

Why GAO Did This Study

Congress authorized CIPP in 2009 to provide greater flexibility in career paths for servicemembers and to enhance retention. CIPP allows servicemembers to take sabbaticals of up to 3 years in exchange for 2 months of obligated service for each month of sabbatical taken. The Navy is the only service to have participants who have completed sabbaticals.

Senate Report 113-211 included a provision for GAO to examine CIPP, and particularly the Navy's experience with it. This report (1) evaluates the extent to which participation in CIPP has reached authorized participation limits and DOD has developed a plan for evaluating whether the program is an effective means to retain servicemembers; and (2) describes the Navy's reported experience with CIPP as a tool for aiding retention by providing career flexibility.

GAO reviewed CIPP legislation and implementation guidance, interviewed DOD and service officials responsible for CIPP, and compared the information obtained against key features of pilot evaluation plans such as clear, measurable objectives and standards for determining pilot-program performance. GAO also reviewed Navy efforts to implement CIPP and, using a GAO-developed questionnaire, collected information from Navy CIPP participants who had completed their sabbaticals.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOD develop and implement a plan to evaluate whether CIPP is enhancing retention. DOD concurred with GAO's recommendation.

View [GAO-16-35](#). For more information, contact Brenda S. Farrell at (202) 512-3604 or farrellb@gao.gov.

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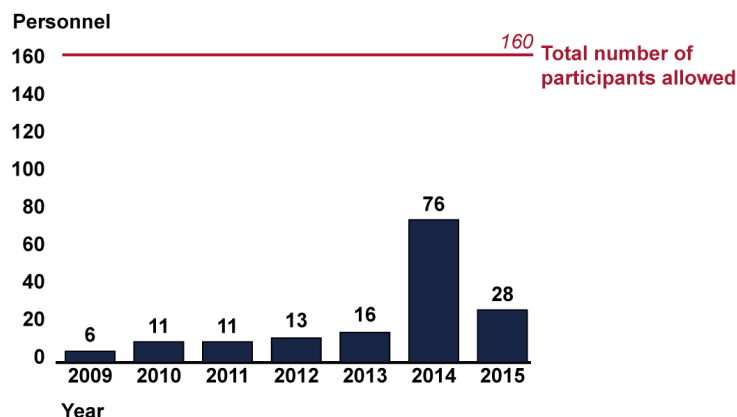
MILITARY PERSONNEL

DOD Should Develop a Plan to Evaluate the Effectiveness of Its Career Intermission Pilot Program

What GAO Found

Participation in the Department of Defense's (DOD) Career Intermission Pilot Program (CIPP)—a pilot program expiring in 2019 that allows servicemembers to take up to a 3-year break in service in exchange for a period of obligated service when they return—has remained below statutorily authorized limits, and officials have identified factors that could be affecting CIPP participation, but DOD has not developed a plan for evaluating whether CIPP is an effective means to retain servicemembers. DOD-wide participation in CIPP has been at less than half the authorized limit of 160 participants—up to 40 participants for each of the four services—per calendar year (see figure below). Service officials stated that factors affecting participation include statutory requirements, such as eligibility criteria, and military culture, among others. CIPP-authorizing legislation and DOD guidance require the services to report on the effectiveness of the pilot, including effect on retention and program costs; however, neither DOD nor the services have developed a plan for evaluating the pilot program. GAO has reported that a pilot program should have a well-developed and documented evaluation plan, including key features such as well-defined, clear, and measurable objectives and standards for determining pilot-program performance. Moreover DOD has proposed expansion of the pilot, and officials stated that CIPP should be made available permanently. However, the basis for these proposals is unclear, and without a well-developed plan for evaluating the pilot, there will be limited assurance that the evaluations conducted will provide the information needed to make decisions about the future of CIPP.

Total Number of Participants Approved to Participate by All Military Services for Calendar Years 2009 through July 2015



Source: GAO analysis of Department of Defense (DOD) data. | GAO-16-35

According to Navy officials, CIPP has provided an option for the Navy to respond to the personal needs of servicemembers, and they believe it has helped to retain servicemembers who otherwise might have left the military. CIPP participants also provided GAO with examples of how the program allowed them to address work-life balance challenges, such as managing deployment schedules and caring for family, that could not be achieved using other options.