

# GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-18-577](#), a report to the Ranking Member, Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions, U.S. Senate

## Why GAO Did This Study

The VR program, administered by Education and state VR agencies, helps people with disabilities obtain employment. In 2014, WIOA made changes to the VR program, increasing its focus on serving employers, promoting career advancement as part of the broader goal of mainstream employment, and coordinating with other workforce programs. GAO was asked to review the VR program under WIOA.

This report examines (1) the steps VR agencies have taken under WIOA to work with employers and place individuals in mainstream employment, and the extent Education has addressed any challenges; (2) how VR agencies have coordinated with other workforce programs and the extent federal agencies have addressed any challenges; and (3) how federal agencies have measured state VR agencies' efforts to serve employers. GAO surveyed all 79 VR agencies (74 responded); conducted three discussion groups with 36 state VR officials and four with 29 employers that worked with VR; interviewed VR and other workforce officials in three states, selected for geographic dispersion, among other factors; and reviewed relevant federal laws, regulations, and guidance.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO is making seven recommendations, including improving information on career advancement and partnerships, and aligning performance measures with activities. DOL agreed, while Education neither agreed nor disagreed with the recommendations, but said it will consider taking steps in response.

View [GAO-18-577](#). For more information, contact Elizabeth H. Curda at (202) 512-7215 or [curdae@gao.gov](mailto:curdae@gao.gov).

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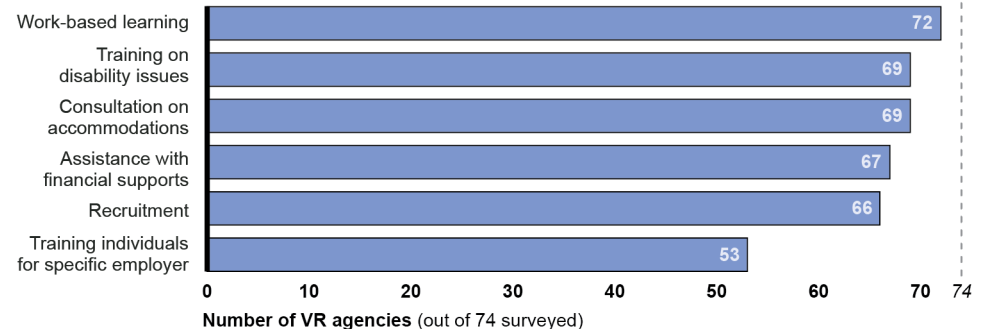
## VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION

### Additional Federal Information Could Help States Serve Employers and Find Jobs for People with Disabilities

## What GAO Found

State vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies reported expanding services for employers in order to promote hiring individuals with disabilities in mainstream employment (where they are integrated with employees without disabilities and earn competitive wages), but the Department of Education (Education) has not fully addressed related challenges. Most VR agencies in GAO's survey reported providing specific employer services under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) (see figure). However, many agencies reported challenges meeting employers' needs and promoting mainstream employment. For example, some did not fully understand when they are allowed to help employed individuals with career advancement. Education has provided related guidance, including disseminating information at conferences. However, officials at two of three VR agencies GAO spoke with said more information would be helpful. Increasing access to this information may help more VR agencies understand when they have the option of using VR funds for such services.

Types of Employer Services Provided by Most State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies



Source: GAO survey of vocational rehabilitation (VR) agencies. | GAO-18-577

Most VR agencies GAO surveyed reported increasing coordination with other workforce agencies, but some gaps exist in federal guidance intended to enhance coordination. Employers GAO spoke with cited challenges navigating workforce programs, yet few agencies reported documenting roles and responsibilities of the agencies they partner with to work with employers. While Education and the Department of Labor (DOL) have provided some related technical assistance, they have not provided examples of documentation of roles and responsibilities. GAO's prior work has found that such documentation can help improve coordination by clarifying who does what in a partnership.

Education and DOL are piloting three measures of the effectiveness of workforce programs in serving employers: employer penetration (i.e., percentage of employers receiving a service), retention with the same employer, and repeat business customers. However, some VR agencies cited concerns with piloted measures, such as the employer penetration measure not being sufficiently linked to VR core program activities. Taking such concerns into account when finalizing performance measures may result in performance metrics and targets that encourage VR agencies to more effectively serve employers.