



Report to the Ranking Member,
Committee on Health, Education,
Labor and Pensions, U.S. Senate

February 2018

WORKFORCE INNOVATION AND OPPORTUNITY ACT

Federal Agencies'
Collaboration
Generally Reflected
Leading Practices, but
Could Be Enhanced

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-18-171](#), a report to the Ranking Member, Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

WIOA was enacted in 2014 and requires DOL, Education, and HHS to collaborate on an ongoing basis to implement the law. WIOA requirements involving interagency collaboration include issuing regulations, developing a common performance system, and overseeing state planning. In prior work, GAO identified leading practices that can enhance and sustain federal collaborative efforts. Given the ongoing collaboration required by WIOA, GAO was asked to review the collaborative approaches the agencies have used to implement the law.

This report examines the extent to which federal agencies' efforts to implement certain WIOA requirements have aligned with leading collaboration practices.

GAO reviewed relevant federal laws, regulations, and guidance. GAO also interviewed officials from DOL, Education, and HHS who led the overall collaboration effort, gathered information from interagency workgroups, and reviewed relevant documentation. In addition, GAO interviewed Office of Management and Budget staff regarding their role in this collaboration. GAO assessed the agencies' efforts against leading collaboration practices and federal internal control standards.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making 6 recommendations to DOL, Education, and HHS to better address their resource needs and document their agreements. HHS agreed with GAO's recommendations. DOL and Education neither agreed nor disagreed but planned to take actions to address the recommendations.

View [GAO-18-171](#). For more information, contact Cindy Brown Barnes, (202) 512-7215, brownbarnesc@gao.gov.

February 2018

WORKFORCE INNOVATION AND OPPORTUNITY ACT

Federal Agencies' Collaboration Generally Reflected Leading Practices, but Could Be Enhanced

What GAO Found

Federal agencies' efforts to implement Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) requirements related to regulations, program performance, and state planning aligned with most of the leading collaboration practices that GAO identified in its prior work, but could be enhanced in two areas. Officials from the Departments of Labor (DOL), Education (Education), and Health and Human Services (HHS) reported having taken actions consistent with five of seven leading collaboration practices (see table).

Table: Examples of Federal Agencies' Actions That Were Consistent with GAO's Identified Leading Collaboration Practices

Leading Collaboration Practices	Examples of Actions Taken by the Departments of Labor (DOL), Education (Education), and Health and Human Services (HHS) to Implement the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)
Defining Outcomes and Accountability	Implemented outcomes and time frames required by WIOA by establishing interim outcomes and deadlines. The agencies also identified additional outcomes and tracked their progress, for example, by developing work plans with deadlines for specific tasks.
Bridging Organizational Cultures	Shared information about differences across agencies in programs and processes. For example, identified each agency's existing process for reviewing and approving state plans before developing a joint process.
Establishing and Sustaining Leadership	Shared leadership of the collaboration by identifying a senior leader from each agency and workgroup co-chairs from each agency. These workgroup leadership roles are generally a core job responsibility.
Clarifying Roles and Responsibilities	Developed a collaboration structure, including roles and responsibilities of interagency workgroups, and a joint decision-making process involving senior leaders from each agency.
Including Relevant Participants	Involved relevant participants from DOL, Education, HHS, and other agencies as needed. Participants committed staff resources to help carry out interagency workgroup activities.

Source: GAO and analysis of information from DOL, Education, and HHS officials. | GAO-18-171

However, GAO noted that the agencies' efforts could be enhanced in two areas:

Resources. The agencies have leveraged various resources, but have not fully identified the resources needed to address technology challenges. Online collaboration tools could help address these challenges, and officials said they have used them to a limited extent based on their business needs. DOL and Education officials said the agencies are exploring options for using online tools to a greater extent, but have not fully identified their technology needs or which tools would best meet these needs. Without doing so, the agencies may be missing opportunities to collaborate more efficiently and effectively.

Written agreements. The agencies have not formally documented their agreements about how they are collaborating or sharing resources. Officials said they have not formally documented their agreements because they believed it was not necessary, and they faced time constraints. However, the agencies have experienced turnover among senior officials, and without documentation of how they are collaborating, it may take longer for newly appointed officials to become familiar with and implement collaboration efforts. In addition, without documenting decisions about how they share resources, the agencies may be missing opportunities to assess whether their approach could be enhanced.

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Abbreviations

DOL	Department of Labor
Education	Department of Education
HHS	Department of Health and Human Services
ICR	information collection request
OMB	Office of Management and Budget
TANF	Temporary Assistance for Needy Families
WIOA	Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act

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February 8, 2018

The Honorable Patty Murray
Ranking Member
Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions
United States Senate

Dear Senator Murray:

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) requires federal agencies to collaborate to implement programs serving jobseekers and employers.¹ Enacted in July 2014, WIOA emphasizes the alignment and integration of workforce programs, which are administered primarily by the Departments of Labor (DOL) and Education (Education), with support from the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) and other partner agencies.² These programs provide education and training services that help jobseekers obtain employment and advance in the labor market, including job search assistance, career counseling, and a variety of occupational skills, classroom, and on-the-job training. In addition, WIOA emphasizes that employers are also customers of the workforce system, and includes provisions that involve them in helping the system provide the skilled workers they need. WIOA requires DOL, Education, and HHS to work together in various ways to implement the law, including issuing regulations, developing a common performance accountability system, and overseeing state workforce development

¹Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, Pub. L. No. 113-128, 128 Stat. 1425 (2014) (codified as amended at 29 U.S.C. § 3101 *et seq.*).

²WIOA designated six programs as core and established common performance measures for them. Four of these programs are administered by DOL: Title I Adult, Title I Dislocated Worker, Title I Youth, and Wagner-Peyser Employment Services. Two of these programs are administered by Education: Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, and State Vocational Rehabilitation Services (Vocational Rehabilitation).

planning.³ According to agency officials, these three areas were the primary focus of their collaboration after WIOA was enacted and they said they had completed most of the actions needed to implement them by summer 2016.

Beyond these initial efforts, WIOA requires ongoing collaboration among DOL, Education, and HHS to oversee the full implementation of the law. For example, WIOA requires DOL and Education to collaborate on an ongoing basis to review updates to state plans every 2 years, approve any modifications, and approve new state plans every 4 years.⁴ Further, WIOA encourages DOL, Education, HHS, and other relevant federal agencies to conduct program research and evaluation. In our prior work, we have identified leading practices that can help enhance and sustain federal collaborative efforts.⁵ We have also determined, as part of our prior work, that collaborations experience common challenges, including using resources such as staff, funding, and technology.⁶

In light of the ongoing collaboration required by WIOA, you asked us to examine the approaches the federal agencies have used to foster their collaborative efforts to implement the law. This report examines the extent to which federal agencies' efforts to implement WIOA requirements

³State workforce development plans must include planning for the six programs designated as core by WIOA, and may also include planning for one or more additional programs and activities. For ease of reference, we refer to WIOA "Unified State plans" and "Combined State plans" collectively as "state workforce development plans." 29 U.S.C. § 3112-13. Further, we refer to these additional programs and activities as "other partner programs" throughout this report. The other partner programs include the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, which is administered by HHS. Furthermore, WIOA requires TANF services to be available at one-stop centers—also known as American Job Centers—that provide workforce services, although state governors may opt out of this requirement.

⁴WIOA also requires HHS to review and approve the relevant portions of state plans when they include TANF as a partner program.

⁵See GAO, *Managing for Results: Key Considerations for Implementing Interagency Collaborative Mechanisms*, [GAO-12-1022](#) (Washington, D.C.: Sept. 27, 2012). Many of the key features and considerations we identified in [GAO-12-1022](#) align with the key collaboration practices we identified in GAO, *Results-Oriented Government: Practices That Can Help Enhance and Sustain Collaboration among Federal Agencies*, [GAO-06-15](#) (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 21, 2005). Also see GAO, *Managing for Results: Implementation Approaches Used to Enhance Collaboration in Interagency Groups*, [GAO-14-220](#) (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 14, 2014). For a complete list of our relevant previous work, see the Related GAO Products page at the end of this report.

⁶[GAO-14-220](#).

related to regulations, program performance, and state planning have aligned with leading collaboration practices.

To address this objective, we reviewed relevant federal laws, regulations, and guidance. In addition, we interviewed senior DOL and Education officials at the Assistant Secretary level, and other senior Education and HHS officials who served as key leaders in this interagency collaboration from 2014 to 2016.⁷ We also obtained information, through interviews or written responses, from five interagency groups identified by knowledgeable agency officials as integral to developing WIOA regulations, developing a common performance accountability system, or providing guidance and oversight related to state planning. These groups are the (1) Coordinating Committee, (2) Regulations Workgroup, (3) Performance Workgroup, (4) One-Stop Workgroup, and (5) State Plan Workgroup.⁸ Additionally, we obtained information, through interviews or written responses, from the Joint Technical Assistance and Communication Workgroup and the Shared Monitoring Workgroup, which were identified by knowledgeable agency officials as integral to ongoing efforts to oversee the full implementation of WIOA.⁹ (For a description of the role of each workgroup, see appendix I). To corroborate information from interviews and written responses, we reviewed relevant agency documentation such as meeting agendas, work plans, and tracking tools. Furthermore, we interviewed Office of Management and Budget (OMB) staff to obtain information on (1) their role in this effort, and (2) the OMB MAX Federal Community website, which federal agencies can use to share information. Lastly, we assessed the agencies' collaborative efforts against the leading practices for interagency collaboration that we have identified in our prior work, as well as related federal internal control standards.¹⁰

⁷Most of these senior officials were politically appointed, and the presidential administration changed in January 2017. Non-termed political appointees are typically asked to leave their positions when a presidential administration changes. As of October 2017, the positions held by these senior officials at DOL and Education were vacant.

⁸The Regulations Workgroup was discontinued in August 2016 after the WIOA regulations were issued, but the other four groups are ongoing, according to agency officials.

⁹We also obtained some information on the purpose and membership of three other interagency workgroups: the Career Pathways Workgroup, Evaluation Workgroup, and Youth Workgroup.

¹⁰[GAO-12-1022](#), [GAO-06-15](#), [GAO-14-220](#), and GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, [GAO-14-704G](#) (Washington, D.C.: September 2014).

We conducted this performance audit from September 2016 to February 2018 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 for 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

WIOA Requirements and Implementation Timeline

WIOA required federal agencies to collaborate to implement a new framework for the workforce development system over the 2 years following its enactment in 2014.¹¹ This framework included outcomes related to regulations, program performance, and state workforce development planning. Specifically, WIOA required:

- DOL, Education, and HHS, as appropriate, to develop joint regulations implementing WIOA;¹²
- DOL and Education to develop a common performance accountability system for the core programs to assess their effectiveness in achieving positive outcomes for individuals served by those programs, including a new measure of effectiveness in serving employers and definitions of the performance measures specified in the law;¹³ and
- DOL and Education to provide guidance to states on their workforce development plans, and review and approve these plans before they were implemented, including involving other federal agencies in the review process as needed.¹⁴

¹¹WIOA has a number of different requirements, some of which included statutory timelines for implementation, required ongoing collaboration, or both. For example, WIOA required DOL and Education to review and approve initial state workforce plans within two years of the date of enactment of the Act, and continue to review state workforce plans indefinitely, at least every four years. 29 U.S.C. § 3112-13.

¹²29 U.S.C. § 3343(f).

¹³29 U.S.C. § 3141.

¹⁴When states also include planning for other partner programs, WIOA requires the agencies overseeing those programs to review and approve the relevant portions of the plan. For example, WIOA requires HHS to review and approve the relevant portions of state plans when they include TANF. 29 U.S.C. § 3112-13, 3343(a).

According to officials and related documentation, by summer 2016, federal agencies had completed most of these requirements (see fig. 1).¹⁵

Figure 1: Implementation Timeline for Certain Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Requirements

July 2014	Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) enacted
April 2015	The Departments of Labor (DOL) and Education (Education) issue proposed WIOA regulations ^a
July 2015	DOL and Education issue a proposed performance reporting template
February-March 2016	DOL, Education, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and other agencies issue guidance on state workforce development plans ^b
April 2016	States submit workforce development plans to DOL and Education for review
June 2016	DOL and Education post final WIOA regulations on their websites and issue additional performance reporting guidance ^c DOL, Education, HHS, and other agencies approve state workforce development plans ^b
July 2016	State workforce development plans and common performance measures take effect
August 2016	Final WIOA regulations published in Federal Register ^{a,c}

Source: GAO analysis of relevant federal law, Federal Register notices, joint guidance issued by DOL, Education, and other federal agencies, and information from DOL, Education, and HHS officials and DOL's website. | GAO-18-171

^aTo implement WIOA, DOL and Education issued five separate proposed regulations resulting in five separate final regulations. Each set of proposed and final regulations included one joint regulation issued by both agencies, one issued by DOL, and three issued by Education. DOL, Education, and HHS officials told us that HHS was involved in developing the joint regulation.

^bThe other agencies were the Departments of Agriculture and Housing and Urban Development. State workforce development plans must include planning for the six programs designated as core by WIOA, which are administered by DOL and Education. States may also include planning for one or more additional programs and activities, including programs and activities administered by HHS and the Departments of Agriculture and Housing and Urban Development.

^cWhile the agencies announced the final regulations in June 2016 by posting them on their websites, the regulations were not published in the Federal Register until August 19, 2016.

¹⁵According to officials, as of summer 2016, the agencies were still in the process of developing the performance measure on effectiveness in serving employers. In July 2016, the agencies began piloting three different approaches for measuring the effectiveness of the core programs in serving employers. As part of this pilot, the agencies asked states to select two of these three approaches and collect related data. In October 2017, officials told us they were in the process of evaluating the pilot and that states would begin reporting outcomes on this performance measure in October 2018.








Beyond the initial 2-year period, WIOA requires ongoing collaboration among DOL, Education, and HHS to oversee the full implementation of the law. For instance, WIOA requires federal agencies to review updates to state plans every 2 years beginning in spring 2018. WIOA also requires federal agencies to approve new state plans every four years beginning in spring 2020. In addition, WIOA encourages federal agencies to collaborate to conduct program research and evaluation. Agency officials told us they also plan to continue their efforts to provide joint technical assistance and guidance to states and localities, and to collaborate to monitor state program performance.

Leading Practices for Interagency Collaboration

In our prior work, we found that interagency collaborative mechanisms benefit from certain leading practices, or key features, which raise issues to consider when implementing these mechanisms. Specifically, we found that federal agencies have used a variety of mechanisms to carry out collaborative efforts, which all benefited from certain key features, such as bridging organizational cultures and clarity of roles and responsibilities (see fig. 2).¹⁶ These key features raise issues for agency officials to consider when working collaboratively. For example, agency officials should consider the missions and cultures of the participating agencies, whether the agencies have agreed on common terminology and definitions, and whether the agencies have clarified roles and responsibilities.

¹⁶[GAO-12-1022](#), [GAO-06-15](#), and [GAO-14-220](#).

Figure 2: Key Features and Considerations for Implementing Interagency Collaborative Mechanisms

Key features		Key considerations
	Outcomes and accountability	Have short-term and long-term outcomes been clearly defined? Is there a way to track and monitor their progress?
	Bridging organizational cultures	What are the missions and organizational cultures of the participating agencies? Have agencies agreed on common terminology and definitions?
	Leadership	How will leadership be sustained over the long-term? If leadership is shared, have roles and responsibilities been clearly identified and agreed upon?
	Clarity of roles and responsibilities	Have participating agencies clarified roles and responsibilities?
	Participants	Have all relevant participants been included? Do they have the ability to commit resources for their agency?
	Resources	How will the collaborative mechanism be funded and staffed? Have online collaboration tools been developed?
	Written guidance and agreements	If appropriate, have participating agencies documented their agreement regarding how they will be collaborating? Have they developed ways to continually update and monitor these agreements?

Source: GAO. | GAO-18-171

Our prior work has also identified specific approaches that interagency groups have used to address common challenges and implement key features related to outcomes and accountability, leadership, and resources.¹⁷ With respect to resources, for example, we identified several approaches, including (1) developing an inventory of resources dedicated to interagency outcomes, which can help identify and coordinate agency spending, and (2) leveraging related agency resources toward the group’s outcomes.

¹⁷GAO-14-220.

**Federal Agencies’
Collaboration Has
Generally Aligned
with Leading
Practices, but
Agencies Have Not
Fully Identified
Resource Needs or
Documented
Agreements**

**Federal Agencies’ Efforts
Reflected Most of the
Leading Collaboration
Practices**

Overall, we found that the agencies’ efforts to implement WIOA were aligned with five of the seven leading practices for interagency collaboration we have identified in our prior work.¹⁸ Specifically, the agencies’ efforts aligned with leading practices in the areas of (1) outcomes and accountability, (2) bridging organizational cultures, (3) leadership, (4) clarity of roles and responsibilities, and (5) participants. For example, consistent with the clarity of roles and responsibilities practice, the federal agencies developed a collaboration structure including politically-appointed leaders—or Principals—from each of the three agencies, a Coordinating Committee made up of career-level leaders from each agency, and nine interagency workgroups with specific roles and responsibilities.

¹⁸[GAO-12-1022](#), [GAO-06-15](#), and [GAO-14-220](#).

Key Issues to Consider

- Have short-term and long-term outcomes been clearly defined?
- Is there a way to track and monitor their progress?

Source: GAO. | GAO-18-171

Outcomes and Accountability

According to DOL, Education, and HHS officials, WIOA established key outcomes and time frames for the collaboration, and the agencies determined how to implement them within the relevant statutory time frames.¹⁹ Specifically, these officials said they worked jointly to identify interim outcomes, set related deadlines, and monitor progress for the agencies' key outcomes—issuing regulations, developing a common performance system, and overseeing state planning. To accomplish this, each workgroup developed a work plan with deadlines for specific tasks. For example, State Plan Workgroup officials told us that they identified interim outcomes that they needed to accomplish before states could submit their plans to federal agencies, including developing the information collection request (ICR) containing the state plan requirements and planning guidance.²⁰ These officials set deadlines for these interim outcomes based on the sequence in which they needed to occur. Similarly, DOL, Education, and HHS officials told us that the Regulations Workgroup also had a work plan with time frames and interim outcomes, and developed a day-to-day chart that officials used to brief the Principals and manage time frames during the last several months of the regulation development process. This chart included deadlines for sending drafts for legal review and deadlines for when legal reviews needed to be completed, among other key tasks. Furthermore, these officials said the Principals monitored the progress of the workgroups on key outcomes, and the agencies regularly communicated their progress on key outcomes with external parties, including congressional staff.

Officials from all three agencies told us that they also identified additional outcomes that they believed were needed to effectively implement the law. For example, the One-Stop Workgroup developed answers to frequently asked questions about funding infrastructure costs for American Job Centers that provide workforce services. The agencies also developed an existing portal on Education's website to serve as a central location for states to submit their workforce development plans and for

¹⁹Implementation requirements and corresponding time frames can be found throughout WIOA. For instance, WIOA required DOL, Education, and HHS to develop and publish final implementing regulations not later than 18 months after the date of enactment of WIOA. 29 U.S.C. § 3343(f).

²⁰Pursuant to the Paperwork Reduction Act, federal agencies collecting information from 10 or more non-federal entities must comply with a number of statutory provisions, including submitting an ICR to the Director of the OMB for approval. 44 U.S.C. § 3507.

federal agencies to review these plans. Furthermore, the agencies have provided joint technical assistance and guidance to states and localities through the Innovation and Opportunity Network website and through online webinars on various WIOA implementation topics.²¹ DOL, Education, and HHS officials said they tracked progress on these additional outcomes using the same approach they used to track required outcomes.

Key Issues to Consider

- What are the missions and organizational cultures of the participating agencies?
- Have agencies agreed on common terminology and definitions?

Source: GAO. | GAO-18-171

Bridging Organizational Cultures

DOL, Education, and HHS officials said that learning about differences in each agency's culture, programs, and processes was important to accomplishing their outcomes related to WIOA. Early in the collaboration, they held an interagency retreat at DOL to help facilitate knowledge sharing about program services and structures, as well as agency processes. They said that they continued this learning process in the interagency workgroups. Furthermore, these officials told us that this learning process helped develop their commitment to the collaboration. These officials explained that, as they became more familiar with other agencies' programs, they developed a genuine commitment to working collaboratively. One senior official noted that the high level of commitment among the partner agencies set this collaboration apart from other collaborative efforts in which he has previously participated.

Officials from the three agencies told us that they shared information about differences between program requirements, with respect to services, participants, and program structures. For example, Education officials shared information about the continuum of services provided by the Vocational Rehabilitation program, which includes determining eligibility, developing individualized employment plans, and helping individuals with disabilities obtain employment.²² Officials explained that this differs from some workforce programs, which may provide services to participants over a shorter period of time. In addition, officials told us that they shared information about the characteristics of program participants, which led them to realize that their programs may potentially be providing different services to the same participants at different points in time. Furthermore, officials said they learned that DOL has a regional structure for administering its programs, while Education's structure is primarily

²¹For the Innovation and Opportunity Network website, see <https://ion.workforcegps.org>.

²²Education provides grants to states to administer the Vocational Rehabilitation program.

state-based. Officials told us they bridged this difference by deciding that DOL would use its regional structure to communicate with states about WIOA implementation issues, while Education would use its state liaisons.

DOL, Education, and HHS officials said they also shared information about differences at the agency level, with respect to processes for approving state plans and clearing documents. Prior to WIOA, states submitted separate plans to DOL, Education, and HHS for the programs administered by each agency. In contrast, under WIOA, states are required to develop one plan that includes the six core DOL and Education programs, and may also include other programs, such as HHS's TANF program. WIOA requires DOL and Education to review and approve these plans, and also requires HHS to review and approve them when they include TANF. As a result, the agencies must now coordinate their efforts to review and approve state plans. DOL, Education, and HHS officials said they first needed to learn more about each agency's existing process for reviewing and approving these plans before they could develop a joint interagency process for reviewing and approving them under WIOA. For example, DOL and Education had different levels of communication with states prior to approving these plans. In addition, due to the different nature of its review process, HHS used different terminology than DOL and Education to indicate that state plans met federal requirements. The role of the officials who approved the state plans was also different across agencies and programs. Furthermore, in order to issue joint guidance and regulations, officials said they needed to learn about differences in each agency's processes for clearing documents before they are shared outside the agency. For example, officials told us that the Coordinating Committee helped the agencies navigate differences in their clearance processes by connecting the lead regulatory officials at Education with those officials at DOL.

Key Issues to Consider

- If leadership is shared, have roles and responsibilities been clearly identified and agreed upon?
- How will leadership be sustained over the long term?

Source: GAO. | GAO-18-171

Leadership

The agencies have shared leadership of the WIOA collaboration by identifying Principals, Coordinating Committee co-chairs, and workgroup co-chairs from each agency. In the first two years of the collaboration, the Principals included Assistant Secretaries from DOL and Education, the Director of HHS's Office of Family Assistance, and the Commissioner of

Education's Rehabilitation Services Administration.²³ Most of these Principals were politically appointed and left their positions by January 2017 due to the change in presidential administrations. Since then, officials told us that Deputy Assistant Secretaries or other senior, career-level officials have assumed the role of those Principals, and have held monthly meetings. The agencies have also shared leadership of the Coordinating Committee and the workgroups by identifying co-chairs representing each of the three agencies, with the exception of the Performance Workgroup, which is co-chaired by DOL and Education officials. HHS officials explained that they were not members of this workgroup because the WIOA common performance measures do not affect HHS programs.²⁴

The agencies plan to sustain leadership of the collaboration over the long term by maintaining key relationships across agencies and filling career-level leadership positions when they become vacant. DOL, Education, and HHS officials said that career-level officials have developed the relationships across agencies that are needed to sustain the collaboration, and are dedicated to maintaining these relationships in the future. In addition, officials told us that co-chairing the workgroups is generally a core job responsibility for career-level officials. As a result, if these officials leave their positions, the officials hired to replace them would continue to lead the workgroups. According to officials, this approach has been successful in sustaining the leadership of the collaboration since WIOA was enacted.

Key Issues to Consider

- Have participating agencies clarified roles and responsibilities?
- Have participating agencies articulated and agreed to a process for making and enforcing decisions?

Source: GAO. | GAO-18-171

Clarity of Roles and Responsibilities

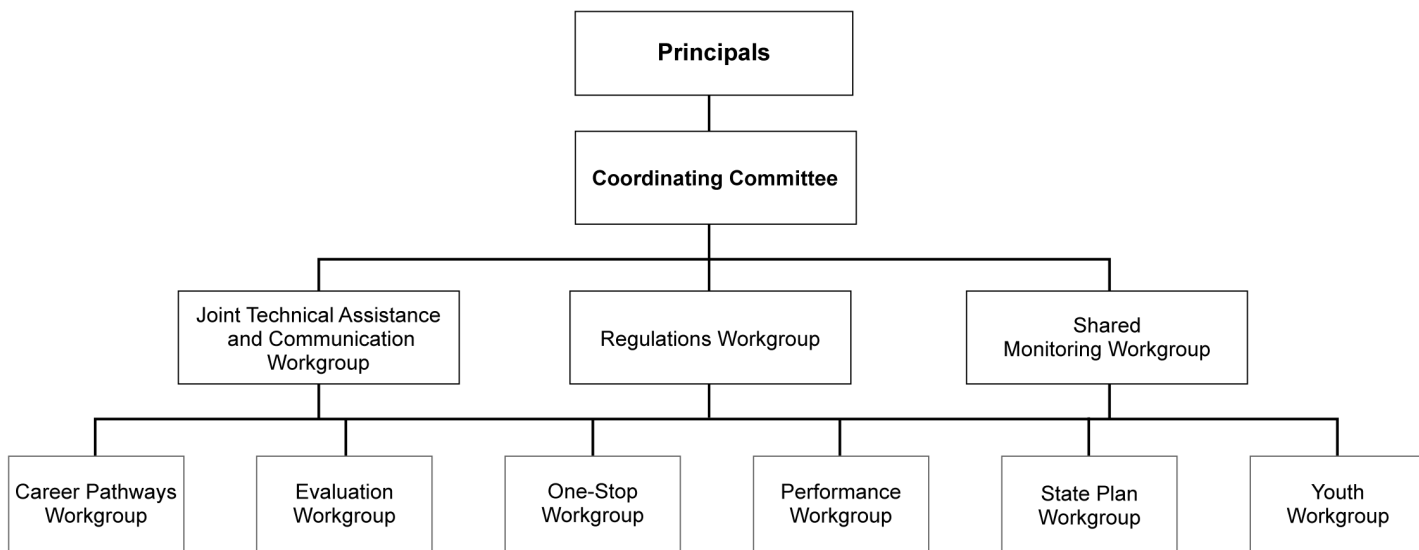
As mentioned earlier, the federal agencies developed a collaboration structure initially headed by politically-appointed leaders, or Principals, from each of the three agencies who provided guidance and oversight to the entire group (see fig. 3). At the next level below the Principals, a Coordinating Committee made up of career-level leaders from each agency acted as a liaison between nine interagency workgroups and the Principals, and developed and monitored timelines for accomplishing outcomes. The nine workgroups performed a wide range of duties that

²³Officials told us that the Assistant Secretary of HHS's Administration for Children and Families delegated this responsibility to the Director of the Office of Family Assistance, which oversees the TANF program.

²⁴The WIOA common performance measures are statutorily required for the six core programs administered by DOL and Education, and are not required for HHS programs.

helped to implement the WIOA requirements of issuing regulations, developing a common performance system, and implementing and overseeing state planning. Each workgroup had specific roles and responsibilities in carrying out the work of the collaboration. (For a description of the role of each workgroup, see appendix I). For example, the Performance Workgroup is responsible for overseeing the implementation of WIOA provisions related to program performance, including developing regulations and reporting requirements, and providing guidance and technical assistance to states and localities. In addition, three workgroups coordinated across the other workgroups to accomplish their outcomes. These workgroups are the 1) Joint Technical Assistance and Communication Workgroup, 2) Regulations Workgroup, and 3) Shared Monitoring Workgroup. For example, the Joint Technical Assistance and Communication Workgroup coordinated the technical assistance provided by the other workgroups and shared information about this assistance with states and localities.

Figure 3: Collaboration Structure Created by the Departments of Labor (DOL), Education (Education), and Health and Human Services (HHS) to Implement the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)



Source: GAO analysis of information from DOL, Education, and HHS officials. | GAO-18-171

According to officials, this collaboration structure facilitated joint decision-making. Specifically, as the leaders of the collaboration, the Principals made joint decisions that resulted in shared outcomes. For example, officials told us that the Principals decided that the agencies would submit one joint draft regulation to OMB instead of submitting a separate draft

from each agency.²⁵ In addition, officials said the interagency workgroups sought guidance and approval from the Principals on key decisions, which was facilitated by the Coordinating Committee. The workgroups developed issue papers outlining options for the Principals' consideration, and the Coordinating Committee prioritized these issues and determined when they would be elevated to the Principals for discussion. For example, the Performance Workgroup used issue papers to seek guidance on drafting policy and to seek approval for the definition of each performance measure.

Key Issues to Consider

- Have all relevant participants been included?
- Do they have the ability to commit resources for their agency?

Source: GAO. | GAO-18-171

Participants

Officials from the four workgroups we interviewed told us that they involved all relevant participants in the WIOA collaboration by seeking members who represented the relevant DOL, Education, and HHS programs, and by involving officials from other agencies and subject matter experts, as needed. For example, State Plan Workgroup members included DOL and Education officials who represented the six core programs, as well as HHS officials who represented the TANF program, which states may include as a partner program in their workforce development plans. In addition, the workgroup included members from the Departments of Agriculture and Housing and Urban Development who oversaw other partner programs. Furthermore, all four workgroups involved experts on particular topics. For example, the Joint Technical Assistance and Communication Workgroup involved staff who were responsible for technical assistance activities in their agencies. In addition, the One-Stop Workgroup involved staff with legal expertise, and the Performance Workgroup consulted with staff from DOL's Chief Evaluation Office. Officials from all four workgroups told us that workgroup members were able to commit resources for their agencies, primarily staff resources, to help carry out workgroup activities.

DOL, Education, and HHS officials said they involved OMB staff throughout the process of developing WIOA regulations. For example, these officials told us that they reached out to OMB early in this process to identify the areas that OMB staff viewed as important. These officials also consulted OMB while they were drafting the proposed and final regulations, and noted that OMB staff were always willing to review drafts before the agencies submitted the final regulations package. These

²⁵As previously noted, the five WIOA regulations published in August 2016 included one regulation that was jointly developed by DOL, Education, and HHS.

officials noted that they had similar interactions with OMB regarding other documents that required OMB approval, including the ICR containing the state plan requirements and planning guidance. Officials said they believe their efforts to involve OMB throughout this process resulted in the draft regulations moving more quickly through the OMB review process than they would have otherwise. They added that they also consulted with other staff from the Executive Office of the President, and typically met with them together with OMB.

Agencies Have Leveraged Some Resources, but Have Not Fully Identified Those Needed to Address Technology Challenges

Key Issues to Consider

- How will the collaborative mechanism be funded and staffed?
- Have online collaboration tools been developed?

Source: GAO. | GAO-18-171

Resources

Although their efforts reflected most of the leading collaboration practices, the agencies have not fully identified the resources needed to address the technology challenges they have experienced. Specifically, officials from all four workgroups we interviewed told us that the collaboration could be enhanced by addressing technology challenges so they can more easily develop joint documents across agencies. Our prior work found that a leading collaboration practice is to identify and address needs by leveraging resources, including staff, funding, and information technology resources.²⁶ As part of this practice, agencies should identify the various resources needed to sustain their collaborative effort.²⁷

DOL, Education, and HHS officials told us that the agencies have found various ways to leverage resources to support their collaborative efforts. Specifically, all three agencies provided staff to help carry out this work. For example, officials told us that DOL reprioritized ongoing work in order to allow staff to contribute to interagency workgroup activities.²⁸

Regarding agency funding, officials said DOL used flexibility in the line item appropriation for the Dislocated Worker National Reserve to support

²⁶GAO-06-15, GAO-12-1022, and GAO-14-220. For example, we found that agencies have leveraged information technology resources by using online collaboration tools and developing information-sharing websites.

²⁷GAO-12-1022 and GAO-06-15.

²⁸Education and HHS officials noted that their agencies had fewer staff resources, so they were unable to redistribute ongoing work, and the staff who contributed to interagency workgroup activities did so in addition to their existing responsibilities.

WIOA technical assistance and transition activities.²⁹ Furthermore, officials told us that all three agencies have used existing contracts to support collaborative efforts.³⁰ With respect to information technology resources, officials said Education adapted an existing portal on its website to serve as a central location for submitting and reviewing state plans, as previously noted.³¹ In addition, the State Plan Workgroup used OMB's MAX Federal Community website to develop and store joint documents and used Google Docs to plan and track the state plan review process. Officials noted that all of the interagency workgroups also used other information technology resources to carry out their work, including using video and other technologies to conduct meetings.

However, officials from all four workgroups we interviewed noted that they faced technology challenges, including developing joint documents and sharing calendars across agencies. Officials said they have primarily used Microsoft Word and email to create joint documents, and officials from two workgroups told us they experienced challenges editing these documents, for example, difficulties merging comments from different agencies and managing multiple versions. Officials also said that in one instance, due to technology limitations, they physically transported a document in order to obtain written signatures from officials at each of the three agencies. In addition, officials from one of the workgroups said they lacked a single repository for storing joint documents. Furthermore, officials from three of the workgroups told us that it was challenging to schedule meetings because they were unable to share calendars across agencies and they relied on email to coordinate many schedules. Although officials said that the agencies have been able to achieve their outcomes despite these technology challenges, they present opportunities for the agencies to enhance their collaboration as they continue to work together to review and approve state plans, provide joint technical assistance and guidance to states and localities, and monitor state program performance.

²⁹Specifically, officials told us that DOL's Employment and Training Administration used 5 percent of the line item appropriation for the Dislocated Worker National Reserve in program years 2015 and 2016 to support WIOA technical assistance and transition activities.

³⁰For example, DOL and Education officials told us that contract staff facilitated discussions and took notes to help the Joint Technical Assistance and Communication Workgroup analyze the technical assistance plans developed by the other workgroups.

³¹Specifically, this portal was located on the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services, Rehabilitation Service Administration's website.

Online collaboration tools currently available to agency officials—such as OMB’s MAX Federal Community website, Google Docs, and SharePoint—offer features that could help address technology challenges, but officials said they have used these tools to a limited extent. DOL, Education, and HHS officials said they weighed the value of these tools in the context of their business needs, such as the time frame in which they needed to accomplish their outcomes, and decided that it was not appropriate to use them to a greater extent at the time. In addition, officials told us that information security issues limited their use of certain online tools. For example, DOL and Education officials used SharePoint to develop documents internally, but officials said they were unable to use SharePoint across agencies for various reasons, including agency firewalls. Additionally, officials said they used Google Docs to share non-deliberative information related to the state plan review process, but did not use it to share deliberative information due to concerns that the information might not be sufficiently secure.

DOL and Education officials said their agencies are currently exploring options for using online collaboration tools to a greater extent, but the agencies have not fully identified their information technology needs or determined which tools would best meet these needs. As previously noted, collaborating agencies should identify the resources, including information technology resources, needed to sustain their collaborative effort.³² Specifically, officials said the agencies have not yet identified or prioritized their specific technical requirements, including information security needs, or conducted market research to determine which online tools would best meet these needs. We have previously found that identifying and prioritizing requirements, such as information security needs, is a critical factor in successfully acquiring information technology.³³ For example, to successfully acquire the needed information technology, each collaborating agency would first have to identify its own technical requirements and information security needs, and then reach agreement with the other agencies on their joint requirements and needs.

In addition, according to federal internal control standards, agencies should design their information systems and related control activities to

³²[GAO-12-1022](#) and [GAO-06-15](#).

³³GAO, *Information Technology: Critical Factors Underlying Successful Major Acquisitions*, [GAO-12-7](#) (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 21, 2011).

achieve objectives and respond to risks.³⁴ When acquiring information technology, these control activities may include documenting requirements. Moreover, we have reported that market research is a critical step in the acquisitions process.³⁵ Conducting market research would allow the agencies to identify which online collaboration tools offer features such as document storage and the ability to share calendars across agencies. Conducting such research would also allow the agencies to determine whether the technical limitations they have experienced can be addressed, as well as which tools would best meet their information security needs. Without fully identifying their technology needs and leveraging their resources to address these needs, the agencies may be missing opportunities to collaborate more efficiently and effectively as they continue to develop joint documents such as planned cross-departmental guidance and monitoring tools.

Agencies Have Not Documented Agreements to Ensure Continuity of Collaborative Efforts

Key Issues to Consider

- If appropriate, have participating agencies documented their agreement regarding how they will be collaborating?
- Have they developed ways to continually update and monitor these agreements?

Source: GAO. | GAO-18-171

Written Guidance and Agreements

DOL, Education, and HHS officials told us that the agencies have informally confirmed their collaborative agreements, but we found that they have not documented in writing their agreements about how the collaboration operates or how they share resources to support joint efforts. Our prior work found that formally documenting agreements is a leading collaboration practice that can strengthen agencies' commitment to working together.³⁶ These written agreements can address various aspects of collaboration, including leadership, roles, responsibilities, and resources. Specifically, officials told us that they have confirmed their interagency agreements through verbal discussions and work plans. However, officials said the agencies have not formally documented in writing their agreements about the structure of the collaboration, the roles

³⁴See GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, [GAO-14-704G](#) (Washington, D.C.: September 2014).

³⁵Market research is the process used to collect and analyze data about capabilities in the market that could satisfy an agency's needs, and can include conducting outreach to vendors to determine the extent to which their products meet agency requirements. See GAO, *Market Research: Better Documentation Needed to Inform Future Procurements at Selected Agencies*, [GAO-15-8](#) (Washington, D.C.: Oct. 9, 2014).

³⁶[GAO-12-1022](#) and [GAO-06-15](#). Specifically, we found that agencies can strengthen their commitment to working together by articulating their agreements in formal documents, such as a memorandum of understanding, interagency guidance, or an interagency planning document, signed by senior officials in the respective agencies.

and responsibilities of each federal agency and workgroup, or the process for making decisions.³⁷ In addition, officials told us that the agencies have not formally documented their agreement that they would use the existing portal on Education's website, which is maintained by Education staff, to receive and review state plans.³⁸ Officials also said the agencies have not formally documented their agreements regarding how they use existing contracts to support collaborative efforts.

DOL, Education, and HHS officials said they have not formally documented their agreements because they believed it was not necessary and they faced time constraints, but they would consider documenting them in the future under certain circumstances. Officials said they determined that it was not necessary to document their agreements, and doing so would have been burdensome and taken time away from accomplishing their outcomes under tight time frames. The officials said written agreements are not needed because the agencies are already committed to the collaboration, and are required by law and regulations to continue to work together to implement WIOA. With respect to agreements about sharing resources, officials generally said that documenting these agreements would only be necessary if the agencies combined funding from separate appropriations.³⁹ Officials said they would consider combining funding from separate appropriations and documenting these agreements on a case by case basis. For example, officials said the agencies are exploring other options for the online portal they use to receive and review state plans, and would consider developing a written agreement if they decide to share related costs.

Documenting agreements about operations and resources is critical to ensuring continuity in collaborative efforts over time, in particular because two of the three agencies have experienced turnover in politically

³⁷Although the previous section of this report includes a figure depicting the agencies' collaboration structure, we developed this figure ourselves based on information we obtained through interviews with agency officials. Furthermore, officials provided us with information about the content of their informal collaborative agreements, but this information did not constitute a formal written interagency agreement that existed prior to our review.

³⁸Officials noted that the use of Education's online portal was considered an interim strategy and they are continuing to explore a longer term strategy.

³⁹In one interview, some officials said it would be helpful to document the agencies' agreement regarding the funding for and location of the online portal for receiving and reviewing state plans.

appointed senior officials. According to federal internal control standards, agencies should use methods such as written documentation to internally and externally communicate the information needed to achieve their objectives.⁴⁰ Internal control standards also note that documentation provides a way to retain organizational knowledge and mitigate the risk of having that knowledge limited to a few officials.⁴¹ As of October 2017, the positions held by the political appointees who initially led the collaboration at DOL and Education were vacant. Our prior work found that transitions in leadership can weaken the effectiveness of any collaborative mechanism.⁴² Without documentation of how the collaboration operates, it may take longer for newly appointed senior officials to become familiar with and continue to make progress in implementing the collaboration.

In addition, without documenting decisions about how they share resources, such as the online state plan portal and related staff resources, as well as existing contracts, the agencies may be missing opportunities to identify the resources contributed by each agency. For example, we have previously reported that federal agencies have used resource inventories to better understand the range of resources dedicated to interagency outcomes, which can help identify and coordinate agency spending.⁴³ The agencies may also be missing opportunities to assess whether their approach to sharing resources could be enhanced, including whether it is sustainable on an ongoing basis. For example, the agencies could use written agreements to communicate key resource decisions to agency leadership and to serve as a starting point for revisiting these decisions in the future.

Conclusions

Over a relatively short time period, DOL, Education, and HHS officials implemented a new framework for the workforce development system under WIOA. This effort was substantial and required an unprecedented level of coordination among these agencies across two presidential administrations. Furthermore, the agencies' efforts to accomplish these outcomes reflected many leading collaboration practices. In particular, the collaboration structure they established has played a critical role in

⁴⁰[GAO-14-704G](#).

⁴¹[GAO-14-704G](#).

⁴²[GAO-12-1022](#).

⁴³[GAO-14-220](#).

facilitating cross-program learning and decision-making, and will likely position them well as they continue working together to oversee the full implementation of WIOA.

However, the agencies have not fully identified their technology resource needs or formally documented their collaboration agreements. This was due, in part, to time constraints, but with many statutory deadlines behind them, the agencies now have an opportunity to fully implement these leading practices. The agencies have started to explore ways to use online collaboration tools to a greater extent, which could help address the technology challenges they have faced. However, without fully identifying their technology needs and leveraging their resources to address them, the agencies may be missing opportunities to collaborate more efficiently and effectively as they continue to develop joint documents. In addition, key leadership positions that provide attention, focus, and oversight for the collaboration remain vacant at two of the three agencies. While the agencies have sustained the leadership of the collaboration despite these vacancies, formally documenting agreements could help support a smooth transition of leadership when these positions are filled. Without documentation of how the collaboration operates, it may take longer for newly appointed officials to become familiar with and implement collaborative efforts. Furthermore, without documenting decisions about how they share resources, the agencies may be missing opportunities to develop a more cohesive and sustainable approach across organizations.

Recommendations for Executive Action

We are making six recommendations, two to each of the three agencies in our review, to take steps to enhance their collaboration:

The Assistant Secretary of DOL's Employment and Training Administration should work with Education and HHS to fully identify and address their technology resource needs by (1) jointly identifying and prioritizing requirements for online collaboration tools, including those related to security, (2) determining which online tools would best meet their needs, and (3) leveraging their resources to support greater use of those tools. (Recommendation 1)

The Assistant Secretaries of Education's Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education and Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services should work with DOL and HHS to fully identify and address their technology resource needs by (1) jointly identifying and prioritizing requirements for online collaboration tools, including those related to

security, (2) determining which online tools would best meet their needs, and (3) leveraging their resources to support greater use of those tools. (Recommendation 2)

The Director of HHS's Office of Family Assistance should work with DOL and Education to fully identify and address their technology resource needs by (1) jointly identifying and prioritizing requirements for online collaboration tools, including those related to security, (2) determining which online tools would best meet their needs, and (3) leveraging their resources to support greater use of those tools. (Recommendation 3)

The Assistant Secretary of DOL's Employment and Training Administration should formally document agreements with Education and HHS about how the collaboration operates and how the agencies share resources. (Recommendation 4)

The Assistant Secretaries of Education's Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education and Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services should formally document agreements with DOL and HHS about how the collaboration operates and how the agencies share resources. (Recommendation 5)

The Director of HHS's Office of Family Assistance should formally document agreements with DOL and Education about how the collaboration operates and how the agencies share resources. (Recommendation 6)

Agency Comments and Our Evaluation

We provided a draft of this report to the Department of Labor (DOL), the Department of Education (Education), the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), and the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for review and comment. DOL's Employment and Training Administration (ETA), Education, and HHS provided written comments that are reprinted in appendixes II, III, and IV, respectively. ETA and Education also provided technical comments, which we incorporated as appropriate. ETA and Education did not state whether they agreed with the two recommendations made to each of their agencies. HHS agreed with the two recommendations we made to it. OMB did not provide comments.

With respect to our first, second, and third recommendations that ETA, Education, and HHS work together to fully identify and address their technology resource needs, ETA and Education acknowledged that there is more work to be done in this area. ETA stated that it will continue to work with its partners to facilitate collaboration, including through technology-based solutions. Education stated that, since our review, it has made progress in identifying and prioritizing technology needs and conducting related market research. Education also stated that, together with its WIOA federal agency partners, it plans to issue a Request for Information in January 2018 to identify options for a new online system for submitting state plans. In addition, Education stated that the agencies have made progress in identifying existing internal tools that they can use to share documents. HHS stated that it will work with DOL and Education to ensure that technology resources are fully identified for online collaboration tool requirements.

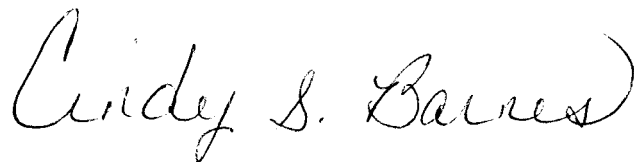
With respect to our fourth, fifth, and sixth recommendations that ETA, Education, and HHS formally document their collaboration agreements, ETA and Education said they would explore developing such agreements. ETA noted that written agreements are important to ensure continuity; however, Education stated that it is not convinced that a formal agreement is necessary, given that the WIOA collaboration has been institutionalized. Education also stated that the lack of a formal agreement has not negatively affected the agencies' commitment to working together or the quality of their work. We continue to believe that formally documenting their collaboration agreements would help ETA, Education, and HHS ensure continuity in their efforts to fully implement WIOA, particularly given current vacancies in key leadership positions at two of the three agencies. Documenting collaboration agreements could help support a smooth transition of leadership when these positions are filled,

and could also help the agencies assess and enhance their approach to sharing resources. HHS stated that it will work with DOL and Education to outline collaboration operations and ensure that documented agreements are in place to ensure that the agencies share resources.

We are sending copies of this report to the appropriate congressional committees, the Secretary of the Department of Labor, the Secretary of the Department of Education, the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, the Director of the Office of Management and Budget, and other interested parties. In addition, the report is available at no charge on the GAO website at <http://www.gao.gov>.

If you or your staff have any questions about this report, please contact me at (202) 512-7215 or brownbarnesc@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 V.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Cindy S. Barnes".

Cindy Brown Barnes
Director
Education, Workforce, and Income Security Issues

Appendix I: Interagency Groups for Implementing the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act

Table 1 lists the interagency groups that the Departments of Labor, Education, and Health and Human Services used to implement the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). According to officials, the groups were active as of September 2017, with the exception of the Regulations Workgroup, which was discontinued in August 2016 after the final WIOA regulations were issued.

Table 1: Interagency Groups Used by the Departments of Labor (DOL), Education (Education), and Health and Human Services (HHS) to Implement the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA)

Group	Role	Member Agencies
Principals	Provides direction and feedback to the Coordinating Committee and the interagency workgroups and makes final policy decisions.	DOL, Education, and HHS
Coordinating Committee	Coordinates the work of the interagency workgroups, acts as a liaison between the workgroups and the Principals, and develops and monitors timelines for accomplishing outcomes.	DOL, Education, and HHS
Joint Technical Assistance and Communication Workgroup	Coordinates the technical assistance provided by the other workgroups and shares information about this assistance with states and localities.	DOL, Education, and HHS
Regulations Workgroup	Coordinated and developed the joint WIOA regulation and related information collection request, including coordination across the other workgroups.	DOL and Education
Shared Monitoring Workgroup	Develops approaches for aligning the monitoring of certain WIOA requirements across agencies, including developing a shared monitoring tool and processes for sharing information.	DOL, Education, and HHS
Career Pathways Workgroup	Coordinates WIOA career pathways activities across WIOA federal partners, including sharing information about how programs support career pathways and providing related technical assistance.	DOL, Education, HHS, and the Departments of Transportation and Housing and Urban Development (HUD)
Evaluation Workgroup ^a	Aligns the evaluation-related efforts under WIOA.	DOL, Education, and HHS
One-Stop Workgroup	Oversees the implementation of WIOA provisions related to one-stop centers, including developing regulations and providing guidance and technical assistance to states and localities.	DOL, Education, and HHS
Performance Workgroup	Oversees the implementation of WIOA provisions related to program performance, including developing regulations and reporting requirements, and providing guidance and technical assistance to states and localities.	DOL and Education

**Appendix I: Interagency Groups for
Implementing the Workforce Innovation and
Opportunity Act**

Group	Role	Member Agencies
State Plan Workgroup	Oversees the implementation of WIOA provisions related to state plans, including developing regulations, providing guidance and technical assistance to states, and coordinating the process for reviewing and approving state plans across federal agencies.	DOL, Education, HHS, HUD, and the Department of Agriculture
Youth Workgroup	Coordinates systems alignment across WIOA federal partners, including technical assistance, policy, and performance issues.	DOL, Education, and HHS

Source: GAO analysis of information from DOL, Education, and HHS officials. | GAO-18-171

^aAccording to officials, the Evaluation Workgroup was established more recently than the other workgroups, and met for the first time in September 2017.

Appendix II: Comments from the Department of Labor

U.S. Department of Labor

Employment and Training Administration
200 Constitution Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20210



JAN 10 2018

Ms. Cindy Brown Barnes
Director
Education, Workforce, and Income Security
Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Ms. Brown Barnes:

On behalf of the U.S. Department of Labor's Employment and Training Administration (DOL/ETA), thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the Government Accountability Office's (GAO) draft report titled, *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act: Federal Agencies' Collaboration Generally Reflected Leading Practices, but Could be Enhanced (GAO-18-181)*.

Throughout the implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), the Departments of Labor, Education (ED), and Health and Human Services (HHS) have strengthened and advanced their long standing partnerships. Since WIOA's enactment in 2014, the Departments formed a strong and multi-layered collaborative to manage implementation of WIOA's many complex changes, worked under aggressive timelines, facilitated alignment within the workforce system and successfully delivered outcomes as required under the new law. A collaborative approach was critical, as we engaged with states and the workforce system broadly to ensure consistent communications and to achieve WIOA's vision of an integrated service delivery approach. The benefits of this collaboration are reflected in our joint implementation of the State Plan process; establishment of joint indicators of performance accountability and aligned reporting for common elements; joint regulations and guidance; continued joint technical assistance; and coordination on Federal grant monitoring. Significantly, as we move from the initial implementation phase, the Departments have institutionalized the collaboration and continue to work toward seamless and aligned system and program administration and oversight.

We appreciate that GAO recognized the enormous challenges in implementing a new framework for the national workforce development system under a tight statutory timeline. We are also pleased that GAO recognized our work as consistent with GAO's identified leading and promising practices, including defining outcomes and accountability; bridging organizational cultures; establishing and sustaining leadership; clarifying roles and responsibilities; and including relevant participants.

The GAO report recommends that ETA, ED, and HHS continue to work together to fully identify technology needs and resources, and that the Departments should formally document written agreements about how the collaboration operates and how the agencies share resources.

**Appendix II: Comments from the Department
of Labor**

While the Departments have leveraged technology to facilitate collaboration, ETA recognizes that there is more work to be done. While we are not aware of an immediate demand for an online collaborative tool for jointly archiving documents, ETA will continue to work with our partners to facilitate collaboration, including through technology-based solutions.

Through the three agencies' efforts to ensure close collaboration, the Departments used consistent communication and documented their organization and processes, which has facilitated the ability to meet common goals. As we shared with GAO, plans were iterative, continually reassessed, prioritized, and revised due to changes in circumstances, needs of the system, available Federal resources, and new information.

The GAO report states that our learning process helped develop our commitment to the collaboration, and, the absence of formal, written agreements did not have negatively impact the work we were able to accomplish within the timeframe required by statute. We agree that written agreements are important to ensure continuity, and will explore with our partners areas if formal written agreements would further facilitate our work.

Sincerely,



Rosemary Dahasky
Deputy Assistant Secretary
Employment and Training Administration
U.S. Department of Labor
200 Constitution Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20210

Appendix III: Comments from the Department of Education



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

WASHINGTON, DC 20202

JAN 11 2018

Ms. Cindy S. Brown Barnes
Director, Education, Workforce, and Income Security Issues
Government Accountability Office
441 G Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20548

Dear Ms. Brown:

Thank you for providing the U.S. Department of Education (Department) the opportunity to review and comment on the Government Accountability Office (GAO) draft report: "WORKFORCE INNOVATION AND OPPORTUNITY ACT: Federal Agencies' Collaboration Generally Reflected Leading Practices, but Could Be Enhanced," (GAO-18-171). This report has two recommendations for the Department to the Assistant Secretaries for the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE) and the Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services (OSERS).

Throughout the implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), the U.S. Departments of Labor (DOL), Education (Department), and Health and Human Services (HHS) (collectively "agencies") have strengthened and advanced their longstanding partnerships. Since WIOA's enactment in 2014, the agencies formed a strong and multi-layered partnership to manage implementation of WIOA's many complex changes, worked under aggressive timelines, and successfully delivered outcomes required under the law to facilitate alignment within the workforce system. A collaborative approach was critical as the agencies engaged with States and the workforce system broadly to ensure consistent communications and to achieve the vision of WIOA of an integrated approach to service delivery. Significantly, as the work evolves into program administration and oversight, the agencies have institutionalized the collaboration to ensure seamless and aligned implementation of WIOA.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the draft report and its recommendations to the Department. The Department's responses to the draft report's two recommendations are provided below. In addition, enclosed are technical comments to the draft report.

Recommendation 1: *The Assistant Secretaries of Education's Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education and Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services should work with the Department of Labor (DOL) and Health and Human Services (HHS) to fully identify and address their technology resource needs by: 1) jointly identifying and prioritizing requirements for online collaboration tools, including those related to security, 2) determining which online tools would best meet their needs, and 3) leveraging their resources to support greater use of those tools.*

Response: The Department has collaborated with HHS and DOL (collectively "agencies") using online tools and remains committed to improving the use of online collaboration tools to implement WIOA. These three agencies used various online collaboration tools, such as MAX.gov, to assist the agencies in interagency collaboration under WIOA. Additionally, the agencies leveraged existing online resources by utilizing OSERS' online portal for the submission of Unified and Combined Plans.

The Department agrees that further exploration of technology solutions is warranted and, since GAO's review, has made progress in identifying and prioritizing technology needs and conducting market research into potential new collaborative platforms. The Department, in collaboration with its WIOA

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Page 2

federal agency partners, plans to issue a Request for Information in mid-January 2018 to gain a greater understanding of the full range of available options from the private sector for a multi-agency online document processing system for the submission of State plans, which is one of our identified priorities. Additionally, the agencies have made progress in identifying existing internal solutions for collaborative tools that enable interagency sharing of documents.

Recommendation 2: *The Assistant Secretaries of Education's Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education and Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services should formally document agreements with DOL and HHS about how the collaboration operates and how the agencies share resources.*

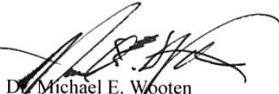
Response: As stated in the draft report, the Department and its partner agencies “confirmed their interagency agreements through verbal discussions and work plans.” The agencies determined a formal agreement was not necessary during the initial implementation. The lack of a formal agreement between the Department and its partner federal agencies has not negatively affected the agencies’ commitment to working together or the quality of work. Rather, the agencies focused their efforts, at a time when all required work was on a fast-track, on the work itself, instead of slowing the process by diverting valuable resources to the development and clearance of such an interagency agreement. Given that the continued interagency collaboration has been institutionalized, the Department is not convinced that a formal agreement is necessary, but will discuss with its federal partner agencies (HHS and DOL) whether current resources and circumstances warrant developing a formal agreement.

We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the draft report and would be glad to work with your office as you finalize the report.

Sincerely,



Kimberly M. Richey
Deputy Assistant Secretary,
Delegated the authority to perform the functions
and duties of the Assistant Secretary for
Special Education and Rehabilitative Services



Dr. Michael E. Wooten
Acting Assistant Secretary for Career, Technical,
and Adult Education

Enclosure

Appendix IV: Comments from the Department of Health and Human Services



DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY

Assistant Secretary for Legislation
Washington, DC 20201

JAN 23 2018

Cindy S. Brown Barnes
Director, Education, Workforce, and Income Security Issues
U.S. Government Accountability Office
441 G Street NW
Washington, DC 20548

Dear Ms. Barnes:

Attached are comments on the U.S. Government Accountability Office's (GAO) report entitled, "*Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act: Federal Agencies' Collaboration Generally Reflected Leading Practices, but Could Be Enhanced*" (GAO-18-171).

The Department appreciates the opportunity to review this report prior to publication.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Barbara Pisaro Clark".

Barbara Pisaro Clark
Acting Assistant Secretary for Legislation

Attachment

GENERAL COMMENTS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES (HHS) ON THE GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY OFFICE'S DRAFT REPORT ENTITLED - WORKFORCE INNOVATION AND OPPORTUNITY ACT: FEDERAL AGENCIES' COLLABORATION GENERALLY REFLECTED LEADING PRACTICES, BUT COULD BE ENHANCED (GAO-18-171)

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) appreciates the opportunity from the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to review and comment on this draft report.

Recommendation 1

The Director of HHS's Office of Family Assistance should work with Department of Labor (DOL) and Education to fully identify and address their technology resource needs by: (1) jointly identifying and prioritizing requirements for online collaboration tools, including those related to security, (2) determining which online tools would best meet their needs, and (3) leveraging their resources to support greater use of those tools.

HHS Response

HHS concurs with GAO's recommendation. HHS will work with the DOL and Education to ensure technology resources are fully identified for online collaboration tool requirements.

Recommendation 2

The Director of HHS's Office of Family Assistance should formally document agreements with DOL and Education about how the collaboration operates and how the agencies share resources.

HHS Response

HHS concurs with GAO's recommendation. HHS will work with DOL and Education to outline collaboration operations and ensure documented agreements are in place to ensure agencies share resources.

Appendix V: GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

GAO Contact

Cindy Brown Barnes, (202) 512-7215, brownbarnesc@gao.gov

Staff Acknowledgments

In addition to the contact named above, Danielle Giese (Assistant Director), Caitlin Croake (Analyst-In-Charge), LaToya Jeanita King, Andrew Sherrill, and Sarah Veale made key contributions to this report. Also contributing to this report were Holly Dye, Nicole Jarvis, Elizabeth Kowalewski, Sheila McCoy, Mimi Nguyen, Jessica Orr, Jessica Rider, Monica Savoy, Ben Sinoff, Almeta Spencer, and Paul Wright.

Related GAO Products

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act: Selected States' Planning Approaches for Serving Job Seekers and Employers. [GAO-17-31](#). Washington, D.C.: November 15, 2016.

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act: Information on Planned Changes to State Reporting and Related Challenges. [GAO-16-287](#). Washington, D.C.: March 7, 2016.

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Managing for Results: Implementation Approaches Used to Enhance Collaboration in Interagency Groups. [GAO-14-220](#). Washington, D.C.: February 14, 2014.

Managing for Results: Key Considerations for Implementing Interagency Collaborative Mechanisms. [GAO-12-1022](#). Washington, D.C.: September 27, 2012.

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