

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-17-31](#), a report to the Ranking Member, Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

Enacted in 2014, WIOA aims, in part, to increase coordination among federal workforce development programs, which are administered primarily by DOL and Education. GAO was asked to review selected states' approaches for addressing certain WIOA provisions in their state workforce plans.

GAO examined 1) approaches selected states have taken to develop plans for implementing career pathways, sector partnerships, and regional planning strategies, and 2) related planning challenges these states have encountered and how they have addressed them.

GAO reviewed relevant federal laws, regulations, and guidance. GAO also conducted case studies in five states (California, Colorado, Kentucky, Ohio, and Pennsylvania). GAO selected these states based on input from national associations about their level of experience with career pathways, sector partnerships, and regional planning strategies, and GAO's review of relevant reports. In these states, GAO interviewed state workforce board officials and agency officials who were involved in developing the state plan. The information GAO obtained provides in-depth examples but is not generalizable to all states. GAO also reviewed state plans and other relevant documentation. In addition, GAO interviewed DOL and Education officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is not making recommendations in this report. DOL and Education provided technical comments on a draft of this report, which GAO incorporated as appropriate.

View [GAO-17-31](#). For more information, contact Andrew Sherrill at (202) 512-7215 or sherrilla@gao.gov.

November 2016

WORKFORCE INNOVATION AND OPPORTUNITY ACT

Selected States' Planning Approaches for Serving Job Seekers and Employers

What GAO Found

Officials in five selected states reported using three main approaches to develop plans for implementing career pathways, sector partnerships, and regional planning strategies under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). GAO selected states that had various levels of experience with these strategies. Specifically, as a condition of receiving funding, federal agencies require state plans under WIOA to include career pathways strategies, which align education, job training, and support services to help job seekers obtain employment. These plans must also include sector partnership strategies, which help employers in an industry address shared goals and hiring needs. In addition, states are required to establish regions, which may be made up of multiple local workforce areas. According to the Department of Labor (DOL), these regions are intended in part to align workforce activities with regional economies. To address these requirements, officials in each of the five states reported:

- **Building on prior experience to enhance career pathways, sector partnerships, or both strategies.** For example, Pennsylvania's state plan proposes building on over 10 years of experience with sector partnerships by increasing technical assistance for them and exploring the development of a certification program for these partnerships.
- **Increasing the involvement of stakeholders, which uncovered ways to enhance services in most selected states.** For example, Ohio officials said they involved the state agency that oversees employment services for individuals with disabilities and advocates for these individuals in planning efforts for the first time, which led them to provide training on disability awareness for staff at all local workforce centers.
- **Using multiple sources of labor market information, which helped better align career pathways strategies with employer needs in some selected states.** For example, Colorado officials said they asked employers to review projected worker shortages in the medical industry over the next 10 years, and employers said they would need more workers over a shorter period of time. Officials used this information to focus their career pathways strategies on preparing individuals to eventually fill the jobs that were projected to have worker shortages.

Officials in four of the states GAO selected reported facing challenges establishing regions due to local areas' concerns, which they addressed by revising regional boundaries or increasing the number of regions and by providing incentives for regional collaboration or innovation. In three states, officials said they revised their regions in response to local concerns. For example, California officials said they redrew regional boundaries after a local area requested that it be assigned to a different region based on commuting patterns, among other factors. In addition, to encourage regional collaboration or innovation, officials in four states reported providing financial incentives. For example, a Kentucky official said the state is using a private grant to fund regional efforts to develop career pathways and sector partnership strategies. Additionally, DOL and Department of Education (Education) officials told us that they plan to support states with related technical assistance.