

Highlights of [GAO-05-886](#), a report to congressional requesters

## Why GAO Did This Study

Between 2002 and 2012 nearly 850,000 jobs will open in the construction industry; experts predict that there will not be enough skilled workers to fill them. This has heightened concerns about program outcomes and program quality in the nation's apprenticeship system and the Department of Labor's oversight of it. GAO assessed (1) the extent to which Labor monitors registered apprenticeship programs in the states where it has direct oversight, (2) its oversight activities in states that do their own monitoring, and (3) the outcomes for construction apprentices in programs sponsored by employers and unions in relation to programs sponsored by employers alone.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that Labor better utilize its database for oversight—particularly for apprenticeship programs with expected future labor shortages—develop a cost effective strategy for collecting data from council-monitored states for selected occupations, conduct its reviews of apprenticeship activities in states that regulate their own programs on a regular basis to ensure that state activities are in accord with those requirements set forth by federal law, and offer substantive feedback. Labor concurred with these recommendations and said it has taken initial steps to implement them.

[www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-886](http://www.gao.gov/cgi-bin/getrpt?GAO-05-886).

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

# REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMS

## Labor Can Better Use Data to Target Oversight

### What GAO Found

Labor's monitoring of programs it directly oversees has been limited. We found that in 2004 Labor reviewed only 4 percent of programs in the 23 states where it has direct oversight. According to federal program directors in those states, limited staff constrained their ability to do more reviews. Also, Labor has focused in recent years on registering new programs and recruiting apprentices. Although Labor collects much data about the programs it oversees, it has not employed its database to generate information indicative of program performance, such as completion rates, that might allow it to be more efficient in its oversight.

Labor does not regularly review council-monitored states or collect data from them that would allow for a national picture of apprenticeships. Labor is responsible for conducting formal reviews of the 27 states and the District of Columbia that established apprenticeship councils to monitor their own apprenticeship programs; but, according to directors in these states, the reviews have been infrequent and not necessarily useful. While Labor collects only aggregate data on apprentices from most of these states, we identified 10 states with large numbers of apprentices that were willing and capable of providing GAO data on apprentices by occupation as well as some information on completion rates, completion times, and wages.

Data in Labor's apprenticeship database and from council-monitored states show that completion rates and wages for construction apprentices in programs sponsored jointly by employers and unions were higher than those for programs sponsored by employers alone. We found that completion rates for apprentices in programs jointly sponsored by unions and employers were 47 percent on average compared with 30 percent in programs sponsored solely by employers. Completion rates declined under both types of sponsorship for the period we examined, but Labor, as part of its oversight, does not track reasons for noncompletion, making it difficult to determine what lies behind this trend.

### Construction Apprentices at Work



Source: Department of Labor/OATELS.