Recruitment Campaign Gets Underway,” October 22, 2019, available at <https://www.census.gov/newsroom/press-releases/2019/2020-recruitment-campaign-launch.html>.

⁹ P.L. 95-454, Title II, §201(a), 92 Stat. 1119, October 13, 1978.

¹⁰ For further information, see the “Coverage,” section at http://www.fedscope.opm.gov/datadefn/ae_hri_sdm.asp.

¹¹ For definitions of each variable, see OPM, “FedScope Data Definitions,” February 18, 2014, at <http://www.fedscope.opm.gov/datadefn/DataDefinitions.pdf>.

September, and December) for the most recent ten fiscal years. September data, which align with the end of the fiscal year, are available from 1998 to the present.

- **Accession.** This set of cubes contains the number of people added to the federal civilian workforce each fiscal year. It includes data elements on employees hired from outside the government and those who transferred from one type of federal service category to another.¹² The most recent 19 fiscal years of data are available.
- **Separation.** This set of cubes contains the number of people who leave the federal civilian workforce each fiscal year. It captures data elements on employees who transferred to other agencies, voluntarily resigned, retired, experienced a reduction-in-force (RIF), were terminated, or died while employed. The most recent 19 years of data are available.
- **Employment Trends.** This set of cubes displays the most recent five years of employment cube data together in one interface, facilitating workforce data comparisons and trend recognition.
- **Diversity.** This set of cubes sorts data by an Ethnicity and Race Indicator. Data elements for 14 categories of racial and ethnic groups are available for the most recent eight years. September data, which align with the end of the fiscal year, are available from 2006 to the present.

Table 2 provides some top-level data on total on-board employment available from FedScope.

Table 2. Federal Civilian Employees On-Board Personnel, 2015-2022

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
United States	2,029,293	2,054,135	2,045,458	2,056,092	2,087,269	2,134,575	2,144,744	2,132,723
U.S. Territories	12,311	12,046	12,276	14,386	14,246	14,896	15,288	16,047
Foreign Countries	29,168	29,938	29,085	29,360	30,027	30,200	29,509	29,511
Unspecified Areas	944	919	928	964	1,270	1,435	1,470	2,015
Total	2,071,716	2,097,038	2,087,747	2,100,802	2,132,812	2,181,106	2,191,011	2,180,296

Source: Office of Personnel Management (OPM), FedScope, <http://www.fedscope.opm.gov>.

Notes: Each total is an “on-board” count for September of the year noted. Current coverage does not include the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve, Central Intelligence Agency, Defense Intelligence Agency, foreign service personnel at the State Department, National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency, National Security Agency, Office of the Director of National Intelligence, Office of the Vice President, Postal Regulatory Commission, Tennessee Valley Authority, U.S. Postal Service, White House Office, foreign nationals overseas, Public Health Service’s Commissioned Officer Corps, non-appropriated fund employees, selected legislative branch agencies, the judicial branch, or active duty military.

Employment and Trends

Employment and Trends is an occasional publication from OPM based on on-board employee data. It provides data on executive departments and independent agencies, including the Department of Defense (DOD) civilian employees, Executive Office of the President, legislative branch, and judicial branch. It presents selected data in detailed statistical tables and includes information by government branch, agency, and location. Introductory material in *Employment and Trends* explains the data presented, time lags in data releases, and caveats to consider when

¹² The three service categories are competitive service, excepted service, and Senior Executive Service.

calculating workforce totals. The most recently released version of this resource is available at <http://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/data-analysis-documentation/federal-employment-reports/#url=Employment-Trends>.

Common Characteristics of Government

Common Characteristics of Government is a publication that includes a brief outline of OPM's federal employee databases and includes frequently requested data. The latest edition (FY2017) is available at <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/data-analysis-documentation/federal-employment-reports/common-characteristics-of-the-government/ccog2017.pdf>.

Sizing Up the Executive Branch of the Federal Workforce

Sizing Up the Executive Branch of the Federal Workforce is an OPM report that provides access to frequently requested data related to the executive branch. This report includes some information related to the size of the executive branch by month and year, types of employment, and other frequently requested data. The most recent report (FY2017) is available at <https://www.opm.gov/policy-data-oversight/data-analysis-documentation/federal-employment-reports/reports-publications/sizing-up-the-executive-branch-2016.pdf>.

Office of Management and Budget

OMB is the largest component of the Executive Office of the President. OMB reports directly to the President, and it assists executive departments and agencies in implementing priorities and commitments of the President.¹³ OMB produces the *Budget of the United States*, which includes federal employee statistics created using the FTE counting method.

Budget of the United States

The Budget of the United States, sometimes referred to as the President's Budget, is a four-volume set of documents that includes detailed financial information on individual programs and appropriations accounts. Three volumes of the budget include information on direct civilian FTEs.¹⁴ Tables in the President's Budget typically include actual FTE levels for prior fiscal years and estimates for the two most current fiscal years. The U.S. Government Publishing Office website posts budget volumes dating back to FY1996 at <https://www.govinfo.gov/app/collection/BUDGET/>.

Table 3 illustrates an example of some commonly requested federal employment data found within the President's Budget.

¹³ More information on OMB's mission and structure can be found at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/>.

¹⁴ EOP, OMB, *Budget of the United States Government, Analytical Perspectives Fiscal Year 2023* (Washington: GPO, 2022), pp. 81 and 83; U.S. Executive Office of the President, Office of Management and Budget, *Budget of the United States Government, Historical Tables Fiscal Year 2023* (Washington, GPO, 2022), Section 16 – Executive Branch Civilian Full-Time Equivalent Employment (available in Excel format only); and EOP, OMB, *Budget of the United States Government Appendix Fiscal Year 2023* (Washington: GPO, 2022), pages on which “Employment Summary” table appears (i.e., Capitol Police on p. 14, Office of Congressional Workplace Rights on p. 16, Congressional Budget Office on p. 17).

Table 3. Total Federal Employment
(as measured by full-time equivalents)

Description	2022 Actual	2023 Estimate	2024 Estimate	Change: 2023 to 2024	
				FTE	Percentage
Executive Branch Civilian					
All Agencies, Excluding Postal Service	2,185,751	2,274,192	2,355,917	81,725	3.5%
Postal Service ^a	667,363	563,470	554,707	-8,763	-1.6%
Subtotal, Executive Branch Civilian	2,853,114	2,837,662	2,910,624	72,962	2.5%
Executive Branch Uniformed Military					
Department of Defense ^b	1,383,899	1,344,841	1,343,592	-1,249	-0.1%
Department of Homeland Security (USCG)	41,310	43,036	44,810	1,774	4.0%
Commissioned Corps (DOC, EPA, HHS)	6,239	6,236	6,351	115	1.8%
Subtotal, Uniformed Military	1,431,448	1,394,113	1,394,753	640	Non-zero less than 0.1%
Total, Executive Branch	4,284,562	4,231,775	4,305,377	73,602	1.7%
Legislative Branch^c	31,662	35,257	35,718	461	1.3%
Judicial Branch	32,805	33,376	33,783	407	1.2%
TOTAL	4,349,029	4,300,408	4,374,878	74,470	1.7%

Source: President's FY2024 Budget, *Analytical Perspectives*, Table 13-3, p. 145, <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/BUDGET-2024-PER/pdf/BUDGET-2024-PER.pdf>.

- Includes the Postal Rate Commission.
- Includes activated Guard and Reserve members on active duty. Does not include full-time support (Active Guard & Reserve (AGRSs)) paid from Reserve Component appropriations.
- FTE data not available for the Senate (positions filled were used for actual year and extended at same level).

The following volumes of the President's Budget include information on federal employees. The current volumes can be accessed at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/budget/>.¹⁵

Analytical Perspectives

The *Analytical Perspectives* volume typically includes information on the federal workforce, sometimes including information on occupations, trends, education level, age distribution, and other factors. The most current *Analytical Perspectives* volume of the President's Budget is available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/analytical-perspectives/>.

Appendix

The *Appendix* volume typically includes an estimate of individual agency FTEs based on the President's proposal along with an estimate and actual FTE count for the prior two years. The most recent *Appendix* volume of the President's Budget is available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/appendix>.

¹⁵ The U.S. Government Publishing Office website posts complete volumes of the *Budget of the United States Government* back to FY1996. They can be accessed at <https://www.govinfo.gov/app/collection/BUDGET/>.

Historical Tables

The *Historical Tables* volume of the President’s Budget includes historical data on topics such as budget, receipts, outlays, and deficits. This volume also typically includes historical employment counts. The most recent *Historical Tables* volume of the President’s Budget was released as multiple Excel files, and they are available at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/historical-tables>.

Congressional Budget Justifications

Congressional Budget Justifications are submitted to Congress annually by individual federal agencies and include each agency’s request for the number of FTEs to fund that year. In 2021, Congress passed legislation that, for the first time, required agencies to make their congressional budget justifications available to all Members of Congress and the public in a centralized location. The Congressional Budget Justification Transparency Act of 2021, P.L. 117-40, included requirements that annual agency budget justification materials be publicly posted on USASpending.gov, subject to OMB-developed data standards, and provided to Congress within two weeks. Access to over 100 department and agency budget justification materials are now available on USASpending.gov, “Agency Profiles,” at <https://www.usaspending.gov/agency>.

Congressional Budget Justifications can be another source for data on federal employment FTEs. Budget justifications often include data similar to what is found in the President’s Budget (one year of actual data followed by two years of estimates), but may also include FTE data at a more granular level such as a specific office within an agency.

Consideration of Sources

The resources described in this report contain data often requested by Members or congressional staff. The sources covered differ in methodology, such as how employees are counted (FTEs versus on-board employees), which agencies are included or excluded from counts, and the frequency of data collection. Users should be aware of these differences when using federal workforce statistics from these sources.

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