ADVISORY: UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE PROGRAM LETTER NO. 22-21

TO: STATE WORKFORCE AGENCIES

FROM: SUZAN G. LEVINE /s/
Acting Assistant Secretary

SUBJECT: Grant Opportunity to Support States with Fraud Detection and Prevention, Including Identity Verification and Overpayment Recovery Activities, in All Unemployment Compensation (UC) Programs

1. Purpose. To notify State Workforce Agencies regarding the availability of up to $140 million to support states with fraud detection and prevention, including identity verification and overpayment recovery activities, in all UC programs.

2. Action Requested. The U.S. Department of Labor’s (Department) Employment and Training Administration (ETA) requests that State Workforce Agency Administrators:

   • Review the funding opportunity to determine if the state will apply for funds under this solicitation;
   • Coordinate with appropriate state staff to develop a SF-424 under this solicitation;
   • Submit the SF-424 by e-mail to covid-19@dol.gov by the close of business on September 13, 2021, with an electronic copy to the appropriate regional office. The subject line of the e-mail should include the name of the state and the title “ARPA Fraud Prevention Grant 2021.”

3. Summary and Background.

   a. Summary – The Department is making up to $140 million available for grants to states to support states with fraud detection and prevention, including identity verification and overpayment recovery activities, in all UC programs. States may use the funds made available under this UIPL to support innovative strategies and solutions to 1) strengthen identity verification of Unemployment Insurance (UI) claimants; 2) enhance fraud detection and prevention strategies; 3) improve data management and analytic capabilities; 4) increase cybersecurity; and 5) expand overpayment recovery efforts.
Additionally, as a condition of receiving a grant under this UIPL, states must agree to information disclosure with the Department’s Office of Inspector General (DOL-OIG) as described in Section 5.c.i. of this UIPL.

b. Background – Since the onset of the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, the UI program has been an attractive target for international and domestic criminal organizations perpetrating identity fraud. States have worked tirelessly to combat relentless and sophisticated fraud attacks, while simultaneously responding to the highest claims workload in the history of the UI program.

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 provides for a $2,000,000,000 appropriation 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. Such funds may be used for federal administrative costs; system-wide infrastructure investment and development; and to make grants to states or territories administering UC programs for such purposes, including the establishment of procedures or the building of infrastructure to verify or validate identity, implement federal guidance regarding fraud detection and prevention, and accelerate claims processing or process claims backlogs due to the pandemic.

Addressing both eligibility fraud and identity fraud remain a top priority for the Department and the entire UC system. As discussed in UIPL Nos. 23-20; 28-20; 28-20, Change 1; and 28-20, Change 2, ETA strongly encourages states to adopt an array of solutions and techniques to detect and fight fraud, to have robust strategies in place to verify the identity of individuals applying for unemployment benefits, and to strengthen efforts to recover overpayments, including fraudulently paid UC benefits. This includes implementing National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST)-compliant Identity Assurance Level 2 (IAL2) and Authenticator Assurance Level 2 (AAL2) identity proofing (see section 4.b. of this UIPL for more information). States are also encouraged to make use of the tools, resources, and services of the UI Integrity Center, funded by the Department and operated in partnership with the National Association of State Workforce Agencies (NASWA). See Training and Employment Notice (TEN) No. 04-20 for further information on the Integrity Data Hub (IDH).

As a reminder, states must refer allegations which they reasonably believe constitute UC fraud, waste, abuse, mismanagement, or misconduct to the DOL-OIG. Additionally, states are required to disclose confidential UC information related to the CARES Act, as amended, to the DOL-OIG for the purpose of UC fraud investigations and audits for the entire pandemic relief period. See UIPL No. 04-17, Change 1. States should also

---
1 NIST Special Publication (SP) 800-63 provides technical requirements for implementing digital identity services. The publication includes: an overview of identity frameworks; using authenticators, credentials, and assertions in a digital system; and a risk-based process to select assurance levels at https://pages.nist.gov/800-63-3/sp800-63-3.html.
actively and regularly share information about suspected fraud with other state UI agencies and with local, state, and federal law enforcement.

ETA is committed to supporting states by providing funding and investing in the most innovative and successful tools and resources to stay ahead of fraud schemes, which includes providing states with options to access NIST-compliant identity proofing and authentication solutions. This includes Blanket Purchase Agreements (BPAs) awarded by the Department that provide the Department with a procurement vehicle to enhance identity proofing in the state’s UI programs. In the near future, the Department plans to issue guidance to states on the BPAs and the procedures for the Department to issue orders under those BPAs, in accordance with federal procurement regulations. As part of that ordering process, the Department anticipates working with states to identify particular requirements applicable to a state UI program and to provide for the payment for services ordered using grants made available under this UIPL or another funding source identified by the state subject to requirements of federal appropriations law.

**Promoting Program Equity.** As states consider additional tools to incorporate into their fraud management operations, equitable access to unemployment benefits must be at the forefront of the decision-making process, in line with Executive Order (EO) 13985 of January 2021 and UIPL Nos. 02-16 and 02-16, Change 1. At the most fundamental level, equity within the UC program means the provision of UC payments to eligible workers, regardless of one’s background, in a timely and fair manner, with an application process that is readily accessible to all workers. In the context of fraud management, equitable access means that there are alternatives to digital mechanisms of identity proofing; that the mechanisms used to prove identity or flag for fraud do not contain racial, gender, or other bias; and that data is available to understand the impact of fraud mitigation on eliminating barriers that prevent full and equal access to benefits for all eligible individuals.

In the near future, the Department expects to issue additional funding opportunities for promoting equitable access and ensuring the timely payment of benefits with respect to UC programs. States may want to consider these additional funds when preparing their strategies to detect and prevent fraud under this UIPL.

4. **Guidance.** This section provides definitions for different types of fraud, namely eligibility fraud and identity fraud. States are encouraged to implement NIST-compliant processes for identity proofing and authentication to combat identity fraud.

a. **Types of Fraud.** There are primarily two different types of fraud occurring within the UC program.

i. **Eligibility fraud** generally occurs when benefits or services are acquired as a result of false information with the intent to receive benefits for which an individual or individuals would not otherwise be qualified. State law determines how this is evaluated within the UC program. Not all improper payments are considered fraudulent.
ii. **Identity fraud** is when one person acquires and uses the identifying information of another person in order to illegally receive benefits. The fraud can happen either at the time of UI application submission, or by changing key user data like bank account information after a claim has been established. As discussed in UIPL No. 16-21, synthetic identity fraud occurs when real and fake information are combined to create false identities.

b. **National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST)-compliant IAL2/AAL2 Identity Proofing and Authentication.** The Department strongly encourages all states to implement NIST-compliant identity proofing, specifically IAL2 and AAL2, before claimants start filling out the UI claims application and for re-accessing their account. IAL2 and AAL2 are recommended for UC programs due to the personally identifiable information (PII) collected from individuals and employers. NIST Standard Publication (SP) 800-63 outlines components of identity assurance that states should take into consideration when reviewing available tools/solutions:

i. **Identity Assurance Level (IAL)** indicates how robust the identity proofing process is and how the identity in question is bound between an authenticator and a specific person. IAL2 requires evidence that supports the real-world existence of the claimed identity and verifies that the applicant is appropriately associated with this real-world identity. IAL2 introduces the need for either remote or physically-present identity proofing and includes filling out personal information (name, address, DOB, etc.) and submitting photos of approved government-issued identification or supporting documents for remote identity proofing.

ii. **Authenticator Assurance Level (AAL)** refers to the authentication process and indicates the confidence that the person trying to log in is the same person as the person attached to the account. AAL2 indicates the level of security behind the point of access, which requires the proof of possession and control of two distinct authentication methods.

As states are implementing NIST-compliant IAL2/AAL2 identity proofing and authentication services or other identity verification methods, the Department strongly encourages states to include service delivery expectations that mitigate access barriers to individuals. The state must provide at least two options to individuals upfront to verify their identity (i.e., online, by phone, and/or in-person). An example of service delivery expectations that further mitigate access barriers include that incorrect identity proofing by denying the validation of an individual’s identity who has accurately represented themselves and submitted to identity proofing requirements (which is an example of a “false positive”) shall not exceed 0.5 percent of the total IAL2 identities processed. Timely determinations prevent fraudulent benefit payments while ensuring that qualified and eligible claimants receive benefits as soon as administratively feasible. See UIPL Nos. 04-01, 01-16, and 16-21.
5. **Funding for States to Combat Fraud in All UC Programs.** This section discusses the amount available to states, allowable uses of funds, application instructions, and reporting requirements.

a. **Amount Available to States.** The Department is providing a total of up to $140 million to states to combat fraud in all UC programs. The methodology for state funding levels is based on size of UI covered employment in the state. For purposes of this methodology, states are assigned to four groups (Small, Medium, Large, and Extra-Large) based on the 12-month average of UI covered employment for the four quarters in calendar year 2020 reported on the ES 202 (Employment, Wages and Contributions). States are assigned to the size groups as follows:

- Small: covered employment under 1 million employees
- Medium: covered employment between 1 million and 2 million employees
- Large: covered employment between 2 million and 7 million employees
- Extra Large: covered employment greater than 7 million employees

Attachment I lists funding available for each state.

b. **Allowable Use of Funds.** States may use the funds made available under this UIPL to strengthen identity verification of UI claimants, enhance fraud detection and prevention strategies, improve data management and analytic capabilities, increase cybersecurity, and expand overpayment recovery efforts in all UC programs. Examples of permissible uses of these funds include but are not limited to the following activities:

i. Procuring, implementing, and paying reoccurring subscription costs and/or ongoing maintenance costs of identity verification and fraud detection solutions, such as NIST-compliant IAL2 and AAL2 tool(s)/strategy(ies) that provide identity verification and user authorization of all individuals applying for UC benefits. This includes using such funds to pay for services provided under an order issued by the Department against one of the Department’s identity proofing BPAs;

ii. Implementing or enhancing data analytics capabilities to understand the nature and prevalence of fraud and the impact of fraud mitigation efforts, such as tracking:
   - Current and historical numbers of cases flagged as potential or resolved fraud;
   - Type of fraud (eligibility fraud vs. identity fraud);
   - Type of perpetrators; and
   - Investigation outcomes.

---

2 Since Guam, American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau do not operate regular UC programs, this grant opportunity is not being made available to these jurisdictions.
iii. Implementing cross-matching to detect suspicious activity, including synthetic or false identities, and identification of other patterns of fraudulent behavior (e.g., with a state’s own internal data or the IDH Identity Verification (IDV) solution);

iv. Implementing or enhancing cybersecurity perimeter defense for the websites and web applications responsible for initial application steps and regular certification (e.g., to protect against online bot attacks);

v. Costs incurred from working with banks and financial institutions to detect suspicious activity, ensure that accounts are not unduly suspended and eligible claimants with suspended claims are paid benefits, and facilitate the expeditious return of improperly paid UC funds;

vi. Costs incurred to capture and analyze additional data elements to measure the service delivery expectations. This includes capturing any data elements to measure effectiveness and equity outcomes of identity verification and fraud detection and prevention solutions, tools, and actions associated with the use of these funds to ensure that service delivery does not adversely affect people of color, individuals in poverty, and others who may have been historically underserved or marginalized.

Examples include tracking which claims were flagged as potential fraud at any time, the length of time to resolve these investigations, and the outcome of these investigations (e.g., fraud, overpayment but not fraudulent, non-issue (i.e., “false positive”)) by demographic group.

Other examples include reporting data on claimant experience with fraud fighting technology (e.g., speed of identity proofing broken out by subgroups such as race, ethnicity, gender, disability status, geographic location, age).

vii. Assessing and mitigating disproportionate impact of fraud measures on vulnerable communities such as communities of color, communities with disabilities, limited English proficient and immigrant communities, and certain geographic communities (e.g., rural versus urban).

viii. Assessing and mitigating security vulnerabilities (e.g., migrating from using PINs to strong passwords, locking accounts after multiple failed login attempts, immediately notifying users when key account information like when a mailing address or bank account is modified);

ix. Hiring staff or obtaining contract services to conduct fraud investigations, other eligibility fraud and identity fraud detection-related activities, and support overpayment recovery efforts;\(^3\)

---

\(^3\) Refer to UIPL No. 12-01, Change 2, for states’ ability to exercise flexibility in staffing models after the emergency flexibilities under Section 9015, ARPA, expire on September 6, 2021.
x. Costs incurred as a result of a state’s participation in forfeiture and seizure efforts of law enforcement agencies (e.g., Department of Justice, United States Secret Service); and

xi. Administrative expenses incurred by the state to gather business requirements, program computer systems, or otherwise implement tools, strategies, or solutions to strengthen fraud detection, prevention, and recovery efforts.

c. **Requirement to Receive Funding.**

i. **Required Disclosure to DOL-OIG.** As discussed in UIPL No. 04-17, Change 1, states must refer allegations which they reasonably believe constitute UC fraud, waste, abuse, mismanagement, or misconduct to the DOL-OIG. Additionally, states are required to disclose confidential UC information related to the CARES Act, as amended, to the DOL-OIG for the purpose of UC fraud investigations and audits for the entire pandemic relief period, which for most states will be weeks of unemployment beginning after January 27, 2020 through weeks of unemployment ending before September 6, 2021.

As a condition of receiving funding through this solicitation, the state must agree to provide all confidential UC information to DOL-OIG for purposes of both investigating fraud and performing audits through weeks of unemployment ending before December 31, 2023.

States may use funds awarded under this UIPL, UI administrative grant under Section 302(a), SSA, or another source of funding to pay for this disclosure. See 20 C.F.R. 603.8(b).

d. **Application Instructions.**

States are required to submit an SF-424 (OMB No. 4040-0004) https://apply07.grants.gov/apply/forms/sample/SF424_4_0-V4.0.pdf. ETA encourages states to submit this form as soon as possible, but no later than **September 13, 2021**, by electronic submission to the ETA National Office at covid-19@dol.gov with a copy to the appropriate ETA Regional Office. For additional information on completing the SF-424, please refer to Attachment II.

In order to attest compliance with the requirement to receiving this funding under section 5.c.i. of this UIPL, states should check the “I AGREE” box under Item 21 and include the appropriate language in Item 15 as indicated in the instructions for completing the SF-424. Additionally, please note that states should maintain any supporting documentation that serves as evidence for meeting this requirement in this UIPL.
e. **Reporting Requirements.**

States must provide a narrative Quarterly Progress Report (ETA 9178-ARPA) and Quarterly Financial Report (ETA 9130) containing updates on the progress and implementation of each grant project. The form ETA 9178-ARPA is provided as Attachment III. ETA will use the ETA 9178-ARPA report to track each state’s progress in addressing fraud with ARPA funds, ensuring that a state’s use of funds is consistent with the permissible solutions/activities outlined in section 5.b. of this UIPL, and ensuring fraud prevention solutions/activities do not have a negative impact on access to benefits.

States must provide ETA with an ETA 9178-ARPA narrative update that identifies the specific issue a state’s proposed solutions/activities will impact, to report specific outcome metrics as they relate to the solutions/activities, including service delivery expectations that mitigate access barriers to individuals (see section 4.b. of this UIPL). Please refer to Attachment III for instructions for completion and the timeline of submission for the ETA 9178-ARPA.

*A note for states participating in the Department’s identity proofing BPAs.* States that participate in the Department’s identity proofing BPAs may be subject to additional terms and conditions. The terms and conditions of any grant issued in accordance with this UIPL shall be read in harmony with, and as complementary to, the terms and conditions set forth in the identity proofing order and corresponding BPA.

5. **Inquiries.** Please direct inquiries to covid-19@dol.gov with a copy to the appropriate ETA Regional Office.

6. **References.**

- American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARPA), including Title IX, Subtitle A, Crisis Support for Unemployed Workers (Pub. L. 117-2);
- Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021, including Division N, Title II, Subtitle A, the Continued Assistance for Unemployed Workers Act of 2020 (Pub. L. 116-260);
- Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act (Pub. L. 116-136), Title II, Subtitle A – Relief for Workers Affected by Coronavirus Act;
- Section 303 of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 503);


• UIPL No. 04-17, Change 1, Requirement for States to Refer Allegations of Unemployment Compensation (UC) Fraud, Waste, Abuse, Mismanagement, or Misconduct to the Department of Labor's (Department) Office of Inspector General's (DOL-OIG) and to Disclose Information Related to the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act to DOL-OIG for Purposes of UC Fraud Investigation and Audits, issued August 3, 2021, https://wdr.doleta.gov/directives/corr_doc.cfm?DOCN=5817;


• UIPL No. 12-01, Change 2, States’ Ability to Exercise Flexibility in Staffing Models for the Performance of Certain Unemployment Compensation (UC) Administrative

- TEN No. 04-20, Encouragement for States to Use the Integrity Data Hub (IDH) available through the Unemployment Insurance (UI) Integrity Center, issued August 31, 2020, https://wdr.doleta.gov/directives/corr_doc.cfm?DOCN=3588;
- TEN No. 03-20, Unemployment Insurance (UI) Integrity Center’s Integrity Data Hub (IDH) Fraud Alert System, issued August 31, 2020, https://wdr.doleta.gov/directives/corr_doc.cfm?DOCN=5585; and

7. Attachment(s).

- Attachment I: State Size Classifications and Funding Allocation to Support States with Fraud Detection and Prevention, Including Identity Verification and Overpayment Recovery Activities, in All Unemployment Compensation (UC) Programs;
- Attachment II: Instructions for Completing the SF-424; and