

TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT NOTICE	NO. 30-23
	DATE May 8, 2024

TO: STATE WORKFORCE AGENCIES
STATE WORKFORCE LIAISONS

FROM: JOSÉ JAVIER RODRÍGUEZ /s/
Assistant Secretary

SUBJECT: Availability of the Unemployment Insurance (UI) Equitable Access Toolkit

1. **Purpose.** To inform State Workforce Agencies (SWAs) of the release of the updated Equitable Access Toolkit published on WorkforceGPS under the UI Community of Practice (COP). This toolkit provides SWAs with actionable solutions for common and emerging issues related to equitable access to unemployment compensation (UC) programs.
2. **Action Requested.** The U.S. Department of Labor’s (Department) Employment and Training Administration (ETA) requests that SWA Administrators provide information contained in this Training and Employment Notification (TEN) to all staff and ensure these staff have access to the UI COP on the WorkforceGPS webpage (<https://www.workforcegps.org>) by creating an account or logging in to view exclusive content. SWAs can access the toolkit directly at https://www.workforcegps.org/resources/2023/04/UI_Content/Public_Equitable_Access_Toolkit.
3. **Summary and Background.**
 - a. Summary – This TEN announces the Department’s publication of the updated UI Equitable Access Toolkit to help states identify and address barriers workers face when seeking to access unemployment insurance (UI) benefits. This toolkit has been developed based on the Department’s learnings from its UI Tiger Team engagements with SWAs across the country. It is intended to be used as a resource for states to develop initiatives and refine strategies towards the goal of promoting equitable access to UC programs.

The Department previously published the first iteration of this toolkit, which featured four topics and was announced in TEN No. 26-22. This complete toolkit now contains ten topics that cover the complete claimant journey. See Unemployment Insurance Program Letter (UIPL) No. 01-24 for a review of the claimant journey and additional ways for SWAs to improve equitable access across their UC programs. The updated UI Equitable Access Toolkit announced in this TEN shares practical ways for SWAs to identify, improve, and remedy access issues in their UC programs.

The toolkit is available on the WorkforceGPS UI COP website. States and stakeholders are encouraged to explore the content and apply all applicable steps within their programs.

- b. Background – On March 11, 2021, the President signed the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA) into law (Public Law (Pub. L.) 117-2). Section 9032, ARPA, creates a new Section 2118 of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act (Pub. L. 116-136) and provided for a \$2,000,000,000 appropriation¹ to the Secretary of Labor (Secretary) to detect and prevent fraud, to promote equitable access, and to ensure timely payment of benefits to eligible workers with respect to UC programs.

On August 17, 2021, the Department issued UIPL No. 23-21, announcing the availability of ARPA funding for activities that promote equitable access to UC programs.

On November 2, 2021, the Department issued UIPL No. 02-22 to notify states of the availability of ARPA funding to support states with improving UC systems and processes following a consultative assessment with a team of experts (i.e., UI Tiger Teams) provided by the Department. This amount was later modified as a result of the Fiscal Responsibility Act (FRA) and announced with publication of UIPL No. 11-23 on July 13, 2023.

States are encouraged to visit the ARPA and Unemployment Compensation webpage at https://www.workforcegps.org/resources/2023/04/UI_Content/Public_ARPA_External and UI Modernization webpage at www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/ui-modernization for more information. To automatically receive updates when new information and more promising recommendations are posted, ensure staff are registered for UI COP by having them visit the website at:

<https://www.workforcegps.org/login?returnUrl=https://www.workforcegps.org/user/myprofile/my-communities>.

ETA has observed promising recommendations through UI Tiger Team engagements and will utilize the UI COP to share these observations. Established in 2011, the UI COP provides a means for ETA and states to communicate important information and share promising practices and program improvements. The UI COP is a private community available exclusively to state and federal UI practitioners. See TEN No. 18-11.

On November 8, 2023, the Department issued UIPL No. 01-24 to provide SWAs clarity on the terms “access,” “equitable access,” and “integrity.” This UIPL informs states of ways that equitable access can be evaluated and enhanced, including through technical assistance and tools from various Department initiatives and state-based partnerships.

4. **UI Equitable Access Toolkit.** Equitable access intersects with all agency functions. This toolkit highlights the importance for SWAs to review all aspects of their UI programs and

¹ The Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2023, enacted on June 3, 2023, rescinded \$1,000,000,000 of these funds previously provided for UI program purposes.

proactively look for ways it can better improve access and prevent possible access issues for all populations.

The “UI Equitable Access Toolkit” now has ten topics. In a step-by-step approach, this toolkit provides an overview of promising practices and actionable ways for SWAs to address and remove common barriers that make it difficult for people to access UI benefits.

This toolkit can be accessed directly at:

https://www.workforcegps.org/resources/2023/04/UI_Content/Public_Equitable_Access_Toolkit.

The toolkit’s ten topics include:

- a. ***Equitable Access Data & Metrics.*** Topic 1 identifies how SWAs can start measuring equitable access throughout each stage of the claimant journey (see UIPL No. 01-24), as well as creating a proactive process improvement team specifically focused on identifying and remedying barriers to access UI.
- b. ***Community Outreach.*** Topic 2 reviews ways for SWAs to learn from the community where access issues may exist. Importantly, one-off issues may be indications of systematic internal processing issues, and community stakeholders can help provide needed insight into areas of improvement.
- c. ***Plain Language Standards.*** Topic 3 highlights ways for states to prioritize and improve communication with claimants and employers so that all parties understand their requirements and responsibilities.
- d. ***Language Assistance Services.*** Improving access for claimants with Limited English Proficiency (LEP) is critical to comply with federal law, and Topic 4 reviews ways for states to prioritize and improve LEP services.
- e. ***Online Accessibility.*** Compliance with federal accessibility laws requires a proactive approach. Moreover, all claimants and employers will benefit from a more accessible online service option. Topic 5 helps SWAs navigate accessibility standards and introduces promising practices that may help to create an optimal user experience.
- f. ***Digital User Experience.*** Many SWAs desire to have claimant and employers conduct their claims online, and Topic 6 provides suggestions for states to improve online services so that people will better understand how to use them and, in turn, want to use them.
- g. ***Improving Claimant Access.*** States are required to have non-digital options for claimants to access their claim, including having in-person and/or phone services. See UIPL No. 01-24 and UIPL No. 02-16. Having well-supported alternatives to online services is not only required, but also critical for an agency’s success to deliver benefits

when due. Topic 7 helps agencies conduct an internal review of these non-digital options so that they can provide and improve access.

- h. **Contact Center Operations.** Between phone, online, and other methods for claimants and employers to communicate with the agency, SWAs should look for ways to gather and store the information they learn from across their various contact points. SWAs should also create and execute action plans to improve access to UI services based on the information. Topic 8 provides a maturity model for states to leverage to improve their contact centers and highlights how SWAs can incorporate information from their contact centers into their process improvements.
- i. **Equity Safeguards for Program Integrity.** Program integrity and equitable access are inextricably linked (for more on the connection between these two facets of UC programs, see UIPL No. 01-24). Program integrity requires that SWAs are paying all eligible claimants when due, which means that internal fraud and integrity tools must be properly calibrated to ensure that eligible claimants can maintain access to their claim for benefits. Topic 9 outlines several ways for SWAs to balance their program integrity and equitable access responsibilities.
- j. **Equity Safeguards for Automated Processes.** Technology has improved claim processing significantly, but it requires significant oversight and continuous improvements to ensure that it is not also creating access issues for eligible claims. Topic 10 reviews methods for states to embed equitable access safeguards across automated processes within the agency.

5. **Inquiries.** Please direct inquiries to the appropriate ETA Regional Office.

6. **References.**

- American Rescue Plan Act, Pub L. 117-2, enacted March 11, 2021;
- Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act (Pub. L. 116-136), including Title II Subtitle A, Relief for Workers Affected by Coronavirus Act, enacted March 27, 2020;
- UIPL No. 01-24, *Equitable Access in the Unemployment Insurance (UI) Program*, issued November 8, 2023, <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/advisories/uipl-01-24>;
- UIPL No. 11-23, *Announcement of Grant Opportunities and National Identity (ID) Verification Offering under the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA)*, issued July 13, 2023, <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/advisories/uipl-11-23>;
- UIPL No. 03-23, *Availability of U.S. Department of Labor (Department) Funded Resources and Services to State American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Grantees*, issued March 6, 2023, <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/advisories/uipl-03-23>;
- UIPL No. 02-22, Change 2, *Extension of Time for States to Express Interest in the Grant Opportunity Announced in Unemployment Insurance Program Letter (UIPL) No. 02-22, to Support States Following a Consultative Assessment for Fraud Detection and Prevention, Promoting Equitable Access, and Ensuring the Timely Payment of Benefits, including Backlog Reduction, for all Unemployment Compensation (UC) Programs*,

issued September 19, 2022,

<https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/advisories/uipl-02-22-change-2>;

- UIPL No. 02-22, Change 1, *Extension of Time for States to Express Interest in the Grant Opportunity Announced in Unemployment Insurance Program Letter (UIPL) No. 2-22 to Support States Following a Consultative Assessment for Fraud Detection and Prevention, Promoting Equitable Access, and Ensuring the Timely Payment of Benefits, including Backlog Reduction, for all Unemployment Compensation (UC) Programs*, issued February 16, 2022, <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/advisories/unemployment-insurance-program-letter-no-02-22-change-1>;
- UIPL No. 02-22, *Grant Opportunity to Support States Following a Consultative Assessment for Fraud Detection and Prevention, Promoting Equitable Access, and Ensuring the Timely Payment of Benefits, including Backlog Reduction, for all Unemployment Compensation (UC) Programs*, issued November 2, 2021, <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/advisories/unemployment-insurance-program-letter-no-02-22>;
- UIPL No. 23-21, *Grant Opportunity for Promoting Equitable Access to Unemployment Compensation (UC) Programs*, issued August 17, 2021, <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/advisories/unemployment-insurance-program-letter-no-23-21>;
- UIPL No. 02-16, Change 1, *State Responsibilities for Ensuring Access to Unemployment Insurance Benefits, Services, and Information*, issued May 11, 2020, <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/advisories/unemployment-insurance-program-letter-no-02-16-change-1>;
- UIPL No. 02-16, *State Responsibilities for Ensuring Access to Unemployment Insurance Benefits*, issued October 1, 2015, <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/advisories/unemployment-insurance-program-letter-no-02-16>;
- UIPL No. 11-14, *Collection and Analysis of Claimant Demographic Data*, issued May 15, 2014, <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/advisories/unemployment-insurance-program-letter-no11-14>;
- TEN No. 06-23, *Announcing “Fundamentals of Equitable Access in Unemployment Insurance (UI)” Online Training*, issued September 1, 2023, <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/advisories/ten-06-23>;
- TEN No. 26-22, *Availability of the Unemployment Insurance (UI) Equitable Access Toolkit*, issued on May 12, 2023, <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/advisories/ten-26-22>;
- TEN No. 24-22, *New Unemployment Insurance (UI) Tiger Team Promising Recommendations Resource Pages Available on WorkforceGPS*, issued April 17, 2023, <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/advisories/ten-24-22>;
- TEN No. 18-11, *Unemployment Insurance (UI) Community of Practice (COP)*, issued November 30, 2011, <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/advisories/training-and-employment-notice-no-18-11>; and
- UI Modernization webpage, <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/eta/ui-modernization>.

7. **Attachment(s)**. Not Applicable.