

# Trump administration reports 23,000 fewer federal jobs since September

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump's administration reported having 2.3 million people on federal payrolls in March, little changed from prior months despite the Republican's efforts to shrink the size of government.

The Office of Personnel Management, which functions as the HR department for the federal government, published figures

on Tuesday on hiring and firing across thousands of government offices, with growth in some areas of government largely canceling out cuts elsewhere.

Overall, the number of federal jobs — excluding postal workers and the military — was down about 23,000 from September, the last published report on overall staffing levels.

To be sure, the numbers are only through March and Mr. Trump, who took office in January, has continued efforts to shrink the federal workforce. The administration has signed deals, for example, with at least 75,000 federal workers, agreeing to pay them for several months before they resign. A spokesperson at the Office of

Personnel Management said hundreds of thousands of such workers will drop off federal payrolls in October.

“This data marks the first measurable step toward President Trump's vision of a disciplined, accountable federal workforce and it's only the beginning,” Acting OPM Director Chuck Ezell said in a statement.

Mr. Trump, with help from former adviser Elon Musk, kicked off a sweeping campaign in January to shutter federal offices and cut jobs. Federal worker unions and their allies pushed back in court, with judges ordering agencies in some cases to rescind or pause the firings.

The new figures show a nose-dive in hiring, which dropped by

half in February from January. OPM ordered federal agencies to pause hiring on Inauguration Day, with exceptions for positions related to immigration, national security or public safety. The federal government hired fewer than 5,000 people in January, compared to about 20,000 in December before Mr. Trump returned to the White House. — *Reuters*

OPINION

## Making character references truly count

*I'm the recruitment manager of a medium-sized establishment. We don't require character references, especially when certain job applicants have proven their worth during our intensive interviews. Am I doing it right? — Lost Lamb.*

In the era of AI, psychometric tools, and applicant tracking systems, the humble, age-old character references may appear irrelevant and unwanted. Many times, we ditch character references who give exaggerated recommendations. So, what's the use?

Is that a good reason to ignore them?

Of course not. Don't be too quick to dismiss references. When done right, character references can offer powerful insight into a candidate's true self — something no résumé, chatbot, or even a deep-dive stress interview can capture.

But you're right. Many reference checks are ineffective if you don't exercise critical thinking. Anyway, you can only do it if you're ready to decide between the top two contenders in the shortlist. What's important is to expect that references may not give you an objective answer.

You can only know the truth when you dig deeper, assuming that character references are approachable, friendly, and accommodating.

RIGHT STRATEGIES

If thoughtfully and thoroughly consulted, references can help you answer many questions every hiring manager wrestles with. Here's how to transform character references into effective allies for smart hiring. Note, however, that the following strategies may apply only for candidates vying for key and sensitive managerial posts:

**One, ask the right people.** Job candidates would always give you the names of people who are friendly to them. That's understandable. However, as a hiring manager, your job is to ask for specific details and not just praise from the right people. You can do this by asking for the names of their former direct bosses and not just office colleagues.

One caveat, though. Don't do this when the applicants are still employed, or you'll risk damaging their career in that organization. Better, if you can talk to their past employers. If possible, ask for the names of people who don't always agree with them on certain issues.

**Two, settle for three references.** Other than the candidates' direct boss, talk to their former colleagues who have worked with them in collaborative roles. Talk to objective references who can speak to the candidates' competence, character, and integrity.

Again, be careful with this approach as you don't want to destroy the candidates' careers by talking to many people who can spill the beans unnecessarily.

**Three, know their specific stories.** Don't be tempted to ask — “Would you rehire this person?” This question is vague and subjective. More often, the answer reflects personal bias or internal policies, not the candidate's actual performance. Instead, ask the following behavioral and insightful questions that could yield meaningful insights:

Can you describe a situation when the candidate made a serious mistake? In what way did they handle it? How did they respond to critical, negative feedback? What strengths did they bring to your organization? What challenges did they face?

**Four, read between the lines.** What isn't said is more revealing than what is said out loud. Be cautious if a reference speaks in glowing but vague terms. Imagine hearing this — “he's a great guy, always smiling.” If the reference struggles to give specific examples, that's a red flag.

Likewise, listen and understand for long pauses, hesitation, faint praise, and polite evasions. You have to understand this as people avoid direct criticism out of fear of legal consequences or personal discomfort. Trust your instinct when something is a bit off.

**Five, understand but double-check.** Validate the information against what was stated in the candidate's resume or what came up during the interview. Did the candidate lead a cross-functional project that yielded millions? Did they leave the job voluntarily, or was there a story behind it?

It's not about catching the candidates in a lie, but about gaining clarity. That's where you should be able to reconcile different stories.

**Six, discover the personal bias.** Character references are not neutral. Many of them are supporters. Some are reluctant whistleblowers. They're playing it safe, just enough not to get sued. Recognize that cultural norms may discourage people from speaking negatively, even if it's warranted.

Some references may be overly enthusiastic because of loyalty. Others may refrain from giving a candidate's strengths out of rivalry or resentment.

**NOT A DECIDING FACTOR**

Seeking the character references' opinion is not obsolete. But it's often underutilized. When you ask the right people the right questions, listen carefully to the answers. You'll gain a rare window into how a person shows up when things aren't perfect.

Reference checks should never be the only deciding factor. They're like dessert, not the main course. They may be used only alongside in-depth interviews, work samples, and other related hiring processes.

In a world that thrives on trust, culture, and collaboration, references are your greatest allies, if you know how to handle them well.

Ask questions and receive REY ELBO's insights for free. E-mail [elbonomics@gmail.com](mailto:elbonomics@gmail.com) or DM him on Facebook, LinkedIn, X, or via <https://reyelbo.com>. Anonymity is guaranteed.



# DEI policies find backing in PHL despite US crackdown

By Adrian H. Halili  
Reporter

DIVERSITY, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies are finding acceptance in the Philippines, labor professionals said, despite a highly publicized crackdown against the practice in the US, where the Trump administration has rejected it as unmeritocratic.

“Workers stand to benefit greatly from adopting and promoting workplace DEI,” Federation of Free Workers President Jose G. Matula said via Viber.

According to Mr. Matula, in the Philippine context, more workers could benefit from stronger legal protections for marginalized workers and ensuring equal opportunities regardless of gender,

age, disability, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or background.

“These measures will enhance employment rates, reduce inequality, and foster a more productive, innovative, and humane labor market,” he added.

“What we need now is improved or better implementation of policies,” Maria Ella Calaor-Oplas, an economics professor specializing in human capital development research at De La Salle University, said via chat.

She was referring to laws like the Magna Carta of Women (Republic Act No. 9710) and the Magna Carta for Persons with Disability (RA 7277).

According to JobStreet by SEEK's Hiring, Compensation & Benefits Report 2025, more than 60% of Philippine companies have adopted DEI initia-

tives, the highest in Southeast Asia.

The report also found that Philippine companies are actively investing in DEI, with 62% implementing anti-discrimination and harassment policies, and 59% establishing employee resource groups.

Other efforts include unconscious bias training (with a 54% adoption rate), regular DEI assessments (44%), and mentorship programs for underrepresented groups (46%).

Mr. Matula said that the government should enforce anti-discrimination laws, and pass more legislation enshrining gender equality and inclusive employment.

It should also provide incentives to companies that practice inclusive hiring and promote diverse leadership, he added.

Mr. Matula said labor inspections and occupational safety programs should hold companies to a DEI standard.

He added that government agencies should promote social dialogue with trade unions to ensure fair representation.

Ms. Oplas said that the government should also draft a Magna Carta for senior high school (SHS) graduates entering the labor force.

“This is something not yet taken care of, and seems to be needed now that we are looking at the value of K-to-12. If we want to be inclusive, we need to make room for our SHS Graduates,” she added.

On Wednesday, the Palace said President Ferdinand R. Marcos, Jr. is looking to expand and improve the K-to-12 program, after noting its failure to produce work-ready graduates.

## Power Maintenance Updates

by **MERALCO ADVISORY**

The following are scheduled power interruptions necessary for the regular maintenance and upgrade of our power distribution facilities, to ensure the delivery of safe and reliable electricity to your areas. Rest assured that Meralco is doing everything to quickly restore your electricity according to schedule.

**TUESDAY, JULY 8, 2025**

**QUEZON CITY (TANDANG SORA)**  
BETWEEN 9:00AM AND 2:00PM – PORTION OF CIRCUIT KAYBIGA 422YX  
Portion of Ivory St. from White St. to and including Red, Gold and Yellow Sts. in Apocar Subd.; and portion of White St. in Carmel 5 Subd.

**REASON:** Line reconductoring work and replacement of poles along Ivory St. in Apocar Subd., Bgy. Tandang Sora, Quezon City.

**WEDNESDAY, JULY 9, 2025**

**MANILA (PACO)**  
BETWEEN 12:01AM AND 4:00AM – PORTION OF CIRCUIT PACO 423VY – STA. ANA 43VN  
Portion of Pres. Quirino Ave. from near NSCR - Paco Station to and including Philippine Columbian Association.

**REASON:** Line maintenance work along San Antonio St. near Pres. Quirino Ave. Ext. in Paco, Manila.

**WEDNESDAY TO THURSDAY, JULY 9 – 10, 2025**

**QUEZON CITY (BALARA, BATASAN AND GREATER FAIRVIEW)**  
BETWEEN 11:00PM (WED., 07/09/25) AND 5:00AM (THU., 07/10/25) – PORTION OF CIRCUITS DILIMAN 425VU AND 43VU  
Portion of Commonwealth Ave. from near Samonte St. to BF Homes Road including Villa Beatriz Subd., Don Antonio Heights Subd., Don Enrique Heights Subd., Kasiyahan Subd., Frater Village, Neopolitan 5 Casamilan Subd., A. Bonifacio, Doña Felicidad, Don Primotivo and Kaligtasan Sts.; St. Benedict Parish, Bahay Aruga, KFC Restaurant, Eastwest Bank, Mercury Drug, Metrobank, Burger King, Shopwise Commonwealth, Domino's Pizza, Afri Commonwealth, One Felicity Center, Chevrolet Commonwealth, Chery Auto Commonwealth, Asian Institute of Computer Studies (AICS) Head Office, Jockey Building, ECLARO Philippine Headquarters, Carole & Sons, Ghost Kitchen, Madamba Builders, PLK Philippines Inc., Sodeska Food Corp. and Omerio Printgraphix Inc. in Bgys. Old Balara, Batasan Hills, Holy Spirit and Greater Lagro.

**REASON:** Replacement of poles and line reconductoring along Don Edilberto St. in Don Enrique Heights, Bgy. Holy Spirit, Quezon City.

**FRIDAY, JULY 11, 2025**

**MARIKINA CITY (BARANGKA) AND QUEZON CITY (BALARA)**  
BETWEEN 9:00AM AND 9:30AM AND THEN BETWEEN 2:30PM AND 3:00PM – PORTION OF CIRCUIT MARIKINA 48VG  
Portion of Katipunan Ave. from Hon. B. Soliven Ave. 1 to and including Miriam Collage Grade School, Miriam College Library and Miriam College High School in Bgy. Loyola Heights, Quezon City.  
Portion of Hon. B. Soliven Ave. 1 from Katipunan Ave. to Peru St. in Loyola Grand Villas Phases 3 & 4 including Marymount Compound; Badjao, Bagobo, Gaddang, Ibanag, Ifugao, Ilongot, Kalinga, Mangyan, Maranao, Montesque, Tasadang, Tausug and Yakan Sts. in La Vista Subd.; Columbia St. in Loyola Grand Villas Phases 3 & 4; La Vista Clubhouse and La Vista Basketball Court in Bgys. Loyola Heights and Pansol in Quezon City.  
Portion of Hon. B. Soliven Ave. 2 from Hon. B. Soliven Ave. 1 to and including Guatemala, Argentina, Bahamas, Paraguay, Puerto Rico and Venezuela Sts. in Loyola Grand Villas Phase 2; Columbia St.; and Loyola Grand Villas (LGV) Community Center in Loyola Grand Villas Phase 1, Bgy. Barangka, Marikina City; and portion of Loyola Grand Villas Phase 3 & 4 in Bgy. Pansol, Quezon City.

BETWEEN 9:00AM AND 3:00PM – PORTION OF CIRCUIT MARIKINA 48VG  
Portion of Hon. B. Soliven Ave. 3 from Spain St. in Loyola Grand Villas Phases 3 & 4; to and including Woodridge Subd.; Baretto, Bern, Brazil, Denmark, Finland, Greece, Katipunan Ext., Monaco, Moscow, Norway, Nova Scotia, Rome, Sweden and Switzerland Sts. in Loyola Grand Villas Phases 3 & 4; and Acropolis Loyola Clubhouse in Bgys. Barangka and Tumana in Marikina City; Katipunan and Moscow Sts. in in Loyola Grand Villas Phases 3 & 4, Bgy. Pansol, Quezon City.

**REASON:** Installation of facilities and line reconductoring work along Hon. B. Soliven and Katipunan Aves. in Loyola Grand Villas, Marikina City.

**SATURDAY, JULY 12, 2025**

**BULACAN (BOCAUE)**  
BETWEEN 10:00AM AND 3:00PM – PORTION OF CIRCUIT SAOG 413SAO  
Portion of Pag-asa St. from near E. Eusebio Provincial Road to and including B. Nicolas, P. Lasaro and D. Macam Sts.; and 1<sup>st</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> Aves. in Pag-asa Subd., Bgy. Taal.

**REASON:** Line reconductoring work in Bgy. Taal, Bocaue, Bulacan.

**SATURDAY AND SUNDAY, JULY 12 & 13, 2025**

**LAGUNA (STA. CRUZ)**  
BETWEEN 11:00PM AND 11:59PM (SAT., 07/12/25) AND THEN BETWEEN 8:00AM AND 9:00AM (SUN., 07/13/25) – THE WHOLE OF CIRCUITS STA. CRUZ 322WF, 34WF, AND 35WF  
Bgys. Bagumbayan, Bubukal, Calios, Duhat, Gatid, Labuin, Pagsawitan, Palasan, Patimbao, San Pablo Sur, Sto. Angel Central, Sto. Angel Norte, Sto. Angel Sur and Town Proper.

**REASON:** Maintenance work inside Meralco – Sta. Cruz substation.

**SUNDAY, JULY 13, 2025**

**MANILA (STA. CRUZ, TONDO, SAMPALOC AND QUIAPO)**  
BETWEEN 8:30AM AND 9:00AM AND THEN BETWEEN 3:00PM AND 3:30PM – PORTIONS OF CIRCUITS NORTH PORT 53H AND TUTUBAN 432VT  
Portion of Doroteo Jose St. from Luzon Bridge to near Tomas Mapua St. in Sta. Cruz.  
Portion of Alonzo and Severino Reyes Sts. from Doroteo Jose St. to Recto Ave. in Sta. Cruz.  
Portion of Recto Ave. from Severino Reyes St. to near Rizal Ave. in Sta. Cruz.  
Portion of Antonio Rivera St. from Mayhaligue St. to and including SW Tower in Tondo.  
Portion of Mayhaligue St. from Severino Reyes St. to Masangkay St. including Broadview Towers in Tondo.  
Portion of Quezon Boulevard from Fugoso St. in Sampaloc to near Recto Ave. in Sta. Cruz including Manila City Jail in Quiapo.  
Portion of Quezon Boulevard from Soler St. Ext. to near Paterno St. in Quiapo.

BETWEEN 8:30AM AND 3:30PM – PORTION OF CIRCUIT NORTH PORT 53H  
Portion of Severino Reyes, Alonzo and Kusang Lobo Sts. from Doroteo Jose St. to Mayhaligue St. in Sta. Cruz.  
Portion of Tomas Mapua St. and Rizal Ave. from near Recto Ave. to Mayhaligue St. in Sta. Cruz.  
Portion of Anacleto and Makata Sts. from Lope de Vega St. to Mayhaligue St. in Sta. Cruz.  
Portion of Oroquieta Road from Recto Ave. to Bambang St. in Sta. Cruz.  
Portion of Maria Natividad, Manuel Hizon, Felix Huertas, Sulu and Pedro Guevarra Sts. from Fabella St. to near Alvarez St. in Sta. Cruz.  
Portion of Bambang, Remigio and Mayhaligue Sts. from Rizal Ave. to Pedro Guevarra St. in Sta. Cruz.  
Portion of Fugoso, Fabella and Lope de Vega St. from Alonzo St. to Pedro Guevarra St. in Sta. Cruz.  
Portion of Doroteo Jose St. from Tomas Mapua St. to Oroquieta Road in Sta. Cruz.

**REASON:** Replacement of poles, line reconductoring work and installation of additional lightning protection devices along Oroquieta and Fugoso Sts. in Sta. Cruz, Manila.

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