



BRIEFLY...

JOB CORPS SHOULD IMPROVE ITS PRE-ADMISSION EVALUATION PROCESS

March 25, 2021

WHY OIG CONDUCTED THE AUDIT

Admitting applicants to the Job Corps program without sufficiently evaluating their ability to fit within the program can result in program disruptions and safety issues. The Job Corps program currently provides academic and career skills training to nearly 30,000 low-income, disadvantaged youth at 121 residential centers nationwide. Previous OIG audits and preliminary audit work on this project have identified issues with Job Corps Center student safety. We conducted the audit because we were concerned an insufficient evaluation to determine the suitability of students could lead to program disruptions and unsafe learning environments.

WHAT OIG DID

We conducted a performance audit to answer the following question:

Did Job Corps sufficiently evaluate the suitability of incoming students?

To answer this question, we reviewed Job Corps and center policy and procedures, and interviewed relevant stakeholders. We also observed student intakes, conducted stakeholder surveys, and tested student records.

READ THE FULL REPORT

<http://www.oig.dol.gov/public/reports/oa/2021/05-21-001-03-370.pdf>

WHAT OIG FOUND

Job Corps did not sufficiently evaluate the suitability of incoming students. The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) requires Job Corps to assess the suitability, or "fit," of applicants for the program. However, Job Corps' admissions screening process does not allow Admissions Counselors to sufficiently inquire about an applicant's history to help them determine if applicants are ready for the Job Corps program. A large portion of Center Directors surveyed said they had observed an increase in the number of separations due to mental health and substance abuse issues during their tenure, and two-thirds of Center Directors reported an increase in the number of violent incidents they associated with mental health issues.

Job Corps management has been aware of such issues, but has not taken action in response. For example, in 2015, Job Corps convened a working group to explore the possibility of pre-enrollment drug testing of Job Corps applicants. However, the working group subsequently disbanded without any action taken. Additionally, Job Corps rolled out a system-wide applicant readiness tool in the summer of 2019, but we found that few Admissions Counselors were aware of it.

As a result, applicants who were not properly assessed during the admissions process have caused classroom disruptions and safety issues, as well as strained the resources of unprepared Job Corps Centers.

WHAT OIG RECOMMENDED

Given how essential it is to determine whether an applicant is suitable for the program, Job Corps must take action to develop a more robust pre-enrollment suitability assessment apparatus to identify applicants who might impact the safety of Centers and cause program disruptions, and identify strategies for assisting these students with their challenges. We made four recommendations to the Assistant Secretary for Employment and Training Administration (ETA) to address this issue. ETA generally agreed with our recommendations.