

Highlights of [GAO-11-703](#), a report to the Ranking Member, Subcommittee on Highways and Transit, Committee on Transportation and Infrastructure, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

The Federal Highway Administration's (FHWA) on-the-job training program—a relatively small part of the federal aid highway program—requires states to implement job training programs to provide traditionally underrepresented groups with opportunities in highway construction. To increase the effectiveness of state job training programs, FHWA grants up to \$10 million annually for supportive services, such as job placement assistance.

This report examines the extent to which (1) FHWA's job training program enhances training and career opportunities for these groups, (2) FHWA oversees the job training programs, and (3) supportive services provide assistance to these programs. To address these topics GAO reviewed federal legislation, good management practices identified in prior GAO reports, FHWA documents, and proposals and reports submitted by states. GAO conducted an in-depth examination of these efforts in four states, and interviewed a cross-section of FHWA staff, state officials, and industry groups.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that FHWA (1) strengthen on-the-job training program criteria, (2) create and implement an oversight approach for its job training program, and (3) evaluate the extent to which supportive services programs have met their goals and use this information to inform future funding decisions. The agency generally agreed with these recommendations and provided technical comments, which were incorporated as appropriate.

View [GAO-11-703](#). For more information, contact David J. Wise at (202) 512-2834 or [wised@gao.gov](mailto:wised@gao.gov).

## ON-THE-JOB TRAINING

### Federal Highway Administration Needs to Strengthen Program Assessment

## What GAO Found

It is unclear the extent to which FHWA's on-the-job training program enables women, minorities, and economically disadvantaged individuals to reach journey-level status in the highway construction trades, although stakeholders believe it can create some opportunities. FHWA's decentralized management of the program—in which state transportation agencies and FHWA's division offices are generally responsible for program implementation—has led to a wide range of practices. As a result, the types of training opportunities created by the program vary from state to state in terms of, for example, the length of training and the entities involved in providing training. In addition, the extent that state programs focus on creating training opportunities for traditionally underrepresented groups differs. The limited amount of useable information available on program results varies among states. As a result, FHWA does not know how well the program is doing, and GAO could not accurately determine how many trainees participate in the program or the demographics of those trainees; however, GAO estimates that several thousand likely participate in any one year.

FHWA's oversight approach does little to assess program results. FHWA lacks clear criteria that articulate what states are supposed to accomplish through their job training programs. While some broad program expectations are stipulated in guidance and regulations, FHWA acknowledges some of these are outdated. Furthermore, FHWA's oversight approach does not determine the overall effectiveness of state programs or measure state progress. For example, although state transportation agencies are required to submit achievement information on an annual basis to FHWA division offices, states submitted this information using a wide range of different output terms and different demographic and trade classification categories. GAO has reported that program criteria are key aspects of results-oriented performance management. In the absence of clear federal criteria, state officials have relied on their own judgment to implement the program with little assurance that their programs meet federal standards for performance management. Some recent FHWA efforts may strengthen program oversight and results assessment.

Through a separate program, FHWA provides funding for a variety of activities intended to increase the overall effectiveness of the on-the-job training program, but its overall stewardship of the program is limited. FHWA's supportive services program provides grants for locally tailored initiatives, such as skills training, child care, and career awareness events, that directly and indirectly link to job training programs. However, there is insufficient data to determine how effective these efforts have been in enhancing job training opportunities. Although FHWA has articulated the types of data states should collect and report, the agency does not know, and GAO could not determine, the number of participants in the supportive services program or its effect, in part because grantees do not always provide information about their program results. However, GAO estimated that there are about 10,000 people participating in any one year. Furthermore, past performance information is not required of applicants or scored during funding reviews. Given that many grantees are funded repeatedly, good management practices suggest that using past performance information can inform and improve recipient selection approaches. Program results are important for making budgetary and programmatic decisions. Without insight into program activities, FHWA cannot ensure that funding is used effectively.