



Highlights of [GAO-07-521](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

State vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies, under the Department of Education (Education), play a crucial role in helping individuals with disabilities prepare for and obtain employment, including individuals receiving disability benefits from the Social Security Administration (SSA). In a prior report (GAO-05-865), GAO found that state VR agencies varied in the rates of employment achieved for SSA beneficiaries. To help understand this variation, this report analyzed SSA and Education data and surveyed state agencies to determine the extent to which (1) agencies varied in earnings outcomes over time; (2) differences in state economic conditions, client demographic traits, and agency strategies could account for agency performance; and (3) Education's data could be used to identify factors that account for differences in individual earnings outcomes.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that Education promote certain promising practices identified in our analysis, reassess the data it collects on clients, and consider economic factors when measuring state agency performance. Education generally agreed with our recommendations, but disagreed that economic factors should be incorporated into performance measures. It considers these factors during monitoring and believes its approach to be effective. We maintain that these factors are critical to measuring agencies' relative performance. www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-07-521.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Denise Fantone at (202) 512-4997 or fantoned@gao.gov.

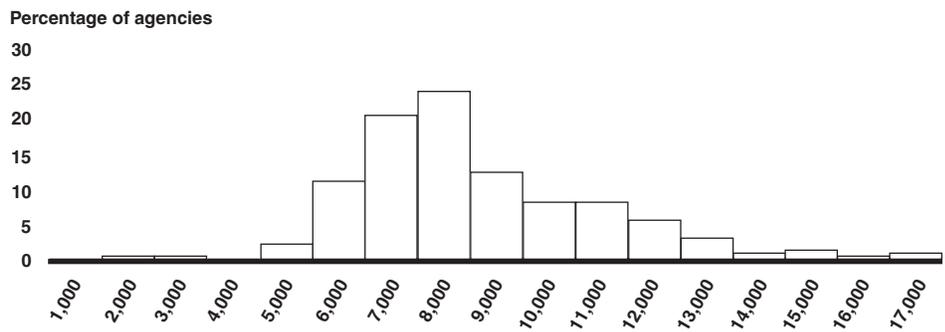
VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

Improved Information and Practices May Enhance State Agency Earnings Outcomes for SSA Beneficiaries

What GAO Found

Our analysis of data on state agency outcomes for SSA beneficiaries completing VR found that state agencies varied widely across different outcome measures for the years of our review. For example, from 2001 to 2003 average annual earnings levels among those SSA beneficiaries with earnings during the year after completing VR varied across state agencies from about \$1,500 to nearly \$17,000.

Distribution of State Agency Average Annual Earnings for SSA Beneficiaries during the Year after VR



Average annual earnings from 2001-2003 for SSA beneficiaries with earnings during the year after VR

Source: GAO analysis of SSA data.

Note: Earnings are in 2004 dollars.

After controlling for a range of factors, we found that much of the differences in state agency earnings outcomes could be explained by state economic conditions and the characteristics of the agencies' clientele. Together state unemployment rates and per capita income levels accounted for roughly one-third of the differences between state agencies in the proportion of SSA beneficiaries that had earnings during the year after VR. The demographic profile of SSA clients being served at an agency—such as the proportion of women beneficiaries—also accounted for some of the variation in earnings outcomes.

We also found that after controlling for other factors, a few agency practices appeared to yield positive earnings results. For example, state agencies with a higher proportion of state-certified counselors had more SSA beneficiaries with earnings during the year after completing VR.

However, we were unable to determine what factors might account for differences in earnings outcomes at the individual level. This was due in part to Education's data, which lacked information on important factors that research has linked to work outcomes, such as detailed data on the severity of clients' disabilities. Although Education collects extensive client-level data, some key data are self-reported and not always verified by state agencies.