Preliminary Observations on Efforts to Foster Entrepreneurship with Historically Black Colleges and Universities

Small Business Administration (SBA) programs and activities that foster entrepreneurship have included, but do not specifically target, Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU). SBA funds 63 Small Business Development Centers (SBDC) that are generally hosted by colleges or universities. Two of the 63 SBDCs are hosted by HBCUs—Howard University and the University of the Virgin Islands—and at least 16 of the more than 900 SBDC satellite locations have been at HBCUs. SBA’s district offices also can initiate and oversee outreach activities to foster entrepreneurship. While these activities are not targeted to HBCUs, some district offices have worked with HBCUs. For example, district offices co-sponsored 10 counseling and training activities in 2013–2018 with six HBCUs and signed memorandums with at least 27 HBCUs to strengthen local small business development in 2008–2018.

Business Workshop at the Small Business Development Center at the University of the Virgin Islands

GAO’s preliminary observations indicate SBA has limited data on entrepreneurship-related efforts at HBCUs. In 2018, SBA established two goals for working with HBCUs: (1) to raise awareness and provide information to help raise the capacity of HBCUs to participate in federally funded programs, and (2) to promote collaboration among HBCUs, SBA resource partners, and SBA district offices. GAO’s ongoing work identified that HBCU-specific data (such as the number of outreach events involving HBCUs or the number of HBCU students or alumni who participated) are incomplete at an agency-wide level. Moreover, SBA does not systematically collect written feedback from event participants, including for events involving HBCUs.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is not making recommendations in this testimony, but will consider them, as appropriate, as it finalizes its work.