

Job Corps: A Primer

August 3, 2022

Congressional Research Service

<https://crsreports.congress.gov>

R47208



R47208

August 3, 2022

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Job Corps: A Primer

Job Corps is a comprehensive and primarily residential federal job training program for youth ages 16 to 24 who are low-income and have a barrier to education and employment. The program is authorized under Subtitle C, Title I of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA, P.L. 113-128). Job Corps operates through more than 100 centers located across the 50 states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia.

Following a sharp reduction and proposed phase-out of the program in FY1985, Job Corps appropriations have steadily increased but have not kept pace with inflation, with the exception of a temporary increase via the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (P.L. 111-5) in response to the 2007-2009 recession.

The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) awards two-year contracts to Job Corps center operators, with five for-profit corporations receiving the majority of the contracts awarded. To emphasize the educational mission of Job Corps, operators may choose to refer to their centers as campuses.

The U.S. Department of Agriculture's Forest Service operates more than 20% of the centers as Job Corps Civil Conservation Centers (CCCs), which are located on federal lands, in order to offer training in forestry and other conservation-related careers. The national Director of Job Corps oversees six regional offices that supervise and support individual centers, and the national office establishes enrollment goals and supports the recruitment of eligible applicants through a nationwide marketing campaign.

Each center must provide a program of education that focuses on career and technical education and training that leads to employment. Required services include initial assessment of skill levels; job search, placement assistance, and career counseling; and the provision of workforce and labor market employment statistics information, including job vacancies and information on prerequisite job skills and local occupations that are in demand. Job Corps participants receive assessment and counseling at regular intervals to assist with employment placement prior to graduating and for up to one year after graduation.

While enrolled, participants are eligible to receive a biweekly living allowance as well as basic medical, dental, and mental health services. Each center's program may also include English language acquisition, work-based learning, recreational activities, physical rehabilitation and development, driver's education, and/or counseling, which may include financial literacy.

Operators must report on the primary indicators of performance as described in WIOA, including the credentials earned by Job Corps participants, their job placements, and their average wages. In most cases, DOL may not renew a contract if a center ranks among the lowest 10% of centers nationwide for two years and fails to achieve an average of 50% or higher in the expected levels of performance. Each center must also implement strict standards of conduct, including a zero tolerance policy covering multiple areas and mandatory drug testing of all enrollees. At least 80% of a center's participants must reside onsite.

Overall, the structure of Job Corps has remained relatively unchanged since the program was first created by the Economic Opportunity Act (EOA) of 1964. The Secretary of Labor has the authority to create demonstration projects to experiment with different models of delivering Job Corps services in a manner that improves outcomes and reduces cost. The largest demonstration project, Job Corps Scholars, provides funding directly to community colleges, historically Black colleges and universities, and tribally controlled colleges and universities to offer Job Corps-eligible students career and technical education instruction, intensive personal and academic counseling, and employment placement services. The Job Corps Scholars program has awarded \$31 million to 26 grantees in 15 states.

The National Job Corps Study, authorized in 1993 by DOL, remains the most rigorous evidence of Job Corps' effectiveness. This randomized control trial found several short-term benefits of the program, as participants earned GEDs and vocational certificates, and saw immediate wage increases. However, the study found that the wage increases did not persist over time, except for participants who enrolled at age 20 or older. For these older students, wages continued to be higher than those of nonparticipants even 20 years after graduation.

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Introduction

Job Corps provides job training and academic programming for individuals ages 16 to 24 who are low-income and have a barrier to employment, such as not having earned a high school diploma. Unlike most other federal workforce training programs, Job Corps is primarily residential. The stated purpose of Job Corps is to

(A) assist eligible youth to connect to the labor force by providing them with intensive social, academic, career and technical education^[1], and service-learning opportunities, in primarily residential centers, in order for such youth to obtain secondary school diplomas or recognized postsecondary credentials leading to—

(i) successful careers, in in-demand industry sectors or occupations or the Armed Forces, that will result in economic self-sufficiency and opportunities for advancement; or

(ii) enrollment in postsecondary education, including an apprenticeship program; and

(B) support responsible citizenship.²

Job Corps has trained and educated more than 2 million individuals since it was created by the Economic Opportunity Act (EOA) of 1964, though its recent enrollment was severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic as residential centers closed and gradually reopened. It is administered by the Employment and Training Administration's (ETA's) Office of Job Corps in the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL). Job Corps is currently authorized under Subtitle C, Title I of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA; P.L. 113-128), as amended by the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (P.L. 115-224).

This report begins with a description of Job Corps appropriations and operations, including how contracts are awarded, students are recruited, and operators deliver services. It then focuses on accountability measures as well as evidence of Job Corps' effectiveness. The report concludes with a discussion of the history of the program since its inception.

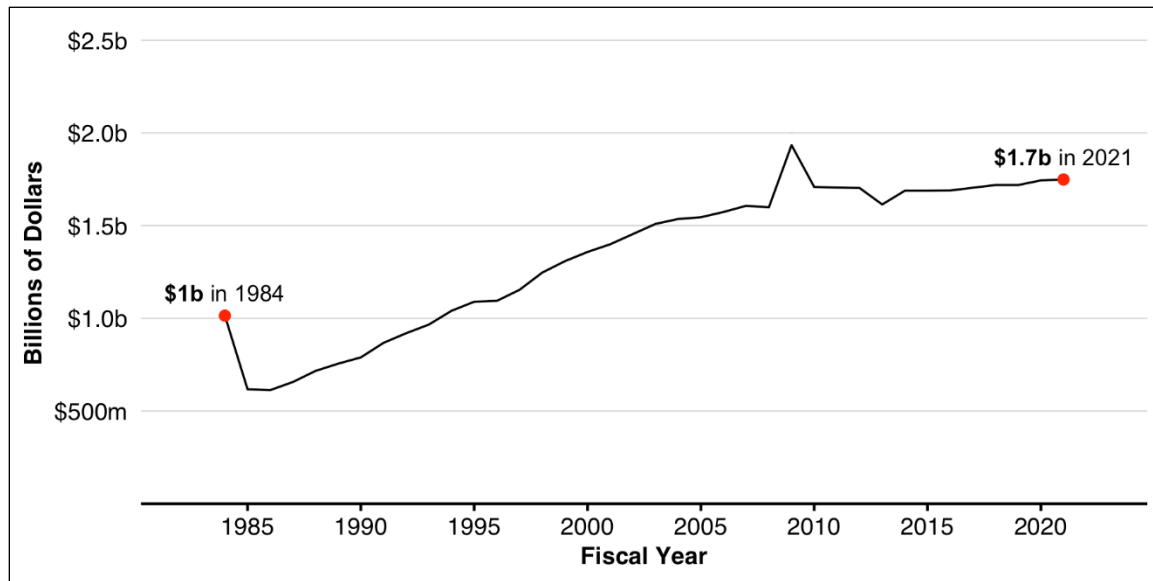
Appropriations

FY1985 marked a low point in Job Corps appropriations levels as the Reagan Administration proposed a phase-out of the program. Since that time, Job Corps appropriations have steadily increased, although these increases have not kept pace with inflation (as shown in **Figure 1** and **Figure 2**). In FY2009, Job Corps received a temporary boost in appropriations during the Great Recession, as national unemployment reached 10%.³

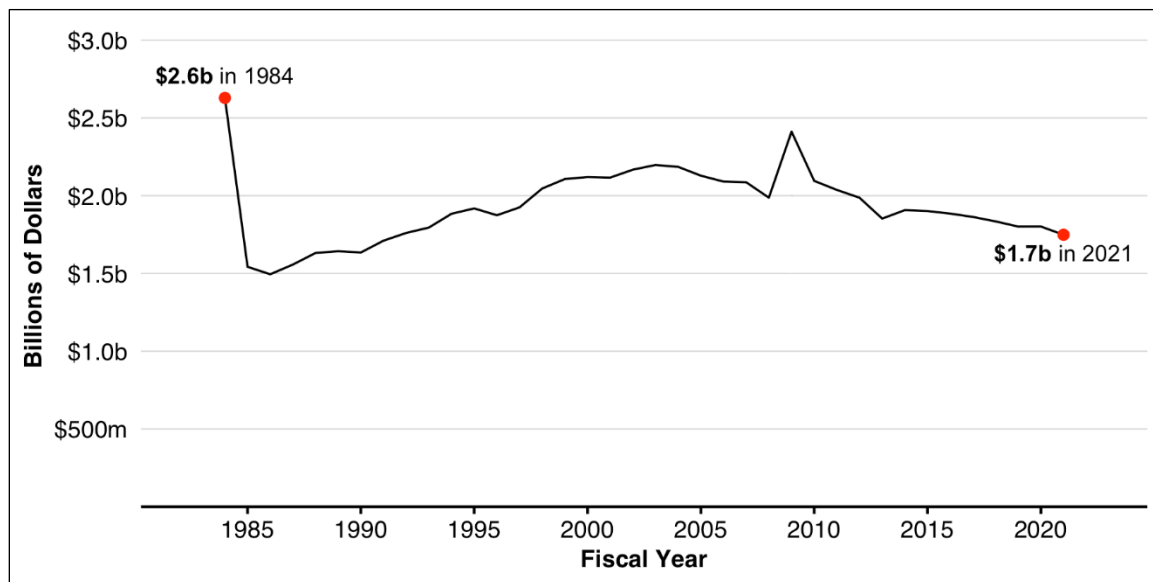
¹ For more information on career and technical education (CTE), see CRS Report R47166, *Career and Technical Education: A Primer*.

² Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA, P.L. 113-128), §141.

³ See U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, https://www.bls.gov/spotlight/2012/recession/pdf/recession_bls_spotlight.pdf.

Figure 1. Appropriations for Job Corps

Source: Prepared by CRS. Data from FY1984 through FY2013 are provided by DOL at <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ETA/budget/pdfs/tepbah.pdf>. Data for FY2013 through FY2021 are found in the FY2023 DOL Congressional Budget Justification for the Job Corps program, p. 12, at <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/general/budget/2023/CBJ-2023-VI-04.pdf>.

Figure 2. Inflation-Adjusted Appropriations for Job Corps in 2021 Dollars

Source: Prepared by CRS. Data from FY1984 through FY2021 are provided by DOL at <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/ETA/budget/pdfs/tepbah.pdf>. Data for FY2013 through FY2021 are found in the FY2023 DOL Congressional Budget Justification for the Job Corps program, p. 12, at <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/general/budget/2023/CBJ-2023-VI-04.pdf>.

Notes: Inflation adjustments relied on the nonseasonally adjusted Consumer Price Index for All Urban Consumers (CPI-U), with FY2021 as the base year (accessed March 28, 2022, at <https://www.bls.gov/data/home.htm>).

Job Corps Operations

Job Corps is unique among federal youth workforce development programs because of its residential model and its contracting of all services through centers located across 50 states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia. More than 100 individual centers report to one of the six regional offices headquartered in Boston, Philadelphia, Atlanta, Dallas, Chicago, and San Francisco. These regional offices report to the national office and the national Director of Job Corps.

Job Corps students typically live at a center⁴ while they learn skills in specific training areas for a maximum of two years. Individuals with disabilities may remain enrolled for an additional year (for a total of three years), and individuals who participate in national service may be granted an enrollment extension.⁵

Participants can earn a GED, a high school diploma, and/or postsecondary credits while receiving meals, health care, a living allowance, and child care. Prior to exiting Job Corps, participants receive transitional support services, such as help finding employment, housing, child care, and transportation. Job Corps activities are intended to help enrollees “(A) secure and maintain meaningful unsubsidized employment; (B) enroll in and complete secondary education or postsecondary education or training programs, including other suitable career and technical education and training, and apprenticeships programs; or (C) satisfy Armed Forces requirements.”⁶

All Job Corps centers must adhere to the requirements of the Policy and Requirements Handbook (PRH).⁷ Each center must also submit its own operating plan for approval by the Secretary of Labor (the Secretary).⁸

Participant Eligibility⁹

At each center, Admissions Counselors (ACs) are responsible for determining whether an applicant is eligible. All applicants must be

- a U.S. citizen; a lawfully admitted permanent resident alien, refugee, asylee, or parolee, or other alien who has been authorized to work in the United States; or a resident of a U.S. territory;
- between the ages of 16 and 24;

⁴ At least 80% of a center’s students must reside onsite. The House-passed version of the latest WIOA reauthorization would codify the word “campus” instead of “center.” See CRS Report R47099, *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2022 (H.R. 7309)*.

⁵ As authorized by a Civilian Conservation Center program, WIOA, §146(b)(3).

⁶ WIOA, §148. For more information on allowances, allotments, and transition payments, see the PRH, <https://prh.jobcorps.gov/Enrollment%20Services/1.1%20Outreach%20and%20Recruitment/Exhibits/Exhibit%206-2%20Student%20Allowance%20and%20Allotment%20System.pdf>.

⁷ An interactive version of the PRH is available at <https://prh.jobcorps.gov/Pages/Home.aspx>.

⁸ WIOA, §151.

⁹ See WIOA, §144. For detailed procedures on verifying eligibility requirements, see Exhibit 1-1 of the PRH, <https://prh.jobcorps.gov/Enrollment%20Services/1.2%20Eligibility/Program%20Requirements/Exhibit%201-1%20Job%20Corps%20Eligibility%20Requirements.pdf>.

- low income, meaning that the applicant meets one or more of the following criteria:
 - is on public assistance,¹⁰
 - has income below the poverty level,
 - is experiencing homelessness,¹¹
 - is eligible for free or reduced price lunch, or
 - is a foster child;
- has a barrier to education and employment, meaning that the applicant meets one or more of the following criteria:
 - is basic skills deficient¹²;
 - did not graduate from high school;
 - is homeless¹³;
 - is a runaway, in foster care, or has aged out of foster care;
 - is a parent;
 - requires additional education; or
 - is a victim of severe forms of trafficking in persons.¹⁴

Recruitment¹⁵

The Secretary prescribes specific standards for the recruitment, screening, and selection of eligible applicants. These standards reflect the Secretary’s consideration of recommendations from governors, local boards, and other interested parties.¹⁶ Centers must provide ACs and One-Stop Career Centers¹⁷ or American Job Centers with current information about all aspects of center life, as well as offer tours to prospective applicants, parents, school counselors, employers,

¹⁰ Eligible programs include the supplemental nutrition assistance programs established under the Food and Nutrition Act of 2008, Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) established under Title IV of the Social Security Act, and the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program established under Title XVI of the Social Security Act.

¹¹ As defined in Section 41403(6) of the Violence Against Women Act of 1994 (42 U.S.C. §14043e-2(6)). A *homeless child or youth* is defined in Section 725(2) of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. §11434a(2)).

¹² This is defined in Section 3 of WIOA as a youth who “has English reading, writing, or computing skills at or below the 8th grade level on a generally accepted standardized test” or a youth or adult who “is unable to compute or solve problems, or read, write, or speak English, at a level necessary to function on the job, in the individual’s family, or in society.”

¹³ As defined in Section 725(2) of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. §11434a(2)).

¹⁴ As defined in Section 103 of the Victims of Trafficking and Violence Protection Act of 2000 (22 U.S.C. §7102).

¹⁵ See WIOA, §145.

¹⁶ See Chapter 1.4 of the PRH, <https://prh.jobcorps.gov/Enrollment%20Services/1.4%20Enrollee%20Selection/Pages/default.aspx>. Recent congressional proposals to streamline recruitment for Job Corps include developing a joint application for Job Corps, YouthBuild, and other youth workforce investment activities. See CRS Report R47099, *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2022 (H.R. 7309)*.

¹⁷ For more information, see CRS Report R44252, *The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and the One-Stop Delivery System*.

and others whenever possible.¹⁸ The Secretary is also authorized to contract out recruitment, screening, and selection of eligible applicants.¹⁹

During FY2020, a national marketing campaign based primarily on digital platforms yielded more than 280,000 prospective applicants. Of these, 44,000 applied, which generated more than 20,000 new enrollees.²⁰ These nationwide marketing investments totaled \$3.7 million, which was about \$13 to generate each prospective applicant. In addition to national efforts, each center can conduct its own marketing and advertising as part of its approved budget.

Services Provided at Centers

Job Corps centers are to provide enrollees with “an intensive, well organized, and fully supervised program of education, including English language acquisition programs, career and technical education and training, work experience, work-based learning, recreational activities, physical rehabilitation and development, driver’s education, and counseling, which may include information about financial literacy.”²¹ For example, the Potomac Job Corps Center in Washington, DC, provides training in 12 careers including building construction technology, plumbing, and culinary arts, with facilities that can house up to 378 participants.²²

Centers must provide certain services initially, such as orientation to the one-stop delivery system, coupled with an assessment of skill levels (including literacy, numeracy, and English language proficiency), aptitudes, and supportive service needs.²³

Participants then must receive

- labor exchange services, including job search, placement assistance, and career counseling;
- referrals to and coordination of activities with other programs and services;
- workforce and labor market employment statistics information, including job vacancies and information on prerequisite job skills and local occupations that are in demand; and
- performance information and program cost information on eligible providers of training services.²⁴

Job Corps participants are to receive assessment and counseling at regular intervals to assist with employment placement prior to graduation.²⁵ Job Corps centers may provide personal allowances

¹⁸ For more information, see Chapter 1.1. of the PRH, <https://prh.jobcorps.gov/Enrollment%20Services/1.1%20Outreach%20and%20Recruitment/Pages/default.aspx>.

¹⁹ WIOA, §145.

²⁰ FY2022 Congressional Budget Justification for the Job Corps program, <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/general/budget/2022/CBJ-2022-V1-04.pdf>.

²¹ WIOA, §148.

²² For more information, see <https://www.jobcorps.gov/center/potomac-job-corps-center>.

²³ WIOA, §134(c)(2)(A).

²⁴ Services provided are described in additional detail in WIOA, §134(c)(2)(A). Eligible providers are described in Section 122 of WIOA and include institutions of higher education, apprenticeship program providers, or other public or private providers of training services, which may include joint labor-management organizations, and eligible providers of adult education and literacy activities when combined with occupational skills training.

²⁵ WIOA, §149.

for enrollees, transition allowances for graduates, and up to three months of employment services for former enrollees.²⁶

Center Safety and Standards of Conduct

Center operators are required to establish and comply with agreements with law enforcement and submit Center Safety and Security Standard Operating Procedures to the national office.²⁷ In 2017, Congress held hearings to address the issue of student safety at Job Corps centers in the wake of two homicides that occurred at centers in 2015.²⁸

To address concerns around the underreporting of significant incidents, Congress asked the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to analyze incident and participant survey data. GAO analyzed incident data covering the period from January 1, 2007, to June 30, 2016, and found nearly 50,000 safety and security incidents during a period when approximately 539,000 students were served. In addition, survey data analysis covered the period from March 2007 through March 2017, during which an average of 72% of participants reported feeling safe.

As residential programs, Job Corps centers maintain strict standards of conduct with a multitier disciplinary system.²⁹ Under a mandatory zero tolerance (ZT) policy, drug testing must be administered to new enrollees, with results available within 45 days. A positive result leads to automatic expulsion. The ZT policy, under which an enrollee is automatically dismissed, covers acts of violence; use, sale, or possession of a controlled substance; abuse of alcohol; and other illegal or disruptive activity, using guidelines established by the Secretary.³⁰

Centers must also submit Significant Incident Reports (SIRs) to the national and regional offices in the event of any of the following:

- a. Death or work/training-related hospitalization of one or more active students or on-duty staff in one incident, work training related amputations, and work/training related losses of an eye
- b. Serious illness, or serious injury (e.g., epidemic, hospitalization, emergency room treatment requiring hospital admission or surgery, reaction to medication/immunization) to an active student and/or on-duty staff member
- c. Physical assault
- d. Inappropriate sexual behavior
- e. Indication that a student is a danger to himself/herself or others
- f. Incident requiring law-enforcement involvement

²⁶ WIOA, §150.

²⁷ For more information, see Chapter 5.3 of the PRH, <https://prh.jobcorps.gov/Management%20Services/5.3%20Safety%20and%20Security/Pages/default.aspx>.

²⁸ See Joe Davidson, “Job Corps Program Hit on Student Safety Problems, Despite Successes,” *The Washington Post*, July 17, 2017, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/powerpost/wp/2017/07/17/job-corps-program-hit-on-student-safety-problems-despite-successes/>. A full transcript of the hearing is available at <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-115hhrg25922/html/CHRG-115hhrg25922.htm>.

²⁹ Exhibit 2-1 of the PRH lists actions to be taken in response to specific incidents and whether a Significant Incident Report (SIR) is required, <https://prh.jobcorps.gov/Management%20Services/5.3%20Safety%20and%20Security/Associated%20Reporting%20Requirements/Exhibit%202-1%20Infraction%20Levels%20Definitions%20and%20Appropriate%20Center%20Actions.pdf>.

³⁰ WIOA, §152.

- g. Incident involving illegal activity
- h. Arrest of current student or on-duty staff member
- i. Motor vehicle accident involving injuries, or damage to a center vehicle
- j. Theft or damage to center, staff, or student property
- k. Incident threatening to close down the center or disrupt the center's operation
- l. Incident involving a missing minor student³¹

Initial SIRs must be submitted within 24 hours of all incidents—with the exception of the death of an active student or on-duty staff member, for which centers have six hours to submit an SIR. Centers must then take corrective action and continue to submit supplemental reports until the incident has been resolved.

Awarding of Center Contracts³²

The federal government does not directly operate Job Corps centers. Instead, the Secretary awards contracts for the operation of Job Corps centers for a maximum of two years. Job Corps operators may be a “Federal, State, or local agency, an area career and technical education school, a residential career and technical education school, or a private organization.”³³ In practice, five private, for-profit contractors operate the majority of centers. The U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Forest Service operates roughly 20% of centers as Job Corps Civil Conservation Centers (CCCs), which are located on federal lands in order to offer training in forestry and other conservation-related careers. The remaining operators are a mix of for-profit and nonprofit organizations.³⁴

Recent congressional proposals have sought to improve diversity among the types of Job Corps operators,³⁵ and DOL has encouraged more nonprofit organizations to apply for Job Corps contracts.³⁶

Demonstration Projects³⁷

The Secretary has demonstration project authority. The primary goal of recent demonstration projects has been to enhance student outcomes and cost effectiveness by providing services outside of traditional Job Corps centers or through different types of operators, such as institutions of higher education and state governmental agencies.

³¹ Chapter 5.4 of the PRH, <https://prh.jobcorps.gov/Management%20Services/5.4%20Significant%20Incidents/Pages/default.aspx>.

³² See WIOA, §147.

³³ WIOA, §147.

³⁴ The exact percentages of operator types change slightly from year to year as centers open and close. For more information, see Mathematica Policy Research, *The External Review of Job Corps: An Evidence Scan Report*, Washington, DC, 2018. <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/OASP/legacy/files/JC-EvidenceScan.pdf>.

³⁵ For more information, see CRS Report R47099, *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2022 (H.R. 7309)*.

³⁶ FY2023 Congressional Budget Justification for the Job Corps program, <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/general/budget/2023/CBJ-2023-V1-04.pdf>.

³⁷ Section 156(a) of WIOA allows the Secretary to “carry out experimental, research, or demonstration projects relating to carrying out the Job Corps program.”

The most recent demonstration projects began in FY2019. DOL awarded demonstration projects to the Louisiana National Guard³⁸ and the State of Idaho³⁹ in order to provide Job Corps services at a lower cost than traditional Job Corps centers, and to examine whether student outcomes would improve as a result.

Job Corps Scholars

A larger demonstration project, Job Corps Scholars, was announced in FY2019 and is subject to an independent evaluation that is expected to conclude in FY2024.⁴⁰ Rather than contract with centers as part of the traditional model, DOL awarded Job Corps Scholars funds directly to community colleges, historically Black colleges and universities, and tribally controlled colleges and universities. These institutions then provided Job Corps-eligible students with educational and career and technical education (CTE) instruction, intensive personal and academic counseling, and employment placement services. The Job Corps Scholars program awarded \$31 million to 26 grantees in 15 states.⁴¹

Accountability

DOL ranks Job Corps centers in terms of their effectiveness according to several metrics.⁴² These performance metrics are distinct from any SIRs that may be reported to the regional or national office as part of a violation of the standards of conduct or the ZT policy.

Primary Indicators of Performance⁴³

Job Corps operates under accountability requirements that are similar to other youth workforce development programs authorized by WIOA. The primary indicators of performance are

- the percentage of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program;
- the percentage of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the fourth quarter after exit from the program;
- the median earnings of program participants who are in unsubsidized employment during the second quarter after exit from the program;
- the percentage of program applicants who obtain a recognized postsecondary credential, or a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, during participation in or within one year after exit from the program⁴⁴;

³⁸ This is known as “the Job ChalleNGe project,” which is delivered through a repurposed Job Corps center designed to serve 200 participants annually in two cohorts of 100 cadets; see <https://www.dol.gov/newsroom/releases/eta/eta20190610>.

³⁹ This program is a unique partnership between the Idaho Department of Labor and the College of Western Idaho. For more information, see <https://cwi.edu/news/news-room/cwis-partnership-idaho-job-corps-helps-students-thrive>.

⁴⁰ For more information, see <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/oasp/evaluation/currentstudies/job-corps-evidence-building-portfolio>.

⁴¹ For more information and a list of grantees, see <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/jobcorps/job-corps-scholars>.

⁴² Centers are regularly ranked, with public reports available at <https://www.jobcorps.gov/job-corps-reports>.

⁴³ See WIOA, §116.

⁴⁴ Program participants who obtain a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent are included in this percentage only if in addition to obtaining such diploma or its recognized equivalent they have obtained or retained

- the percentage of program participants who, during a program year, are in an education or training program that leads to a recognized postsecondary credential or employment and who are achieving measurable skill gains toward such a credential or employment; and
- the indicators of effectiveness in serving employers (ESE measures), such as retention with the same employer (the percentage of participants who exit and are employed with the same employer in the second and fourth quarters after exit).⁴⁵

Job Corps centers are considered to be high performing under these metrics as long as they meet 100% or higher of their expected levels of performance.⁴⁶ The Secretary establishes the expected levels using a statistical model to adjust the national goal (upward or downward) for each center. The model accounts for the abilities of the students enrolled and the characteristics of the environment in which a center operates using local economic data.⁴⁷ High performing operators have an advantage in the competitive selection process for contracts.⁴⁸

In addition to the expected levels of performance for a Job Corps center as established by the Secretary, contractors also report information that includes the following:⁴⁹

- the number of enrollees served;
- demographic information on the enrollees served, including age, race, gender, and education and income level;
- the number of graduates of a Job Corps center;
- the number of graduates who entered the Armed Forces;
- the number of graduates who entered apprenticeship programs;
- the number of graduates who received a regular secondary school diploma or GED;

employment or are in an education or training program leading to a recognized postsecondary credential within one year after exit from the program.

⁴⁵ Additional ESE measures can be found at https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/OASP/Measures%20of%20Effectiveness%20in%20Serving%20Employers_Final%20Report_12-31-20.pdf. These indicators are established by the Secretary of Labor and the Secretary of Education in consultation with representatives of states and political subdivisions, business and industry, employees, eligible providers of activities carried out through the core programs, educators, researchers, participants, the lead state agency officials with responsibility for the programs carried out through the core programs, individuals with expertise in serving individuals with barriers to employment, and other interested parties.

⁴⁶ For the reporting period from July 1, 2021, to February 28, 2022, 17 centers qualified as high performing with overall ratings of 100% or above, see https://s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/jobcorps.gov/2022-05/rcrr_02282022_PY.pdf. The highest-performing center during this period was the Mingo Job Corps Civilian Conservation Center in Puxico, MO, with a 114.4% rating. The Frenchburg Job Corps Civilian Conservation Center in Frenchburg, KY, and the Ramey Job Corps Center in Aguadilla, Puerto Rico, were the second and third highest-performing centers, respectively. Centers ranked 18 through 116 achieved lower than a 100% overall rating. The lowest performing center was the Cascades Job Corps Center in Sedro Wooley, WA, with an overall rating of 64.5%.

⁴⁷ For more information on the performance management system and levels of performance, see https://s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/jobcorps.gov/2017-04/Job_Corps-jc_performance_management_system_overview_guide.pdf.

⁴⁸ WIOA, §147.

⁴⁹ Unlike the expected levels of performance, this information is not used to determine whether a center must develop and implement a performance improvement plan, as described in WIOA, §159(f)(2).

- the numbers of graduates who entered unsubsidized employment related to the CTE and training received through Job Corps, and the number who entered unsubsidized employment unrelated to the CTE and training received;
- the percentage and number of former enrollees, including those dismissed under the ZT policy;
- the percentage and number of graduates who enter postsecondary education;
- the average wages of graduates on the first day of unsubsidized employment and six months later;
- the percentage of enrollees as compared to enrollment targets as established by the Secretary;
- the cost per enrollee⁵⁰;
- the cost per graduate⁵¹; and
- any additional information required by the Secretary.⁵²

Job Corps' outcome measurement system further disaggregates these performance indicators by type of training program, such as training to become an automobile technician, medical assistant, or corrections officer. In addition to performance goals for individual centers, training programs have their own separate goals for completion rates and average wages.⁵³

Evidence of Effectiveness

Relatively little rigorous evidence exists concerning the effectiveness of Job Corps aside from the National Job Corps Study, during which researchers conducted a randomized control trial to determine whether Job Corps participants achieved better outcomes than those who did not enroll.

Findings from the National Job Corps Study⁵⁴

Drawing upon a nationally representative sample, National Job Corps Study researchers randomly assigned nearly 81,000 eligible program applicants between late 1994 and early 1996 to either a treatment group, whose members were allowed to enroll in Job Corps, or a control group, whose 6,000 members were not allowed to enroll. The study used survey data from participants four years after random assignment as well as earnings data covering the nine years following random assignment.

In the treatment group, 93% of the members enrolled in an education or training program during the first 48 months, and the group saw a 21% increase in GED certificates earned and a 31% increase in vocational certificates earned compared to the control group. The treatment group saw

⁵⁰ This is calculated by comparing the number of enrollees at the center in a program year to the total budget for such center in the same program year.

⁵¹ This is calculated by comparing the number of graduates of the center in a program year compared to the total budget for such center in the same program year.

⁵² WIOA, §159.

⁵³ For a full list of types of center training programs, see the regularly updated Job Corps report page at <https://www.jobcorps.gov/job-corps-reports>, or https://s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/jobcorps.gov/2022-05/rveo_02282022_PY.pdf for an example from the reporting period 7/1/2021 to 2/28/2022.

⁵⁴ Peter Schochet, John Burghardt, and Sheena McConnell, "Does Job Corps Work? Impact Findings from the National Job Corps Study," *American Economic Review*, vol. 98, no. 5 (2008), pp. 1864-1886.

an increase of 2.2% in high school diplomas earned—perhaps because they earned a GED instead—and most of those who returned to high school did not graduate. Job Corps participation had no effect on college attendance or completion compared to the control group, suggesting that participants did not pursue additional education after earning vocational certificates.

As for earnings, three years after random assignment, Job Corps participants earned \$1,150 more annually than those in the control group.⁵⁵ These earnings increases did not persist nine years later, except for those participants who began the program at age 20 or older. The study provides evidence that Job Corps may be more effective for these older participants.

Re-analysis and Follow-Up Studies

A re-analysis of the National Job Corps Study focused on the amount of time that enrollees spent receiving Job Corps training rather than on whether participants enrolled at all. The authors revealed that wages continued to increase for Job Corps participants the longer they remained in training. Participants who spent at least 40 weeks in training saw an increase of \$1,612 annually two years after random assignment, which was \$462 more than the average impact for all participants.⁵⁶

Another follow-up study reproduced earlier results after examining participants' tax records 20 years after random assignment. The authors found that the same older students (those who began at age 20 or older) continued to benefit from the program in terms of their earnings, while younger students still did not see wage increases compared to the control group.⁵⁷ One recent proposal in the 117th Congress, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2022 (H.R. 7309), would eliminate the requirement that only 20% of Job Corps enrollees may be 22 years or older, perhaps related to these findings.⁵⁸

History of Job Corps⁵⁹

This section provides a brief history of Job Corps, including its origins and major shifts in its appropriations over time.

Origins in the War on Poverty

Job Corps was created by the Economic Opportunity Act (EOA) of 1964, a legislative cornerstone of President Lyndon B. Johnson's War on Poverty, to tackle the problem of youth unemployment. The inspiration for Job Corps came from the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC), a 1933 work relief program that gave millions of young men employment on environmental projects as part of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal.

⁵⁵ This estimate includes zero earnings for nonworkers.

⁵⁶ Carlos A. Flores, Alfonso Flores-Lagunes, Arturo Gonzalez, and Todd C. Neumann, "Estimating the Effects of Length of Exposure to Instruction in a Training Program: The Case of Job Corps," *Review of Economics and Statistics*, vol. 94, no. 1 (2012), pp. 153-171.

⁵⁷ Peter Schochet, *National Job Corps Study: 20-Year Follow-Up Study Using Tax Data*, Mathematica Policy Research, 2018, <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/OASP/legacy/files/Job-Corps-IRS-Report.pdf>.

⁵⁸ For more information, see CRS Report R47099, *Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2022 (H.R. 7309)*.

⁵⁹ Much of the material for this section comes from Joseph E. Blackett, *A Legal History of the Job Corps*, dissertation, Andrews University, 2002, <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1231&context=dissertations>.

Whereas the CCC focused on training adults, Job Corps focused on training youth in order to better prepare individuals ages 16 to 24 for adulthood. The residential component of Job Corps remains one of its signature components compared to other federal youth workforce development programs.⁶⁰

Following the passage of EOA and an initial appropriation of \$280 million, the first Job Corps center opened on January 15, 1965, at Camp Catoctin in Maryland, with 14 staff members providing services to 30 students at a site adjacent to the presidential retreat at Camp David. The first Job Corps Women's Center was established a few months later in Cleveland, OH.

Previous CCC centers and retired military bases provided many of the first Job Corps sites throughout the country. As the program expanded and costs increased, some students were allowed to commute beginning in 1967, but the majority of participants continued to live onsite, as do most current participants.

Periods of Contraction and Expansion

In 1969, shortly after the inception of Job Corps, the incoming Nixon Administration instructed the Director of Job Corps to begin phasing out the program. By the end of the Nixon Administration, Job Corps was serving a reduced number of students with a budget of \$151 million.

Under the Carter Administration, Job Corps' budget increased more than threefold to \$560 million (albeit during a period of high inflation), with 99 centers serving more than 40,000 students nationwide. A 1979 report from the Comptroller General described ongoing debates about the program, some of which continue today. For example, the report questioned whether youths should be removed from their home environments, and whether all graduates were earning above-poverty wages.

Although concerns about cost effectiveness and cost overruns have recurred at various periods during the history of Job Corps, appropriations have remained fairly stable and have not significantly declined since FY1985. At the end of the Reagan Administration, Job Corps appropriations were at \$716 million—\$156 million more than under the Carter Administration.

As discussed in an earlier section, the program has received either gradual increases or level funding in terms of nominal dollars from the 1990s to the present, and its operations have remained relatively stable.⁶¹ However, funding levels have declined some in terms of constant dollars since the mid-1990s.

COVID-19 Impacts

The COVID-19 pandemic severely impacted Job Corps operations, resulting in a dramatic reduction in students served during FY2020 and FY2021. Students vacated Job Corps centers beginning in March 2020, and distance learning began in May 2020. Enrollment dropped by 56%, and the number of students completing trade training dropped to zero by April 2021. The average

⁶⁰ For a comprehensive list of such programs, see CRS In Focus IF11952, *Youth Employment and Training Programs Authorized by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act*.

⁶¹ Congress investigated some funding gaps and center closures in 2015. For more information, see CRS Report R43611, *Recent Developments in the Job Corps Program: Frequently Asked Questions*.

time students took to finish the program more than doubled, from 8 to 18 months.⁶² Most students began to return to centers during the first quarter of FY2021.⁶³

Legislation

Since the passage of EOA in 1964, the authorization for Job Corps has existed in the following statutes:

- the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act of 1972 (CETA);
- the Job Training Partnerships Act of 1982 (JTPA);
- the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 (WIA); and
- the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014 (WIOA; P.L. 113-128) (the most recent authorization), as amended by the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (P.L. 115-224).⁶⁴

CETA, JTPA, and WIA each served as the primary federal workforce development law until repealed by its successor. The core components of Job Corps have remained largely the same over time even as the program has expanded and evolved to serve a greater proportion of older students and more female students.⁶⁵

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Acknowledgments

CRS Research Assistant Paul Romero created Figure 1 and Figure 2.

⁶² U.S. Department of Labor, Office of Inspector General–Office of Audit, *COVID-19: Safety and Remote Learning Challenges Continue for Job Corps*, 2021, <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/21109064-jobcorpsioigreport>.

⁶³ FY2023 Congressional Budget Justification for the Job Corps program, <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/general/budget/2023/CBJ-2023-V1-04.pdf>.

⁶⁴ For more information, see CRS Report R44252, *The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act and the One-Stop Delivery System*; and CRS In Focus IF11952, *Youth Employment and Training Programs Authorized by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act*.

⁶⁵ Elena Silva, “Job Corps,” *Encyclopedia Britannica*, December 31, 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Job-Corps>.

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