National Priority #1

Improve Program Performance and Operate the UI Program Effectively

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The SQSP process is intended for states to develop and execute a strategic road map to improve program administration and ensure quality service delivery. Significant progress has been made nationwide in improving the timeliness of benefit payments in recent years. However, many states continue to face challenges in meeting the acceptable level of performance for first payments, adjudication, and appeals. ETA has observed contributing factors which include the need to make program improvements to aging technology systems and/or to implement new technology solutions; training state staff; the reduction in staffing levels as workloads and funding decline; the loss of key subject matter expertise; and the addition of front-end checks, such as ID verification to strengthen integrity of the UI system.

An effective customer experience (CX) occurs when individuals can effectively and efficiently interact with state UI systems across all access points such as phone, website, online portal, mobile application, or in-person. If CX considerations and improvements are interwoven with a SWA's existing processes, then individuals are more likely to complete tasks accurately, timely, and more independently (i.e., requiring fewer SWA staff interactions). For additional information and resources, see TEN No. 18-24.

As part of the FY 2026 SQSP preparation, states should assess their current strategies and processes to further improve timeliness and operational effectiveness. States must, in the State Plan Narrative, describe their plans to address any pending adjudication and appeals backlogs and to improve timely delivery of benefits.

For FY 2026, ETA will continue to provide intensive technical assistance to support performance improvements for states with sustained poor performance; and to use the UI performance management system, UI Performs, which includes core measures and Secretary's Standards to monitor state performance.

In developing their SQSPs, states are strongly encouraged to incorporate administrative capacity-building strategies such as:

- Conducting business process analysis in key areas to identify opportunities for improving program operations, and implementing recommendations from the analysis to improve performance;
- Reviewing staff training strategies to support succession planning and ongoing staff development (https://www.naswa.org/services/learning); and
- Using technical assistance opportunities offered by the Department, the UI Information Technology Support Center (ITSC), and the UI Integrity Center, as well as the peer-to-peer communication platforms and other information sharing tools available through the UI Community of Practice (CoP).