

Highlights of [GAO-05-544](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2005 mandated that GAO review whether the transition assistance program (TAP) is meeting the needs of service members leaving the military. GAO (1) assessed TAP administration, including program participation, and (2) identified actions agencies are taking to improve TAP and challenges that remain.

TAP serves military personnel with at least 180 days of active duty who separate or retire and members of the Reserves and National Guard who are released from active duty, a process termed demobilization. Recently, the Reserves and National Guard have been called to active duty in greater numbers than at any other time since the Korean War.

What GAO Recommends

We recommend that DOD, in conjunction with DOL and VA, determine what demobilizing Reserve and National Guard members need to make a smooth transition and explore options to enhance their participation, such as employment workshops before or after their demobilization and timely information about the need to apply for certain benefits while still on active duty. GAO also recommends that VA take steps to ascertain the level of participation of service members in the Disabled TAP component. All three agencies concurred with our findings and recommendations.

www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-544.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on the link above. For more information, contact Cynthia A. Bascetta at (202) 512-7101 or bascettac@gao.gov.

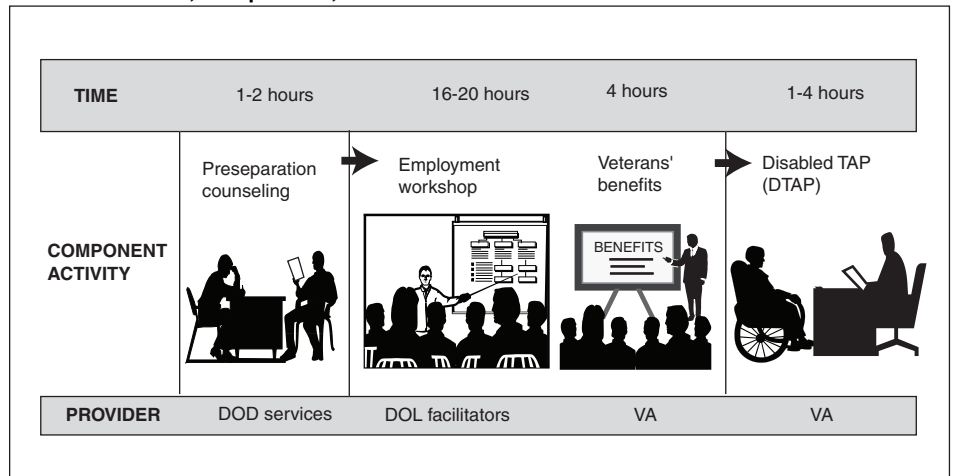
MILITARY AND VETERANS' BENEFITS

Enhanced Services Could Improve Transition Assistance for Reserves and National Guard

What GAO Found

Transition assistance is intended to help service members successfully adjust to civilian life after serving in the military. Jointly administered by the Departments of Defense (DOD), Labor (DOL) and Veterans Affairs (VA), the four components of TAP are coordinated through meetings of agency TAP managers and interagency agreements.

TAP Time Frames, Components, and Providers



Source: GAO analysis.

Both the method of delivery and the level of participation may vary, with participation rates highest for the mandatory preseparation counseling. Because they demobilize within days after they return from overseas, generally members of the Reserves and National Guard may get similar information but not the time to participate fully in TAP. At demobilization they may complete their preseparation counseling forms as a group without individual attention; get 45 minutes of briefing on veterans' benefits rather than a half-day; and receive no employment preparation. Participation of service members in the Disabled TAP component is not known, because VA does not track this information.

The federal agencies have taken actions to improve TAP's content and increase participation among full-time active duty military personnel but face challenges serving Reserve and National Guard members because of their rapid demobilization. To improve content, the agencies have updated, or plan to update, their manuals, forms, and other materials, and DOL is assessing its employment workshop curriculum using focus groups and survey data. To increase participation, DOL and VA provide some employment workshops and veterans' benefits briefings overseas, and DOD is considering mandating participation in all components. While the agencies have not assessed when and where to offer TAP for members of the Reserves and National Guard, DOL has pilot programs in three states that will offer employment workshops after the members return home.