

2020 Full Employment Best Practices Award

Missouri Department of Labor & Industrial Relations

Background

Historically, the Missouri Department of Labor and Industrial Relations' (DOLIR's) Division of Employment Security (DES) relied largely on its Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) program to provide reemployment and training opportunities to unemployment insurance (UI) claimants. The program required an in-person visit to job centers throughout the state.

In 2020, as the COVID-19 pandemic led to quarantines, business closures and record unemployment, many states suspended RESEA operations and work search requirements. Missouri did not. Instead, it relied on a vision of enhanced self-service, personal accountability and greater real-time access to gainful employment opportunities, while pursuing a set of new initiatives to meet its reemployment goals.

Missouri's Reemployment Goals

- Promote a robust economic recovery by getting people back to work
- Enhance on-line technology usage
- Expedite claimants' access to vital reemployment services
- Build on the partnership between the UI and workforce arms of the agency to best serve shared customers
- Develop greater virtualization, mimicking in-person service delivery

Initiatives

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

1. **Maintain & Modernize the RESEA Engagement & Enhance Completion Rates.** The agency quickly replaced the existing in-person RESEA process and seamlessly shifted the process to a safer, virtual environment by March 17, 2020 while increasing completion rates
2. **Maintain Work Search Reporting Requirements.** Missouri maintained work search reporting requirements for all claims without a work search waiver, including pandemic-related claims effective July 5, 2020
3. **Integrate the State's Online Claim System and Real-Time Job Information System.** DES systematically pre-registers claimants in Missouri's online case management application for reemployment services, and provides real-time job information every time they file a weekly claim
4. **Reassess All Reemployment Practices and Implement Virtual Processes Where Practical.** The agency implemented virtual job fairs, on-line behavioral assessments and free on-line training workshops

A detailed review of each initiative follows.

1. Maintain & Modernize the RESEA Engagement & Enhance Completion Rates

The convergence of technology and staff collaboration is most evident in the administration of Missouri's RESEA program.

RESEA is a federal program designed to assess selected UI claimants and refer them to services that will assist them in becoming reemployed. Missouri uses an algorithm to identify the claimants most likely to exhaust benefits, and assigns each claimant a score to prioritize scheduling. Additionally, Missouri gives preference to former military members receiving benefits under the federal UCX program, to ensure they receive the customized reemployment services they may need to seamlessly transition to the civilian workforce.

Selected claimants are **required to complete the appointment to maintain UI eligibility**. An automated feedback loop for recording appointment outcomes ensures appropriate actions are taken on the claim in respect to the outcome and status of the RESEA appointment. Missouri's DOLIR-DES administers this program in partnership with Department of Higher Education and Workforce Development (DHEWD) Office of Workforce Development (OWD) and local Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) that operate Job Centers throughout the state.

In 2020, many states temporarily discontinued the operation of their RESEA programs—but not Missouri. Using a combination of new technologies and resources already on hand, Missouri quickly and smoothly shifted from conducting RESEA appointments in person to conducting them virtually and did so by March 17, 2020. This allowed Missouri to continue helping unemployed citizens return to work without risking their health or that of the staff.

Nearly ten thousand claimants participated in Missouri's RESEA program in 2020, and the vast majority did so from the comfort of their own homes. Remarkably, the 68% completion rate for 2020 was 3% higher than the year before.

2. Maintain Work Search Reporting Requirements

While some states waived work search requirements for the majority of 2020 and some through the end of 2020, Missouri recognized that getting people back to work was key to a robust economic recovery. Accordingly, the state reinstated work search requirements effective July 5—including pandemic-related claims. Missouri was one of the first states to do so. Subsequently, more than 329,000 claimants logged over 11.7 million completed work search activities.

Work search activities enhance personal accountability, keep claimants connected to the employer community and provides job-ready employees for the marketplace.

3. Integrate the State's Online Claim System and Real-Time Job Information System

Missouri's commitment to reemployment precedes recent events, as evidenced by the long-standing collaboration between DES and the DHEWD-OWD.

Each claimant for Unemployment Insurance (UI) is systematically pre-registered in MoJobs, Missouri's online case management application for employment services. This establishes a claimant work search profile that helps expedite access to vital reemployment services.

In 2020, 357,641 UI claimants were either referred for initial pre-registration or updating in MoJobs. In addition, claimants receive real-time job information when they file their claim and every time a week is certified through a direct interface between MoJobs and UInteract (Missouri's online UI application).

Providing claimants with real-time job referrals during the weekly claim certification process enhances work search opportunities and helps claimants fulfill work search requirements. This approach can also lower a state's improper payment rate as work search errors are the leading cause of improper payments nationally.

4. Reassess All Reemployment Practices and Implement Virtual Processes Where Practical

Agency leaders knew they needed to rapidly respond to the COVID-19 crisis and the unprecedented economic shutdown that resulted. However, many traditional in-person services were no longer possible while minimizing risk to claimants, employers and staff.

Missouri Job Center staff were issued laptops and cell phones, while staff without home internet service were provided MiFi hotspot devices to work from home. Staff utilized existing computer systems (DES's UInteract and OWD's MoJobs). Staff were able to refer claimants to a wide variety of online services, connecting claimants with employers and beneficial training. The annual hardware cost to support remote work is approximately \$125,000.

Claimants were referred to virtual job fairs in which over 550 employers and 4,070 job seekers participated in between July and November. The workshops have continued into 2021.

Claimants were also provided the opportunity to take an assessment in a third-party behavioral assessment tool (Talify) that provides job seekers with a profile outlining the types of roles in which they are most likely to succeed, based on their interests and personality. Job seekers also receive coaching around their strengths and interviewing tips specific to their personality. Employers can use the system to search for and contact candidates that look like the right fit for their organizations.

In addition, claimants were given the opportunity to complete free online training through two different providers (Coursera and CompTIA).

- 2,348 claimants participated in 2020
- Coursera had no cost to the agency and over 1,500 Missourians completed the course.

- CompTIA served 1,000 Missourians with reemployment training at a cost of \$2 million in CARES funding

Conclusion

Going forward, Missouri is dedicated to increasing the reemployment benefits of their RESEA program. A team from the University of Missouri's Department of Economics and Truman School of Public Affairs will begin evaluating the program to help assess its efficacy and identify the most promising opportunities for improvement.

Missouri is also committed to continuing innovation in connecting UI claimants with vital reemployment services. The state has scheduled 10 virtual job fairs for the first half of 2021, and there are plans to increase the availability of on-line workshops.

Missouri's Job Centers will implement technology enhancements to improve services to UI claimants through greater virtualization that mimics in-person service delivery. The agency believes this will provide diverse, multiple-entry access points, while increasing capacity through phone, web and in-person meetings, better meeting the needs and expectations of today's job seekers.

For a year of exemplary accomplishments, the American Institute for Full Employment is pleased to award the state of Missouri one of its two Full Employment Best Practice Awards for 2020.

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.