

2019 Full Employment Best Practices Award Ohio Department of Job and Family Services

Background

Historically, the Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, Office of Unemployment Insurance Operations (“Ohio”) relied solely on its Unemployment Compensation Reemployment Services (UCRS) and Reemployment Eligibility Assistance (REA) programs to provide claimants reemployment training and opportunities. Both programs required an in-person visit to an OhioMeansJobs (AJC) Center. Because that was not in line with the Agency’s vision of enhanced self-service, personal accountability and greater real-time access to gainful employment opportunities, it identified a set of new initiatives to meet its reemployment goals.

Reemployment Goals

Ohio’s goals were to:

- Provide access to reemployment tools and potential jobs 24 hours a day
- Enhance self-sufficiency and technology usage
- Expose claimants to gainful employment opportunities
- Promote consideration and action about individual career plans of action up to and after 20 weeks of benefits
- Build on the partnership between the UI and workforce arms of the Department in order to best serve their joint customers
- Increase awareness of the services available at OhioMeansJobs and other professional networking sites

New Initiatives

To achieve its goals, the agency collaborated with several state partners to overhaul its reemployment efforts by launching the following initiatives:

1. **Modernizing Work Search Policy** – Updated and expanded acceptable work search activities beyond the traditional work application to align modern day job search activities with work search integrity.
2. **Leveraging Verifiable Activities of Partners** – Led the nation as the first state to launch a partnership with LinkedIn for alternative work search activity verification, using features such as job applications, eligibility reminders, application history and free access to LinkedIn courses and other resources.
3. **Enhancing Online Job Search Systems** - Leveraged its available technology to enhance UI claimant online registration, completion of eligibility requirements and pursuit of re-employment opportunities.
4. **Improving RESEA Engagement & Completion Rates** – Developed a focused program and proactive notification methods and reminders to enhance claimant participation in the Re-employment Eligibility Services Assessment program (RESEA).
5. **Strengthening Claimant Communications** – Improved communication and education strategies to build clarity for claimants about their work search requirements.

Further details for each initiative are below.

1. Modernized Work Search Activities

Under federal law, to receive UI benefits, claimants must actively seek work. In the past, “actively seeking work” meant *applying* for two jobs each week with two different employers. Partnering with the National Association of State Workforce Agencies (NASWA) and the US Department of Labor, Ohio decided to expand and modernize its “*actively seeking work*” policy.

Ohio leaned on research suggesting that submitting job applications is not necessarily the best way for individuals to become reemployed, and that networking, creating and maintaining online professional profiles and enhancing job skills are important. To reflect these insights, Ohio expanded its “actively seeking work” policy to not only include applying for work but also the following, some of which are also easily verifiable for integrity purposes:

- Submitting a resume to an employer
- Completing activities assigned to the claimant by the RESEA and UCRS programs
- Creating and maintaining a reemployment plan
- Creating and maintaining a searchable/active resume on an online job board
- Completing an activity in OhioMeansJobs.com
- Attending a job fair
- Creating a personal user profile on professional networking site (such as LinkedIn)
- Attending a training
- Interviewing for suitable work
- Contacting a union hiring hall for work
- Any other good faith reemployment strategy reasonably expected to result in reemployment

The Agency feels its newly modernized work search policy better supports claimants in their reemployment efforts, better acknowledges the important work of the state’s workforce partners and better aligns with modern job search activities that have proven to be effective.

2. LinkedIn Partnership – Verifying Other Valuable Activities

In early September of 2019, Ohio became the first state to partner with LinkedIn on alternative work search activities. The initiative helps claimants be more aware of the valuable activities at LinkedIn and allows claimants using LinkedIn’s job board to generate a report confirming their work search activities on the job board.

As a complement to their work in OhioMeansJobs.com, Ohio claimants can now use LinkedIn to:

- Apply for jobs and have those jobs count towards the requirement to complete two work search activities each week
- View and save LinkedIn application history in one convenient location
- Receive email reminders of progress made toward required weekly work search activities
- Access free LinkedIn courses and other resources.

The LinkedIn pilot is meant to supplement rather than replace other work search activities. It not only provides simplicity and convenience for job seekers, it also provides the Agency with valuable information on modern day work search efforts and how best to assist claimants in their quest for their next job.

3. Leveraging a Real-Time Reemployment System

In 2013, Ohio enhanced its existing online job matching system, OhioMeansJobs.com (OMJ) to provide online self-service re-employment tools. The enhancements were geared toward helping job seekers plan their careers, search thousands of jobs, build and post resumes, grade the strength of an individual's resume, conduct skills assessments, practice interviewing and learn about career fairs in their chosen area.

OhioMeansJobs also includes a thorough and engaging online orientation video that allows every UI claimant to conveniently and quickly learn about relevant state resources early in their claim.

In order to take advantage of the vast array of reemployment tools offered in OMJ, Ohio passed UI legislation requiring claimants to register as well as complete two specific types of reemployment activities in the system to continue their claim:

1. **Resume** – By week 8, create or update an active resume in OMJ that is searchable by employers and
2. **Career Profile** – By week 20, complete an individual career profile in OMJ by identifying their skills and preferred industry and occupation.

In addition to these re-employment tools, OMJ is Ohio's premier job matching electronic site; it helps employers find employees by allowing employers to post jobs, search claimant resumes and access other state services.

Other Features. To assist in the claimant's search for meaningful work, the law requires the Agency each week, via OMJ, to provide claimants with up to five matched job opportunities in their listed field of work. The site also acts as a "career counselor" by laying out critical skills, reading levels, average salary, preferred WorkKeys scores, key abilities, personality traits and tools that may be used in a particular career/industry. It matches claimants to available apprenticeships opportunities and relevant workforce programs in a claimant's area.

Claimants unable to access the internet or use a computer can go to a local job center and complete the requirement in person with the help of an agent.

4. Enhanced RESEA Program & Completion Rate

Ohio has pursued two strategies to enhance the quality and engagement of claimants in RESEA-funded assistance. It moved the RESEA program from the Unemployment Insurance Office to the Workforce Office and changed its RESEA approach to a more targeted one. There was a shift in mindset from one of quantity to quality. Ohio now delivers the RESEA program in 12 of Ohio's 88 counties based on the population of claimants most likely to exhaust their benefits.

It also began using specific staff, dedicated to RESEA, to avoid the program being just one of "a million other things" staff had to deliver each week. These strategies appear to work well as a second triaged step, following Ohio's first step of serving claimants early in a claim through OhioMeansJobs, the state's self-service reemployment website.

Ohio's second RESEA initiative focused on RESEA completion rates. In many states, nearly half of claimants do not complete required RESEA appointments and, in 2014, Ohio was at a similar completion rate (49.3%). To boost claimant attendance, Ohio has developed three strategies:

- **Reminder Calls** - Staff make reminder calls 24 to 48 hours prior to the initial appointment. The calls not only helped with reminding the claimant of the appointment but also give staff an opportunity to establish rapport with the claimant and set expectations for the appointment.
- **Scheduling Hotline** - Dedicated staff maintain a "hotline" to assist with scheduling, rescheduling and follow-up assistance.
- **Self-Scheduler** - Ohio developed a RESEA self-scheduler that is due to launch the first quarter of 2020. As proven in other states, this initiative should further enhance the initial participation rate, minimize the number of appointments rescheduled and enhance claimants' experience participating in RESEA.

The combined efforts to engage claimants has already yielded significant results. In 2019, Ohio's completion rate had risen 26.8 percentage points to **76.1%**, one of the strongest in the nation.

5. Claimant Communications

After the program statutory and system requirements were completed, an agency cross-sectional workgroup created a high-level communication plan to notify claimants of the reemployment enhancements. This entailed:

- Adding on-hold messages to the phone system reminding claimants of the new requirements
- Creating, printing, and distributing flyers to claimants detailing the new requirements
- Adding informational posts to the department's Facebook page
- Issuing a press release about the LinkedIn pilot, which was picked up by the Associated Press
- Adding verbiage to the UI Claimant Worker's Guide
- Posting informational messages on OMJ's "scrolling marquee"
- Updating splash pages on the agency website
- Reaching out and holding meetings and informational sessions with stakeholder groups, such as Workforce Investment Board (WIB) directors throughout Ohio and various Legal Aid representatives

Results of Ohio's Reemployment Initiatives

Though these initiatives have not yet reached their full implementation and impact maturity, they appear to be delivering impressive results. While Ohio's total unemployment rate of 4.3% is higher than the US average of 3.7%, its UI claim duration and exhaustion rate are both stronger than the national averages.

Exhaustion Rate

As of September 30, 2019, Ohio's UI claimant exhaustion rate was 24.3%, nearly 10 percentage points lower than the US average of 34.6%, making it the 11th lowest in the nation.

RESEA Completion Rate

As noted above, between 2014 and 2019 Ohio has improved its RESEA completion rate by 26.8 percentage points from 49.3% to **76.1%**, to become one of the strongest in the nation.

Duration Rate

Despite its higher total unemployment rate, as of September 30, 2019, Ohio's duration rate was nearly half a week lower than the US average (14.6 vs. 15 weeks).

Savings

One year of keeping the Ohio duration rate 0.4 weeks lower than average not only helped claimants return to work faster, it saved the state UI trust fund \$23.9 million (for the year ending Sept. 30, 2019).

Conclusion

Ohio says it has learned valuable lessons from the initiatives that are important to share with other states:

- Exposing claimants to various electronic reemployment tools is invaluable.
- Linking the reemployment tool activities to benefit eligibility incentivizes claimants to take the time to complete the requirements, and realize a direct benefit.
- Such a project requires a broad range of subject matter experts working in conjunction with one another.
- Training staff on both the UI and Workforce sides of the house is key to the success of enhancing reemployment requirements.

By modernizing its work search activities and communications, Ohio is better equipping UI claimants early in a claim and, in later weeks, more effectively engaging and providing high quality services to those still struggling to land a job. This self-service empowerment triage model avoids a one-size-fits-all approach and serves claimants well by leveraging strategies and funding to maximize impact.

For these reasons, the American Institute for Full Employment is pleased to award the state of Ohio its Full Employment Best Practice Award for 2019.

The American Institute for Full Employment is a nonprofit consulting group that studies, designs and helps states implement best reemployment practices in Unemployment Insurance and workforce programs. Our team of consultants includes former state agency executives who have extensive experience managing state programs and are devoted to helping states achieve their potential. To apply for a free reemployment assessment, use the contact information below.

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