

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-14-137](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

As the economy recovers, some employers continue to face difficulty finding qualified workers. The WIA Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs provide services, including job training, which aims to help participants acquire skills and credentials employers need. Under WIA, states are required to report data on training participants who obtain credentials and on those who enter employment related to the training they receive. Given that a WIA reauthorization proposal would establish both of these outcomes as performance measures, GAO was asked to examine the capacity of states to report on these outcomes. This report addresses: 1) the extent to which training participants obtained credentials and training-related employment, 2) challenges states face in reporting data on credentials and what steps, if any, they and DOL are taking to address them, and 3) challenges states face in reporting data on training-related employment and what steps, if any, they and DOL are taking to address them. GAO interviewed DOL officials, workforce experts, and state and local officials and employer organizations from a nongeneralizable sample of six states selected in part on the basis of geographic diversity. GAO also analyzed data on credential attainment and training-related employment for program years 2010 and 2011.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOL identify and share with states strategies that may ease collection and improve the quality of training-related employment data. DOL agreed with GAO's recommendation.

View [GAO-14-137](#). For more information, contact Andrew Sherrill at (202) 512-7215 or sherrilla@gao.gov.

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WORKFORCE INVESTMENT ACT

Strategies Needed to Improve Certain Training Outcome Data

What GAO Found

Of the more than two million total participants in the Workforce Investment Act's (WIA) Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs, about 11 percent and 16 percent, respectively, received training in program year 2011, and about two-thirds of the training participants in each program attained a credential. Little is known, however, about how many participants got jobs related to their training. From program year 2006 through program year 2011, the percentages of training participants who earned a credential declined from about 74 percent to 58 percent for the Adult Program and from about 75 percent to 63 percent for the Dislocated Worker Program, according to data from the Department of Labor (DOL). Of those training participants who attained a credential in program year 2011, about 65 percent earned occupational credentials, such as a welding certificate, followed by lower percentages who earned occupational skill licenses and associate's degrees, among others. In contrast, GAO found training-related employment data unreliable primarily because a significant portion of the data was missing.

Workforce officials in four of six selected states cited some obstacles in reporting data on credential attainment, and both DOL and states are taking steps to address challenges. Officials in four states GAO contacted said reporting such data can be resource-intensive, largely because case managers must manually track this information from various sources, including participants, training providers, and third-party organizations. To improve credential attainment and reporting, DOL clarified which credentials should be reported and began measuring credential attainment through an agency-wide goal in 2010. Officials in five states have taken similar steps, such as setting goals and tracking credential attainment, and enhancing data exchange with training providers. Officials in most of the six states GAO contacted noted some obstacles to obtaining such data. For example, officials from several states cited student privacy laws as a barrier in verifying credentials with training providers. Officials in three states told us that they ask participants to sign consent forms allowing training providers to give credential information to local officials.

Workforce officials in most of the selected states identified even greater challenges reporting data on training-related employment, including the high degree of resources required and the subjective nature of determining whether employment is linked to training. DOL has taken only limited steps to address these challenges. To report such data, case managers seek participants' employment information from participants, employers, and wage records. Then they must piece it together to determine whether participants' employment is "substantially related" to their training. Officials in most of the six states described this process as resource-intensive and noted that making such determinations are subjective since one case manager's interpretation of "substantially related" may differ from another's. Given these challenges, officials in all six states have taken some steps to increase access to employment information or make decisions less subjective. DOL has recently stressed the importance of reporting data on training-related employment and shared a few practices with states to increase reporting rates; however, it has not identified and disseminated strategies to address the ongoing challenges states face regarding resource intensiveness and subjectivity, which could improve the quality of such data.