

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-13-664](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

The unemployment rate for all veterans has risen since the beginning of the economic downturn, but the unemployment rate for Native Americans living on tribal land has been higher. In addition, tribal land is frequently located in remote areas characterized by limited economic development, which can make finding a job challenging. DOL administers several grant programs that provide employment assistance to all eligible veterans, including Native Americans. In response to a statutory mandate, in October 2010, DOL submitted a report to Congress recommending that the agency take actions to increase employment and training opportunities for Native American veterans living on tribal lands. GAO assessed (1) the status of DOL efforts to implement the report's recommendations and (2) whether and how DOL can improve on its efforts to implement the report's recommendations. GAO reviewed federal laws, regulations, and DOL guidance; interviewed DOL, state, and tribal officials as well as Native American veterans; and conducted site visits to tribal lands in four U.S. regions.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOL develop a written strategy to implement the 2010 recommendations that incorporates roles and responsibilities, goals, costs, and time frames. DOL should also expand collaboration with other agencies to leverage resources and identify and disseminate lessons learned from prior relevant efforts. DOL agreed with GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-13-664](#). For more information, contact Andrew Sherrill at (202) 512-7215 or sherrilla@gao.gov.

September 2013

NATIVE AMERICAN VETERANS

DOL Needs a Clear Plan to Improve Employment and Training Services on Tribal Lands

What GAO Found

The Department of Labor (DOL) is in the early stages of implementing several of the 2010 report's recommendations, but implementation of the remaining recommendations has not occurred. The agency has begun to take steps to respond to three of the report's six recommendations: improve interagency collaboration, create an advisory subcommittee for Native American veterans, and conduct a needs assessment. To increase collaboration, DOL has conducted several listening sessions with tribal leadership and begun collaborating with agencies that serve veterans, including the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) and the Department of the Interior's Bureau of Indian Affairs, to learn more about how to better serve Native American veterans. With regard to an advisory subcommittee, DOL is developing a proposal to establish a subgroup for Native American veterans on its existing veterans' employment and training advisory committee, and is considering appointing a representative from the Native American veterans' community to serve on that committee. To assess need, DOL has identified a potential source for data within DOD that provides race and ethnicity and address information for returning veterans that could help better target visits to tribal land, but its plans to acquire these data are still being negotiated and could take time to finalize. However, DOL has taken little to no action on recommendations to increase outreach, pursue program flexibility, and boost economic development. DOL officials told us that leadership transitions and budget challenges have contributed to their limited response to date. In addition, since delivering the report in 2010, DOL has not developed a strategy that specifically establishes roles and responsibilities, goals, costs, and time frames for implementation of the report's recommendations.

Recommendations from 2010 DOL Report, Employment Needs of Native American Veterans Living on Tribal Lands



Source: GAO analysis of *Employment Needs of Native American Veterans Living on Tribal Land*, U.S. Department of Labor, Washington, D.C., 2010.

DOL could build on its efforts to implement the report's recommendations, even in a constrained budget environment. For example, DOL could expand the collaboration it has begun with other agencies that serve Native American veterans on tribal land, such as the Department of Education (Education). GAO site visits indicated that some Native American veterans received employment services from a vocational rehabilitation program administered by Education. DOL can consider partnering with this program. DOL could also identify and disseminate lessons learned from states that have collaborated with other agencies and tribal governments. For example, a DOL program in Montana has leveraged other agency resources, such as collaborating with the VA Vet Center to provide both health and employment services to Native American veterans in remote tribal areas using mobile units, an approach that may be applicable in other states. To boost economic development, DOL could review information from its existing grants and guidance on economic development to disseminate to DOL grantees that serve Native American veterans.