



Highlights of [GAO-06-496](#), a report to Committee on Finance, U.S. Senate

TRADE ADJUSTMENT ASSISTANCE

Labor Should Take Action to Ensure Performance Data Are Complete, Accurate, and Accessible

Why GAO Did This Study

In the current tight budgetary environment, program performance is likely to be an increasingly significant factor used to help policymakers assess programs and determine funding levels. Given concerns over the quality of performance data for the Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) program and the importance of having meaningful information to assess program performance, we examined (1) whether the TAA performance data provide a credible picture of the program's performance, (2) what TAA performance data the Department of Labor (Labor) makes available to the public and states and the usefulness of the data for managing the program, and (3) what Labor is doing to address issues with the quality of TAA data submitted by states.

What GAO Recommends

GAO is recommending actions for Labor to help improve the completeness and accuracy of performance data, to make the performance data more informative, and to increase opportunities for states to share lessons learned on issues relevant to TAA data quality. In its comments, Labor did not disagree with our findings and recommendations and said the report will be helpful in its continuing efforts to improve the quality of TAA performance data.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-06-496.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Sigurd R. Nilsen at (202) 512-7215 or nilsens@gao.gov.

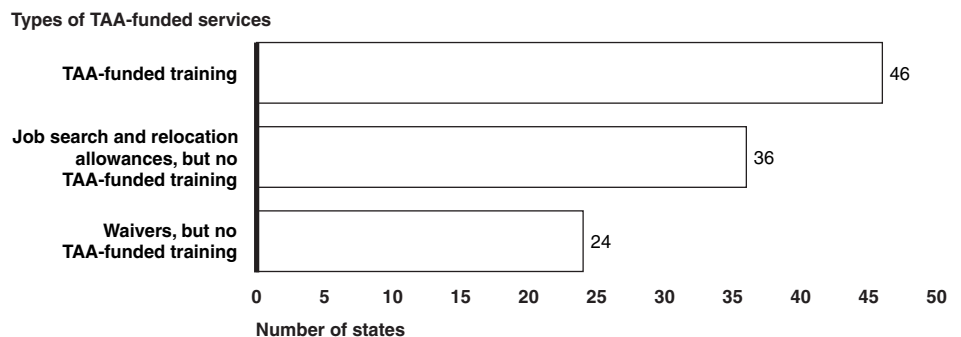
What GAO Found

The performance information that Labor makes available on the TAA program does not provide a complete and credible picture of the program's performance. Only half the states are including all participants, as required, in the performance data they submit to Labor—states were more likely to report participants who received training than those who received other benefits and services but not training. In addition, many states are not using all available data sources to determine participants' employment outcomes. This may result in lower reported outcomes because states may be inaccurately recording some workers as unemployed who actually have jobs. To compile their performance data, some states are using manual processes or automated systems that lack key capabilities to help minimize errors, but many states have plans to improve their systems' capabilities.

Labor reports data on TAA activity levels, services provided to TAA participants, and key performance measures. The performance data may be useful for providing a long-term national picture of program outcomes, but it represents participants who left the program up to 30 months earlier and, thus, is not useful for gauging the TAA program's current performance. Also, the performance information is not displayed using categories that would be informative to policymakers, such as type of service received and industry of dislocation. Most states find the performance information they receive from Labor to be at least moderately useful, but many want more information.

Labor has taken steps to improve the quality of TAA performance data, but issues remain. In 2003, Labor began requiring states to validate their data, and most states reported that this increased awareness of data quality at the state and local level. However, the validation process does not address the problem of participants being excluded from the performance data. In fiscal year 2006, Labor instituted a set of common measures, and many states reported they are experiencing delays in implementing all required changes. States also expressed interest in receiving more opportunities to share lessons learned on topics relevant to TAA data quality.

Number of States Including All or Most Participants in TAA Performance Data, by Type of Service Received



Source: GAO survey of state TAA officials.