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VETERANS EMPLOYMENT

Promising VA Technology Education Pilot Would Benefit from Better Outcome Measures and Plans for Improvement

Why GAO Did This Study

The federal government helps veterans pursue skills needed in the civilian workforce. Specifically, the Harry W. Colmery Veterans Educational Assistance Act of 2017 instructed VA to develop a 5-year pilot program to help veterans obtain high-technology jobs. VA created VET TEC to support veterans who enroll in high-technology education programs through VA-approved training providers.

The act includes a provision for GAO to assess VET TEC. This report examines the (1) demographic characteristics of participants, (2) employment outcomes of participants, (3) benefits and implementation challenges reported by training providers, and (4) steps VA has taken to improve the VET TEC program.

GAO analyzed data on VET TEC participants and reviewed relevant VA documents, federal laws, and regulations. GAO interviewed VA officials and a nongeneralizable sample of approved training providers selected for variation in the number of veterans served and locations. GAO also compared VA's efforts to leading practices for effective pilot design.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is making six recommendations, including that VA develop an employment rate calculation consistent with standard approaches; determine data needed to fully inform employment outcomes; and develop clear, measurable objectives for VET TEC. VA neither agreed nor disagreed with the recommendation to develop a standardized employment rate calculation and generally agreed with the other recommendations.

View GAO-23-105343. For more information, contact Dawn Locke at (202) 512-7215 or locked@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

Over 6,700 veterans enrolled in the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) Veterans Employment Through Technology Education Courses (VET TEC) pilot program from May 2019 through May 2, 2022. They were generally more racially and ethnically diverse and more likely to have a service-connected condition, compared to working-age veterans in the U.S. population. Most veterans (66 percent) who enrolled in the program completed their training (see figure).

Did not complete	Currently enrolled	Completed
13% (888)	**21%** (1,403)	**66%** (4,502)

Source: GAO analysis of Department of Veterans Affairs data. | GAO-23-105343

VA calculates an employment measure for certain VET TEC participants for whom VA has made a final milestone payment decision. However, VA does not calculate an employment rate for all VET TEC participants who completed the program, in accordance with other government and industry approaches. As a result, VA lacks sufficient information to compare VET TEC to other programs or to assess the effectiveness of the program at getting veterans into jobs. In addition, VA does not use all available data or collect additional data on employment outcomes. For example, VA does not use information it collects on the type of employment program participants obtain (e.g., full-time, part-time, self-employed, etc.). In addition, VA does not systematically collect data on whether veterans retain employment. Without fully using available data or collecting additional relevant data, VA does not have a full picture of VET TEC employment outcomes.

Training providers told GAO that key benefits of VET TEC include an accelerated path to employment and virtual training. Three of five training providers said VET TEC allows veterans to enter the workforce quickly. Veterans completed training in 3 months, on average, according to GAO analysis of VA data. Training providers also cited challenges with some aspects of VET TEC. For example, three training providers said they faced delays in getting their applications approved, and four training providers said some application instructions were unclear. VA has taken some steps to address these challenges, such as revising certain aspects of its training provider approval processes.

VA has identified several actions for enhancing VET TEC. Specifically, VA has identified specific areas of improvement for VET TEC, with over 80 related tasks. For example, VA is planning to develop a scorecard to assess training provider quality and update its employment certification form. However, as of May 2022, VA had not developed consistent, clear, and measurable program objectives—a leading practice of effective pilot program design. Over the course of GAO's review, VA officials provided various versions of program objectives for VET TEC that were not consistent. These objectives were also not measurable because they did not include an indicator of how VA will measure progress. As a result, assessing and evaluating VET TEC by the end of the pilot will likely be difficult for VA.

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United States Government Accountability Office