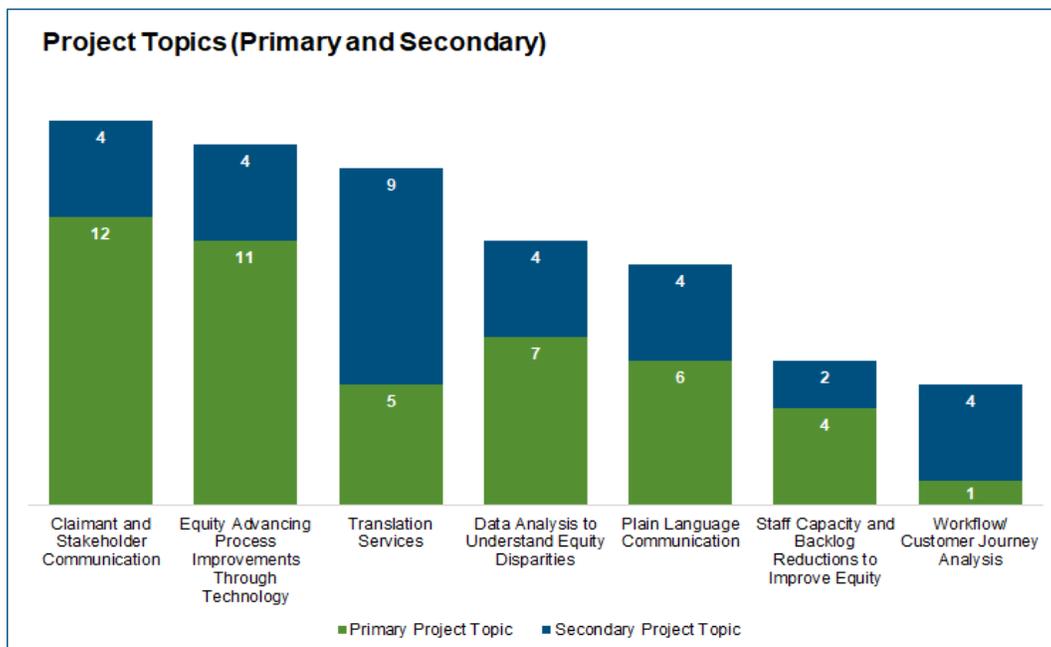


Promoting Equitable Access to Unemployment Compensation Programs: Overview of State Equity Grants

Quantitative Overview of Approved Grants

The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) has approved equity grants to 12 states, as of June 1, 2022. These 12 states will receive funding to implement 46 different projects designed to promote equitable access to unemployment compensation programs. In designing their projects, states had broad flexibility to develop their own state-specific strategies to promote equitable access within their own jurisdiction. The AIR team reviewed proposals for the approved equity grants and identified the following for each project: project topic, both primary and secondary; target populations; and languages used in the projects. State projects were designed to address equity barriers for specific populations, with these strategies as part of broader solutions to promote equitable access. Projects addressed topics such as claimant communication, process improvements and technology improvements that are all linked to underlying equity barriers for specific populations. Further, many state projects recognized the intersectional challenges of multiple barriers for individuals who are part of several targeted populations and designed projects to address the compounded impact of multiple barriers.

The team identified seven project topics; for each project, the team identified a primary topic and a secondary topic if needed. State equity projects approved to date most commonly promote equitable access through claimant and stakeholder communication, equity advancing process improvements through technology, and translation services. The chart below identifies the project topic descriptions used in the analysis, along with the number of projects that addressed each topic as either a primary or secondary area of focus.



In addition, the team identified the target populations for each state equity project. In total, projects will target 19 underserved populations and two other state-specific target populations. The top three target populations are Non-English or Limited-English Proficient, people with disabilities, and individuals residing in rural communities with multiple barriers. Many state projects focused on overlapping demographic and socioeconomic characteristics that present barriers to access.

Finally, the team identified languages that will be used in each state equity project. States identified 19 unique languages they will address in their projects. The predominant language was Spanish; other languages used in multiple projects include Chinese, Amharic, Korean, and Vietnamese.

Overview of Themes within Approved Grants

Although states' projects were varied in their scope, project type and focus, several themes emerged from the analysis of projects. Many state projects related to conducting customer outreach and expanding and improving services to claimants. States often planned to achieve these goals through plain language communication efforts and increased staffing. Some states proposed increasing staff capacity to address backlogs, while others proposed creating new staff positions focused on claimant communication, outreach, and navigation services. State projects also focused on advancing equity by using technology to streamline claim filing, certification, and other processes for underserved populations. Finally, data analysis projects typically involve analyzing data points from the customer journey or analyzing large data populations to understand and identify equity disparities. Examples of state projects in each of these themes are described below, including similar projects being undertaken in multiple states.

Customer Outreach

- Create short instructional videos, in English and Spanish, to explain common UI services (2 state projects)
- Conduct customer surveys to identify underserved populations; increase partnerships with community-based organizations serving those target populations
- Conduct user research to identify website content most frequently accessed by users; identify a website redesign that will make this content easier to find

Customer Service Improvements Through Tactical Staffing

- Create new staff positions focused on increasing responsiveness to customers with barriers, helping claimants navigate the claims process, and conducting outreach to target populations (4 state projects)
- Increase staffing to address appeals backlogs (3 state projects)
- Create a business unit focusing on equitable access for UI claimants
- Add UI staff to local job centers to improve customer service

Claimant Communications

- Conduct plain language and accessibility reviews of current UI web pages, handbooks, and claimant- and employer-facing materials; incorporate plain language to improve readability (5 state projects)
- Gather data on language preference from UI claimants; capture this data in the claimant record to trigger automatic translation requests and identify the need for translation services to these claimants
- Establish automated notifications to claimants informing them of their claim status and at key milestones

Claim Filing and Certification Process

- Purchase tablet devices for use in mobile units and in job centers to aid claimants with limited internet access in claim filing and certification (2 state projects)
- Incorporate text messaging to communicate more effectively with claimants (2 state projects)
- Update claim system to be compliant with accessible screen readers
- Use Human Centered Design (HCD) best practices to improve the digital experience of claimants
- Simplify fact-finding experience for claimants by creating dynamic and responsive questions, driven by a decision tree within the IT system, to tailor the fact-finding experience to the individual claimant
- Translate all RESEA and Eligibility Review related screens into Spanish

Equity Advancing Process Improvements Through Technology

- Analyze timeliness data for population groups with UI system accessibility challenges to identify disparities; use findings to develop strategies to remove barriers and drive staff training curriculum
- Analyze customer journey using data-driven models to identify areas of inequity; develop and present visualizations of data; make recommendations for UI business and system improvements
- Create a single reporting tool by combining data from multiple platforms (benefits management, phone system, public website, employer wage reporting system); use combined data to analyze customer outcomes

Workflow/ Customer Journey Analysis

- Study and understand the customer journey while engaging with the UI system to identify areas of inequity
- Use Human-Centered Design (HCD) best practices to improve the digital experience for claimants, focusing on the career center website and the UI claims portal
- Review current workflow and queue process of monetary determinations that need additional work; implement changes to enable the monetary unit to resolve monetary determinations more efficiently
- Enable claimants to upload required documents to their claim from their home thereby getting the information to agency sooner

DOL will award additional equity grants to states in the coming months.