



Selecting Claimants and Meeting Attendance

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April 2022

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The initial service activity in the RESEA program is a mandatory meeting between the Unemployment Insurance (UI) claimant and an RESEA caseworker. Strategies for selecting participants and scheduling that mandatory meeting both contribute to a program's success (Darling et al., 2017; Klerman et al., 2019).¹

Because there tend to be more eligible UI claimants than there are available program participant slots, states use selection criteria to identify which RESEA-eligible claimants to select for an RESEA meeting.² When designing a program, a key consideration related to program impact is how to identify claimants who are most likely to benefit from participation.

To benefit from the services offered by RESEA, claimants must first attend the RESEA meeting(s).³ However, achieving high attendance rates is challenging; about half of selected claimants do not attend as initially scheduled and about a third never attend (Darling et al., 2017; Klerman et al., 2019).

Though states may want to select appropriate claimants and promote high attendance rates, strategies for selecting RESEA participants and for promoting meeting attendance constitute only a relatively small part of RESEA as a whole (see box below). This suggests that they likely contribute a small share of the program's overall impact.

About this Brief

This brief summarizes the state of the evidence about two RESEA program components: (1) which UI claimants would benefit the most when selected to participate and (2) changes in scheduling practices to increase meeting attendance rates. The brief closes with a discussion of gaps in the current evidence base and implications of evaluating these kinds of RESEA program components. This brief is the first of three summarizing the current state of the evidence relevant to the RESEA program.

About the RESEA Program

RESEA supports states' activities to improve employment outcomes among persons receiving UI, strengthen UI program integrity, promote workforce program integration, and connect UI claimants with partner programs.

At a minimum, participants must meet with a service provider who completes a review of the claimant's UI eligibility, delivers customized labor market information, enrolls the claimant in the Wagner-Peyser Act-funded Employment Service program, develops an individual reemployment plan, and refers the claimant to additional reemployment services.

The most recent program guidance is available at <https://wdr.doleta.gov/directives/>.

This is one of several "State of the Evidence Briefs" prepared for the U.S. Department of Labor, Chief Evaluation Office, under Contract 1605DC-18-A-0037, Evaluation to Advance Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessments (RESEA) Program Evidence. Visit <https://www.dol.gov/agencies/oasp/evaluation/completedstudies> for other briefs and reports. The views expressed are those of the authors and should not be attributed to DOL, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement of the same by the U.S. Government.

As a result, measuring the impact of these initial components on final outcomes (employment and UI duration) requires larger samples than are needed to evaluate the impact of more intensive components, such as reemployment services.

Which Claimants Benefit Most from RESEA?

This section reviews the literature on the use of *profiling scores*—a product of the UI system’s Worker Profiling and Reemployment Services (WPRS) program—as a criterion for participant selection, because those scores have been, and as of 2021 continue to be, the primary method that states use to select claimants for RESEA (Trutko et al., 2022). The discussion covers the theoretical motivation for using profiling scores and the evidence for whether RESEA has a greater impact on the outcomes of claimants with high profiling scores. It concludes with a brief discussion of evidence for other plausible selection criteria.

Most states target their RESEA programs to those claimants deemed most likely to exhaust benefits as determined by a profiling model that statistically estimates a claimant’s probability of benefit exhaustion.⁴ The details of each state’s profiling model can differ in many ways, but models generally intend to identify claimants who, in the absence of reemployment assistance, are projected to have lower employment rates and higher exhaustion rates relative to other claimants.⁵

There is room for debate as to whether an RESEA program should be expected to have larger overall impacts if it serves claimants with higher profiling scores than if it served claimants with lower profiling scores. On the one hand, claimants with higher profiling scores could have the greatest potential for improvement in their outcomes because their expected average claim durations are longer. On the other hand, some of the reemployment barriers faced by claimants with lower profiling scores may be more readily addressed through the services offered by RESEA than can the kinds of barriers faced by claimants with higher profiling scores.

The available evidence generally does not support the hypothesis that reemployment programs’ impacts on UI duration are larger for claimants with higher profiling scores, relative to those with lower scores. Based on data collected in Kentucky in the 1990s, for example, Black et al. (2003) explored whether the WPRS system had larger impacts on reducing weeks of UI received for those claimants profiled as more likely to exhaust. They found no evidence of such a relationship.⁶ More recent evidence partially affirms that finding. For example, a 2013-2014 impact study estimated the impact of four states’ Reemployment and Eligibility Assessment (REA) program—Indiana, New York, Washington, and Wisconsin (Klerman et al., 2019). Like Black et al. (2003), this study found no evidence that REA was more effective for claimants with higher profiling scores in New York and Washington. However, in one state (Indiana), the study did find that REA was more effective for those with higher profiling scores.⁷

In examining how REA’s impacts varied across different claimants, the Klerman et al. (2019) study found that benefit duration impacts across four states, as a whole, were larger for claimants with lower weekly benefit amounts (WBAs). Differential impacts were moderately large: decreases in UI duration nearly twice as large for those with a WBA below the median (1.6 weeks) compared to those with a WBA above the median (0.9 weeks). A more robust analysis in that study suggests that the relation is nearly linear: impacts were progressively greater for claimants with lower WBAs.⁸

These findings suggest that if a state’s goal is to select those claimants who will experience the largest drop in UI duration, states might want to consider selecting those with lower WBAs.⁹ However, states may need to weigh such goals against other priorities and outcomes (e.g., earnings and employment) when deciding on claimant selection criteria.

What Promotes RESEA Meeting Attendance?

UI claimants who are selected for RESEA can only benefit from its services if they first attend its initial meeting(s), since that is the way they can obtain the services. But many claimants do not attend the mandatory meeting(s) on time or at all (Klerman et al., 2019; Darling et al., 2017).¹⁰

Non-attendance causes two problems. First, as noted above, claimants who are selected but do not attend cannot receive the services provided by the RESEA meeting. Second, missed meetings are an inefficient use of RESEA caseworkers' time, as they reserve portions of their workdays for scheduled meetings that ultimately do not occur.

Here we identify available evidence for four approaches that states have taken to increase attendance at RESEA meetings.

1. **Improved communication.** RESEA programs face a significant communication challenge (Darling et al., 2017). Programs need to get claimants' attention and explain their responsibilities as UI recipients, the role of the RESEA program, its benefits, and how to comply with its requirements.

A growing body of research has studied strategies for communicating with participants of public programs (Chetty et al., 2009; Cooke et al., 2018; Milkman et al., 2011; Rogers et al., 2013; Dai et al., 2014; Beshears et al., 2009). But there is limited research on the effects of communication mode, timing, or content specifically in the context of RESEA-like programs. One study of behavioral messaging strategies for UI claimants selected to participate in Michigan's REA program suggests that states might pursue communication strategies that prioritize clarity and concision and that emphasize program benefits (Darling et al., 2017).¹¹ That study—a randomized controlled trial—involved a series of behaviorally-informed emails sent as a follow-up to the state's standard notification letter initially sent to UI claimants selected for REA. The authors report increases in attendance rates at the initial REA meeting of about 14 percentage points (e.g., 50 percent attendance in the control group vs 64 percent attendance in the treatment group), compared to those who received only the standard letter. The emails' clear and concise messages promoted a positive relationship with REA program staff while reminding claimants of upcoming appointments.

2. **Stronger penalties.** States treat non-attendance as non-compliance with UI eligibility requirements, triggering a suspension of benefits. However, the immediacy and duration of those suspensions are left to states' discretion. Studies find that about two-thirds of states respond by suspending benefits until the claimant attends the meeting, and evidence suggests that this policy could be related to attendance rates (Trutko et al., 2022; Minzner et al., 2017). Relative to states that suspend benefits only for the week of non-attendance, states that suspend benefits until the non-compliant claimant attends an REA meeting have been found to have higher attendance rates. However, research has not demonstrated whether or not these relationships are causal, meaning the differences in attendance rates cannot necessarily be attributed to the non-attendance policy.¹²

3. **Flexible scheduling.** States differ in their approach to scheduling RESEA meetings. Some states automatically schedule claimants for meetings at specific dates and times. Others allow claimants to self-schedule (within a provided time frame). Relative to automatic scheduling, a self-scheduling policy might be expected to have two opposing effects on attendance rates. On the one hand, some claimants might not self-schedule their appointment and ultimately fail to attend a meeting, which would lower overall attendance rates. On the other hand, those claimants who do self-schedule an appointment might select a time more convenient for them, which would make them more likely to attend the meetings and, in turn, raise overall attendance rates.

Though no study has used a rigorous impact evaluation design to analyze how scheduling strategies affect attendance rates, some evidence supports both of these hypothesized effects. REA claimants who self-schedule appeared more likely to attend the scheduled meeting, but states that allowed self-scheduling still had overall attendance rates similar to other states, suggesting that some claimants might never schedule their meetings when given the opportunity to self-schedule (Minzner et al., 2017).¹³

4. **Strategic timing.** How soon a claimant is scheduled for an in-person meeting might have important consequences for meeting attendance rates and other longer-term outcomes, such as claim duration

and employment or earnings; however, there are no rigorous impact analyses of scheduling policies. There is some evidence that attendance rates at initial meetings appear higher when scheduled closer to the start of the claim (Klerman et al., 2019). Among the four states included in this REA impact study, Indiana allowed for the most time (eight weeks at the median) between selection into the program and the date of the first meeting. The other three states scheduled initial REA meetings about four to six weeks after selection, and attendance rates were about 10-15 percentage points higher than in Indiana.

Gaps in the Evidence and Implications for Future Evaluations

The existing evidence base has a number of gaps regarding which approaches to selecting and scheduling UI claimants for RESEA are most effective. The list below briefly discusses several options for future research related to the topics covered in the previous sections. The list is not meant to be exhaustive of all possible evidence-building options. States could pursue a research agenda to address those gaps, replicate previous studies, or expand the evidence base in new directions.

- **Selection.** Provided that a given evaluation enrolls a sufficiently large sample of study participants, states can analyze whether program impacts vary with claimant characteristics, as was done in one REA impact study (Klerman et al., 2019). Though several studies have not found larger program impacts among claimants with higher profiling scores, future evaluations could continue to explore differential impact using alternative profiling models or other criteria (e.g., demographics, labor market conditions, or work history).
- **Communication.** Building on recent research on behavioral communication strategies to increase program participation, states might want to consider experimenting with different aspects of their communication plans, including modes (e.g., letter, text, and phone), timing, frequency, and content.
- **Non-compliance.** Comparisons of attendance rates across states suggest that rates vary with states' responses to non-attendance, but existing evidence is merely suggestive, not causal. Future research could directly test for impacts of different responses to non-attendance.
- **Timing.** Existing research suggests that claimants might attend meetings at higher rates when scheduled closer to the start of the claim, but no evaluation has considered the effects of the timing of scheduled meetings. In addition to effects on attendance rates, states could test for effects of varying the timing of meetings on UI duration and time to reemployment.
- **Scheduling.** As noted above, it is unclear from existing evidence whether allowing claimants to self-schedule affects meeting attendance, relative to other approaches to scheduling. States interested in self-scheduling could experimentally test for impacts on attendance. Self-scheduling might also affect the timing of scheduled meetings relative to the start of the claimant's UI claim.

The choice of which component(s) to evaluate will have methodological implications for the RESEA program evaluations conducted. Evaluations to identify which claimants to select for RESEA services would require relatively large sample sizes, which some states may struggle to achieve on their own.¹⁴ However, it would be relatively straightforward to implement random assignment evaluations to determine which interventions increase meeting attendance, and these evaluations would have manageable sample size requirements. Specifically, states might only need samples of fewer than a thousand claimants to identify impacts on attendance rates. In comparison, identifying impacts on UI duration and employment would likely require much, much larger samples.

If empirical studies are not feasible, states can also generate considerable insight from process studies to describe and analyze the service delivery activities and operations of their RESEA program. Though such studies do not produce conclusive evidence of effectiveness, they are less complex logistically and have shorter time frames than do random assignment impact studies. Findings from a process study could provide a

faster route to actionable evidence on how to adjust ongoing program activities, which could be rigorously tested for evidence of effectiveness via experimental impact analysis.

Notes

1. Readers can find more detail about each study discussed in this brief through CLEAR: <https://clear.dol.gov/reemployment-services-and-eligibility-assessments-resea>.
2. According to states' submissions of ETA9047 and 9128 data in 2019, about 2.8 million UI beneficiaries were not exempt from work search—a rough estimate of the population eligible for RESEA selection—and 1.2 million beneficiaries were scheduled for an RESEA meeting.
3. Though all RESEA programs include at least one mandatory meeting, states have the flexibility to mandate attendance at subsequent RESEA meetings. States are not limited in the number of subsequent RESEA meetings that they require.
4. The Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018 amended Title III of the Social Security Act, adding a new Section 306 covering RESEA provisions. That legislation limits RESEA eligibility to those claimants considered most likely to exhaust benefits, but under recent annual appropriations acts, Congress has allowed states increased flexibility to target claimants according to other criteria, including local labor market trends or other available data. This flexibility, however, is not part of the permanent RESEA program authorization and is dependent on continued inclusion in annual appropriations legislation. Moreover, if a state chooses not to rely on a profiling model to select RESEA claimants, the state must operate a separate WPRS program, which is itself mandated under a standalone requirement.
5. See Sullivan et al. (2007, Appendix B) for one detailed comparison of profiling models.
6. See Black et al. (2003, Table 3) for a presentation of how impacts vary by profile score.
7. See Klerman et al. (2019, Exhibit 7-11) for a presentation of how impacts vary by profile score. There is no official profiling model used in Wisconsin, so that state was not included in the analysis.
8. If the goal is to cut UI benefits paid, the analysis is more subtle. For a given number of weeks not claimed, dollars saved will be larger for those claimants with a larger WBA. This effect appears to offset much of the differential impact of WBA on UI duration.
9. This discussion concerns differential impact on UI duration. A recent REA impact study (Klerman et al., 2019) also explored differential impact on employment and earnings. There were no clear patterns. This appears to be due to lack of statistical precision.
10. See Klerman et al. (2019, Exhibit 4-3); see Darling et al. (2017, Figure IV.3) for presentation of attendance rates at the initial REA meeting.
11. See Darling et al. (2017, Figure IV.3) for presentation of impacts on attendance rates.
12. See Minzner et al. (2017, Exhibit 4.10) for a comparison of attendance rates across Indiana, New York, Washington, and Wisconsin. See Exhibit 7.3 for discussion of responses to non-attendance at scheduled meetings. Note that Indiana, New York, and Wisconsin created pending issues and imposed multi-week suspensions of benefits on non-compliant claimants, whereas Washington did neither.
13. See Minzner et al. (2017, Exhibit 4.10) for a comparison of scheduling and attendance rates across states. Note that Wisconsin allowed for self-scheduling of REA appointments, whereas the other states did not.
14. See *REA Impact Study Briefs: Methodological Insights*, available at <https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/OASP/evaluation/pdf/REA%20Impact%20Study%20Briefs%20-%20Methodological%20Insights.pdf>.

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