

# Increase Community Education



## What is it?

A large proportion of laid-off workers (two out of five in the 1990s) don't apply for UI benefits and may not know that UI is available to them. State agencies can develop outreach programs to encourage potentially eligible workers to apply. Effective outreach programs combine media strategies and partnerships with community-based organizations serving low-wage or immigrant (and often non-unionized) workers, those least likely to access benefits. In addition, state agencies should ensure that employers fulfill their responsibility to notify separated employees about UI.



## Key arguments in favor

**Many struggling jobless workers do not apply for UI benefits because they think they are ineligible.** In the 1990s, two out of five laid-off workers did not apply for benefits. When asked by researchers why they did not apply, workers were most likely to say they thought were ineligible; very few said they did not need the money. Public awareness of UI benefit rules is limited and many workers who don't file a claim would qualify if they applied.

**A combined strategy of media and community-based strategies can help increase application rates.** At a reasonable price, UI agencies can purchase radio or newspaper ads that encourage jobless workers to apply. UI agencies can also partner with community-based organizations, training their staff in the basics of UI eligibility and applications. CBOs are in the best position to distribute UI informational materials – such as rack-cards and fliers – in the community.

**State agencies should ensure that employers fulfill their obligations to notify separated employees about UI.** The best opportunity to educate potential consumers about UI applications is at the time of separation. As per federal rules, many states require that employers give workers a form or flier with basic UI information the worker needs to file a claim, including the claim center telephone number and the name and address of their employer. Massachusetts uses an innovative model to encourage compliance with this rule – workers who do not receive the required notices from employers can get back benefits if they apply late.



## Key arguments against and responses to them

**Opponents say:** The state should not engage in UI outreach to bring more workers onto UI benefits when the costs of unemployment benefits are already too high.

**Response:** Unemployment burdens communities in a myriad of ways – greater social welfare costs, increased family stress, increased burdens on local charities or food banks, and less local spending by unemployed families. Receipt of

unemployment benefits can lessen hardship and poverty among unemployed workers and consequently lower other state and societal costs.

**Opponents say:** Public education and outreach about unemployment insurance are not necessary.

**Response:** The decline in the rate of applications for and receipt of UI over the last several decades demonstrates that greater information is needed for UI to fulfill its goals. Moreover, the process of applying for unemployment insurance has become more challenging for some claimants as states have switched to telephone applications. Today's workers are less likely to be part of unions which traditionally have provided information and assistance on UI applications. State agencies routinely provide assistance to employers on a range of UI topics through seminars and newsletters, but they rarely have a parallel process for workers. A public education campaign is an important part of a balanced approach to UI administration.



## Which states do it?

Washington State embarked on an outreach campaign to Spanish speaking workers in 1999, as part of its transition from in-person applications to telephone applications. Due in part to this outreach program, unemployment insurance claims among Spanish-speakers rose by 18 percent over the next year (from fourth quarter 1999 to the fourth quarter of 2000).



## Model legislation

### Massachusetts

(g) Each employer shall issue to every separated employee, as soon as practicable, but not to exceed 30 days from the last day said employee performed compensable work, written information furnished or approved by said division which shall contain the name and mailing address of the employer, the identification number assigned to the employer by said division, instructions on how to file a claim for unemployment compensation, the address and telephone number of the regional office which serves the recipient, and the telephone number of the teleclaim information line. Delivery is made when an employer provides such information to an employee in person or by mail to the employee's last known address. The waiting period under section 23 for an employee who did not receive the information required by this paragraph and who failed to file timely for benefits, shall be the Sunday of the initial week such employee would have been eligible to receive unemployment compensation. Each employer shall have the burden of demonstrating compliance with the provisions required herein.

MASS. GEN LAWS ch. 151 § 62A

## References

Andrew Stettner & Stephen Wandner, Why are many Jobless Workers Not Applying for Benefits? MONTHLY LABOR REVIEW, June 2000, at 21-32.



Chapter Model Policy	1. Low-wage Worker Access		2. Access for Women and Working Families			3. Eligibility for Nonstandard Workers		4. Build Income Security			6. Financing for Long-term Solvency		State UI Reciprocity Rate: 2001-2003
	Alternative Base Period		Undue Family Hardship	UI for Domestic Violence Survivors	Moving to Follow a Spouse	Children's Allowances	Part-time Workers Treated Favorably	Favorable Test for Employer-Employee Relationship	Indexed Weekly Benefit Amount	Better Extended Benefit Triggers (6.5% TUR)	Eliminate the Waiting Week	Indexed Taxable Wage Base	
Nebraska							X	X					0.37
Nevada			X		X				X	X	X	X	0.48
New Hampshire	X			X			X		X	X			0.29
New Jersey	X		X	X		X	X	X		X	X	X	0.55
New Mexico	X		X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	0.29
New York	X		X	X	X		X	X					0.44
North Carolina	X		X	X	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	0.39
North Dakota											X	X	0.36
Ohio	X					X		X			X	X	0.41
Oklahoma	X		X	X	X		X	X			X	X	0.31
Oregon			X	X	X			X	X		X	X	0.49
Pennsylvania			X	X	X	X	X	X					0.62
Rhode Island	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X			0.52
South Carolina													0.41
South Dakota			X	X			X						0.25
Tennessee													0.25
Texas			X	X	X								0.29
Utah								X			X	X	0.30
Vermont	X						X	X	X	X			0.55
Virginia	X		X				X	X					0.33
Washington	X		X	X	X		X	X	X		X	X	0.48
West Virginia							X	X					0.39
Wisconsin	X		X	X						X			0.55
Wyoming			X	X			X	X			X	X	0.31
Total	20		14	27	18	13	23	23	32	10	13	16	NA