



Highlights of [GAO-06-82](#), a report to congressional requesters

WORKFORCE INVESTMENT ACT

Labor and States Have Taken Actions to Improve Data Quality, but Additional Steps Are Needed

Why GAO Did This Study

Federal programs carried out in partnership with states and localities continually balance the competing objectives of collecting uniform performance data with giving program implementers the flexibility they need. Our previous work identified limitations in the quality of performance data for the key employment and training program—the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). WIA relies on states and localities to work together to track and report on participant outcomes, and it changed the way outcomes are measured. Given the magnitude of changes and the impact such changes can have on data quality, we examined (1) the data quality issues that affected states’ efforts to collect and report WIA performance data; (2) states’ actions to address them; and (3) the actions the Department of Labor (Labor) is taking to address data quality issues, and the issues that remain.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is recommending that Labor determine a standard point of registration and monitor its implementation; that Labor conduct its own review of WIA participant files and take steps to hold states accountable for meeting data validation requirements; and that Labor develop a standard monitoring tool for WIA performance data. In its response, Labor agreed with our findings and recommendations and noted steps it is taking to implement them.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-82.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Sigurd R. Nilsen at (202) 512-7215 or nilsens@gao.gov.

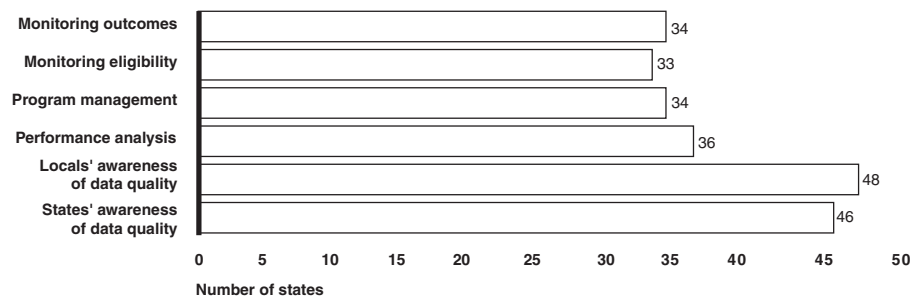
What GAO Found

Three key issues—flexibility in federal guidance, major changes to states’ information technology (IT) systems, and limited monitoring—compromised states’ early efforts to collect and report WIA performance data. Labor’s initial guidance allowed states and local areas flexibility in deciding which jobseekers to track and when jobseekers leave services and get counted in the measures. As a result, states and local areas have differed on whom they track and for how long. States took various approaches to implement IT systems for meeting WIA reporting requirements. Thirty-nine states reported to us that they made major modifications to their IT systems since WIA was first implemented in 2000. Thirteen of them said the changes resulted in problems affecting data quality, and 5 states are still trying to resolve these problems. In addition, oversight of WIA performance data was insufficient at all levels during early implementation.

Almost all states have made efforts to improve the quality of WIA performance data—at least 40 states have controls in their IT systems that capture WIA performance data, such as edit checks or exception reports to help screen for errors or missing data. Forty-three states have taken actions to clarify Labor’s guidance and help local areas determine who should be tracked in the performance measures. In addition, most states said they monitor local areas by assessing local procedures and policies.

Labor recently began addressing data quality issues, however, some issues remain. In 2004, Labor addressed some data quality concerns by requiring states to validate their data and ensure the accuracy of their performance outcomes. Most states told us that Labor’s requirements have increased awareness of data quality at the state and local level. However, Labor does not have methods in place to review states’ validation efforts or hold states accountable for complying with its requirements. Labor issued guidance requiring states to implement common performance measures on July 1, 2005, which clarified some key data elements, but does not address all the issues. Labor has some federal monitoring processes in place but lacks a standard monitoring guide to address data quality.

States’ Views of How Labor’s Data Validation Efforts Have Helped Them



Source: GAO survey of states.