



## Acknowledgements

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## Executive Summary

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Since the 1990s and into the early years of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, states moved their unemployment insurance (UI) operations from an in-person claims filing system for initial and continued claims to a system where these processes were performed by call (contact) centers generally not co-located with reemployment services. The Employment and Training Administration (ETA) incentivized states to move to such a system by offering competitive grants of up to \$1 million for states submitting comprehensive plans, which would accomplish the establishment of call centers on a planned and timely basis, utilizing cutting edge technology. Since that time, a number of factors have influenced how states use and operate call centers to administer the UI program such as the Great Recession and its aftermath, more states moving to online claims filing, and new technologies and tools that support call center operations.

In August 2014, the U.S. Department of Labor contracted Coffey Consulting to undertake a study to determine the current state of UI call center operations and the role the call center plays in the delivery of timely, customer-focused UI program services. Specific objectives included determining how state call centers manage both anticipated and unanticipated workloads; how states recruit and train staff, monitor their performance, and provide technical assistance (TA) to them to enhance operations; and how states use performance standards common to the industry.

Current configurations of state information technology infrastructure determine whether call centers can interface with other technologies to facilitate the filing and processing of claims and/or obtaining information on the status of any claim. An important question explored was what changes enabled states to move to Internet claims filing, allowing customers access to their accounts online and how these changes impacted operations. An equally important focus of the study was identifying valuable metrics and performance standards used in the industry and by state UI agencies that improve call center performance and customer satisfaction. The study also identified state call center best practices that can be shared among the states to help them improve performance, explore future plans for their UI call centers, and seek state recommendations on how best to improve the performance of call centers that could become the basis for the Office of Unemployment Insurance (OUI) to provide TA to states.



## *Scope*

The study covered all 53 state agencies that operate UI programs. During the Great Recession (December 2007 – June 2009),<sup>1</sup> state UI agencies were overwhelmed with the volume of claims filed and the increasing number of unemployed workers relying on UI benefits for extended periods of time. States experienced sudden surges in workload as well as unprecedented backlogs of nonmonetary and monetary determinations, requests for appeals, and customer inquiries about their benefits and/or regarding the different program(s). States' UI call centers were the front lines in their interactions with people trying to understand and gain access to the UI program.

In most states, call centers process initial claims and respond to customers on every type of question related to UI or to their particular claim. Most centers combine claims taking staff and customer service staff with adjudication experts, who investigate and make decisions regarding eligibility issues that trigger or prevent payments from taking place. Management of appeals and the administration of hearings on individual cases are done elsewhere in the UI agency; accordingly, those functions were not a focus of the study.

This study also assessed whether states are aware of, and taking advantage of, the latest call center technology, forecasting software and management tools, and whether equipment upgrades and other investments had been completed recently. The inquiry also looked at management practices related to effective recruitment, training, deployment and retention of limited human resources as well as the performance metrics used by states to assess the effectiveness of daily operations in call centers and the resulting impact on customers and staff productivity. The study also explored lessons learned during the Great Recession and its aftermath and collected information from states regarding the effect that self-service, web-based technology had on the volume of work and the customer interfaces given that 75-80 percent of initial claims are now filed on the web in most states.

Six states do not operate call centers for the processing of intrastate UI claims: Arkansas, Delaware, Hawaii, New Hampshire, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and West Virginia. Coffey conducted interviews with the UI Directors in those programs to determine why they did not manage call centers. In some cases, the states had an unsatisfactory experience with interactive voice response (IVR) applications in the past. In others, state managers either prefer to take initial claims in person using experienced UI claims takers, or they thought that the needs of their

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<sup>1</sup> Business Cycle Dating Committee, National Bureau of Economic Research. Sept. 20, 2010.

customers required in-person assistance. Generally, these states are not interested in moving to call centers in the future.

## ***Methodology***

The study included the following activities:

1. Researching publicly available data regarding the operation of call (contact) centers used currently by private sector organizations to meet the needs of their customers.
2. Determining what information was required in order to achieve the objectives of the study. A collaborative effort between OUI staff and the Coffey team produced a series of questions designed to capture both foundational data about the current state of UI call center operations and the technology, staffing, and management practices that drive performance, as well as future plans that states have for their UI call centers. A two-phase data collection design was agreed upon in which OUI took the lead on conducting a quick turnaround survey of all 53 state UI agencies, and Coffey took the lead in scheduling and managing the interviews with states. Coffey developed an *Assessment Guide* to structure interviews with the states and to enable them to facilitate preparation for their interviews. Survey recipients and the subjects of the interviews included all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.
3. Obtaining approval from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for the survey to be sent to the states. The survey was sent to all 53 state UI agencies in May 2015 and was completed and returned to ETA by all 53 organizations by June 2015.
4. Conducting a pilot test of the *Assessment Guide* during interviews with UI Directors and call center managers in Connecticut and Minnesota in August 2015.
5. Obtaining approval from OMB for extensive interviews by phone to be conducted with 53 UI agencies. Interviews began on July 21, 2016 and were completed with all 53 UI programs on October 25, 2016.
6. Developing a database of the information collected from the survey of the 53 state UI agencies and interviews with UI leadership in the 53 states. Information from this database was utilized in preparing the Final Report.

## Findings

Based on information collected during the interviews with 53 UI Directors and the responses to the survey conducted by ETA, the findings are as follows:

Despite the widespread practice of enabling the filing of UI claims by state web sites, 110 UI call centers in 47 states remain a very strong and frequent point of contact for customers of the UI program. Call center staff are involved in virtually all functions related to establishing claims for benefits and maintaining eligibility. Almost 90 percent of the states report that their call centers are sufficiently open and adequately staffed in non-peak times to allow all customers to file claims and resolve problems with their UI benefits.



States have made many investments in recent years to upgrade call center infrastructure and modernize phone systems and other technical components that drive performance. Although they make less use of multiple contact channels (i.e., twitter, mobile web chat, etc.) than the private sector, almost all states with more than one call center operate statewide virtual call centers where unexpected or rising workloads can be transferred easily to staff prepared to respond.

States are not utilizing industry software and other workforce management tools to the extent used by private call centers to forecast workloads and schedule work teams as efficiently as possible. Many states report having no formal process for projecting workloads and planning deployment of staff. This may be due, in part, to the uniqueness of the UI program.

Because of the complexity of UI laws and multiple benefit programs, it generally takes a minimum of six to eight months or more for a new employee to become proficient in call center duties and for them to be able to respond effectively to customer service inquiries. States have well-defined onboarding systems for training, mentoring and supporting new employees, and there is a widespread belief that cross-training of all staff is the key to effective call center management.

Call center staff turnover in most states is very high (e.g., 35-50 percent) compared to other positions in the UI agencies, and some of the turnover results from promotions and transfers. States report that the biggest reasons for leaving are low salaries and the nature of the work. Recruitment and hiring of new employees is a lengthy process in most, if not all, states.

States use similar strategies for responding to surges in claims workloads, with reliance on overtime and redeployment of staff from other UI departments, along with use of temporary help, as the main management actions. Few states rely on expanded hours for remote staff (e.g., working at home) when claims rise, or rely on nearby states to help staff UI functions when, for example, natural disasters cause shutdowns or limit employment for extended periods.

States use many of the performance metrics common to daily call center management outside government, but produce fewer automated performance reports because of their reliance on old software or software that is incompatible with the agency mainframe. However, less than half of the states (44 percent) use *service levels*, e.g., 80 percent of calls answered within 20 seconds, as a Key Performance Indicator (KPI). This is in direct contrast with the private call center industry, where *service levels* are the most commonly used KPI. The use of the KPIs focusing on attrition and agent absenteeism is also low compared to the private sector.

Almost all call center personnel are trained to deal with customer service issues as well as claims processing requests. Thus, staff are empowered to resolve issues affecting the claim. But the discretion granted to front line staff varies among the states. Some states require referral of certain issues to subject matter experts or supervisors. Many issues must be referred to adjudicators who may be located in a separate unit. Less than half of the states track customer service calls to determine the reason for the calls and the ultimate resolutions. Some states have used a manual tracking system to create Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) resources for staff and customers.

Some states are taking the lead in two areas that are very important to enhancing customer service: a strong focus on achieving first call resolution of incoming issues and a case management enhancement that enables the call center agent to see everything that has taken place with the claim or issue and to have a knowledgeable discussion with the affected customer. These are capabilities valued and rewarded in the private sector.

States continue to deploy the latest technologies, including expanded IVR software and Internet claims filing. Future plans appear to emphasize emerging technologies, including expanded mobile access, over traditional call center operations. However, most states intend to retain some form of call center operations, both for claims intake and for customer service.

# Chapter 1. Introduction and Background

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## a. Unemployment Insurance (UI) Call Centers Today

Today, 110 UI call centers in 47 states operate throughout the country to ensure timely and efficient processing of claims for unemployment benefits. Primarily staffed by personnel who are trained to provide prompt and responsive services to the public through automated communication systems, UI call centers use modern technology and management tools that are similar to those found in private sector call centers.



Despite a dramatic shift in recent years to filing claims for benefits over the Internet, customers of the UI system continue to rely on call centers to provide a timely voice and solid expertise in explaining and applying state UI laws and the benefit application process and/or tax liability issues for employers.

The organizational structures and management practices in today's UI call centers reflect lessons learned during the Great Recession when the UI program provided millions of eligible unemployed workers with temporary income to support their families. The need to be able to respond immediately to both seasonal and cyclical downturns, as well as sudden declines in employment in certain industries important to each state, continues. Recruitment and training of customer service staff in an industry that struggles with retention and tenure issues require creative and cost-effective strategies. Performance management practices mirror those utilized in private industry call centers and require real-time feedback to call center managers on the state's ability to meet pre-set targets for both customer service and thoughtful deployment of personnel.

This study was undertaken in 2014 to determine trends in call center operations across the country, identify management and customer service challenges states face in today's economy, document effective practices in the utilization of technical and human resources, and explore how states are planning to operate call centers in the ever-changing claims management and customer service environments of the future. The key focus was on benefit payment operations.

## **b. Study Approach**

### ***i. Literature Search – Call Center Operations, Performance Metrics and Management Practices***

The primary focus of the literature review was to gain a better understanding of the practices, technologies and approaches that have been widely adopted, deployed and currently utilized in call (contact) centers in the private sector, as documented or reported in formal and informal publications and electronic media. See *Literature Review of and Information on Contact Center Operations, Practices and Trends* in the Appendix. This project document combines a review of practices and technology to provide a full, connected view of how practices integrated with technology enable the best possible customer interaction environment.

The Literature Review team researched 12 topics identified for investigation in Phase One of the study:

1. Contact Channels
2. Interactive Voice Response (IVR) Systems and Self-service
3. Outbound Applications and Services
4. Service Level Agreements (SLAs)
5. Contact Center Organization
6. Contact Center Segmentation
7. Hours of Operation
8. Workforce Management
9. Human Resources and Training
10. Work at Home and Remote Agents
11. Quality Management
12. Reporting and Analytics

Several findings from the Literature Review informed the information-gathering phases of this study:

- Contact (not call) is used to describe the centers today. This is because the contacts are multi-media. This important shift in the way customers interact provides a significant opportunity to reduce investment in labor by leveraging interaction approaches that use chat from a web site, two-way email, SMS (short message service or text messaging), and mobile communication.

- With this shift comes a more demanding requirement to manage integrated channel environment. Management must be adept in fine-tuning, not only how these media are used, but also how they support center operations while they are in production.
- Management of limited resources requires trained leadership and innovative contact center supervisors. Forecasting volumes and scheduling resources become as critical to the contact center as they are to the manufacturing or production line.
- Recruitment, training and coaching of contact center personnel set apart the best operations. Remote call center agents can be used effectively.
- Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) are used extensively to ensure customer satisfaction, promote efficiency and to recognize high productivity.

## ***ii. Survey of 53 State UI Agencies***

In order to establish a baseline of current state call center operations, a Quick Turnaround Survey methodology was selected. Survey questions focused on several areas that were of interest to OUI and the Coffey team. They covered:

- Functions performed currently by UI call centers
- Methods currently available to claimants to file claims, find out about UI benefits, and determine the status of individual claims
- Technical configurations and systems being used by call center staff
- Processes and strategies used by states to forecast, track and manage changing volumes of claims for benefits
- Staffing dedicated to call center operations
- KPIs used by state managers to monitor and manage operations



In May 2015, OUI requested the Director of each state UI program to complete a survey containing 25 questions, i.e., the *Unemployment Insurance Call Center Survey for States*. *SurveyMonkey* was used to administer the online survey, and most of the UI Programs responded online. Five state UI agencies provided hard copy responses to the questions, and every state submitted a response. Each state's responses were placed into Excel spreadsheets, enabling analysts to determine the nature and scope of UI call

center operations in the state and to compare responses among all 53 states on each of the 25 questions. Twenty tables of data were prepared for use in the analysis of the data collected.

These data provided a rich database of facts and supporting information about current UI call center operations nationwide and enabled the Coffey team to cost-effectively investigate how each state utilized call centers to carry out its UI mission. The survey results were useful in preparing to conduct each interview and set a framework within which state-specific findings could be captured and analyzed.

### ***iii. Interviews with Administrators in 53 UI Programs***

Collection of information on current UI call center operations was completed primarily by interviews with UI managers in the states. After a review of ETA's original 13 research questions, and the completion of the Literature Search of studies on the contact/call center industry, the Coffey team developed a series of questions designed to learn the most about UI call center organization, configuration, operations and management. The questions were organized into an *Assessment Guide* that could be shared with the states when scheduling interviews with UI Directors and other knowledgeable staff.

The *Assessment Guide* was organized into five sections:

1. Current State – Call Center Operations
2. Technologies and Tools Supporting Call Center Operations
3. Call Center Management
4. Performance Management and Measures
5. Future State – Call Center Operations

In order to make each interview as efficient and productive as possible, individual state responses to the May 2015 Survey were inserted into each state *Assessment Guide* in appropriate places. Copies of the state-specific *Assessment Guides* were provided to UI Directors before the interviews to ensure State Administrators could identify the most appropriate staff to provide a review/summary of each topic, as well as provide data to support the description of call center operations in the state. Interviews ranging in length from 2 to 2 1/2 hours were conducted by phone, between July 21, 2016 and October 25, 2016, with teams of interviewers asking questions and recording state responses. Responses were summarized immediately afterward so they could be reviewed by the entire study team.

All 53 state UI agencies participated in the interviews. UI Directors in the six state UI agencies/programs<sup>2</sup> that do not currently operate call centers for their UI claims program were interviewed to determine their reliance on self-service methods of claims filing (e.g., by the web), the role that local service centers play in claims processing, and what they consider best practices in claims administration and customer service. Interview results from the 53 UI programs were reviewed to determine the current state of UI call center operations and management, identify best practices in call center operations, assess UI program use of technologies and tools prominent in the call center industry, identify metrics states use to monitor and improve performance of call center personnel, and to explore plans that states have for future operations.

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<sup>2</sup> The six states include West Virginia, which uses a four-person call center solely for its interstate claims operation.

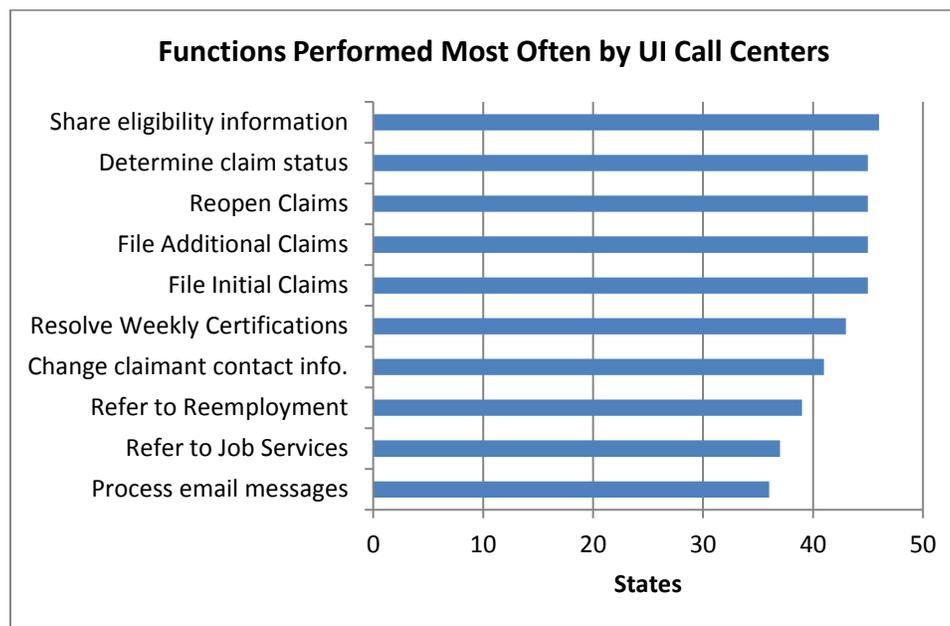
## Chapter 2. State UI Call Center Operations and Management

### a. Current State of UI Call Center Operations

As stated, there are 110 UI call centers in the 47 states which utilize call centers to operate and/or support the UI program. Most states operate more than one call center, enabling them to maintain a system that can continue to process claims for benefits when an economic downturn in one part of the state or a natural disaster overwhelms capacity in the main UI program service site.

#### *What Call Centers Do*

Across the country, 47 of the 53 state UI agencies utilize **call centers** in some manner to facilitate the UI claims process. Forty-five utilize them to support the initial claim process, the additional claim process, and the reopening of claims. The methods by which states utilize call centers to support these processes varies somewhat.

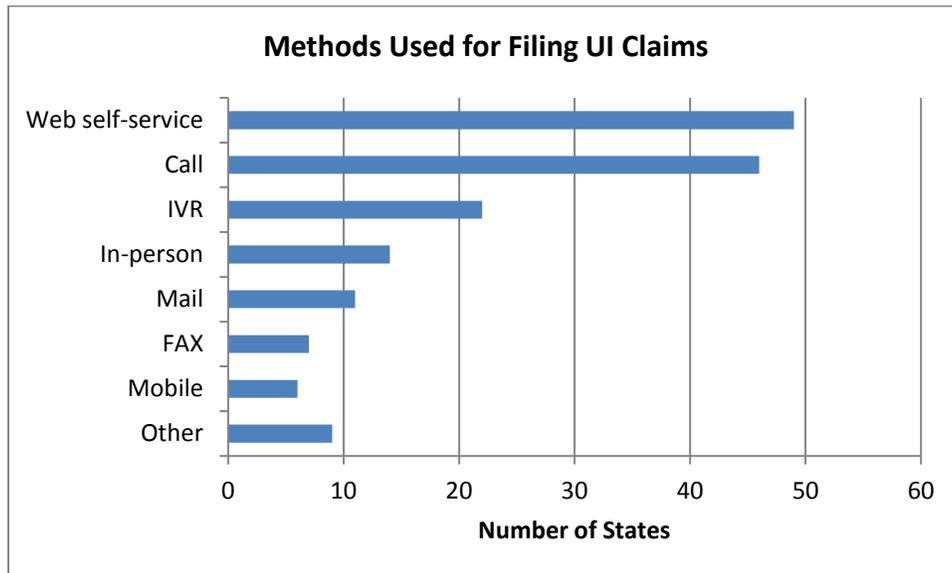


*Source: May 2015 Survey of 53 States Conducted by ETA*

Almost all (94 percent) of the states with call centers use them to support the traditional activities associated with UI claims: initial claims, additional claims, and reopened claims; resolving weekly certification issues and payment problems; and providing eligibility information and claim status information to workers who file for benefits.

To a lesser degree, 80 percent of the states use the call centers to refer claimants to Job Services, provide reemployment services to claimants, process emails, or change contact/demographic information in response to claimant requests.

### ***Filing Claims for Benefits***



Source: May 2015 Survey of 53 States Conducted by ETA

The methods of contact that states offer to benefit claimants for conducting various aspects of UI activities vary. The following figures represent methods of contact allowed by all 53 states, not just those which operate call centers.

- Approximately 87 percent of the 53 states allow claimants to file initial, additional, or reopened claims by telephone, while 26 percent of the states allow these claims to be filed in-person.
- Web self-service filing of such claims is available in 92 percent of the states.
- About 42 percent of the states utilize IVR devices as an initial claim filing option.
- A smaller number of states (21 percent) allow initial claims to be filed by mail.
- Seven states (13 percent) accept initial claims by facsimile, and six states (11 percent) offer a mobile application which supports initial claim filing.

The methods states utilize for the filing of **weekly certifications for benefits** tends to mirror the business process for initial claims.

- Web self-service is the most utilized option with 92 percent of the states offering such transactions.
- Interactive Voice Response is used by 81 percent of states for weekly certification filings.
- Call center agents handle weekly certification filing in 58 percent of the states.
- About 25 percent of the states allow in-person and/or filing by facsimile.
- Mail filing is offered in 40 percent of the states.
- Filing of weekly certifications by mobile device is available in 15 percent of the states.



In Nebraska, state law requires claimants to file weekly claims using the web, and call centers act as a help desk to encourage customers to fill out web-based self-service claims.

## ***Communications***

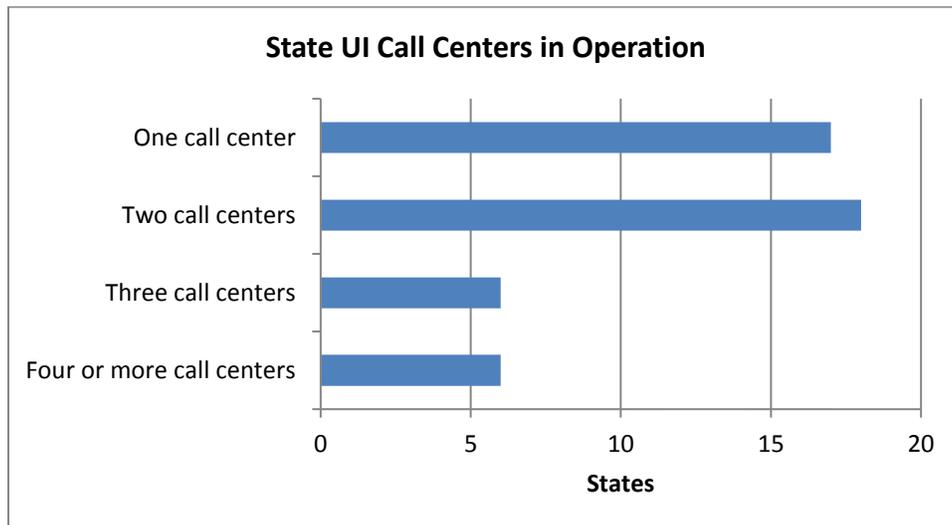
One of the most frequent and recurring reasons for claimants to contact the state UI agency is to determine the status of a claim for benefits after the filing of an initial claim and during the benefit period. The reasons for inquiry are numerous and, at least anecdotally, consume a significant portion of UI staff resources and time. The following data show the various ways states offer claimants access to information regarding the status of an individual claim.

- The vast majority (96 percent) of states provide such information by phone through an agent.
- Web self-service is offered by 77 percent of the states to handle such inquiries.
- Interactive Voice Response is available as a service option in 70 percent of the states.
- An in-person visit to make an inquiry is offered by 36 percent of the states.
- Making a claim status inquiry by email is a service option in 62 percent of the states.
- Social media such as Facebook and Twitter can be used in 28 percent of the states to make inquiries.
- Web chat is available in 9 percent of the states, as are mobile applications for making claim status inquiries.
- Printed material is used by 11 percent of the states for such purposes.

Another source of communication workload for state UI agencies is general inquiry about the UI program. Such inquiries generally precede the filing of a claim and can be made by employers, other service agencies, family members, etc. The methods states offer to make such inquiries generally mirror those available for inquiries regarding claim status.

- Calling the UI agency for such general information is an option in 96 percent of the states.
- Web self-service is offered as a service option in 89 percent of the states.
- Sixty-eight percent of the states configure their IVR devices to provide such general UI information.
- Email is offered as an inquiry tool by 62 percent of the states.
- A walk-in visit to get general UI information can be accomplished in 51 percent of the states. This happens frequently at One-Stop Centers where computer terminals and phones are available to contact the UI agency.
- Facebook is offered in 19 percent of the states and Twitter is offered in 15 percent of the states as a vehicle for obtaining general UI information.
- Printed material containing general information on the UI program is offered by 55 percent of the states.
- Mobile applications are offered in 11 percent of the states for such purposes.

Seventeen of the states operate a single call center, while the other 30 operate multiple call centers. California, for example, operates 15 call centers. No other state operates more than eight (Pennsylvania operates eight centers). Ohio operates five call centers, and three states (Maryland, Missouri and Texas) operate four centers. Six states (Alaska, Connecticut, Florida, Maine, Massachusetts and New Jersey) operate three centers, while the remaining states operate two centers.



Source: Interviews with 53 UI Programs in 2016

Of the 30 states operating multiple call centers, 28 have developed a system where calls to the multiple centers can be **integrated and managed as one “virtual” workload** to allow

shifting of calls between the centers to balance workload and improve response time. (In Maine, an online adjudication schedule automatically sends claims with issues to the next available adjudicator regardless of location.)

### ***Many State UI Call Centers Operate Differently Today Versus 2008 When the Great Recession Workload Emerged***

About 75-80 percent of initial claims are filed today using Internet sites created by the states, and unemployed workers are frequently urged by UI staff to file on the web. Many of those customers end up contacting the call centers during their UI benefit collection period, and some states require discussions with claimants who file on the web. For example, in Alabama, 45 percent of web filers needed UI staff intervention in order for the UI staff to complete their eligibility determination.

Some states have made significant changes in the organization and staffing of their call center operations in recent years. For example, Ohio has downsized from ten to five locations, introduced teleworking for certain staff, and placed a huge emphasis on cross-training of staff. Currently, all staff are trained to perform all functions, and there is now only one grade level for customer service representatives. In 2013, the Louisiana Workforce Commission rolled out the Benefits Analysis Team (BAT). This consists of 10 teams with 10 supervisors, two managers and a Chief of Benefits. Analysts are graded at Levels 1-4: Level 1 consists of new trainees; Level 2 does 60 percent phone work and 40 percent adjudication; Level 3 is 40 percent to 60 percent; and Level 4 is 20 percent to 80 percent. Currently, there are 86 analysts. As workloads vary, these proportions of phone and adjudication work can be varied. In November 2015, Louisiana implemented web-based claims processing and BAT added the function of reconsiderations. Tennessee operates what the state describes as a One Touch service/business management system. The overall system is called *Zendesk*, which agency staff described as "a mall with many stores" (i.e., applications). Tennessee operates a ***ticketing*** application within its overall system. The ticketing system routes a UI customer to the individual who has handled the claim in the past and includes in that routing all information about that claim. This contact can be through e-mail, phone, IVR, chat, and text. Claims-takers perform all functions except adjudication, which is performed by adjudicators who work in the Knoxville call center and in Nashville.

## ***Staffing Patterns Vary and Organizational Structures Today Differ from State-to-State***

In most states, UI call centers house three organizational units: initial claims-taking, customer service and adjudication. In some states (e.g., Illinois), the adjudication function is carried out in regional or local offices.

Staff in UI call centers primarily work in *teams* with a supervisory span of control of 5-20. Teams most often contain 10-12 staffers. Each team may contain a trainer or a subject matter expert. Some states maintain a more traditional organization structure. For example, Nebraska's call center has a work unit headed by a manager, supported by a trainer, and staffed by 22 claims specialists. Staff are assigned to work within the UI call centers primarily on the basis of their grade and technical expertise. In most states, call center staff are cross-trained to become capable of delivering services across UI programs and functions. In almost half the states, staff are also routinely **rotated** among these different UI functions in order to enable them to maintain their expertise and contribute immediately to high priority work efforts during peak periods.

## ***Processing of Initial Claims Today Begins with Customers Selecting Options for Service***

Customers are systematically routed to staff who can handle their requests, primarily as a result of choices the customers select on the IVR system. California relies on skill-based routing of all calls. In Illinois, callers are given five choices in the IVR system, including English and Spanish options, along with an option to get answers to their bank or debit card questions. Using this approach, most states report a high level of efficiency in capturing all the information and data required for them to issue monetary determinations. With consistency, states report that about 75 percent of the initial claims taken in a call center contain all the data needed to determine whether a customer is monetarily eligible for benefits.



## ***Call Centers Play a Role in Registering Claimants for Work/Re-employment Services***

About three-quarters of the states (76 percent) involve their call centers in work registration activities and referrals of unemployed customers to Job Centers to seek help in becoming re-employed.

## ***Benefit Rights Are Provided to Customers Filing UI Claims in Different Ways***

Benefits rights are conveyed to claimants through a variety of methods. In some states (e.g., Michigan and New York), call center staff read benefits rights interview (BRI) statements to callers at some point in the initial claims process. In Wyoming, during the claim interview process, the customer service representative transfers the caller to a pre-recorded message for the BRI. In other states, benefit rights are placed online and claimants, including those who are filing by the web, are expected to access and read them. In several states, claimants are mailed printed materials. In others (e.g., Montana), call center staff do not play any role in presenting benefit rights to initial claims filers.

## ***Customer Service is Performed as an Identifiable and Important UI Activity***

States provide staff who are trained and empowered to identify, explore and resolve issues affecting a claim for benefits. In Louisiana, agents are allowed to resolve more issues as they rise through the ranks from Agent I to Agent IV and complete the required training. In some states (e.g., Iowa), subject matter experts are always available to the agents. Unique among the states, Georgia contracts with a private corporation to handle all customer inquiries, using remote (i.e., working at home) customer service representatives who are trained by the UI agency to respond immediately and accurately to the most frequent inquiries from customers.

The most frequent customer service inquiries are as follows:

- “When will a decision be made on my claim?”
- “How much am I going to get paid?”
- “What is the status of my check (or deposit)?”

Some states track the content and flow of customer service inquiries. For example, Tennessee administrators are able to see customer satisfaction scores for every 100 claims throughout the workday. In New York, the IVR tracks all incoming calls and a “wrap up” box enables each UI staffer at the end of each call to code the caller’s purpose and the actual

resolution of the issue. The result can be seen by supervisors in real time. However, for many call centers, tracking customer service issues is a manual process and is performed only periodically.

In some states (e.g., Montana, Florida and Ohio), **first call resolution** is a call center priority. Other states require supervisory intervention on certain issues such as interstate benefits matters, changing eligibility issues placed previously on the claim, entering liable employer determinations when there is no employer number available, etc.

### ***Integrity–related Activities Are Essential to Call Center Operations***

States have integrated their integrity related activities into their main call center operations and typically conduct the following operations as part of the initial claims process: Social Security Administration (SSA) crossmatch, identity authentication, directory of new hire crossmatches, crossmatches with correctional institutions, overpayment offset, division of motor vehicles (DMV) match, alien verification, etc.

### ***UI Call Centers Operate Fairly Standard Hours of Operation during Peak and Non-peak Workload Periods***

Most UI call centers operate from 8 AM to 5 PM, Monday through Friday and do not accept calls beyond 4 PM in order to clear the queue and complete work on certain claims. In Maryland, calls are received from 8 AM until 2 PM, Monday through Friday. Time after 2 PM is used for data entry, follow up on claims issues, and staff training. A few states build in an adaptable staffing pattern. In Illinois, for example, in order to introduce flexibility into call center operations, three shifts are used: 7:30 AM to 4 PM; 8:30 AM to 5 PM; and 9:30 AM to 6 PM. Texas employs multiple shifts to take advantage of multiple time zones within the state, allowing calls to be received for a longer period of time, in addition to the follow-up time to resolve outstanding claim issues. One shift ends at 10 PM in the evening.

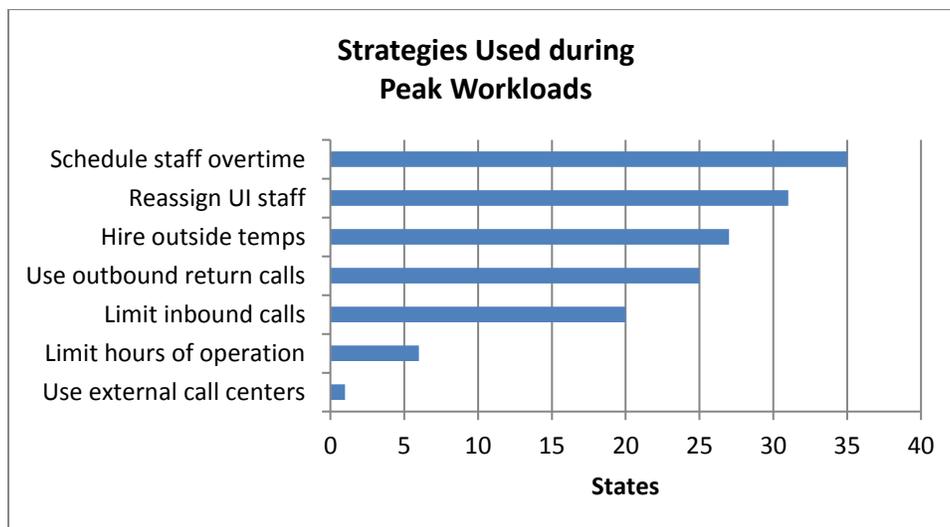
About half of UI call center operations currently offer a **call back** option that allows a caller to leave the queue and receive a call from call center staff when the workload decreases. Almost 90 percent of the states report that call centers are sufficiently open and adequately staffed in non-peak times to allow all customers to file claims and resolve problems with their UI benefits.

## ***Most States, But Not All, Maintain Continuity of Operations Plans***

The major challenge during a sharp seasonal or cyclical rise in claims activity is the necessity to hire and train additional call center staff quickly and effectively. States agree that one principle for success is to maintain cross-trained call center staff who can be redeployed as workloads develop and contribute immediately to claims processing and customer service efforts.

Currently, surges in state UI workloads are most often met with the following strategies:

- Changing hours of operation to include weekends
- Adding adjudicators to claims-taking teams
- Reassigning highly trained UI staff from elsewhere in the agency
- Implementing overtime for regular call center staff
- Relying on temporary help firm employees for processing initial claims



*Source: May 2015 Survey of 53 States Conducted by ETA*

Some states have developed workload management strategies that have proven particularly effective in recent years. For example, Texas uses UI call centers in nearby states to handle surges in Texas calls. North Dakota relies on seasonal hires (November to April) who are well trained in basic UI functions. Louisiana uses Texas UI call center staff who are trained in Louisiana UI law. Nebraska has negotiated with Nebraska Administrative Services for an expedited hiring process when workload demands require it. And, Michigan stated that being able to move cross-trained staff to points where they are most needed is key to effective caseload management. Managers in Minnesota prefer to add staff instead of changing the hours of operation.

## ***States Report that Many Lessons Were Learned from Managing the Claims Workload that Arose during the Great Recession***

In general, hiring new employees took too long and redeployment of adjudicators to answer phones was not a good solution, as backlogs developed later when eligibility issues were identified and had to be resolved by adjudicators. Washington State found that classroom training was difficult to conduct and complete during periods of rapid hiring, as there were too many people in the classrooms. A better solution was developed – hiring people in groups of 10-12. Oregon and Pennsylvania discovered that staff hiring was not the best solution. A better solution was to use part-time staff or intermittent workers who can be brought up to full-time status quickly when the workload requires it. Ohio found that relying on the consistency of permanent staff is the best solution. Texas was able to hire quickly by using the Workforce Boards and found success with calling back retirees. Louisiana UI management determined that the agency needed to reorganize the entire benefit function. Tennessee recommended a focus on technical deployment (not just human resource management) as a key to success. Montana reported three lessons learned:

1. Train temporary employees better;
2. Do not add another call center; and
3. Do not set up a separate queue for problem claims.

## ***Virtual Operating Environments Are Common in the States that Rely on UI Call Centers***

Almost all states that operate more than one call center support a virtual environment in which workloads are easily and routinely moved to centers and staff that can best handle those inquiries. A few states operate with remote staff who work from home or other locations. For example, California supports 12 adjudicators with IT support and ongoing UI training and staff make outbound calls only. Ohio has 33 customer service representatives who work from home. Louisiana has six staff who work in other state agency buildings. Tennessee supports a few UI staff who work in Job Centers. But use of remote staffing is not a widespread management practice in the UI system, unlike the pattern found today in private sector call centers.

## ***Some States Operate without UI Call Centers in 2016***

Six states—Arkansas, Delaware, Hawaii, New Hampshire, the U.S. Virgin Islands and West Virginia—do not use call centers. Two of these, Hawaii and New Hampshire, operated complex, but ineffective, IVR systems which both states abandoned – New Hampshire in 2001, Hawaii after

the last recession. Neither state plans to initiate call centers in the near future. Of these six states, only Delaware, expressed an interest in moving to call centers in the future.

Arkansas is typical of states that do not use call centers. Most initial claims are filed through the Internet in 30 local offices. The state prefers to handle claims in person. Fact finding is accomplished in these offices, but nonmonetary determinations are completed by the State Office. Arkansas contends its staff are experienced and complete the UI processes with fewer problems than if they used a call center operation. While the agency does not intend to implement call centers in the future, it does have two or three cubicles in each office with a phone that can be used to dial-in to a “hotline” number. These are used if the office is busy, and the call is routed to an available workforce specialist in another office, a process that helps the agency leverage resources.

Delaware takes initial claims online and continued claims by IVR or online. While there are no formal plans to initiate call center operations, informal talks are taking place. The agency would consider developing call centers contingent on adequate funding.

West Virginia has never considered initiating call centers. All intrastate claims are taken in person with a claims examiner entering claims data provided by the claimant into the computer system. Local office staff are cross trained to deliver employment service as well as UI-related services. Even in this in-person operation, about 60 percent of initial claims are web-based but filed in local offices.

The U.S. Virgin Islands has never operated a call center. Staff indicated that the agency’s culture of emphasis on personal service is reflected in the U.S. Virgin Islands’ law that prohibits offering state services by telephone. Claimants are directed first to employment service for job registration in the local offices and then sent to UI for manual claims taking.

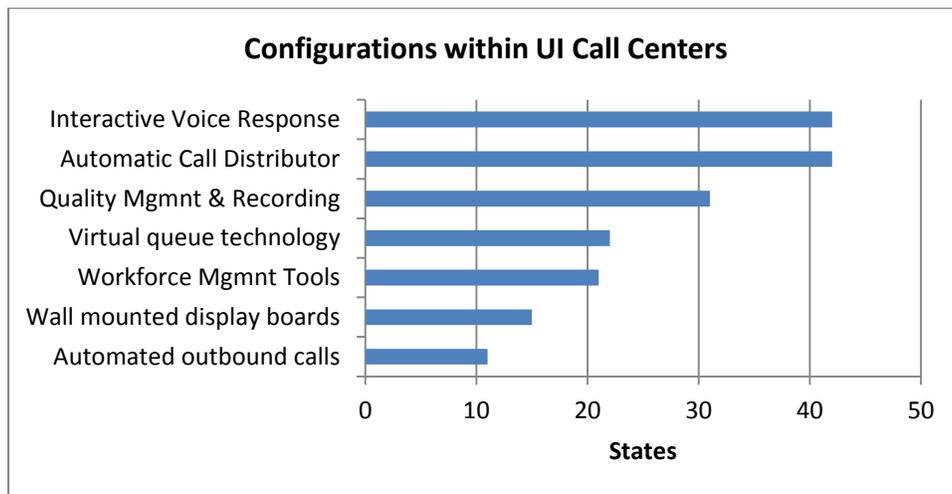
## **b. Technologies and Tools Supporting Call Centers**

### ***States Have Formed Relationships with Multiple Vendors to Maintain and Upgrade Call Center Infrastructures***

Primary operating systems in the states are supported generally by major vendors in the call center industry: Avaya, Cisco, and Genesys. But states depend on many other smaller vendors, as well as their local phone company, for many applications. Few states rely entirely on in-house IT technology and expertise with customer interactions.

## Configurations within the State UI Call Centers are Similar but Not the Same

Most (88 percent) UI call centers make use of IVR<sup>3</sup> and automatic call distribution (ACD) technology to interact initially with claimants and route calls to agents prepared to handle them. IVR systems complement calls center technology. The majority of states use quality management and call recording tools to monitor staff interactions with UI customers, and almost half report using virtual queue technology to give claimants the option of receiving a call back instead of waiting on hold.



Source: May 2015 Survey of 53 States by ETA

Significant upgrades in technology have taken place in many states in recent years, e.g., Florida, New York, and Oregon in 2016; Montana and Ohio in 2015; Texas in 2013 and 2014; and Louisiana in 2011. In some cases, states replaced legacy technology; in others, they added new case tracking tools and customer relationship software to their operations. For example, Oregon recently added call recording and monitoring tools. But, as normal practice, states do not track usage statistics.

Most states, including Florida, Massachusetts, Pennsylvania and Texas, maintain a central control to monitor and manage operations. Ohio has two dedicated staff persons in the call center who monitor daily reports in real time for staffing and scheduling decision-making. In Louisiana, Cisco tools produce daily reports that enable management to determine staffing needs.

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<sup>3</sup> Interactive voice response (IVR): computerized telephone system that allows a caller to respond to a menu of choices (spoken by an 'electronic voice') by pressing the appropriate buttons on the pad of a touch-tone phone. Also called audiotex. Source: <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/interactive-voice-response-IVR.html>

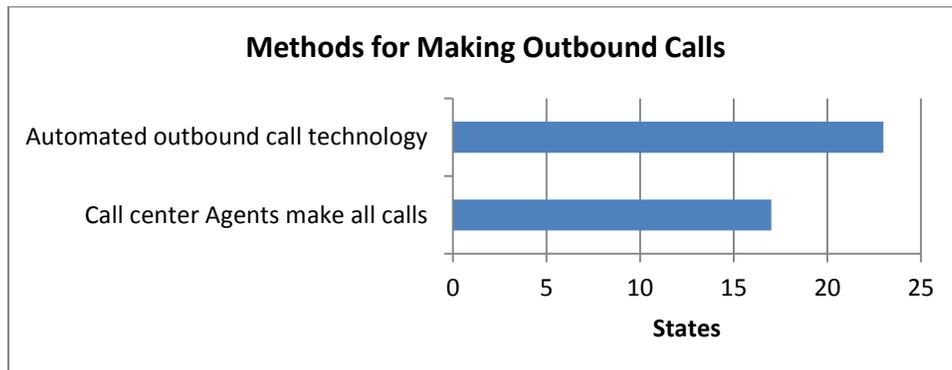
## Customers Can Contact Call Centers by Means Other Than Phone

Claimants, employers, and their representatives can often contact UI staff through several methods: email, web “contact us,” fax, and mail delivered by the U.S. Postal Service. Seventy percent rely primarily on email communication. A few states (e.g., New York and Virginia) offer live online chat options. Mobile applications are available for call center customers in 11 states. Many more states are currently considering their value as they plan modernization efforts.



## States Manage Both Inbound and Outbound Calls

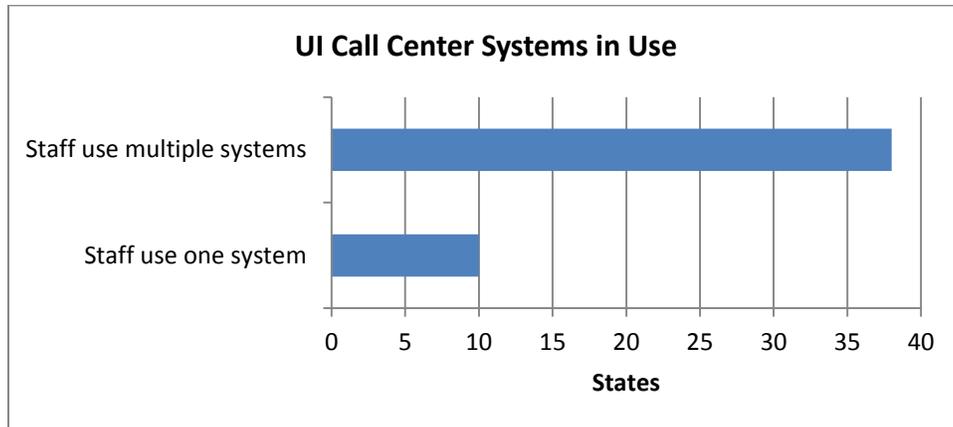
Nearly all states report using real time tools to manage inbound call volume. Almost 40 percent reroute calls within the UI agency, while only four states reroute calls outside the UI agency. Once they are in the queue, customer calls are rarely dropped. Almost half of the state UI call centers make use of automated technology to reach out and contact claimants. For example, California uses automated calls to remind claimants of their approaching hearings date. One-third of the states still rely on agents to initiate and complete calls to claimants.



Source: May 2015 Survey of 53 States by ETA

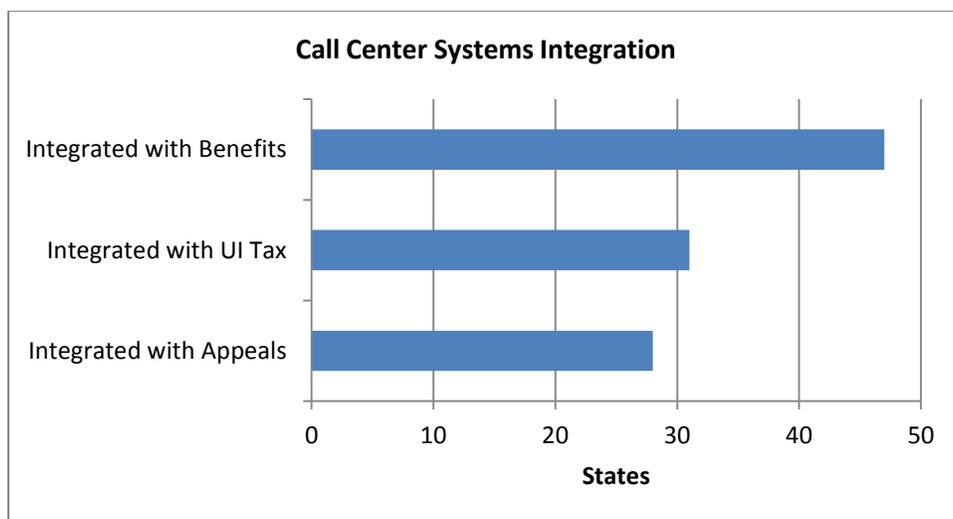
## UI Systems and Integrated Operations

In 80 percent of states, UI call center personnel rely on multiple systems to complete their mission. In those states, staff must open and navigate multiple systems to accomplish daily tasks (e.g., access claimant profiles, determine status of a claim or an appeal, enter missing contact information, etc.). These systems often contain software that is outdated or incompatible with new software used by the UI call centers.



Source: May 2015 Survey of 53 States by ETA

In nearly all states, the UI call center system is integrated with the UI benefits system. However, only 28 states maintain *integrated* benefits and appeals systems. In fact, in the 22 states that allow claimants to **file appeals** through the call center, only half of those states operate with fully integrated UI systems.



Source: May 2015 Survey of 53 States by ETA

## ***Most States Are Managing the Risks Associated with Operating Call Centers***

In general, states have not found their current physical facilities to be a barrier to effective operations. Most states have ready access to information technology experts, either as part of the in-house call center staff (e.g., in Iowa, Massachusetts, Oregon and Texas) or available from a centralized IT department (e.g., in Louisiana and Montana).

Most states have business continuity/disaster recovery plans that rely on readily accessible facilities and equipment, e.g., generators, and are tested regularly. Oregon, for example, has agreements with Idaho and Washington State to assist them in the event of a natural disaster or other event that interrupts call center operations. Mobile devices will enable staff to work from home. Florida recently tested its system when floods forced the closing of two of its six centers. The workload was shifted seamlessly to the other four centers. South Carolina maintains “UI in a Box,” an actual metal box that holds laptops, extension records, and other equipment that can be used in an emergency to operate a mobile UI operation. Few states rely on arrangements with other state agencies for continuity of call center operations.

Many states have addressed the risks associated with information integrity by putting in place software that detects and oversees IP addresses, multiple users from the same IP address, and other identity verification systems to prevent fraud.

### **c. Management of Call Centers**

#### ***UI Call Centers Pose Significant Management Challenges***

Several states reported the following as the most pressing management issues:

- Retention of call center personnel must be a priority when there are limited opportunities for advancement, which often is the case. This challenge is exacerbated when promotional opportunities arise elsewhere in the UI organization and the parent workforce development organization. Additionally, low pay is not a strong motivational factor. Turnover rates for customer service representatives run as high as 25-50 percent in some states. Finally, some states have no succession plans, and many call center staff are close to retirement.
  
- Forecasting software and tools for analyzing staff utilization and workload volumes/patterns are inadequate.

- More attention has to be paid to releasing personnel for advanced training as well as consistent funding of trainers in cost centers.
- Adequate staffing is required in both peak and non-peak times to deliver good service and to keep wait times down to expected levels.
- More IT staff are needed to implement process improvements envisioned or desired by call center managers.
- Managers need to be more creative in filling vacancies and managing change when new business processes are being introduced.
- Operating reports are prepared manually.
- Addressing technology issues: some legacy mainframe systems were last updated in 2000. Some UI systems are not compatible with call center systems.
- There is a need to improve staff capacity versus current workload. Process improvements cannot be implemented because staff cannot be taken off phones to test changes.
- Automated messages are insufficient to meet the needs of some claimants who need to talk to a “live” person.
- Insufficient tools exist to manage the queue.

### ***Staffing and Deployment: Recruitment, Onboarding, Training and Coaching***

States expend considerable resources to recruit, orient, train and supervise call center personnel. Recruitment of new personnel centers from external sources, such as civil service lists and state agencies, represents an effort to attract people with prior call center experience (e.g., Iowa, Michigan, Oregon, and Rhode Island). Using a Workforce Development Plan prepared three years ago, Ohio does both. Michigan has developed an onboarding sequence that works and monitors each agent’s career development. Most states, however, report that recruitment and hiring is a lengthy process that often begins after the need has arisen.



States use classic employee training strategies, including classroom sessions lasting from one to three weeks, covering topics such as, “What is UI,” “Initial Claims” and “Customer Service.” These sessions are usually followed by on-the-job training, shadowing of experienced agents, supervised claims taking, mentoring by successful UI staff for two weeks, and coaching by their supervisors. States are nearly unanimous in asserting that it takes six to eight months for a new agent to become proficient in taking UI claims and responding appropriately to other customer needs. In Florida, the objective of training is to ensure that the new employee “hits the ground running.” But in most states, the new employee takes initial claims before going on the phone to handle all kinds of inquiries. Training manuals are available in almost all states (e.g., California, Illinois, and Montana). Ohio offers a web-based, modular training resource to all personnel.

Louisiana has developed an approach to personnel management that is effective both in managing limited resources and responding quickly to changes in workloads. The Benefit Analysis Team (BAT) employs four levels of agents:

- 1a. Agent answers customer calls 100 percent of the time;
- 1b. Answers calls 80 percent and performs Adjudication 20 percent;
- 2. Answers calls 60 percent and performs Adjudication 40 percent;
- 3. Answers calls 40 percent and performs Adjudication 60 percent; and
- 4. Answers calls 20 percent and performs Adjudication 80 percent.

California limits customer calls to four hours per day (i.e., 8 AM to 12 Noon) in order to ensure completion of follow-up work required to fully process each claim. To enhance staff productivity, the state uses a recording at the end of each call, which saves four minutes per call. In Washington State, all agents are off the phone some part of every day, three to four days of the week. Taking seasonal claims in person takes a lot of pressure off call center staff for those calls. Ergonomic workstations are offered with sit/stand options and large monitors.

### ***Monitoring the Effectiveness of Call Center Personnel***

The supervisory span of control in UI call centers ranges from 7 to 33, but most supervisors are responsible for 8-12 agents.

State	Call Centers in Operation	Agents	Span of Control
California	15	1,667	10-12
Illinois	2	97	22-33

State	Call Centers in Operation	Agents	Span of Control
Iowa	1	14	14
Louisiana	2	79	8-12
New Jersey	3	103	8
Ohio	5	325	8-10
Oregon	2	178	12
Rhode Island	1	15	7

This is a narrower span of control than is found today in many organizations, where reduced management ranks and increased digital access to employee workloads and daily output have resulted in considerably wider spans of control when personnel being supervised are all engaged in the same function.

States reported various methods that they use to establish work protocols and processes. Some, such as Michigan, New Jersey and Ohio, maintain current operations manuals to help supervisors in training employees and overseeing their work activities. Others, such as California, Iowa and Louisiana, rely on support from human resources and IT personnel to establish appropriate procedures and identify divergences that should be corrected.

States report varying degrees of success in monitoring the quality of work actually done by agents on a daily basis. In some states such as Iowa, Ohio and Rhode Island, supervisors have access to recorded calls and quality ratings sheets derived from agent behavior that has been documented. In many other states (e.g., Illinois, Michigan and New Jersey), management is unable to record calls and use them as the basis for performance feedback and personal development. Additionally, management's ability, in some states, to monitor individual calls is governed by a contract with the employee union.

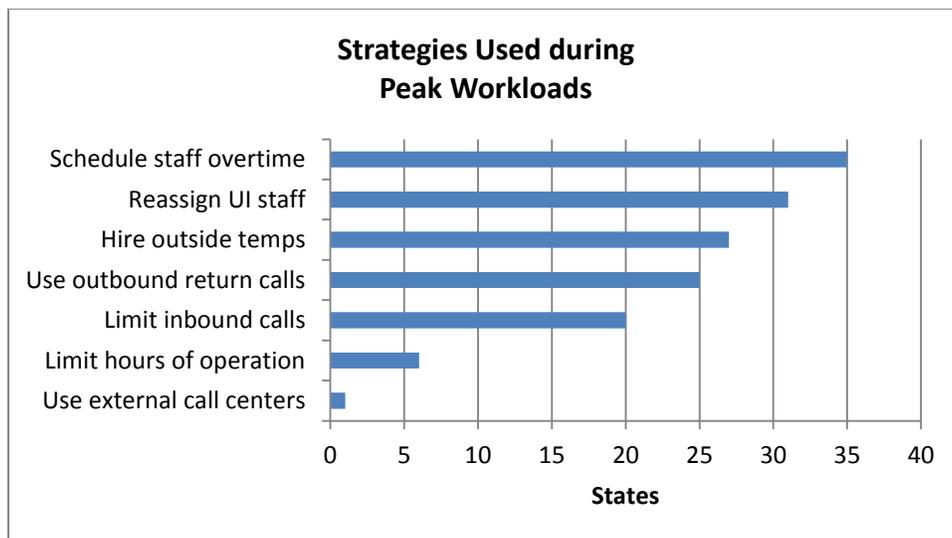
### ***Providing Services to Populations with Special Needs***

States address customer access challenges created by language issues primarily by employing multi-lingual staff (28 states), enabling IVR applications offered in multiple languages that connect customers to agents who are proficient in their language, and contracting with language translation services and language lines (38 states). For example, in Rhode Island several languages are available for translation by staff members: Spanish, Portuguese, Cambodian, Mon

and Laotian. In at least 30 states, teletypewriter (TTY), translation, and video relay services are offered to customers with special vision, hearing or mobility needs. Customer needs are addressed in different ways. For example, in Illinois, call centers use Next Talk, TTY, and video relay. In Louisiana, staff are trained specifically regarding assistive services and how to access them. Arizona used dedicated staff in a claimant advocate unit to handle disability claims on the web with assistance. California adjudicators take these customer calls. Only half the states report some type of training of call center staff to enable them to provide assistance to individuals with special needs.

**Several Strategies Are Used to Process Work during Peak Periods**

As workloads increase, states continually look for ways to deal with the increase in the number of customer calls and claims filed. The following strategies were identified as being used to process work during peak periods: 1) staff overtime, 2) reassignment of staff, 3) hiring outside temporary staff, 4) use outbound return calls, 5) limiting (block) inbound calls, 6) limiting hours of operation to enable staff time for processing activities, and 7) use external call centers.



Source: May 2015 Survey of 53 UI Programs by ETA

Thirty-five states, including California, use overtime as a means to handle the increase in calls and claims. Thirty-one reassign staff from other areas of UI to supplement existing staff in the call center while 27 states, including Louisiana, hire temporary help. Several states have successfully used retirees with UI experience. As technology improved, states have been able to use outbound calling as a means of coping with the increase in workload. Twenty-five states used outbound calling as a means of processing work during peak periods, while 20 limited or blocked inbound calls.

Twelve states use the four most frequently used means to handle the increase (overtime, reassignment of staff, hire temporary help and outbound calling). Seven of the 12 states also limited inbound calls. States often expand the hours of part-time staff to full-time. Georgia uses a contract with Xerox Corporation to expand its ability to handle surges in inquiries, as Xerox can expand capacity rapidly by adding more customer service representatives who work at home. Georgia's training manuals are made available to Xerox personnel.

### ***States Rely Primarily on Full-Time UI Agency Staff during Peak Workloads***

The most common strategy of dealing with peak workloads is staff overtime, while the second most common approach is the reassignment of other UI staff to call centers. Assuming that adequate cross-training has been done, in order for "other" UI staff in Adjudication and Quality Control units to participate in call center operations, most states (including Michigan and Oregon) have a fairly large talent pool from which to draw during peak workloads. However, Ohio reported it is very important for call centers to stop relying on adjudicators to deal with surges in workloads, as that widely followed practice negatively affects productivity and creates nonmonetary determination backlogs and customer service issues. Vermont assigns call center staff to other units during slow periods and reassigns them to call center duty during peak claims periods.

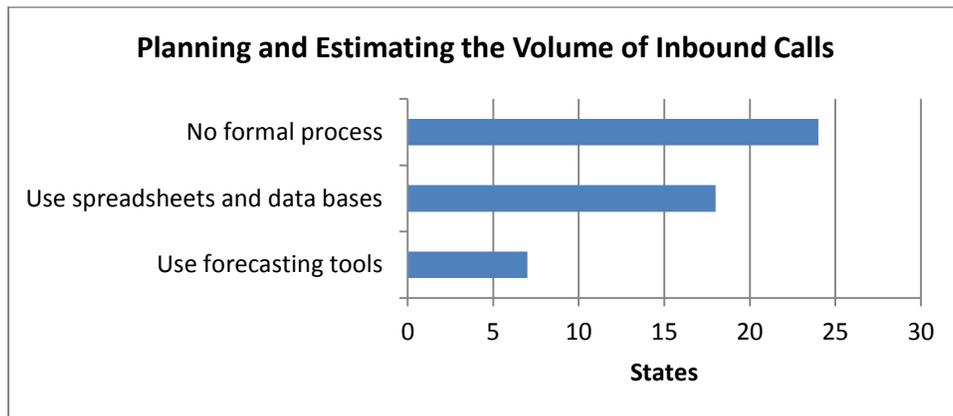
### ***Most States Have Specialized Support Staff Dedicated Exclusively to UI Call Center Operations***

There were three major categories identified in this section: training, IT staff, and external services. The source most frequently identified as providing exclusive support for call center was **external services** such as language lines and TTY/TTD. Twenty-eight states reported that they used external services exclusively for their call centers. Twenty-four reported that they had IT staff dedicated exclusively to the support of the call center(s), while 21 states reported that training staff were dedicated exclusively to the call center. Fifteen states identified all three categories dedicated exclusively to supporting the call centers.

## ***Few States Use Call Center Industry Software Tools for Planning/Estimating the Volume of Inbound Calls***

There were three strategies reported by states for planning/estimating the volume of inbound calls and scheduling staff:

1. State uses forecasting tools (i.e., workforce management software) to forecast volume and schedule staff;
2. State uses spreadsheets and databases to manually forecast volume and schedule staff; and
3. No formal process is in use, but trends from previous periods are reviewed and analyzed.



*Source: May 2015 Survey of 53 UI Programs by ETA*

Twenty-four states reported having no formal process for planning and estimating the volume of inbound calls. Seven states use forecasting tools (workforce management software) to plan for an anticipated increase in workload, while 18 states use spreadsheets and databases to manually forecast the anticipated increase in call volume.

Only three of the seven call centers using forecasting tools rely upon staff overtime as a strategy to process work during peak workloads. Three use staff reassignment to process the increase workload, and one state uses both staff overtime and staff reassignment.

With respect to using spreadsheets and databases as a means of planning for increased workload, 15 states rely upon staff overtime to process the increase in workload. Fourteen states use forecasting tools and databases for staff reassignment to process workload, and 12 states use both staff overtime and reassignment to process the increased workload. Sixteen states, with no formal process for planning/estimating workload, use staff overtime to process increased

workload while 14 states use staff reassignment to process the additional workload. Ten states in this category used both.

### ***Managing Change in Today's State UI Call Centers***

State managers shared many ideas and proposals for ways to improve the productivity of staff and the quality of services offered to customers of the UI system who currently rely on call centers for service:

- Place a priority on achieving *first call resolution* when training new call center staff and deploying new tools and technology
- Learn the needs of younger customers and determine what kind of technical solutions will work best in the future
- Invest in and upgrade the front end processes of UI systems to offer better service, e.g., add CHAT and TEXT features in a secure manner
- Implement integrated unemployment benefits systems
- Encourage and require more use of self-service by customers, support web chat, and reduce phone hours
- Offer staff quality monitoring, coaching and frequent feedback on their performance to improve retention of staff
- Upgrade technology to continually enhance call center effectiveness and efficiency
- Prepare and test disaster recovery plans for call center technology
- Embrace a management style that enhances agility and a willingness to try new processes
- Introduce technology that would help states generate operating reports, professional documents, and other electronic reports

Some states are conducting pilot operations to introduce changes in processes designed to achieve specific objectives, e.g., improving time lapse performance. For example, in New Jersey, adjudicators are using fact finding templates that contain questions to guide the creation of a document for the staff member that can be saved on a central database. Questionnaires are being sent by email so they can be completed the same day rather than waiting for mail processing. When an issue (nonmonetary or other) arises, the questions “pop up” through an online application so the answers can be captured right away, and an adjudicator can resolve the issue quickly. New York utilizes LEAN (waste reduction) methodology to assess possible changes to call center processes.

## d. Performance Management and Metrics

### *Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)*

Research confirmed that KPIs are intended to measure the contact center's ability to deliver the level of service required. When establishing KPIs, management should concentrate on **four key areas** to maximize customer satisfaction and maintain a high performing call center [ICF<sup>4</sup>]:

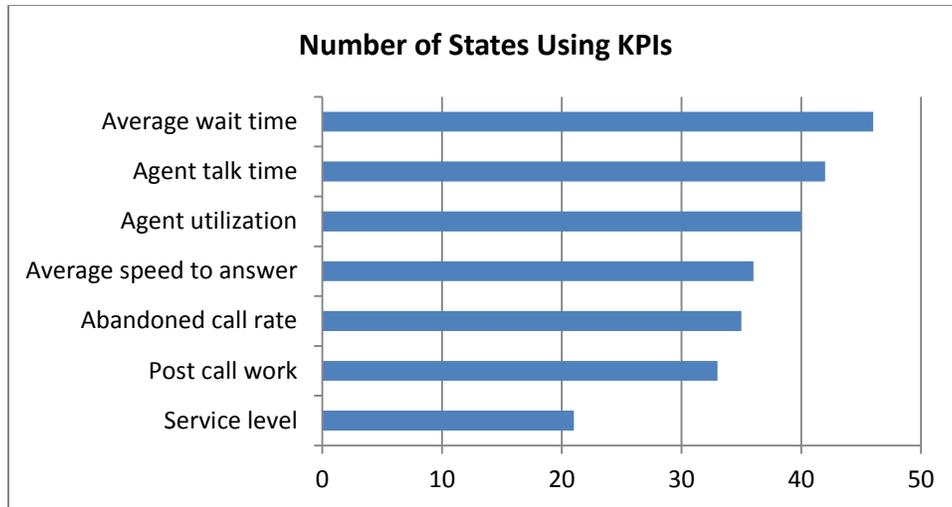
1. Telephone benchmarks (e.g., average speed of answer)
2. Efficiency benchmarks (e.g., adherence to schedule)
3. Human resource benchmarks (e.g., absenteeism)
4. Service benchmarks (e.g., first call resolution rate)

UI call centers currently focus on some, but not all, of these industry standards. The centers make extensive use of telephone benchmarks. Nearly all UI programs (96 percent) use claimant **wait time** as a KPI. Many states display wait times to the call center staff throughout the day and rising wait times can trigger the engagement and use of UI staff who normally work in other UI functions. Three out of four states measure and monitor **average speed of answer**, which takes into account all calls answered by agents, even those calls answered beyond the requisite service level. Almost the same amount of states (73 percent) measure the percentage of **calls abandoned** while the claimant is waiting to speak with an agent. However, less than half of the states (44 percent) use **service levels**, e.g., 80 percent of calls answered within 20 seconds, as a KPI. This is in direct contrast with the private call center industry, where **service levels** are the most commonly used KPI.

Efficiency measures are currently used throughout state UI call center operations. **Talk time** (i.e., call duration) measures time spent actually speaking with claimants about their unemployment claims and related matters, and 88 percent of states use that KPI to manage performance. Almost the same number of UI programs (i.e., 83 percent) monitor **agent utilization**, i.e., the time during a work shift when agents are logged into the system and available to take calls. The majority of states also monitor **post-call agent behavior**, i.e., the time spent after the call is completed to finish forms, update the system, and perform other activities associated with the call.

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<sup>4</sup> International Finance Corporation (IFC). Measuring Call Center Performance: Global Best Practices.



Human Resources KPIs are not measured often nor reported regularly by UI call centers. KPIs such as **agent absenteeism** and **staff attrition** are used extensively in private call centers to identify replacement and training needs (and costs), as well as motivation and stress issues.

Service benchmarks are not produced regularly in state UI call center operations. Private call centers focus on **first call resolution** (i.e., the degree to which calls are resolved in the first attempt, without the agent needing to refer the customer to a colleague or a manager, or call the customer back). Recent research suggests that no single KPI has a bigger impact on customer satisfaction than does first-call resolution (FCR).<sup>5</sup>

In private industry call centers, **customer satisfaction** is a critical benchmark. A three-pronged approach to measuring customer satisfaction is recommended that combines quarterly customer surveys conducted by team leaders with independent third party analysis, and quality assurance measurements. The global metric for customer satisfaction is 90 percent.<sup>6</sup>

There is no standard method for calculating **customer satisfaction**:

*Customer satisfaction measurement has evolved beyond mail surveys (delivered by post) and phone interviews days after the customer's interaction transpired. The big trend now is to survey callers immediately after the interaction occurs, when the experience is fresh in the customer's mind and before problems can escalate. Top centers*

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.icmi.com/Resources/Metrics/2011/02/Seven-Metrics-to-Watch-for-Call-Center-Success>

<sup>6</sup> International Finance Corporation (IFC) World Bank Group. *Measuring Call center Performance: Global Best Practices*.

*typically do this via IVR-based post-call surveys, similar to the type described in the previous section on first-contact resolution. Callers are asked a series of questions about their interaction with the agent, their feelings about the organization and their plans to continue doing business with the company. They are asked to rate each question on a numeric scale (often 1 to 5) for easy customer satisfaction calculation. Many surveys also feature a couple of open-ended questions for more detailed customer feedback.*<sup>7</sup>

Many customers now contact call centers by email or chat, not by phone. Companies can monitor *patterns of interaction* with customers to gain a better understanding of the **customer experience** they are providing:<sup>8</sup>

“Low cost and ease of modification make surveys the overwhelming favorite for measuring past and present patterns. E-mail-based surveys are superior to paper-based ones because they can be more easily shared; they allow rapid distribution; they give the surveyor the flexibility to extend or abbreviate the questioning according to the wishes of the respondent or the substance of the response; they minimize delays in analyzing the results; and they lead to quick action, such as a referral to a general manager should scores fall below a predetermined level. E-mail surveys can also be more easily tailored.”

A few states do conduct **quality assurance** activities, measuring the quality of completed UI calls against a set of criteria that an agent is expected to cover during the call. This includes, but is not limited to:

1. How the agent answers the call
2. How they navigate the caller to a resolution
3. How they end the call

States recognize the importance of quality assurance and that much more could be done to ensure quality services. This is an ongoing challenge and new ideas are surfacing.

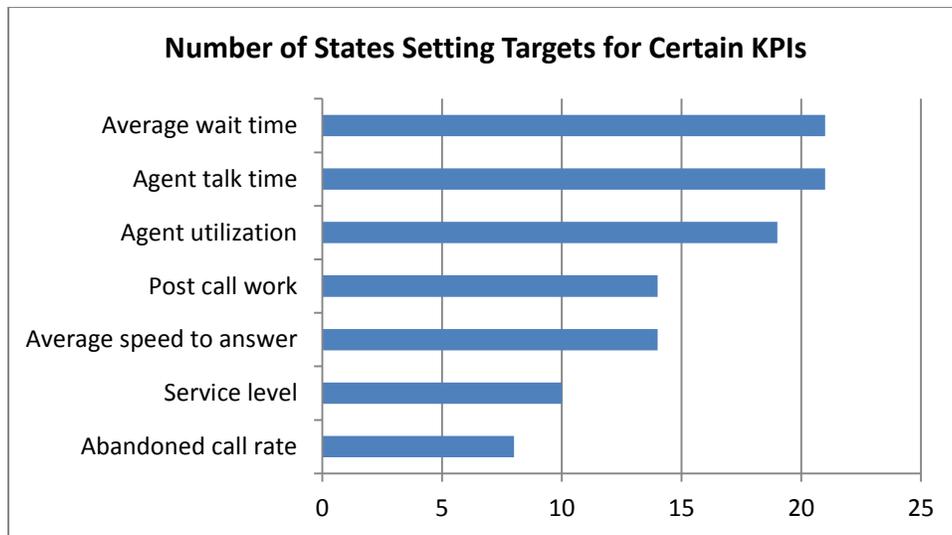
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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.icmi.com/Resources/Metrics/2011/02/Seven-Metrics-to-Watch-for-Call-Center-Success>

<sup>8</sup> Christopher Meyer and Andre Schwager. “Understanding Customer Experience.” *Harvard Business Review*. February 2007.

## Setting Targets for Certain KPIs

Several states set performance targets for the UI call center staff to meet. Almost half the states report (44 percent) setting targets for two KPIs: average wait time and agent talk time (i.e., average call duration). Forty percent set expectations for agent utilization. Fourteen states set targets for average speed to answer and post-call work. Only 10 states set targets for service level. Less than 10 states focus on achieving a certain rate of abandoned calls. Sixteen states do not set targets.



## States Measure and Share Information about Their Performance

California UI has 400 agents on the phone and tracks their success with some clear metrics:

Key Performance Indicators in Place	Current Levels of Performance 2016
Average time agents wait for calls to be routed	<5 minutes
Average talk time	8.8 minutes
Agent handle time	9.2 minutes
Initial claims processed within 3 days	100 percent

Key Performance Indicators in Place	Current Levels of Performance 2016
Online inquiries processed within 5 days	100 percent
Determinations appointments scheduled on a timely basis	95 percent

In Iowa, UI management has a focus on these critical measurements:

KPIs	Current Performance 2016
Answer rate	93.81 percent
Abandon rate	6.19 percent
Wait time	1.32 minutes
Handle time	4.53 minutes

KPIs in use are part of a new vendor's package. A 2016 goal is to achieve a handle rate of 95 percent or greater.

Michigan relies on daily real time monitoring and includes call attempts, calls answered, calls abandoned, average talk time, average speed of answer, average handle time, number of agents, number of calls on virtual hold, number of accepted virtual hold call backs and declined call backs (remain on hold). Measurements are shared twice a day. Average handle time (measure of call talk time + call hold time + after call work time) is closely monitored. Handle time efficiency increased by 18 percent from 2014 to 2016. With the modernization of the UI software (MiDAS), data were collected for a period to determine metrics for work tasks completed in the modernized system. Additional areas were surveyed for items completed outside the software to determine metrics for completing those items. All of Michigan's KPIs relate to federal performance standards, even if indirectly.

In Oregon, the main focus of management is on average speed of answer, average wait time, and post call work. Staff are continually reminded of the importance of wait times and handle times and their impact on the public. All major UI functions have KPIs: claims processing, answering calls, handle times, adjudicating claims and UI quality. Oregon sets high standards for call center operations to ensure achievement of federal U.S. Department of Labor UI Standards.

In Ohio, managers track both the number of calls (e.g., 1,800 per day) and the number handled (e.g., 1,400 per day). Speed of answer is a focus area. Managers no longer track the percent of abandoned calls, as the introduction of virtual hold and call back options offered made that KPI a non-issue.

Minnesota has set KPIs as follows: service level, average speed of answer, average wait time (about 30 seconds), abandon rate (not currently a concern for Minnesota), talk time, post call work, agent utilization, and transfer rates. But all KPIs are not equal. For example, Minnesota managers do not constantly monitor the average wait time because it is so low.

### ***The KPIs in Place Can Drive Performance Improvement***

Many states have data-driven process improvement teams that focus on areas where a change in performance would have a beneficial effect on both customer satisfaction and agency success. Call center staff play a role in both identifying the problem properly and generating realistic, cost-effective solutions.

In California, a Business Process Innovation (BPI) group focuses on operational improvements that connect directly to federal UI standards, such as first payment timeliness and nonmonetary determinations timeliness, as well as other KPIs established based on agreements with the State Legislature. UI call centers conduct quarterly field office basic evaluations and identify root causes of nonperformance in measured areas. Staff provide process improvement suggestions to the BPI team, which works with the call center staff to identify possible solutions.

In Iowa, the customer service managers in tax and benefits identify and fix issues that directly affect the performance of the UI center by reviewing data and finding solutions, including those offered by the UI Call Center agents. The main focus is on answering calls quickly, completing everything required in one call and responding to email inquiries from customers within 24 hours.

In Montana, call monitoring has a direct effect on quality and accuracy in UI Call Center operations. Putting most staff on the phones for intake and answering questions is sometimes necessary, but it has an adverse effect on Montana's timeliness by creating backlogs.

In Oregon, workgroups identify root causes of poor performance and develop solutions.

Louisiana connects UI's Benefit Timeliness and Quality (BTQ) goals with KPIs to ensure that all necessary information is captured in order to complete the claim process timely, with

quality and accuracy. Louisiana reports that handle time is the KPI that relates most directly to the federal UI performance standards.

Minnesota says that KPIs have an indirect influence on a state's ability to achieve federal UI standards. Doing well on the KPIs means that overall performance will improve, which should ensure federal UI performance standards are met.

## ***Customer Service***

Most states see a direct connection between efficient customer service and claimant satisfaction. Some set their operational standards to change call center agent behavior. Louisiana recently set a goal of achieving a five-minute maximum hold time, driven primarily by a new executive management focus on customer service. This goal replaced a 20-minute hold standard, and it was adopted after a review of the standards in similar industries. But the agency standards have to be published and taught. Some employees understand the KPIs immediately, while others require detailed explanations of why their work is so important to the UI mission.

California's Employment Development Department (EDD) captures feedback from claimants and employers relative to their satisfaction with services offered/delivered. UI has a Customer Service survey component that is tracked and reviewed to identify process improvements. EDD's Public Affairs Branch tracks social media traffic and conducts an annual customer service survey for UI. EDD received the 2016 Best of California award for recognition of public sector professionals for innovative technology and solutions in state and local government.

Iowa recently established goals for customer service. The objective is to answer 90 percent of the calls that come in on the Iowa Workforce Department's customer service line.

Montana call center managers perform customer satisfaction survey with claimants and employers and share information with staff who interacted with those customers. Montana broadcasts unsolicited positive feedback from customers across the Bureau.

In Michigan, quality service is confirmed when positive customer service comments arrive during periods when the agency is meeting federal standards for timeliness.

## ***Performance Appraisals***

Most call center employees are affected directly by the KPIs and other standards adopted to manage their behavior and performance against organizational objectives.



Emergency Unemployment Compensation program, which was January 1, 2014. All states reported that the recession influenced their decision-making and provided valuable lessons for the future of call center operations. These lessons had an effect on technology utilization, claims taking procedures, organizational structure, staffing and training, planning for the future, and workload forecasting.

Most states reported that the recession affected their thinking about technology more than any other single factor. Many states reported that the recession pointed out the need for more self-service (Alabama, California, Colorado, Iowa, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York and Utah). This usually took the form of increased use of the Internet, but it also included deploying more sophisticated IVR technologies. Some states emphasized using more Internet-based initial claim filing (Alabama, Iowa, Maryland, Massachusetts and Missouri), while others favored installing or expanding IVR capabilities to allow more self-service with less agent intervention (Colorado, New Jersey and New Mexico). Most states acknowledged the need to improve these technologies to make them simpler, easier to use, and more comprehensive. If claimants could provide most of the intake function by self-filing, call center staff would have more time to respond to inquiries, provide customer service and complete adjudications.

The increase in workloads resulting from the recession highlighted the inadequacy of legacy mainframe computer systems operated in many states. The systems could not be re-programmed fast enough to keep pace with the evolving federal Emergency Unemployment Compensation program, and they did not integrate effectively with the client server systems that support modern technology such as IVR and Internet-based processes. As an illustration, staff in Missouri stated that their UI system was 48-years old. Twenty-five states indicated their intention to modernize their UI systems. (See table at the end of this section.) Eight of these states plan to join a consortium, while the rest will either develop the new system in-house or contract for this activity with a vendor. Some of these upgrades involve incremental changes. Others reflect complete system replacements. Twenty-one states indicated that they plan to change or upgrade their call center technology. Some are upgrading the current system, while others are changing vendors (North Carolina and Oklahoma). Most of these changes include smoother integration with the UI mainframe system.

Pressures from the Great Recession caused many states to examine UI claims taking procedures. In one notable example, Georgia contracted with a vendor, Xerox, to perform most of its telephone customer service activity. Two states (Mississippi and South Carolina) noted that in-person claims-taking failed totally in the recession as a viable procedure, and they abandoned it for more technology-based alternatives. Rhode Island characterized its current system at the

time of the recession as inadequate to handle the workload. Several states observed that features of telephone claims needed to be improved. Iowa decided to record all calls and try to answer them when they are received. Iowa also utilized a procedure that should be noted as a **best practice**. The state utilizes telephone hold time to play recorded messages such as frequently asked questions or Benefits Rights Interview messages.

Connecticut contends that a UI intake system should be developed that does not require UI expertise in order to enter data. In Connecticut's proposed system, intake would be performed by data entry clerks, freeing up UI experts to respond to inquiries and resolve problems. New Jersey echoed this procedure by stating that more information should be taken through the IVR freeing up agents to resolve problems. Some states reported modifications to Internet filing designed to reduce the need for call center intervention in the filing process (Florida, Indiana, Maryland, New York and North Carolina).

Many states reported engaging in some form of process reengineering to improve operations. For example, Rhode Island applied LEAN Manufacturing principles to improve its operations. Adapted to government and other programs from the manufacturing sector, LEAN Manufacturing reengineers processes to reduce unnecessary and redundant steps while providing optimal customer service. North Carolina employed process improvement techniques to lead to fewer manual calls.

Perhaps the most comprehensive procedural change emerged in Pennsylvania where the agency combined all of its UI functions into an Operations Center. All UI functions, including claims processing, adjudication, appeals, tax operations and benefit payment control are channeled through 15 different queues to initiate whatever activity is required.

Recessionary workloads also exposed organizational barriers to efficiency. Functions performed in siloes, limited the flexibility of states to move staff to meet workload fluctuations. Many states reorganized call center staff into teams rather than individual specializations. These teams contained staff at all grade levels and with expertise in all call center operations, enabling resources to be applied where workload demanded. Montana and Louisiana are two of several states organizing staff into teams. Ohio rebuilt its operations from the ground up involving staff at every juncture. It merged UI delivery and call center operations and created a tiered classification system to afford flexibility in claim processing.

The Great Recession forced many states to make changes in the way they hire, train and retain staff. Most states agreed that to be productive and effective, hiring and training staff took more time than the rapidly escalating workloads afforded. Consequently, many states had to

place staff in jobs without thorough training or knowledge of operations resulting in mistakes, duplicate work, and the accumulation of tremendous backlogs. For example, at one time, Tennessee was receiving 800,000 phone calls per month. After major organizational, technological and procedural changes, it now receives about 15,000. Almost all states found it necessary to hire additional staff, although Tennessee argued that technological improvements would be a better response.

Many states indicated that they responded to staffing problems by hiring temporary staff, some directly (Massachusetts and Michigan) and some through temporary hiring agencies (Louisiana). Other states (Ohio and Tennessee) said that states should operate smarter with the staff they have and not hire temporary staff. Massachusetts retains lists of part-time staff for recall when workloads increase. This practice reduces the training requirement. Connecticut plans to develop a system of claim intake so simplified that detailed UI knowledge is not required. In this type of system, only temporary clerks will be employed to staff call centers.

Even though most states reported staffing considerations as a major lesson learned from the Great Recession, they differed widely on approaches to this problem. Some states decided that they should expand staff capabilities so that all staff could perform all functions related to claims-taking including intake, inquiry, adjudication, customer service and back office functions (Iowa, Minnesota, Montana and North Carolina). Several argued for a team approach to handle workload changes where team members could perform multiple functions (Iowa, Mississippi, and South Carolina). Other states concluded that high levels of specialization in areas such as adjudication assured that there would be fewer mistakes and reduced inquiries and follow-up actions (District of Columbia and Pennsylvania). States also specified that they brought in adjudicators to staff their call center functions (Indiana).

Many states noted that the sudden increase in claims volume, coupled with the advent of new, incompletely trained staff, led to mistakes and the accumulation of extensive backlogs, often but not exclusively, in the adjudication process. These backlogs tended to negatively affect processing in all areas of claims taking and problem resolution. Michigan noted that anticipating, predicting and processing backlogs became a major problem.

Onboarding new staff requires the training of that staff. In an environment that normally trains limited numbers of staff primarily in an on-the-job environment, providing effective training quickly to such large numbers of staff taxed most states' existing training programs. Some states noted that they could not train staff fast enough (Alabama, Iowa and Montana). Responses to the training conundrum yielded many innovative training methods. Nebraska recognized the need for expedited training requiring weeks, not months, to attain proficiency. Several states recognized the

need to cross-train staff to enable them to perform multiple functions (Arizona, California, Florida, Rhode Island and Utah). California identified the need to hire and train staff in small groups of 10 to 12. Oregon decided to move to modular training employing technological modules. States cited developing training plans for all levels of training and coordinating these plans with anticipated staffing needs, whether temporary or permanent staff.

The lack of adequate preparation and planning for a recession of the magnitude of the Great Recession constituted the most poignant lesson learned. Maryland staff said that states should be prepared for anything. Virginia staff noted that they were not prepared to react quickly enough. Nebraska staff added that states needed to be prepared for the possibility of another bad recession. The District of Columbia, Illinois and Massachusetts said that states should have a plan in place to react more rapidly to a future recession. Several states noted that planning should be augmented with better methods to predict and forecast future workload needs. Louisiana and Virginia said that workload tracking needed to be improved.

Twenty-eight states reported having strategic plans in place to guide call center operations, although several of them focused on the State Quality Service Plan required annually by ETA. Some states' strategic plans involved statewide processes (North Dakota and Tennessee). A few involved coordination within the state agency (Arizona, Kentucky and Pennsylvania), and some were standalone (Delaware, Oklahoma and Texas). Oregon described a traditional strategic plan including addressing agency-wide operations, service strategies, technology upgrades and management development. This plan is developed by senior executive leaders and updated quarterly using standardized reporting tools.

Most reported plans contained elements of claims taking improvement with some focused on web process changes, and others dealt with call center upgrades. Alabama expects Internet usage to grow as its customer base becomes more computer literate. Several states agreed that future plans involve expanding self-service through improvements in Internet accessibility and clarity as well as improvements in IVR. Arizona intends to distribute as much information as possible to educate the public in self-service. Colorado plans to move away from telephone claims; 70 percent of its claims are self-service, and the goal is to be completely web-based. Iowa anticipates moving to web-based self-service and to use its call center as a support service for claimants who may have difficulty navigating the Internet. Altogether, at least 33 states reported plans to increase the number of web-based initial claims. Nevertheless, most will continue some form of IVR capacity, although enhanced to require less agent intervention, while some states, such as Maryland and Oklahoma, intend to retain their call center operations to provide in person customer service when needed.

Although a few states reported low interest among customers in using Internet filing (Connecticut and Missouri), many reported that most initial claims are filed on the web (Louisiana – 80 percent, Massachusetts – 80-90 percent, Montana – 80 percent and Mississippi – 70 percent). It should be noted that almost all states file continued claims either by IVR or Internet with very little need for agent intervention.



The trend for the future is toward Internet filing, although many states intend to retain some form of telephone claim filing capacity.

As the dizzying pace of technological change continues and new methods of accessing files emerges, many states have tried to include new application features in their processes. For example, some states indicated that they are already deploying mobile applications to access initial claim filing and other intake processes (Indiana and Tennessee), while 25 states indicated that they are either considering mobile applications or have definite plans to initiate them. Mobile applications, as used herein, mean the state having the software necessary to make claim filing and other communication readily available and easily used on hand-held devices including smart phones.

Many states described detailed plans for changing call center functions. California is working with Verizon on a system that would enable all staff to take claims from any location. The agency anticipates this will enable more staff to work from home. Several states plan to reduce call center activities. Connecticut moved all activity into a single call center; Florida is considering outsourcing “basic calls” similar to the way Georgia contracts out customer service calls to Xerox; Michigan has adopted a work processing function called “NICE” that will help phase out manual operations in the centers; Missouri plans to change fact finding dramatically so that it will be accomplished through the web or IVR; New Mexico has eliminated the need for clerical staff in call centers by retooling paperwork processes; and Tennessee’s *Zendesk* operating system has revolutionized its work processes and is updated every Thursday. Some states have substantially increased and expanded activities in call centers. Indiana added 28 part-time staff to handle the volume after consolidating customer services into call centers; Montana’s call center functions as the entire Benefits Section; and North Carolina expanded its call center operations in Charlotte. There is a changing mix of call center vendors and currently, most of these major call center vendors have contracts with states.

Closely related to changes in call center management and technology, many states have engaged in significant changes in their foundational UI computer systems, as reported earlier.

Depending on availability of resources, states may pursue different paths toward upgrading their mainline computer systems. These may include contracting with vendors, making changes with in-house state staff, joining consortia of other states for joint efforts to upgrade systems, or some combination of these approaches. The chart below sets forth the ways that various states indicated that they plan to upgrade their UI computer systems. The use of a “Y” after the state name indicates that the state intends to upgrade its call center system simultaneously. Some of these changes are partial.

***State Methods Used to Upgrade UI Computer Systems***

Contract Out	In-House	Consortia	Other
Alabama (Y)	Colorado	Connecticut	Kentucky (Y)
Arizona (Y)	D.C.	Georgia	Maine
California (Y)	New York (Y)	Iowa	Oregon
Florida		Maryland (Y)	
Louisiana (Y)		Mississippi (Y)	
Massachusetts (Y)		Missouri (Y)	
Oklahoma		North Carolina (Y)	
Pennsylvania (Y)		South Carolina (Y)	
Texas (Y)		Rhode Island (Y)	
Virginia (Y)			

Without question, the Great Recession and its accompanying effects, dramatically impacted state UI information technology systems. In response to this cataclysmic economic event, many states accelerated their efforts to automate claims-taking functions and to deploy the latest technologies, including expanded IVR software and Internet claims filing. Future plans appear to emphasize these emerging technologies, including mobile access, over traditional call center operations. However, many states intend to retain some form of call center operations both for claims intake and for customer service. And, the strain that the recessionary workloads placed on many of the UI legacy computer systems demonstrated the urgent need to upgrade and replace those systems.



## Chapter 3. Conclusion

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### a. Best Practices in Call Center Operations

States across the country are able to identify and describe in detail many management initiatives and successful technology enhancements that could be studied and adapted to other UI programs. A sample of states reveals what they consider to be best practices:

State	Best Practices in Call Center Operations
Connecticut	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Rely on staff with a lot of UI experience who came through the ranks</li> </ul>
Florida	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ New agents are trained to "hit the ground running"</li> </ul>
Minnesota	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Designing and integrating as if one big system</li> <li>▪ Getting the right call to the right person</li> </ul>
Missouri	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Organization of staff in rotating teams that cover all functions, from intake through adjudication</li> </ul>
Montana	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Planning a system (Lexus-Nexus) that will access most public record data bases, such as DMV, to affirm the claimant's identity online at time of filing</li> <li>▪ Issues and problems will be addressed early in the process, and a positive decision can be made to investigate or to proceed with the claim</li> </ul>
North Dakota	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Email and text messaging to claimants</li> <li>▪ Training agents in all phases of work</li> <li>▪ Completing work within expected time frames</li> </ul>
Ohio	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Telework</li> <li>▪ One call resolution</li> <li>▪ In-house build and maintenance of technical call center solutions</li> <li>▪ Dedicated staff monitoring central control</li> <li>▪ Chat online</li> <li>▪ Disaster recovery plan for technology</li> <li>▪ Lean program to reclassify CSRs</li> <li>▪ Mobile device screen configuration and text messaging</li> <li>▪ NICE quality monitoring and coaching feedback</li> </ul>
Tennessee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ <i>Zendesk</i> work flow support and tracking system, esp. the ticketing feature</li> </ul>

State	Best Practices in Call Center Operations
Texas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ One of our best practices is our management style that embraces agility and a willingness to try new processes</li> </ul>
Utah	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Our organizational structure</li> <li>▪ Integrity check with DMV</li> <li>▪ Live chat with multiple claimants</li> <li>▪ Reemployment services coordination with Job Centers</li> </ul>
Virginia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Organization of our intake process</li> <li>▪ Business continuity plan</li> </ul>
Washington	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ All agents are off the phone some part of every 3-4 days of the week</li> <li>▪ Use of SharePoint for business processes</li> <li>▪ Taking seasonal claims in person takes a lot of pressure off call center staff for those calls</li> <li>▪ Ergonomic workstations with sit/stand capability and large monitors</li> </ul>

## b. Opportunities for Technical Assistance

States operating call centers today have many ideas for improving the effectiveness of their current operations. Most of the recommendations focus on better use of technology (both call technology and web self-service) and strategies for engaging and retaining staff who deliver customer service and make decisions regarding a claimant’s eligibility for benefits. A representative group of ideas follows:

State	Recommendations to Improve Call Center Performance
California	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Better scheduling</li> <li>▪ Identifying trends</li> </ul>
Iowa	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Use adjudication vacancies to convert them to claims processing positions</li> <li>▪ Staffing, training and technology improvements</li> </ul>
Florida	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ More customer utilization of available automated tools</li> <li>▪ Improved retention of staff</li> </ul>
Louisiana	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Pay call center staff more and enable permanent appointments</li> <li>▪ Provide more opportunity for career advancement</li> </ul>

State	Recommendations to Improve Call Center Performance
Minnesota	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Providing more information about the web service to reduce calls</li> <li>▪ Better inform people how to use the web site</li> </ul>
Montana	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Knowing who our new, younger claimants will be and what kinds of technological solutions will work best for them</li> </ul>
Nebraska	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ More management, reducing the current span of control</li> <li>▪ A more robust training program, more professional training techniques, and more online training</li> </ul>
New Jersey	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Upgrade technology for effectiveness and efficiency</li> </ul>
New York	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ More staff to shorten wait time</li> <li>▪ Constantly using lean strategies to become more efficient</li> <li>▪ Be more proactive with claimants, getting them to self service</li> <li>▪ Review the reasons for inquiry calls to ascertain whether automated messages can be revised to make them simpler and thereby reduce the number of calls</li> </ul>
North Dakota	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Have an integrated UI system</li> <li>▪ Use more self-service</li> <li>▪ Train and deploy more staff</li> </ul>
Ohio	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Force more use of online filing by those able to do so</li> </ul>
Pennsylvania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Technology that would generate reports and professional documents</li> </ul>
Tennessee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Continue to deploy the latest technology</li> </ul>
Texas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Implementing a new integrated unemployment benefits system</li> <li>▪ Implementing performance-based incentives program</li> </ul>
Rhode Island	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Technology upgrades</li> <li>▪ Increased staff onboarding</li> </ul>

The ideas offered by the 47 states that operate call centers generally fall into three areas that could become the basis for productive engagement in UI call center development efforts:

**Modern technology.** With national vendors providing a wide variety of technology and tools to states, UI managers should be able to introduce cost-effective systems designed to both enhance the success of customer interactions and enable claimants to achieve their goals through the growing array of self-service applications being offered by states. Just as importantly,

UI managers need to become skilled in using the industry software that has been developed to forecast call center workloads, schedule staff for work, and enable managers to use performance metrics that focus on productive deployment of staff assigned to interact with customers.

**Training and development of personnel.**

Because of the high turnover of agents providing front line assistance to claimants, and the need to rapidly recruit, onboard and train personnel unfamiliar with the UI system, states have a common staff training and development need that could possibly be met through a core approach with similar learning objectives, critical elements (e.g., classroom, blended learning and coaching) and customized units to accelerate knowledge and skills development. Behavioral outcomes measures can be designed to achieve desired performance.



**Organizational design and deployment and retention of personnel.** There are just over 100 call centers in operation nationwide and teams of experienced managers dedicated to call center operations who can benefit from networking with other states and sharing best practices in managing operations and delivering team-based services to customers. State-to-state collaboration and visits to other states are greatly encouraged. With growing emphasis on first call resolution of customer service issues and increased reliance on teams of UI specialists who can handle all claims-related functions, all call center managers need to become adept at managing change, empowering staff to fully resolve customer concerns, and engaging staff in managing their career development.