

## 2022 Full Employment Best Practices Award Iowa Workforce Development

### Background

In late 2021, as the Covid-19 pandemic eased and labor demand grew, Iowa's worker shortage had become severe. The state's workforce agency, Iowa Workforce Development (IWD), decided to create a new delivery model to return unemployment insurance (UI) to its original mission as a public safety net that rapidly propels individuals back onto their feet in new jobs. Specifically, IWD's goals were to engage and equip UI claimants to reduce their average length of unemployment and boost the state's economy by filling Iowa employers' large backlog of open jobs.

### Reemployment Initiative Details

To achieve its goals, IWD's dual strategies were to inject increased urgency into the reemployment process and add effective support for UI claimants. In January 2022, IWD set out to:

- Increase and refocus work search requirements for UI claimants
- Launch an unprecedentedly robust reemployment case management program

**1. Work Search Requirements.** IWD expanded its engagement of claimants by refocusing its list of acceptable "reemployment activities" that claimants must complete and document each week to maintain their unemployment benefits. It also increased the number of activities from two to four per week, with three of them being job applications.

The list includes a variety of valuable activities, some of which could be verified by the agency either online through IowaWORKS portal (powered by Geographic Solutions) or through staff documentation of employer responses. They guided claimants to:

1. Attend IowaWORKS live job search workshops, including its job finding club, virtually or in-person
2. Apply for a potential job opening by submitting a resume or application online, in person, by email or by fax or mail
3. Meet with a Career Planner (e.g. RESEA or RCM)
4. Create a reemployment plan (RESEA, RCM or other programs)
5. Participate in a mock interview at IowaWORKS
6. Interview for a job (virtually, in person or at a job fair)
7. Attend a job fair sponsored by IowaWORKS or partners
8. Register with a placement facility of a school or college
9. Attend a scheduled career networking meeting at an IowaWORKS office
10. Attend an appointment with a core WIOA partner (Vocational Rehabilitation, Adult Basic Education, Wagner Peyser, Title I)
11. Take a civil service exam
12. Submit a resume to Home Base Iowa (HomeBaselowa.gov) if a veteran

**2. Case Management.** Iowa's ground-breaking Reemployment Case Management (RCM) system provides an unprecedented level of front-end assistance that equips claimants with the training, tools and skills they need to succeed. In effect, RCM functions as an augmentation of the Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) program, allowing IWD to work with more claimants and work with them earlier in their unemployment. **By contrast, RESEA currently requires job seekers to wait for a positive claim determination before the RESEA dollars can be used to assist them.**

To implement RCM, IWD hired 18 new Career Planners to work with UI claimants. With few exemptions, most claimants are contacted for participation in RCM the first week after filing a claim. Career Planners then use mandatory weekly meetings and workshops to provide direct employment assistance to applicants and connect them to partner programs for training and education opportunities in high-demand careers. To support Career Planner efforts, Iowa added new software capabilities to its IowaWORKS system, making it easier to match skills on a claimant's resume with requirements for high-demand jobs.

To better engage all claimants, appointments and workshops are both offered virtually. In their meetings, Career Planners verify claimant eligibility weekly, review job searches, offer reemployment services including referrals, and discuss claimant job interviews.

New online offerings include engaging, live web workshops such as "Virtual Job Club," which focuses on a reemployment skill each week, and "Who Would You Hire?," which gives claimants the opportunity to view live mock interviews and better understand the hiring process.

As the program evolved, IWD conducted a series of focus groups with RCM customers to gain feedback on RCM and IWD's reemployment services. IWD used the findings to adapt its offerings to better serve claimants. For example:

- After claimants reported age was preventing them from landing jobs, IWD created a "Navigating Ageism" workshop for older workers.
- Claimants suggested having the first workshop focus on demonstrating the IowaWORKS database where they enter weekly work searches, and demonstrating how to use the database to search for work. IWD did just that, and now routinely assigns the orientation workshop to claimants the week after they file their initial claim.

## Results

The results have been twofold. First, the work search modifications strengthened incentives for jobless Iowans to re-enter the workforce as quickly as possible. Second, claimants received additional assistance in getting there. Consequently, claimants are better prepared and more motivated as they begin looking for new positions.

State data suggests the impact of IWD's innovations have been strong:

- In the year after RCM's January 9, 2022 launch, IowaWORKS career planners held a total of 24,416 meetings with RCM recipients.
- Iowa's hybrid virtual program enhancements have driven a substantial increase in attendance at reemployment workshops. In 2021, 14,552 attendees attended workshops. In 2022, attendance nearly tripled to 43,155, despite a drop in weekly claims paid (caseload) of over 50%.
- Iowa's UI exhaustion rate for the 12 months ending September 9, 2022 dropped to 13.7%, the second-lowest in the nation (compared to 24.6% prior to the pandemic).
- Iowa's unemployment duration for the 12 months ending September 30, 2022 was also strong at 11 weeks — 44th-lowest nationally.

## Summary

Iowa's Reemployment Case Management system and enhanced work search activities have produced important lessons:

- Modernizing work search activities with early engagement and effective communications better sets clear expectations for UI claimants—early in the claim—that returning to work is their primary objective.

- Providing earlier and more robust case management support can drive important reemployment outcomes.
- Strongly linking reemployment activities to UI benefit eligibility incentivizes claimants to complete requirements and drives better outcomes.
- Exposing claimants to various reemployment tools earlier in the UI claim process is invaluable.
- Continually obtaining feedback from participants and other stakeholders is critical to ensuring targeted program outcomes.

**If you're a state unemployment program executive and would like to explore how your program may benefit from the best practices of Iowa and other states, contact Bill Starks at [bills@fullemployment.org](mailto:bills@fullemployment.org).**

To learn more about prior year award recipients, visit the American Institute for Full Employment's [website](#).

**About the American Institute for Full Employment**

*The American Institute for Full Employment is a nonprofit consulting and research group, founded in 1994 to promote best practices in solving unemployment in America. Its mission is Full Employment in America. The Institute's team consists of former state agency executives. Its team has designed best practices in workforce, unemployment and welfare programs for decades, working on policy design and implementation in more than 25 states.*