

U.S. Space Academy Proposal: Considerations for Congress

September 21, 2026

On August 28, 2026, President Trump signed [Executive Order \(EO\) 14423 establishing a Presidential Commission on the United States Space Academy](#), to be chaired by the Administrator of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA). The EO directs the commission to submit a report to the President proposing key details for the establishment of a U.S. Space Academy (USSA) within 120 days (i.e., by December 26, 2026).

The stated purpose of the EO includes preparing “the next generation of astronauts, scientists, engineers, operators, entrepreneurs, civil servants, and warfighters.” The EO directs the commission to develop recommendations for the academy’s governance framework, curriculum, and candidate eligibility and service obligations, as well as processes for site location and coordination with existing federal programs. The commission is to report on administrative and legislative actions needed to establish an academy and an implementation strategy to achieve these actions. “Among the frameworks considered,” the commission is to evaluate establishing the academy within NASA.

Existing Federal Service Academies

In [his remarks on signing the EO](#), President Trump compared the USSA concept to existing [military service academies](#). In considering a proposal for a new academy, Congress may draw lessons from the creation of existing academies. There are currently five federal service academies; the

- U.S. Military Academy (USMA), Department of the Army;
- U.S. Naval Academy (USNA), Department of the Navy;
- U.S. Air Force Academy (USFA), Department of the Air Force;
- U.S. Coast Guard Academy (USCGA), Department of Homeland Security; and
- U.S. Merchant Marine Academy (USMMA), Department of Transportation.

The three military service academies and the USCGA require a minimum commissioned service obligation in the Armed Forces. USMMA graduates [are required](#) to accept a reserve officer commission, obtain and maintain merchant mariner licensure, and serve a minimum amount of time as an officer or a civilian employee in the maritime industry. USAFA commissions officers into either the Air Force or the

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Space Force. In 2026, USAFA commissioned 93 officers into the Space Force out of a total of 902 graduates.

USAFA is the most recently established federal service academy. Shortly after the creation of the U.S. Air Force by the National Security Act of 1947 (P. L. 80-253), some Members of Congress began introducing proposals to establish an air academy. Entities within the executive branch commissioned several review boards to examine questions of curriculum, location, governance, and coordination with existing officer commissioning programs. These boards considered questions such as whether a federally operated academy was the most appropriate venue to educate air force officers, what factors should be considered for physical site selection (e.g., security, community receptiveness), and potential costs. These reviews and legislative debate proceeded for nearly seven years until on April 1, 1954, President Eisenhower signed the Air Force Academy Act (P.L. 83-325) into law. Though several other education models were contemplated, the enacted legislation largely mirrored the Army's existing authorities for USMA. The Air Force Academy Act authorized appropriations of \$126 million (in 1954 dollars), which would be about \$1.87 billion in 2026 dollars.

Space Workforce Needs

EO 14423 asks the commission to review “service obligations for [USSA] graduates, including service in the Armed Forces and civilian Federal service and the conditions under which such obligations should be fulfilled.” It may be helpful to assess the workforce needs of the U.S. Space Force and NASA, which employ most of the federal government's space workforce.

Space Force Personnel

The Space Force (established in 2019) is the smallest of the Armed Forces, with about 15,400 uniformed and civilian personnel (called *Guardians*) in FY2025, including about 4,700 active duty officers. The Space Force primarily develops a pipeline of officers through USAFA and the Air Force's Reserve Officer Training Course and has initially grown the uniformed workforce through interservice transfers. Guardians serve primarily in five professional disciplines: space operations, space intelligence, cyberspace operations, engineering, and acquisition.

The Space Force's long-term workforce needs are evolving with the growth of the service and the implementation of the Space Force Personnel Management Act (P.L. 118-31). According to a 2026 Government Accountability Office (GAO) report, “the Space Force has not consistently and accurately determined its personnel requirements to meet its mission needs,” nor has it accurately tracked the number of contracted personnel or the nature of their work.

NASA Workforce

A 2024 National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine report asserted that over two-thirds of the employees in NASA's approximately 17,600-person civil servant workforce were in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) occupations. As of July 2026, NASA's workforce had decreased to about 14,800 civil servants, its smallest workforce since 1960.

NASA's advisory groups have recommended that the agency improve its long-term workforce planning. The NASA Office of Inspector General (OIG), in its 2025 report on NASA's top management and performance challenges, asserted that “NASA's ambitious multi-year exploration, science, and aeronautics missions require the Agency to focus on its workforce needs and staff appropriately. However, the OIG, Government Accountability Office, and National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine ... have all reported on the Agency's lack of a workforce planning process.”

Considerations

Congress may consider the commission's proposal, including the following questions:

- What are the broader, U.S. space workforce needs, including for commercial and contracted support? How do those needs vary across educational backgrounds or level of experience?
- What are the qualifications needed for the federal space workforce, and how could a U.S. Space Academy's curricula address those needs?
- Which agency should be tasked with leading a U.S. Space Academy? Congress may weigh the workforce needs, organizational structure, and capacity of the Space Force, NASA, or other federal agencies.
- To what extent could existing federal institutions or scholarships and grant programs support space workforce needs? What unique benefits might a U.S. Space Academy provide compared to existing programs?
- What would be the projected costs to establish and maintain a Space Academy relative to other education models?

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