



July 2015

VETERANS' EMPLOYMENT

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

Accessible Version

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-15-518](#), a report to congressional committees

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.

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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.

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Abbreviations

AJC	American Job Center
Dignified Burial Act	Dignified Burial and Other Veterans' Benefits Improvement Act of 2012
DOL	Department of Labor
TAP	Transition Assistance Program
VA	Department of Veterans Affairs
VETS	Department of Labor Veterans' Employment and Training Service

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July 16, 2015

Congressional Committees

As the United States continues to draw down its military following an official end to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, hundreds of thousands of military servicemembers are expected to transition to civilian life, some of whom may face challenges finding employment.¹ In 2014, over 7 percent of post-9/11 veterans were unemployed, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.² Through a number of agencies, the federal government provides programs that help ensure the readiness of servicemembers leaving the military and help recently discharged veterans to transition to civilian life. For example, under the Transition Assistance Program (TAP), the Department of Labor (DOL) provides employment workshops at military facilities to help servicemembers prepare for civilian employment. These now-mandatory 3-day workshops teach servicemembers how to search for jobs and provide information on labor market conditions.³

In 2013, the Dignified Burial and Other Veterans' Benefits Improvement Act of 2012 (Dignified Burial Act) was enacted, which required DOL to provide TAP to veterans and their spouses at locations other than military facilities through a 2-year pilot that ended in January 2015.⁴ The act required DOL to conduct the pilot to assess the feasibility and advisability

¹In 2014, we reported that over each of the next 4 years, the Department of Defense estimates that approximately 170,000 to 185,000 active duty servicemembers will separate from the military and about 60,000 National Guard and Reserve members will be demobilized and deactivated from active duty. See GAO, *Transitioning Veterans: Improved Oversight Needed to Enhance Implementation of Transition Assistance Program*, [GAO-14-144](#) (Washington, D.C.: March 5, 2014).

²The unemployment rate for post-9/11 veterans has improved—decreasing from 9 percent in 2013 to 7.2 percent in 2014—but remained above the overall unemployment rate for non-veterans (6 percent), according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

³The VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011 mandated TAP for all transitioning servicemembers, with some exceptions. Pub. L. No. 112-56, § 221, 125 Stat. 711, 715.

⁴Pub. L. No. 112-260, § 301, 126 Stat. 2417, 2424. Although spouses are eligible, we refer to these workshops as “veterans’ employment workshops” for ease of reporting. Similarly, we frequently refer to the participants in the workshops as “veterans,” rather than “veterans and their spouses.”

of providing such a program. The Dignified Burial Act also included a provision for GAO to report on the training provided under the act, including the feasibility and advisability of expanding that training nationally. We examined the following questions:

1. How did DOL implement the veterans' employment workshop pilot?
2. What did state officials report regarding the benefits and challenges of the workshops in the pilot states?
3. How does the pilot inform decisions about its possible expansion?

To address our objectives, we reviewed relevant federal laws and regulations and agency documentation. We also identified sound practices on pilot design from federal agencies, subject matter experts, and GAO's guide that identifies elements of effective internal control, including management's responsibility for defining objectives in specific and measurable terms, communicating necessary information to achieve objectives, and establishing and operating monitoring activities.⁵ In addition, we reviewed our past reports on pilot design, pilot implementation, and high performance organizations to help identify sound design practice criteria. GAO subject matter experts in program design and evaluation assessed the extent to which those criteria were relevant to our review of the veterans' employment workshop pilot by comparing the criteria with the steps of evaluation design listed in our guide on program evaluations.⁶ We interviewed DOL Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) and DOL Chief Evaluation Office officials to identify how the pilot was designed and how it could be evaluated. Because of their expertise and involvement in addressing the needs of veterans, we interviewed officials from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and several veteran service organizations about how the pilot could have been designed and the extent to which DOL collaborated with them in developing and implementing the pilot. We also interviewed DOL and state workforce agency officials from each of the three pilot states: Georgia, Washington, and West Virginia. During our interviews we asked officials about how they implemented the pilot,

⁵GAO, *Auditing and Financial Management, Standards for Internal Control*, [GAO/AIMD-00-21.3.1](#) (Washington D.C.: November 1999).

⁶GAO, *Designing Evaluations: 2012 Revision*, [GAO-12-208G](#) (Washington D.C.: January 2012).

benefits of the employment workshops for pilot participants, and any challenges the states faced. We obtained additional information on the pilot from DOL participant data. Through interviews with knowledgeable agency officials and reviewing agency documentation, we determined the data were sufficiently reliable to describe the populations that took the workshops and were enrolled in DOL's American Job Centers (AJC). DOL collected survey responses from veterans who attended the workshops; however, we determined that we could not present these survey data as representative of pilot participants generally because of the relatively low survey response rate. Nonetheless, through interviews with knowledgeable agency officials and reviewing agency documentation, we determined that some use of survey data was sufficiently reliable for our purposes, such as presenting qualitative response information. Appendix I provides a more detailed discussion of our scope and methodology.

We conducted this performance audit from July 2014 to July 2015 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis from our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Background

DOL and VA Employment and Training Programs Serving Veterans

DOL and VA oversee four employment and training programs targeted to veterans (see table 1). DOL administers its programs through state workforce agencies in each state. DOL oversees these programs through federal officials stationed in each region, including a Director of Veterans' Employment and Training located in each state. DOL's VETS administers three of the employment programs targeted to veterans. VETS also funds its portion of the TAP, which is a joint program with the Department of Defense and VA. VA funds the Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment Program. In December 2012, we examined the extent to which certain federal veterans' employment and training programs vary in terms of the

services they deliver and the veterans who receive them.⁷ We reported that some federal veterans' programs provide similar services (e.g., job placement) but largely serve different populations.

Table 1: Federal Employment and Training Programs Targeted to Veterans

Program and administering agency	Overview	Fiscal year 2014 funding	Number of participants in fiscal year 2014 [Note A]
Jobs for Veterans State Grants (Department of Labor (DOL))	Under this grant program, DOL allocates funds to state workforce agencies in direct proportion to the number of veterans seeking employment in the particular state. The grant supports two types of staff positions in the American Job Center network: Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program - These staff provide employment services to eligible veterans. The law requires that to the greatest extent possible DOL hire qualified veterans to fill these positions. [Note B] Local Veterans' Employment Representatives - These staff reach out to employers to increase employment opportunities for veterans. The law requires that to the greatest extent possible DOL hire qualified veterans or eligible persons to fill these positions. [Note C]	\$175,000,000	332,165
Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (DOL)	Competitive grants to state and local agencies, for-profit/commercial entities, and nonprofit organizations to provide employment and supportive services to homeless veterans.	\$38,109,000	16,133 [Note D]
Transition Assistance Program (DOL) [Note E]	Provides workshops to help transitioning servicemembers prepare for civilian employment. Spouses of transitioning servicemembers are also eligible to take TAP.	\$14,000,000	207,063
Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment Program (Department of Veterans Affairs (VA))	Provides funding for staff located in field offices and subsistence allowances to veterans and pays for tuition, books, and supplies for veterans with service connected disabilities.	\$1,070,930,000	123,383

Source: GAO analysis of DOL and VA annual budget justifications and relevant federal law. | GAO-15-518

Note A: Veterans can be co-enrolled in more than one program and numbers do not represent unduplicated counts.

Note B: 38 U.S.C. § 4103A(b).

Note C: 38 U.S.C. § 4104(c).

Note D: Calculated for program year July 1, 2013 to June 30, 2104.

Note E: This information includes only the DOL portion of TAP, the relevant portion of the program for the purposes of this report.

⁷GAO, *Veterans' Employment and Training: Better Targeting, Coordinating, and Reporting Needed to Enhance Program Effectiveness*, [GAO-13-29](#) (Washington, D.C.: December 13, 2012).

In addition to its programs administered by VETS, DOL offers employment and training services to the general population—including veterans. These programs include a national system of public employment services available to all individuals seeking employment. Those services include job search and labor market information and, as with its veterans programs, DOL administers its general programs through state workforce agencies that provide services at AJCs. Formerly known as One-Stop Career Centers, AJCs unify service locations for multiple federally-funded employment and training programs in a single system. AJCs serve two types of customers—job seekers and employers—and provide access to a full range of services pertaining to employment, training and education, employer assistance, and guidance for obtaining other assistance. Federal law requires these programs to give veterans priority over the general population, meaning that veterans can access services ahead of the general population or, if funds are limited, that veterans access services instead of the general population.⁸ From April 1, 2012, to March 30, 2013, AJCs served about 1.6 million veterans nationally through DOL’s Employment and Training Administration.⁹

Most of DOL’s employment service programs—both for veterans and the general public—report the same performance measures, known as common measures:

- Percentage of program exiters who have obtained employment (entered employment rate);
- percentage retaining employment for 6 months after exiting the program (employment retention rate); and
- 6-month average earnings of program exiters (average earnings).

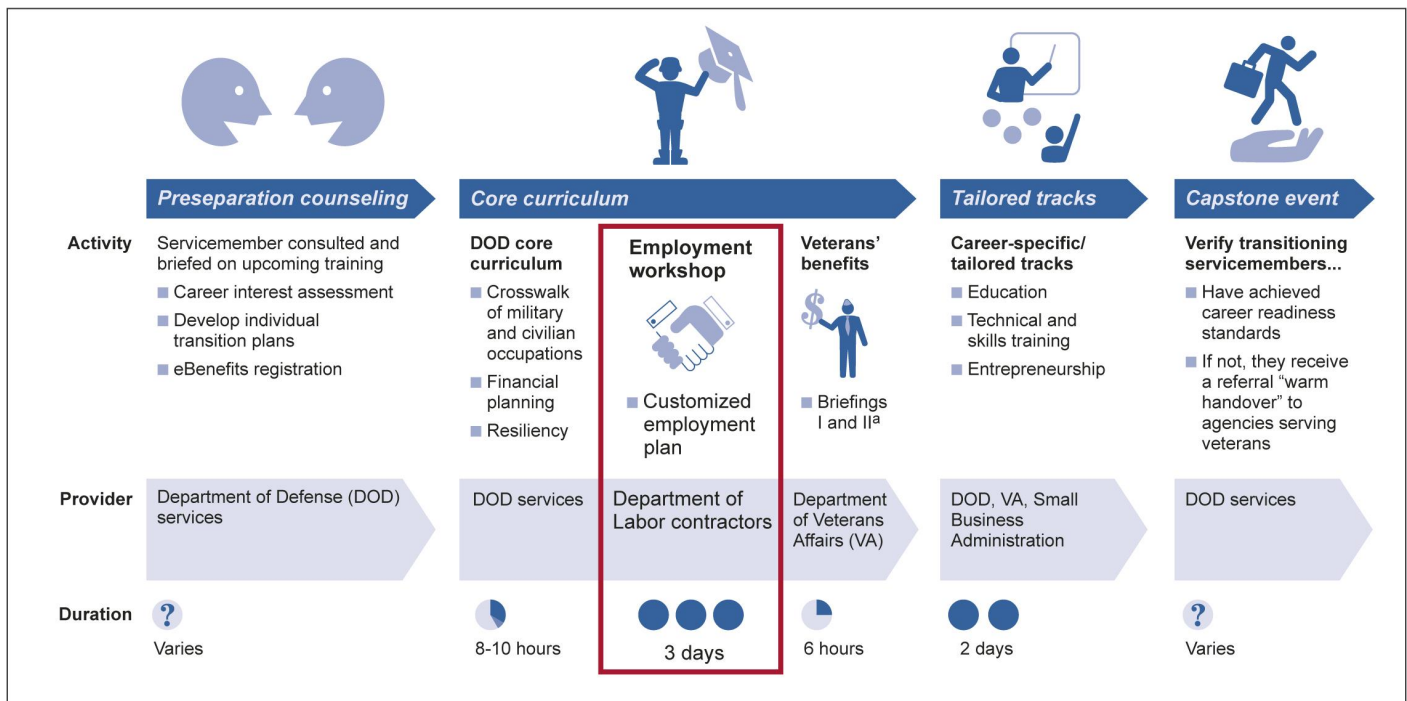
⁸38 U.S.C. § 4215.

⁹DOL’s Employment and Training Administration administers federal government job training and worker dislocation programs, federal grants to states for public employment service programs, and unemployment insurance benefits.

The Transition Assistance Program

TAP was established over 20 years ago to meet the needs of separating servicemembers during their period of transition to civilian life by offering job-search assistance and related services (see fig. 1).¹⁰ TAP consists of several significant components provided by the Department of Defense, VA, DOL, and the Small Business Administration, among others.

Figure 1: Transition Assistance Program (TAP) Components, Activities, Providers, and Timeframes



Source: GAO analysis of implementing agencies' documentation. | GAO-15-518

¹⁰All servicemembers who have been on active duty for at least 180 days are eligible for TAP services, but those separating because of a disability are eligible regardless of the length of their active duty service. Eligible service members must be provided TAP while they are on active duty, either as soon as possible within the 2 years prior to their anticipated retirement date or in the 1 year prior to their anticipated separation date. In either case, TAP services must generally commence no later than 90 days prior to their discharge or release. The exceptions to this rule occur when retirements or separations are not anticipated until 90 or fewer days of active duty remain, or a member of the reserve is being demobilized under circumstances in which the 90 day requirement is unfeasible. In such cases, TAP services must be provided as soon as possible within the remaining period of service.

Note A: VA benefits I and II briefings are two sessions that provide an interactive overview of VA benefits and instruction on healthcare, eBenefits, disability compensation, and how to apply for benefits.

One of the components, DOL's TAP employment workshops, consists of comprehensive 3-day workshops at selected military installations nationwide. Workshop attendees learn about job searches, career decision-making, current occupational and labor market conditions, resume and cover letter preparation, and interviewing techniques. Participants also are provided with an evaluation of their employability relative to the job market.¹¹ TAP workshops must have a minimum of 10 participants and a maximum of 50 participants, per DOL guidelines. The Department of Defense is generally required to mandate participation, with some exceptions.¹² Under the VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011, DOL has been required to use a contractor to conduct these employment workshops since November 21, 2013.¹³

The funding level for the DOL-provided employment workshop component of TAP for fiscal year 2014 was about \$14 million, according to DOL's 2015 Congressional Budget Justification. With these funds, VETS provided nearly 7,000 employment workshops that served over 207,000 participants, according to DOL. DOL reported that this was an 11 percent increase in participants, compared to fiscal year 2013. DOL attributed the increased demand for its employment workshops to the fact that TAP became mandatory for all transitioning servicemembers in fiscal year 2013. DOL requested \$14 million for fiscal year 2015 in order to provide about 5,400 employment workshops with a planned average class size of 35 exiting servicemembers or spouses. This amount included the costs for conducting the pilot workshops outlined in the Dignified Burial Act.

¹¹The VA benefits briefing embeds information for those who have or think they have a service-connected disability. The information is to help determine job readiness and address the special needs of disabled veterans.

¹²10 U.S.C. § 1144(c). The Department of Defense may waive the participation requirement for those for whom participation would not be of assistance because they are unlikely to face major readjustment, health care, employment, or other challenges associated with transition to civilian life; and servicemembers possessing specialized skills who, due to unavoidable circumstances, are needed to support a unit's imminent deployment.

¹³Pub. L. No. 112-56, § 223, 125 Stat. 711, 717.

Online TAP

All of the content from TAP is also available online. The online or “virtual” curriculum was added to benefit servicemembers at geographically separated units, those with a short-notice separation and those contemplating retirement because some servicemembers may not have access to classrooms for transition instruction. Online TAP mirrors the traditional TAP offerings, and allows servicemembers, veterans, and spouses to access it from anywhere in the world.

Off-Base Transition Training

The Dignified Burial Act required DOL to provide TAP to veterans and their spouses at locations other than military installations for the purposes of assessing the feasibility and advisability of providing such a program.¹⁴ The act required the workshops to be piloted for 2 years starting in January 2013:

- in three to five states (at least two of which had to have high levels of veteran unemployment);
- at a sufficient number of locations to meet the needs of veterans and spouses within each pilot state;
- anywhere except military installations (could, however, include National Guard or reserve facilities not on active duty military installations); and,
- in a manner that generally follows the content of TAP.¹⁵

The Dignified Burial Act also required DOL to provide to Congress an annual report on the provision of the workshops for each year of the pilot.

¹⁴See Pub. L. No. 112-260, § 301, 126 Stat. 2417, 2424 (2013).

¹⁵The act states that DOL shall provide TAP under 10 U.S.C. § 1144 and that the training provided should generally follow the content of the TAP under that section. 10 U.S.C. § 1144 describes “...a program to furnish counseling, assistance in identifying employment and training opportunities, help in obtaining such employment and training, and other related information and services...”

DOL Used the Same Employment Workshops for Veterans It Provides to Servicemembers, Citing Time and Resource Constraints for Pilot's Design

In response to the Dignified Burial Act, DOL provided the same employment workshops—including the same curriculum delivered by the same contractor—for the veterans' employment workshop pilot as it uses for active servicemembers as part of on-base TAP. DOL officials said the TAP workshops offered employment training elements that were relevant to veterans, such as information on the federal hiring process, resume writing, and job searching practices. DOL officials also said that its TAP workshops satisfied the Dignified Burial Act's requirement that the training should generally follow the content of the TAP.¹⁶ As required by the act, DOL has published two annual reports on the pilot.

DOL provided the workshops to veterans in three states that volunteered to assist with the pilot—Georgia, Washington, and West Virginia—from November 2013 to December 2014. DOL officials said they selected the pilot states using a number of factors, including selecting two states with high veteran unemployment rates—Georgia and West Virginia—as required by law.¹⁷ DOL also considered states' veteran population, number of military installations, infrastructure, geographic dispersion, and capacity to administer the program.¹⁸ Officials said that they selected West Virginia because it also presented the opportunity to test the pilot in one rural state.

DOL instructed each state to hold 5 workshops; West Virginia subsequently held 7 additional workshops and Washington canceled 1, bringing the three-state total to 21. DOL provided guidance to the pilot states about where to hold the workshops and other requirements and then asked the state workforce agencies to select individual workshop locations based on DOL officials' belief that state workforce agency officials would have a better idea of where the workshops were most needed. For example, DOL told pilot states the workshops could be held

¹⁶DOL officials told us that the Dignified Burial Act did not require the department to provide any other aspects of TAP, such as information on VA-administered veterans' benefits. State workforce agencies frequently placed staff at the workshops to answer questions about VA benefits and other topics not covered by the employment workshop.

¹⁷According to BLS data, the unemployment rate for veterans, 18 years of age or older living in Georgia for the 1st quarter of 2013, was 9.5 percent and West Virginia's rate was 12.1 percent. Washington's rate was 7.1 percent.

¹⁸According to VA's National Center for Veterans Analysis and Statistics, the veteran population living in Georgia as of September 2014 was more than 750,000. Washington's veteran population was over 600,000 and West Virginia's was over 165,000.

anywhere except military installations, as generally required by law, and that the classrooms needed to have internet access and be able to accommodate a large number of people. While each state held the workshops at locations other than military installations, the three state workforce agencies used different approaches in selecting locations for the workshops. Georgia, for instance, chose locations in part using veteran population data from VA's website, Washington chose several locations close to military installations, and West Virginia chose locations mostly near rural areas. While states used different methods to select the workshop locations, Georgia and Washington held most workshops at AJCs. West Virginia held workshops mainly at National Guard installations and community college campuses because the state's AJCs did not have classrooms that could accommodate large numbers of participants or the technology to present the course materials, according to state officials.

DOL also instructed states to market the pilot to veterans and their spouses; each state developed its own marketing strategy. According to state workforce agency officials we interviewed, they worked with other organizations to inform veterans about the workshops. For example, officials from Washington's state workforce agency said they collaborated with federal, state, and non-profit organizations, such as the National Guard, Job Corps, and local VA offices, and also sent marketing e-mails to unemployed veterans they identified through the Department of Defense's Unemployment Compensation for Ex-servicemembers program.¹⁹ Similarly, in West Virginia, officials said they asked their partners, including veteran service organizations and community colleges, to inform their constituents about the workshops. West Virginia officials advertised the workshops through mass marketing efforts, such as television and the state workforce agency website. A Georgia official told us they also worked with state and local partners to inform veterans about the workshops and that they recruited participants through a homeless women's veterans center. Additionally, all three states developed flyers that they distributed through their various partners.²⁰

¹⁹The Unemployment Compensation for Ex-servicemembers program provides unemployment insurance to former servicemembers of all ranks who served in the Armed Forces of the United States and meet other criteria.

²⁰See app. III for examples of flyers used by the pilot states.

Finally, DOL instructed pilot states to help DOL collect information on pilot participants by enrolling workshop participants in the AJC database to get basic demographic data on them and eventually track their employment outcomes.²¹ Officials said they are collecting outcome data for workshop participants using the same measures as other DOL employment programs, namely whether veterans found a job, if they retained the job, and their average wage earnings. Additionally, the department asked states to administer DOL surveys that asked participants about their satisfaction with the workshop, including whether it accomplished its objectives and how much participants valued the training.

DOL received no additional appropriation for the 2 year pilot and time and resource constraints influenced the department's implementation of the pilot, according to DOL officials. For instance, officials said DOL did not have the time or money to work with the TAP contractor to create a new employment workshop that would focus exclusively on veterans, as that would have been expensive and delayed implementation. As a result, the veterans' employment workshops followed the same TAP training schedule—offered over 3 consecutive days.²² Furthermore, DOL officials said that they implemented the pilot in three states, rather than four or five as also allowed by law, because implementing the pilot in additional states would have taken more resources. Officials said that resource constraints also influenced their decision to offer five workshops in each state.²³ Similarly, DOL officials said they asked states to choose locations for their workshops in part because DOL did not have the resources to rent or purchase space to conduct the workshops itself. DOL also used a condensed version of its existing TAP survey to get participant feedback

²¹DOL tracks employment outcomes through a data system the department uses for all its Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act programs, including AJC programs. One purpose of the system is to track participation using a lifecycle model that tracks a participant's first date of services through the last service received. The system also tracks wage records from the last service date for up to 9 months.

²²Workshops were conducted during weekday business hours due to AJCs not being open during evenings or weekends.

²³The Dignified Burial Act did not establish a minimum required number of workshops to provide for each state but rather required DOL to provide workshops at a sufficient number of locations to meet the needs of eligible individuals in each state.

on the veterans' employment workshops;²⁴ officials said that developing a new survey would have been costly and time consuming because, for example, it would have required both departmental and Office of Management and Budget approval.²⁵ As a result, the survey asked customer satisfaction questions such as the extent to which participants felt the workshop was useful rather than why participants took the workshop. Officials noted that DOL implemented the pilot within its existing TAP budget and spent about \$52,000 on costs for the pilot.

State Officials Reported That the Workshops Enhanced Veterans' Job Search Skills but Attracted Few Participants

Some Officials Said the Pilot Helped Veterans Write Resumes and Improve Interviewing Skills

Officials in all three pilot states reported that the workshops benefitted veterans by enhancing their job search capabilities, including helping them (1) write resumes, (2) build interviewing skills, and (3) translate their military experience into civilian job skills. For example, officials in West Virginia stated that one workshop helped a veteran translate experience as an infantryman and command sergeant major into core competencies of personnel management and logistics, noting the veteran could market his skills as a logistics expert and apply for management positions. The officials further noted that the workshop likely increased participants' confidence in their civilian lives, pointing specifically to one participant who had been so motivated by the workshop that he found work and

²⁴The TAP survey contains numerous questions—such as questions on the VA benefits briefing and other portions of TAP—geared toward transitioning servicemembers taking TAP in its entirety, rather than veterans. DOL officials said that they had to use questions pertaining to the employment workshops that were already on the TAP survey to avoid having to go through the Paperwork Reduction Act approval process.

²⁵See 44 U.S.C. §§ 3506 and 3507. Under the Paperwork Reduction Act, agencies usually need Office of Management and Budget approval for any new data collection from the public, such as a survey.

shelter after being homeless. A National Guard representative in West Virginia told us that the workshops also helped veterans prepare for job fairs. Officials in Washington noted that some participants found the workshop useful because it incorporated all of DOL's individual employment services into a single 3-day session in a more intensive learning environment.

On average, the 110 participants who completed the DOL satisfaction survey rated the workshop highly—respondents rated the course a 9 out of 10 overall, with 10 being “excellent”—and many echoed the specific benefits that officials noted.²⁶ For example, 95 of 110 participants reported that they believed both that the training was relevant to their job search needs and that the training improved their skills.²⁷ A little more than half of the participants (59 of 110) also wrote in—rather than checking a box—that they particularly valued the workshop's resume writing assistance.²⁸ DOL's second annual report to Congress on the pilot noted that the satisfaction survey results across the three pilot states were similar. In addition, officials from two veteran service organizations told us that the workshops could enhance veterans' job search skills. One veteran service organization official also told us that the workshops could be more meaningful to veterans than the TAP workshops they took before they left the military because some separating servicemembers may not be able to anticipate what challenges they will face in civilian life and they may not realize how important the skills that are taught in TAP will be to them.

²⁶See app. V for the participant survey, question 13. Fewer than half of the workshop participants (110 of 250) completed DOL's survey. An additional 8 participants completed a different survey created by West Virginia for its first workshop because DOL's survey was not ready for use.

²⁷To report this information, we analyzed those surveys that had a “yes” answer for question 6 (“subject matter was applicable to your employment and job search needs”) and also reported a higher rating of knowledge and skill after the course compared to before (questions 10 and 11).

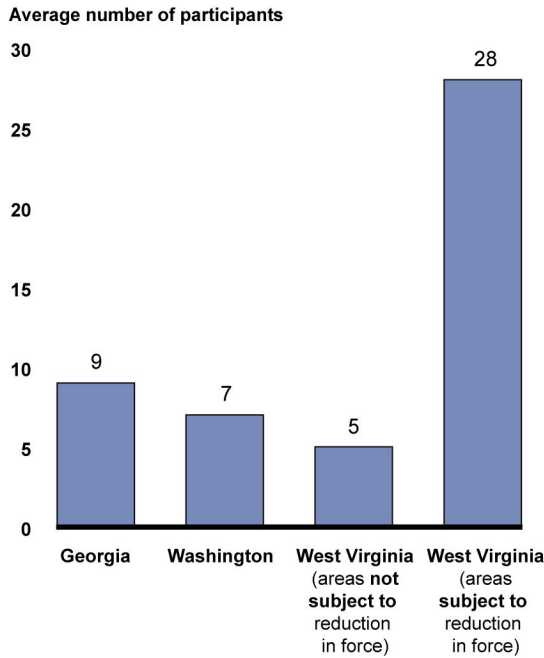
²⁸See question 8 of the participant survey.

States Struggled to Attract Participants and Meet Attendance Goals

Despite efforts noted earlier to market the pilot and recruit participants, states struggled to attract participants and meet DOL's targets for class participation. In 21 workshops across the three states, a total of 250 veterans participated in the pilot, according to DOL data.²⁹ DOL instructed states to have a minimum of 10 participants enrolled in order to schedule a workshop and a maximum of 50 participants—the same guidelines as for DOL's TAP workshops—with a preferred class size of 30-35 participants. Although several state officials told us that most workshops had at least 10 veterans enrolled initially, fewer than half of the workshops had 10 or more veterans actually attend; dozens of enrolled veterans did not show up. Furthermore, only 2 workshops had more than 30 participants. The five largest workshops were all located in an area of West Virginia in which participants may have been Department of Defense civilian contract workers facing a reduction in force. As in Georgia and Washington, workshops in other areas of West Virginia averaged fewer than 10 participants (see fig. 2).

²⁹The 250 total is based on the number of participants who attended on the first day of the workshop. See app. IV for a list of all workshop locations and participation.

Figure 2: Average Number of Participants in Department of Labor (DOL) Veterans' Employment Workshops, by State



Source: GAO analysis of DOL data. | GAO-15-518

State officials and others offered several potential reasons for the generally low participation in the pilot workshops. For example, a state official in Georgia explained that some veterans may not have registered for the workshops because they could not spare 3 consecutive business days if, for example, they were engaged in a job search. Similarly, an official from a veteran service organization noted some veterans might need the time to work at a part-time job. Likewise, DOL's second annual report indicated that states felt challenged by the 3-day format, which they believed precluded many individuals from participating and also resulted in a number of participants leaving at some point during the 3 days. Some state officials also said that some veterans who had registered for the workshops dropped out because of "life demands," such as not having child care, which kept them from participating. An official in Georgia noted that an ice storm forced them to postpone four of the workshops and might have decreased participation in the rescheduled workshops. One DOL official said that participation might have been low in some locations

because some veterans used services from similar programs such as job search services through AJCs.³⁰ After noticing that registrants were dropping out, officials in West Virginia started calling registrants before workshops to remind them. West Virginia officials also worked with a hotel chain to offer free lodging during workshops to try to increase participation. However, a West Virginia official said that these efforts did not seem to have a significant effect on participation.

Several state and veteran service organization officials suggested ideas for increasing participation for any future iteration of the workshops, including (1) holding shorter workshops; (2) providing options for participants to attend only certain portions, such as resume writing; (3) offering workshops at night or on weekends; and (4) having DOL help with marketing. DOL's second annual report noted that states found the lack of funding for marketing the pilot a challenge, saying that they could have engaged in a more comprehensive recruiting effort to ensure greater commitment from participants if funding had been available.

DOL's Design of the Pilot Constrains the Ability to Inform Congressional Deliberation about the Pilot's Future

DOL's Annual Reports Address Attendance, Participant Satisfaction, and Noteworthy State Practices

DOL has published information about the veterans' employment workshop pilot in two annual reports required by the Dignified Burial Act. The 2014 pilot report provided an interim picture of workshop attendance and plans for data collection, and the 2015 report provided final attendance numbers—250 participants in three states—and certain participant demographics. The second annual report noted that a majority of participants were male and between the ages of 25 and 44. We

³⁰As noted earlier, AJCs provide veterans' employment services such as job search activities and labor market information.

Selected Participant Characteristic Data

The Department of Labor collected broad demographic data on the characteristics of the 199 workshop participants who registered with American Job Centers out of 250 total participants. For example:

Age

- 22-32 years of age – 62
- 33-43 years of age – 66
- 44-54 years of age – 40
- 55 years of age older – 31

Employment Status

- Unemployed – 85
- Employed – 77
- Employed but expected to be out of work soon – 37

Education Level

- High school diploma or GED – 97
- Associates degree – 23
- Bachelor's degree – 36

Totals may not add to 199 participants because not all categories are included here and not all participants answered all questions.

Source: GAO analysis of DOL data. | GAO-15-518

conducted some further analyses of the data DOL collected, breaking down age ranges, employment status, and education levels (see sidebar). For example, the majority of participants for whom DOL collected demographic data were employed. DOL also collected data through a participant satisfaction survey; as we mentioned earlier, many survey respondents believed the workshop had increased their job search skills.³¹

Additionally, DOL interviewed state workforce agencies on best practices and challenges states faced. For example, DOL identified as a best practice West Virginia's formation of a diverse working group that included the West Virginia National Guard, local workforce investment boards, community colleges, and local veteran service organizations. Regarding challenges, states noted a lack of funding for state marketing as significant, according to DOL's 2015 report. States also indicated that the 3 consecutive day format excluded veterans who were unable to commit to attending for that period of time and resulted in a number of participants leaving at some point during the workshop. Lastly, the 2015 report also noted DOL plans to collect employment outcome data for workshop participants, which will not be available until October 2016.³²

³¹The data DOL presents in its two annual reports reflect the experiences of the specific participants who took the workshops and do not provide insights beyond those experiences. The survey information, for example, cannot be viewed to represent what all participants thought about the workshop because only about 48 percent of the participants completed the survey; the survey was voluntary and some participants did not stay through the end of the third day of the workshop, when the survey was administered. Similarly, the demographic data do not include information on approximately 20 percent of workshop participants who did not enroll in the AJC system.

³²Officials said the employment outcome data use the same measures as other DOL employment programs, namely whether veterans found a job, if they retained the job, and their average wage earnings. Participants may access other AJC employment programs and DOL's tracking of employment outcomes starts when participants no longer receive services from the AJC. In order to get DOL's 12-month cohort of outcome data for all of the workshop's participants, they have to wait until the last workshop participant stops receiving services and is considered to have "exited" the AJC. DOL officials said they plan to publish relevant outcome information by October 2016.

Design of the Pilot Missed Opportunities to Answer Key Questions That Could Inform Sound Decisions about Its Future

The Dignified Burial Act tasked us with reporting to Congress on the pilot, including the feasibility and advisability of providing veterans' employment workshops nationally. However, DOL's pilot design left unanswered at least three key questions that sound design practices suggest should be considered. Responses to these questions could provide important information regarding the feasibility and advisability of expanding veterans' employment workshops nationally.

1. What is the need for the program overall and for any specific, targeted groups of veterans?
2. What is the pilot's role amid existing federal employment and training programs?
3. Relative to any needs it identifies, against what goals and objectives can DOL assess the pilot or an expanded version of it?

Identifying the Need

Sound pilot design practices call for a needs assessment to better identify the population best served by the program or services being piloted as well as those populations that might not need the services. DOL officials said that they intended the pilot to serve the general veteran population and their spouses, the eligible beneficiaries identified in the Dignified Burial Act. Furthermore, DOL officials noted that because the law had defined a population of eligible beneficiaries, it would have been duplicative to conduct a needs assessment. As DOL noted in its second annual report, however, the general veteran population has widely varied employment experience, dates of separation, and disability status; this suggests different levels of need for the workshops. Had DOL more closely followed sound design practices by conducting a needs assessment, it could have tested this assumption and determined where the greatest need, if any, lay. For example, DOL could have determined whether to target the program to all veterans, regardless of their experiences or, instead, to certain targeted groups that may, because of their situations, be more likely to need and benefit from the workshops.

DOL officials also said that there was not enough time and financial resources to conduct a needs assessment, pointing, as noted earlier, to the fact that DOL received no additional funding for this pilot and had to

complete it within 2 years.³³ However, DOL could have gathered some information without expending significant time or resources. For example, DOL could have consulted with significant external stakeholders, such as the VA and veteran service organizations, to seek input on questions about veterans' needs. Sound design practices indicate the importance of having relevant and timely communications with all stakeholders throughout the design and delivery of the program to fully engage all parties and obtain information in order to achieve all of the pilot's objectives. DOL officials did not reach out to these stakeholders with expertise in veterans' issues because, as they designed it, the pilot did not include information on benefits and services offered through the VA, and thus they viewed collaboration with them as unnecessary. As a result, DOL missed opportunities to gather potentially valuable input to inform the pilot's design, such as better determining the needs of the veteran population, what their participation rates might be, and how to most effectively use limited resources to market the workshops to veterans. For example, officials from two veteran service organizations said they would have helped DOL market the workshops in an effort to increase attendance.

Without specific guidance from DOL about the needs the pilot should address, states determined their own target populations. For example, West Virginia targeted individuals in rural areas, while Georgia focused on veterans who were not required to take TAP prior to leaving the military, according to state workforce agency officials.³⁴ As a result, DOL lacks the benefit of knowing for which veterans the program was most useful and thus whether its approach likely helped those most in need of the resources it devoted to the program.³⁵

³³GAO asked for information about what DOL did to implement the pilot between January 2013—when the Dignified Burial Act was enacted—and June and July 2013, when DOL officials decided on the pilot states, number of workshops, and use of DOL's TAP employment workshops. DOL produced no additional information in response to those requests.

³⁴As previously noted, federal law mandates that the Department of Defense require transitioning servicemembers to participate in an employment workshop, with some exceptions.

³⁵DOL's previously discussed survey focused on determining veterans' satisfaction with the workshops and did not collect demographic information (see appendix V).

Identifying Pilot's Role amid Existing Federal Programs

In addition, because the design did not include a needs assessment, DOL did not know how many workshops would be required to meet the potential demand and the extent to which its existing resources would allow it to meet the identified need. DOL officials said they determined that existing resources would cover only 15 workshops across the three states. Officials could not point to any formal analysis conducted to determine this number, despite the Dignified Burial Act requiring DOL to offer the workshops at a sufficient number of locations within each state to meet the needs of eligible individuals.³⁶ Officials from West Virginia's state workforce agency asked DOL to authorize additional workshops because they said that five was insufficient to reach all of the veterans they believed would likely benefit from attending.³⁷ Officials there said that the additional workshops would help make them more geographically accessible across the state. The overall low attendance levels for the pilot workshops raise questions about the extent to which existing workshops met the demand for them. If DOL had determined the number of workshops needed in each state as part of a needs assessment, it could have been better positioned to learn what additional demand—if any—there might be for the workshops and what the costs could be of meeting that demand.

According to sound design practices, agencies should determine the extent to which a pilot might fill gaps in federal services or enhance existing programs while avoiding inappropriate overlap or duplication with those programs. DOL followed this design practice somewhat, but could have gone further. DOL officials said, prior to the enactment of the Dignified Burial Act and in interviews during our review, that the pilot duplicated existing employment and training programs already available to veterans. However, DOL did not conduct a formal assessment of the extent to which similar programs not only exist, but are also serving veterans (and their spouses). By more closely following sound design practices, DOL could have used the 2-year pilot to better understand the population the program should target. For example, in addition to consulting with stakeholders as previously noted, DOL could have used data underlying a DOL-funded study of how AJCs serve veterans to learn

³⁶Initially, DOL asked state workforce agency officials to estimate the number of workshops they could hold by June, 2014. However, states did not provide an estimate before DOL decided to hold five workshops.

³⁷DOL funded these additional workshops in West Virginia.

the numbers of veterans served by AJCs in the pilot states.³⁸ By not building into its design an assessment of the extent to which existing programs serve the identified needs of all veterans (or targeted groups), it is difficult to draw well-informed conclusions about the advisability of expanding the pilot while being mindful of DOL's resources and the need to avoid unnecessary overlap and duplication of services veterans may already be receiving.

Officials in one pilot state told us they thought the workshops filled a gap by providing higher quality and more updated information on how to write resumes and prepare for interviews than anything the state could deliver to veterans. Officials from two veteran service organizations also suggested the workshops could enhance DOL's employment programs. Officials from one veteran service organization told us that veterans could receive basic employment information through the workshops and then focus on specific training needs when they access other DOL services. In contrast, a DOL official told us that he had attended a workshop and thought DOL's other employment and training programs covered all of the topics in the workshop. Conducting a formal assessment of the extent to which the pilot could either fill a service gap or enhance current programs could have better positioned DOL to serve individuals whom existing programs overlook or could serve in the future.

Goals and Objectives

Sound design principles indicate that goals and objectives can help an agency define a pilot's need and scope, as well as help uncover any differences in expectations and concerns program stakeholders have with implementing the pilot. DOL officials told us that the goal of the pilot was to test its feasibility. However, DOL did not create clear, measurable goals—as well as objectives that link to those goals—that would define what testing the pilot's feasibility meant. States, in turn, administered the pilot based on their perception of the pilot's goals. For instance, West Virginia officials said the purpose of the pilot was to help veterans get "job-ready." Washington and Georgia officials said the purpose was to serve individuals who did not take TAP.

³⁸DOL recently funded an exploratory analysis of services and outcomes for veteran and non-veteran customers of DOL employment services, but there is no evidence that DOL used similar information to better understand the relevant needs for the veterans' employment workshop pilot. See Shane Thompson, Natalie Hinton, Laura Hoesly, and Lauren Scott, *Veteran and Non-Veteran Job Seekers* (January 2015).

The lack of clearly and consistently defined goals and objectives limits DOL's ability to measure the pilot's performance related to any expected outcome or better inform decisions about its future. DOL's annual report provides information on participant demographics, survey data, and upcoming employment outcomes, but DOL cannot determine how well the pilot performed against specific goals and objectives. Therefore, the department missed an opportunity to better establish the value of the pilot, which could have assisted stakeholders such as the Congress in making sound decisions about its future.

Conclusions

The federal government has created a number of programs that assist veterans and servicemembers transitioning to civilian life, including the employment workshop pilot for veterans and their spouses. In embarking on this effort, DOL's approach—asking states to volunteer to participate and making no modifications to the existing TAP workshop—allowed it to implement the pilot within 2 years and without additional funding. While this approach was understandable given the time and resource constraints DOL cited, the pilot design did not fully embrace certain sound practices that would have enabled it to better inform congressional decision-making about the advisability of expanding the pilot. Specifically, questions about the need for offering the workshops to veterans and their spouses, the program's role amid other existing federal programs, and specific goals and objectives against which program performance could be measured remain unanswered. The pilot has ended, but these questions raise the issue of how to leverage the federal investment that was made in the pilot as well as the efforts the states put into delivering the workshops.

In light of the low attendance levels of veterans in the pilot workshop, information on the fundamental issue of whether such a workshop could fill a niche for veterans that is not currently met by existing programs is important. Collaboration with stakeholders such as VA and veteran service organizations could provide useful perspective in developing this information. Such information could assist Congress in making sound decisions on any potential future iterations of the veterans' employment workshop.

Recommendation for Executive Action

To inform decisions on any potential future iterations of the veterans' employment workshop, we recommend that the Secretary of Labor assess and report to Congress the extent to which further delivery of employment workshops to veterans and their spouses could fill a niche

not fully served by existing federal programs. Such an assessment could involve collaboration with VA and other stakeholder organizations.

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

We provided a draft copy of this report to DOL for review and comment. DOL concurred with our recommendation and noted that it will conduct a deliberate assessment of (1) the need for the services offered under the pilot; (2) which services are most useful for veterans and their spouses; and (3) what overlap exists with programs providing similar services to this population. DOL added that the assessment should compare the services the AJC system provides to veterans and their spouses with the information contained in DOL's veterans' employment workshops and online curriculum. DOL also stated that the assessment should identify if specific services provided within the AJC system require revision or redesign to better meet the employment needs of veterans and their spouses. DOL's comments are reproduced in appendix II.

We also provided relevant portions of the draft to VA, which had no comments.

We are sending copies of this report to relevant congressional committees, the Secretary of Labor, and other interested parties. In addition, this report will be available at no charge on GAO's website at <http://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staffs have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-7215 or sherrilla@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. GAO staff who made key contributions to this report are listed in appendix VI.



Andrew Sherrill
Director, Education, Workforce, and
Income Security Issues

List of Committees

The Honorable John McCain
Chairman

The Honorable Jack Reed
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
United States Senate

The Honorable Johnny Isakson
Chairman

The Honorable Richard Blumenthal
Ranking Member
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
United States Senate

The Honorable Mac Thornberry
Chairman

The Honorable Adam Smith
Ranking Member
Committee on Armed Services
House of Representatives

The Honorable Jeff Miller
Chairman

The Honorable Corrine Brown
Ranking Member
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
House of Representatives

Appendix I: Objectives, Scope, and Methodology

The objectives of this report were to examine (1) how the Department of Labor (DOL) implemented the veterans' employment workshop pilot program, (2) what state officials reported regarding the benefits and challenges of the workshops in the pilots, and (3) how the pilot informs decisions about its possible expansion.

To provide information on how DOL designed the pilot, how it planned to evaluate it, and the extent to which DOL collaborated with other organizations during the pilot's design, we reviewed relevant federal laws and regulations and e-mail correspondence between DOL officials on the steps they took to design the pilot and documents describing DOL's plan for collecting data to determine the pilot performance. We also interviewed officials from DOL's Veterans' and Employment Training Service (VETS) about how they selected the states to test the pilot, what steps were taken to set up the infrastructure of the workshops, such as classroom requirements and training materials, and the extent to which they collaborated with other federal and non-federal entities. We also asked VETS officials about the types of performance data they planned to collect and how they planned to report the results of the pilot. We interviewed Department of Veterans Affairs and veteran service organization officials about the extent to which DOL collaborated with them during the design of the pilot and the extent to which DOL collaborated with them in developing and implementing the pilot.

To provide information on how the pilot was implemented and what state officials reported regarding the benefits and challenges of the workshops in the pilots, we conducted telephonic interviews with DOL and state workforce agency officials in each of the pilot states: Georgia, Washington, and West Virginia. During our interviews we asked these officials what their roles and responsibilities were, how workshop locations were selected, what marketing efforts states employed to publicize the workshops, and the extent to which they collaborated with other federal and non-federal entities. We also asked about the benefits the veterans' employment workshops offered participants as they searched for employment, the extent to which the workshops provided information on veterans' benefits not offered by DOL, and any challenges the states faced in delivering the workshops. We reviewed DOL participant data, the results of DOL's survey of workshop participants, and DOL's two annual reports on the pilot, including verifying the reports' workshop attendance figures with DOL and pilot states. To determine the reliability of the data, we interviewed agency officials knowledgeable of DOL's data collection and reporting systems and reviewed agency documentation. We concluded the participant data were sufficiently

reliable to describe certain demographic characteristics of the population that took the workshops and were enrolled in DOL's American Job Centers (AJC). To determine the reliability of the survey data, we interviewed agency officials who developed the survey, reviewed agency documentation, and consulted with GAO subject matter experts in survey design. We determined that DOL's survey data were sufficiently reliable for presenting qualitative response information.

To identify how the pilot informs decisions about its possible expansion, we reviewed how practices in pilot design can affect what an agency learns in its evaluation of a pilot. We reviewed guidance from federal agencies on program design and evaluation found during the course of our research and guidance identified by subject matter experts. We reviewed design and evaluation guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention because officials from DOL's Chief Evaluation Office said they use that guidance for their evaluation practices.¹ We reviewed design guidance recommended by GAO subject matter experts on program design and evaluation.² We also reviewed GAO's Standards for Internal Control, which identifies elements of effective internal controls including management responsibility for defining objectives in specific and measurable terms, communicating necessary information to achieve objectives, and establishing and operating monitoring activities.³ Moreover, we conducted an independent search for guidance to further support the standards for program design noted in this report. We found, for example, guidance supporting the standard of establishing and maintaining clear communication channels with relevant stakeholders from the Department of Health and Human Services' Agency for

¹Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Program Performance and Evaluation Office. The guidance provided includes agency-wide direction, standards, and technical assistance for program planning, performance and accountability, and program evaluation. It also includes guidance for the collection and analysis of performance and accountability data and establishing routine, continuous program improvement based on effective program evaluation and meaningful performance measurement. In addition, the guidance provides resources and assistance to build capacity of programs to perform strong monitoring and evaluation.

²Peter H. Rossi, Howard E. Freeman, Mark W. Lipsey, *Evaluation, A Systematic Approach, 7th Edition*, (Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA., 2003).

³GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, [GAO/AIMD-00-21.3.1](#) (Washington, D.C., November 1999).

Healthcare Research and Quality⁴ and the National Institutes of Health.⁵ We found additional support for conducting a needs assessment identifying whether a new program is needed from the Department of Education⁶ and the Department of Transportation.⁷ GAO subject matter experts in program design and evaluation verified the leading practices and the extent to which the practices were relevant to our review of the veterans' employment workshop pilot by comparing the criteria with steps of evaluation design listed in our guide on program evaluations.⁸ See table 2 for the list of leading practices we identified in pilot design and pilot implementation.

⁴Department of Health and Human Services, Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality, *Designing and Implementing Medicaid Disease and Care Management Programs: Section 2: Engaging Stakeholders in a Care Management Program: Designing and Implementing Medicaid Disease: A Users Guide* (Rockville, MD: October 2014).

⁵National Institutes for Health, Fogarty International Center, Division of International Science Policy, Planning and Evaluation, *Framework for Program Assessment*: (December 2002).

⁶Department of Education, *Comprehensive Needs Assessment: Materials adapted from "Planning and Conducting Needs Assessments: A Practical Guide"* (1995).

⁷Department of Transportation, National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, *Community How to Guide on Needs Assessment & Strategic Planning* (March 2001).

⁸GAO, *Designing Evaluations: 2012 Revision*, [GAO-12-208G](#) (Washington D.C.: January 2012).

Table 2: Selected Leading Practices in Designing and Implementing Pilot Programs and Why the Practices Are Important

Leading practices in designing and evaluating pilots	Why the practice is important
Conduct a needs assessment that identifies the target population	To be able to identify the population the program would likely best serve and which populations would not need the services.
Conduct a needs assessment that identifies whether a new program is needed	To be able to identify the resources needed to operate the program, determine if the program would fill any service gaps, and the extent to which similar services exist.
Establish clear goals and objectives	To define the purpose of the pilot and who it will serve, and allow the ability to measure performance and make decisions about its future.
Establish clear communication channels with stakeholders	To engage employees, clients, customers, partners, and other stakeholders in achieving higher performance by providing a clear and consistent message about the importance of fulfilling the mission. For an entity to run and control its operations, it must have relevant, reliable, and timely communications related to internal as well as external events.
Identify the data necessary to evaluate the pilot	To be able to define the methods that will be used to collect the data and identify the timing and frequency of data collection.
Establish standards for determining pilot program performance	To be able to measure the effectiveness of the pilot against its goals and determine the potential for full-scale implementation.
Conduct regular monitoring over program operations	To mitigate the risks and changes programs face such as changing objectives, laws, and resources, assess the quality of performance over time, and promptly resolve issues.

Source: GAO analysis of guidance on pilot design and evaluation practices. | GAO-15-518

Appendix II: Comments from the Department of Labor

U.S. Department of Labor

Assistant Secretary for
Veterans' Employment and Training
Washington, D.C. 20210



JUL 1 2015

Mr. Andrew Sherrill
Director
Education, Workforce, and
Income Security Issues
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Sherrill,

On behalf of the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the Government Accountability Office's (GAO) Report titled *Veterans' Employment: Need for Further Workshops Should Be Considered before Making Decisions on Their Future*. DOL has assigned the Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) the responsibility to respond to GAO's recommendation(s) in this Report. The GAO Report contained one recommendation:

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 concurs with the recommendation. Prior to a continuation or expansion of this pilot, DOL will conduct a deliberate assessment of the need for these services; which services are most useful for veterans and their spouses; and what overlap exists with programs providing similar services to this population.

The GAO Report confirms many of the lessons we learned from conducting the Off-Base Transition Training Pilot. While validating that there is a sizeable portion of the veteran population (those transitioning prior to 2011) for which the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) was either voluntary or not available, and that those individuals could benefit from specific parts of the program instruction, we also gained a better understanding that there is a broad spectrum of employment needs among this population that makes development of a single program of instruction less useful.

Veterans and their spouses may not require instruction on the full spectrum of skills covered in the DOL TAP employment workshop. Depending on when the veterans left the military,

their work and life experiences could be much broader than that of transitioning service members entering the civilian workforce for the first time. Veterans may only need assistance with resume writing, military skills translation, interviewing techniques, or the federal hiring process; or they may require assistance for issues not covered in the employment workshop. Additionally, we found that one obstacle to participation in the pilot was the 3-day format. Many veterans were unable to commit to a workshop of that length. A veteran's specific employment needs would help determine what skills need to be developed.

We believe the relevant instruction is most effective as part of a comprehensive delivery model focused through the American Job Center (AJC) system. With that in mind, the assessment GAO recommends we undertake should include a thorough comparison of services provided to veterans and their spouses in the AJC system with the information contained in the DOL TAP employment workshop and online curriculum. This comparison would identify which services and topics are most needed by the veterans and their spouses, as well as the best method or methods to deliver those services. The assessment should identify if specific services provided within the AJC system require revision or redesign to better meet the employment needs of veterans and their spouses.

Thank you for providing us an opportunity to respond. Should you have additional questions, please feel free to contact Gordon Burke in the Veterans' Employment and Training Service at (202) 693-4700.

Respectfully,



Teresa W. Gerton
Acting Assistant Secretary

Appendix III: Selected State Marketing Flyers for Veterans' Employment Workshops

Figure 3: Washington State Employment Security Department Flyer



Off-Base Transition Assistance Program Class

Open to all veterans and spouses of veterans

Wednesday – Friday

January 29 – 31 9 AM – 5 PM
(includes 1 – Hr Lunch)

WorkSource Spokane Redwood Room

[Redacted]

Topics Covered

Transition Planning / Career Exploration / Job Search Plan
Building an Effective Resume / Mock Interviews

In partnership with the Spokane Area Workforce Development Council, WorkSource is an equal-opportunity partnership of organizations that provide employment and training services. Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to people with disabilities. [Redacted]

Source: Washington State Employment Security Department. | GAO-15-518

Figure 4: Workforce West Virginia Flyer

ATTENTION VETERANS AND SPOUSES OF VETERANS

If you are transitioning out of the military or have been out for years and are looking for a career join us for a 3 Day employment workshop that was designed specifically with you in mind. This workshop will answer the questions you have about finding employment, translating all your military skills, answering those tough interview questions, navigating the web and effectively using social media as you search for that perfect career just for you. The workshops will be conducted at various sites throughout the state over the next year. Please check the WVMilitaryConnection.org website for future dates and locations. The next training session will be held at:

[Redacted]

[Redacted]





Martinsburg WV 25404

February 5th, 6th, and 7th 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. each day

To register please call [Redacted]

The Department of Labor, WorkForce West Virginia and Employer Support of the Guard and Reserves have teamed up to bring these extraordinary workshops to you.

The workshop will be an investment in your future and the cost to you will be a commitment of 3 days of your time and the desire to improve your ability to secure the career you want.

An equal opportunity employer/program.
Auxiliary aids are available upon request to individuals with disabilities.

Source: Workforce West Virginia. | GAO-15-518

Appendix IV: Department of Labor Veterans' Employment Workshop Locations and Participation Levels

State	Dates	Location	Attendance
Georgia	Nov 12-14, 2013	Mary Hall Freedom Center, Atlanta, GA	13
Georgia	Feb 18-20, 2014	GA DOL Macon Career Center	5
Georgia	Mar 4-6, 2014	GA DOL Columbus Career Center	10
Georgia	Feb 18-20, 2014	GA DOL Augusta Career Center	4
Georgia	Feb 18-20, 2014	GA DOL Savannah Career Center	12
Total Attendance for GA			44
Washington	Jan 15-17, 2014	WorkSource Thurston, WA	10
Washington	Jan 22-24, 2014	WorkSource Kitsap, WA	10
Washington	Jan 29-31, 2014	WorkSource Spokane, WA	5
Washington	Jan 29-31, 2014	Rally Point 6, Lakewood, WA	3
Washington	June 9-11, 2014	Worksource Kitsap, WA	anceled
Total attendance for WA			28
West Virginia	Nov 19-21, 2013	AJC Parkersburg, WV	7
West Virginia	Dec 3-5, 2013	AJC Logan, WV	3
West Virginia	Dec 10-12, 2013	RC Byrd National Aerospace Center Bridgeport	8
West Virginia	Jan 28-30, 2014	National Guard Armory, Eleanor, WV	9
West Virginia	Feb 5-7, 2014	Shepherd University, Martinsburg, WV	24
West Virginia	Feb 11-13, 2014	Shepherd University, Martinsburg, WV	33
West Virginia	Feb 18-20, 2014	Shepherd University, Martinsburg, WV	37
West Virginia	Mar 26-28, 2014	Shepherd University, Martinsburg, WV	27
West Virginia	May 27-29, 2014	Huntington, WV	7
West Virginia	June 17-19, 2014	Shepherd University, Martinsburg, WV	19
West Virginia	Oct 21-23, 2014	New River Community College, Beckley, WV	2
West Virginia	Dec 16-18, 2014	Bridge Valley Community College, Charleston, WV	2
Total attendance for West Virginia			178
Total attendance for all states			250

Source: Department of Labor, Second Annual Report to Congress on Off-Base Transition Training Pilot, April 14, 2015. | GAO-15-518

Note: The total includes two current servicemembers who took the pilot workshops. DOL's participant numbers varied somewhat from totals state workforce agency officials told us. DOL officials noted that their numbers came from numbers on the first day of the workshops, as reported by the DOL contractor. State workforce agencies collectively reported that they had 241 participants.

Appendix V: Department of Labor Survey of Veterans' Employment Workshop Participants

OFF BASE TRANSITION TRAINING PARTICIPANT SURVEY																													
COURSE TITLE DOL Employment Workshop					LOCATION																								
COURSE DATES			FACILITATOR'S NAME			PARTICIPANT'S NAME (OPTIONAL)																							
Evaluate each of the following areas and place an "X" in the appropriate rating block for each item. <i>If you mark a 1 or 2, please comment in the General Comments Block at bottom of form.</i>																													
<table style="width:100%; border:none;"> <tr> <td style="text-align:center;">1</td> <td style="text-align:center;">2</td> <td style="text-align:center;">3</td> <td style="text-align:center;">4</td> <td style="text-align:center;">5</td> <td colspan="5"></td> </tr> <tr> <td style="text-align:center;">STRONGLY DISAGREE</td> <td style="text-align:center;">DISAGREE</td> <td style="text-align:center;">NEITHER AGREE/DISAGREE</td> <td style="text-align:center;">AGREE</td> <td style="text-align:center;">STRONGLY AGREE</td> <td colspan="5"></td> </tr> </table>										1	2	3	4	5						STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	NEITHER AGREE/DISAGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE					
1	2	3	4	5																									
STRONGLY DISAGREE	DISAGREE	NEITHER AGREE/DISAGREE	AGREE	STRONGLY AGREE																									
1. Stated workshop objectives were accomplished.					1	2	3	4	5																				
Section 1 – Transition Planning.....					<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>																				
Section 2 – Career Exploration and Validation.....					<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>																				
Section 3 – Job Search Plan.....					<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>																				
Section 4 – Build an Effective Resume.....					<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>																				
Section 5 – Federal Hiring, Resumes and Programs..					<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>																				
Section 6 – Skilled Interview.....					<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>																				
Section 7 – Interview Post Analysis.....					<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>																				
2. Instructional materials were suitable.					<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>																				
3. Level of difficulty was appropriate.					<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>																				
4. Facilitator was effective.					<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>																				
5. Length of workshop was appropriate.					<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>																				
6. Subject matter was applicable to your employment and job search needs.					<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>																				
7. Would recommend as useful to other veterans.					<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>																				
8. What specific topical areas or features of the training were of the most value to you?																													
9. What were the least valuable?																													
YOUR KNOWLEDGE AND SKILL LEVEL																													
10. Before course					HIGH	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	0	NONE												
						<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>													
11. After course					HIGH	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	NONE											
12. How helpful was the curriculum and activities in improving your knowledge of career transition?																													
GREAT BENEFIT <input type="checkbox"/> SOME <input type="checkbox"/> LITTLE <input type="checkbox"/> NO BENEFIT <input type="checkbox"/>																													
13. What is your overall rating for the course?																													
EXCELLENT					10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1	UNSATISFACTORY														
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>															
GENERAL COMMENTS (if more space is needed, continue on reverse)																													

Source: Department of Labor. | GAO-15-518

Appendix VI: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

Andrew Sherrill, (202) 512-7215 or sherrilla@gao.gov.

Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, Bill MacBlane (Assistant Director), Drew Nelson (Analyst in Charge), David Chrisinger, David Forgosh, Alex Galuten, Monika Gomez, Stephanie Shipman, and Walter Vance made key contributions to this report. Also contributing to this report were Juli Cutts, Laura Hoffrey, Kathy Leslie, Mimi Nguyen, Ronni Schwartz, and James Whitcomb.

Appendix VII: Accessible Data

Accessible Text and Data Tables

Data Table for Figure 1: Transition Assistance Program (TAP) Components, Activities, Providers, and Timeframes

	Preseparation counseling	Core curriculum			Tailored tracks	Capstone event
Activity	Servicemember consulted and briefed on upcoming training <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career interest assessment • Develop individual transition plans • eBenefits registration 	DOD core curriculum <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Crosswalk of military and civilian occupations • Financial planning • Resiliency 	Employment workshop <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customized employment plan 	Veterans' benefit <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Briefings I and II [Note A] 	Career-specific/tailored tracks <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Education • Technical and skills training • Entrepreneurship 	Verify transitioning servicemembers... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have achieved career readiness standards • If not, they receive a referral "warm handover" to agencies serving veterans
Provider	DOD services	DOD services	DOL contractors	VA	DOD, VA, SBA	DOD services
Duration	Varies	8-10 hours	3 days	6 hours	2 days	Varies

Source: GAO analysis of implementing agencies' documentation. | GAO-15-518

Note: The "Core Curriculum – Employment workshop" column is highlighted with a red border.

Note A: VA benefits I and II briefings are two sessions that provide an interactive overview of VA benefits and instruction on healthcare, eBenefits, disability compensation, and how to apply for benefits.

Data Table for Figure 2: Average Number of Participants in Department of Labor (DOL) Veterans' Employment Workshops, by State

State	Georgia	Washington	West Virginia (areas not subject to reduction in force)	West Virginia (areas subject to reduction in force)
Average number of participants	9	7	5	28

Source: GAO analysis of DOL data. | GAO-15-518

Accessible Text for Sidebar Figure

Selected Participant Characteristic Data

The Department of Labor collected broad demographic data on the characteristics of the 199 workshop participants who registered with American Job Centers out of 250 total participants. For example:

Age:

- 22-32 years of age – 62

- 33-43 years of age – 66
- 44-54 years of age – 40
- 55 years of age older – 31

Employment Status:

- Unemployed – 85
- Employed – 77
- Employed but expected to be out of work soon – 37

Education Level:

- High school diploma or GED – 97
- Associates degree – 23
- Bachelor's degree – 36

Totals may not add to 199 participants because not all categories are included here and not all participants answered all questions.

Source: GAO analysis of DOL data. | GAO-15-518

Accessible Text for Figure 3: Washington State Employment Security Department Flyer

[WorkSource Spokane logo]

[American flag graphic]

Off-Base Transition Assistance Program Class

Wednesday–Friday

January 29-31
9 AM–5 PM
(included 1-Hr Lunch)

WorkSource Spokane Redwood Room
[Redacted]

Topics Covered:

Transition Planning / Career Exploration / Job Search Plan
Building and Effective Resume / Mock Interviews

In partnership with Spokane Area Workforce Development Council. WorkSource is an equal-opportunity partnership of organizations that provide employment and training services. Auxiliary aids and services are available upon request to people with disabilities.
[Redacted]

Source: Washington State Employment Security Department. | GAO-15-518

Accessible Text for Figure 4: Workforce West Virginia Flyer

ATTENTION VETERANS AND SPOUSES OF VETERANS

If you are transitioning out of the military or have been out for years and are looking for a career join us for a 3 Day employment workshop that was designed specifically with you in mind. This workshop will answer the questions you have about finding employment, translating all your military skills, answering those tough interview questions, navigating the web and effectively using social media as you search for that perfect career just for you. The workshops will be conducted at various sites throughout the state over the next year. Please check the WVMilitaryConnection.org website for future dates and locations. The next training session will be held at:

[Redacted]
[Redacted]
Martinsburg WV 25404

February 5th, 6th, and 7th
8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. each day

To register please call [Redacted]

The Department of Labor, WorkForce West Virginia and Employer Support of the Guard and Reserves have teamed up to bring these extraordinary workshops to you.

The workshop will be an investment in your future and the cost to you will be a commitment of 3 days of your time and the desire to improve your ability to secure the career you want.

[WorkForce West Virginia USA logo]
[ESGR Employer Support of the Guard and Reserve logo]
[Department of Labor logo]
[WVMilitaryConnection.org logo]

An equal opportunity employer/program.
Auxiliary aids are available upon request to individuals with disabilities.

Source: Workforce West Virginia. | GAO-15-518

Accessible Text for Appendix V: Department of Labor Survey of Veterans' Employment Workshop Participants

OFF BASE TRANSITION TRAINING PARTICIPANT SURVEY

COURSE TITLE: **DOL Employment Workshop**
LOCATION: [Answer text box]
COURSE DATES: [Answer text box]
FACILITATOR'S NAME: [Answer text box]
PARTICIPANT'S NAME (OPTIONAL): [Answer text box]

Evaluate each of the following areas and place an "X" in the appropriate rating block for each item.

If you mark a 1 or 2, please comment in the General Comments Block at bottom of form."

- 1 STRONGLY DISAGREE**
- 2 DISAGREE**
- 3 NEITHER AGREE/DISAGREE**
- 4 AGREE**
- 5 STRONGLY AGREE**

1. Stated workshop objectives were accomplished. [5 answer checkboxes]
 - a. Section 1 – Transition Planning [5 answer checkboxes]
 - b. Section 2 – Career Exploration and Validation [5 answer checkboxes]
 - c. Section 3 – Job Search Plan [5 answer checkboxes]
 - d. Section 4 – Build an Effective Resume [5 answer checkboxes]
 - e. Section 5 – Federal Hiring, Resumes and Programs [5 answer checkboxes]
 - f. Section 6 – Skilled Interview [5 answer checkboxes]
 - g. Section 7 – Interview Post Analysis [5 answer checkboxes]
 2. Instructional materials were suitable. [5 answer checkboxes]
 3. Level of difficulty was appropriate. [5 answer checkboxes]
 4. Facilitator was effective. [5 answer checkboxes]
 5. Length of workshop was appropriate. [5 answer checkboxes]
 6. Subject matter was applicable to your employment and job search needs. [5 answer checkboxes]
 7. Would recommend as useful to other veterans. [5 answer checkboxes]
 8. What specific topical areas or features of the training were of the most value to you? [Answer text box]
 9. What were the least valuable? [Answer text box]
- YOUR KNOWLEDGE AND SKILL LEVEL
10. Before course HIGH [10 answer checkboxes] NONE
 11. After course HIGH [10 answer checkboxes] NONE
 12. How helpful was the curriculum and activities in improving your knowledge of career transition?
 - [Answer checkbox] GREAT BENEFIT
 - [Answer checkbox] SOME
 - [Answer checkbox] LITTLE
 - [Answer checkbox] NO BENEFIT
 13. What is your overall rating for the course? EXCELLENT [10 answer checkboxes] UNSATISFACTORY
- GENERAL COMMENTS (If more space is needed, continue on reverse) [Answer text box]

Source: Department of Labor. | GAO-15-518

Agency Comments

Department of Labor

Page 1

Accessible Text for Appendix II: Comments from the Department of Labor

U.S. Department of Labor
Assistant Secretary for Veterans' Employment and Training
Washington, D.C. 20210
July 1, 2015

Mr. Andrew Sherrill
Director
Education, Workforce, and Income Security Issues
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Mr. Sherrill,

On behalf of the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the Government Accountability Office's (GAO) Report titled *Veterans' Employment: Need for Further Workshops Should Be Considered before Making Decisions on Their Future*. DOL has assigned the Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) the responsibility to respond to GAO's recommendation(s) in this Report. The GAO Report contained one recommendation:

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 concurs with the recommendation. Prior to a continuation or expansion of this pilot, DOL will conduct a deliberate assessment of the need for these services; which services are most useful for veterans and their spouses; and what overlap exists with programs providing similar services to this population.

The GAO Report confirms many of the lessons we learned from conducting the Off-Base Transition Training Pilot. While validating that there is a sizeable portion of the veteran population (those transitioning prior to 2011) for which the Transition Assistance Program (TAP) was either voluntary or not available, and that those individuals could benefit from specific parts of the program instruction, we also gained a better understanding that there is a broad spectrum of employment needs among this population that makes development of a single program of instruction less useful.

Veterans and their spouses may not require instruction on the full spectrum of skills covered in the DOL TAP employment workshop. Depending on when the veterans left the military,

their work and life experiences could be much broader than that of transitioning service members entering the civilian workforce for the first time. Veterans may only need assistance with resume writing, military skills translation, interviewing techniques, or the federal hiring process or they may require assistance for issues not covered in the employment workshop. Additionally, we found that one obstacle to participation in the pilot was the 3-day format. Many veterans were unable to commit to a workshop of that length. A veteran's specific employment needs would help determine what skills need to be developed.

We believe the relevant instruction is most effective as part of a comprehensive delivery model focused through the American Job Center (AJC) system. With that in mind, the assessment GAO recommends we undertake should include a thorough comparison of services provided to veterans and their spouses in the AJC system with the information contained in the DOL TAP employment workshop and online curriculum. This comparison would identify which services and topics are most needed by the veterans and their spouses, as well as the best method or methods to deliver those services. The assessment should identify if specific services provided within the AJC system require revision or redesign to better meet the employment needs of veterans and their spouses.

Thank you for providing us an opportunity to respond. Should you have additional questions, please feel free to contact Gordon Burke in the Veterans' Employment and Training Service at (202) 693-4700.

Respectfully,
Signed by
Teresa W. Gerton
Acting Assistant Secretary

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