

Why GAO Did This Study

Over the next few years, over a million military servicemembers are expected to transition to civilian life and some may face challenges such as finding employment. To help them, TAP provides departing servicemembers employment assistance and information on VA benefits, among other things. Begun in 2011, efforts to revamp TAP are underway based on the VOW to Hire Heroes Act of 2011 and the administration's recommendations. The act also mandated GAO to review TAP. This report addresses: 1) the status of TAP implementation; 2) the extent to which elements of effective implementation and evaluation of TAP have been addressed; and 3) any challenges that may remain. To do this GAO identified five elements of effective implementation and evaluation based on relevant federal laws and previously established GAO criteria for training programs; reviewed related GAO work; assessed reports, plans, and policies provided by agencies that administer TAP; interviewed officials from entities that support servicemembers and veterans; and conducted four nongeneralizable discussion groups with servicemembers who had taken TAP at three military installations.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOD improve oversight and implementation of TAP, including actions to gauge participation for all of the services and collect data about National Guard and Reserve members' experiences. DOD disagreed with two of GAO's three recommendations. GAO continues to believe that the recommendations are needed as discussed in the report.

View [GAO-14-144](#). For more information, contact Andrew Sherrill at (202) 512-7215 or sherrilla@gao.gov.

March 2014

TRANSITIONING VETERANS:

Improved Oversight Needed to Enhance Implementation of Transition Assistance Program

What GAO Found

The Departments of Defense (DOD), Labor (DOL), and Veterans Affairs (VA) have implemented most of the key components of the Transition Assistance Program (TAP), a gateway to information and services available to servicemembers transitioning to civilian life. However, the agencies are still in the process of implementing other key components of TAP. While originally planned for October 2013, agencies now plan to implement virtually all components by the end of March 2014, with full implementation expected by June 2014.

Agencies' efforts are underway to adequately address three of five elements that GAO identified as important for effective implementation and evaluation of TAP:

1-Track attendance: DOD has systems to collect and report on attendance, which help measure the extent to which TAP achieves its attendance goals.

2-Ensure training quality: The agencies collect and plan to use participant feedback on instruction, content, and facilities to improve training. Each agency also plans to monitor its respective TAP components through site visits.

3-Assess career readiness: The agencies developed standards to assess servicemembers' career readiness. During a capstone assessment, commanders are expected to verify and document whether standards were met.

Agencies' efforts to address the remaining two elements are mixed:

4-Ensure participation and completion: DOD has assigned commanders the responsibility for overseeing participation and has required the services to schedule training and communicate its importance to servicemembers. While the Army and Air Force gauge participation at the command level, the Navy and Marines lack a similar oversight mechanism.

5-Measure performance and evaluate results: The agencies have established certain measures to assess program performance, but their TAP evaluation approach is incomplete. For example, the agencies have established measures to track program outputs, such as the percentage of servicemembers who have participated in TAP. However, the agencies' efforts to evaluate TAP results have focused on basic end-of-course evaluations and gauging servicemembers' readiness prior to separation instead of higher impact program evaluations, such as assessing the effectiveness of TAP on servicemembers 6 months after they have separated from the military. According to agency officials, such evaluations are being considered for certain components of TAP, but they could not provide GAO with a justification for including or excluding specific components of TAP in their evaluation planning efforts.

Based on GAO's prior work and according to officials from the agencies and organizations GAO spoke with, a key remaining challenge for TAP may be the unfavorable timing and location of program delivery for National Guard and Reserve members. Unlike active duty servicemembers, National Guard and Reserve members receive TAP services closer to their transition and in locations that are generally neither where they work nor live. As a result, they may be distracted and have less time to benefit from TAP services. DOD is not well positioned to verify these concerns because it is not collecting data about these members' experiences with the timing and location of TAP service delivery.