

Why GAO Did This Study

The federal government has long offered programs that assist veterans with finding employment. In 2013, the Dignified Burial and Other Veterans' Benefits Improvement Act of 2012 was enacted, which required DOL to provide employment workshops to veterans and their spouses at locations other than military facilities through a 2-year pilot that ended in January 2015. The act also included a provision for GAO to report on the training and possible expansion of the pilot.

This report addresses: (1) how DOL implemented the pilot, (2) what state officials reported regarding the benefits and challenges of the pilot, and (3) how the pilot informs decisions about its possible expansion.

GAO reviewed relevant federal laws and regulations; identified leading practices on pilot design from federal agencies, subject matter experts, and GAO's standards for internal control; and interviewed officials from DOL, the Department of Veterans Affairs, state workforce agencies in each of the three pilot states, and veteran service organizations. GAO also obtained information on the pilot from DOL data and a DOL survey of workshop participants.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOL assess and report to Congress the extent to which further delivery of the employment workshop to veterans and their spouses can fill a niche not fully served by existing federal programs. DOL agreed with GAO's recommendation and noted several actions it plans to take to address the recommendation.

View [GAO-15-518](#). For more information, contact Andrew Sherrill at (202) 512-7215 or sherrilla@gao.gov.

VETERANS' EMPLOYMENT

Need for Further Workshops Should Be Considered before Making Decisions on Their Future

What GAO Found

The Department of Labor (DOL) was required by law to provide employment workshops to veterans and their spouses in a pilot program. In response, DOL used the same 3-day employment workshops for the pilot that it provides to servicemembers on military bases as part of the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) in order to implement the pilot within time and resource constraints, according to DOL officials. DOL selected three states for the pilot—Georgia, Washington, and West Virginia—based on a number of factors, including two states with a high veteran unemployment rate, as required by law. DOL instructed each of the states to conduct five workshops—West Virginia held an additional seven and Washington canceled one—and delegated the responsibility for choosing locations and marketing the pilot to state workforce agencies. States held the workshops at locations other than military facilities and employed different marketing approaches to publicize the workshops, including flyers and e-mail. DOL officials said that time and resource constraints, such as implementing the pilot within its existing TAP budget, influenced the department's pilot implementation, including its decision to use the same TAP workshops, conducted over 3 consecutive days, and to offer five workshops per state.

Officials in all three pilot states reported that the workshops benefitted veterans by enhancing their job search capabilities—including resume writing and interviewing—but states had difficulty attracting participants. The workshops generally fell short of DOL's attendance goals: a minimum of 10 participants and a preferred class size of 30-35 participants. A total of 250 participants attended the workshops and fewer than half of the workshops had 10 or more participants. Several state officials noted that it was difficult for veterans to schedule 3 consecutive business days to attend the workshop, and some suggested that shortening the course or offering night or weekend alternatives could have increased attendance.

DOL's design of the pilot limits the ability to inform Congress about the feasibility and advisability of expanding the pilot. DOL's two annual reports to Congress on the pilot provided information on topics such as workshop attendance, participant demographics and satisfaction with the workshop, and noteworthy state practices and challenges. While such information is useful, DOL's pilot design leaves unanswered key questions about the need for the program, the pilot's role amid other federal programs, and the goals and objectives for measuring its progress. For example, sound pilot design practices call for agencies to conduct a needs assessment, which could have helped DOL identify the population best targeted by the pilot, given veterans' varied employment experience and limited federal resources. DOL officials said that they did not have the time and resources to do such an assessment. Additionally, DOL did not assess the extent to which such a program might fill gaps in existing federal employment programs available to veterans, as sound pilot practices suggest. As a result, it remains unclear whether, as DOL officials contend, this pilot unnecessarily duplicates other programs. Moreover, this type of information could assist congressional deliberation about the need for future employment workshops and leverage the federal investment that has already been made in implementing the now-completed pilot program.