Pathway to Recovery Quick Start Action Planner

This Pathway to Recovery Quick Start Action Planner (QSAP) can be used by the public workforce system to aid in planning and preparing for economic recovery.

Introduction

Now more than ever, the public workforce system can deliver critical support to job seekers and businesses across the country. This QSAP aims to assist states as they create and implement economic recovery plans. Designed to help states assess critical areas and strategies for recovery, this tool should be used across Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) partners and state agencies. The elements in the QSAP are derived from recent research and state reports and presentations in the following areas: Staffing, Technology, System Infrastructure and Capacity, Communication, and Funding.

Each state is encouraged to use this QSAP as a guide and add additional elements that reflect the unique characteristics of the state. Additional recovery resources can be found on the Pathway to Recovery Resources on WorkforceGPS.

Who should use the QSAP?

The QSAP is designed for leaders in the public workforce system primarily at the state level. It can be modified to address local area readiness or used in collaboration with state and local leaders. Local leaders are encouraged to participate in the process as they often play a crucial role in facility leasing, innovations in technology, and direct service to jobseekers and businesses. Completing the QSAP and holding a team discussion on the results will help states develop a shared understanding of preparedness to address high volumes of both claims and customer flow, in addition to strains on technology and physical space. The results of these discussions can help all WIOA partners and state agencies develop or improve readiness strategies and plans.

How can the QSAP be used for results?

The QSAP can be used in many ways to assess and prepare for recovery:

- **Individual Assessments and Team Discussion:** Individuals complete the QSAP and then share their results in a group setting – team discussion helps to align around current conditions and areas for action.
- **Facilitated Group Discussion:** A facilitator leads your team through the QSAP as part of a strategic planning session to collectively identify priorities for change.
- **Benchmarking Progress:** You can save the QSAP results as a benchmark – reengage your team to complete again in 6 months or a year to assess your progress.
- **Create an Economic Recovery Plan:** You can review team results and prioritize actions for topic areas scoring 1-3 as immediate needs and topic areas scoring 4-5 as secondary needs. Create an action plan to address each area, complete with action, specific steps to address, the designated person(s) responsible, and timelines.

Instructions

Each section includes a brief description, a list of topic areas to consider when planning and preparing for economic recovery concerning the identified topic area, and a list of additional resources to review.

For each of the topic areas, we suggest that states evaluate their readiness on a five-point scale, with 1 indicating "no work has been done on this item" and 5 indicating "we have fully addressed or implemented this item". The tables provide a place to capture notes and next steps. See the sample table below.

Topic Area	Rating	Notes & Next Steps
1. We have considered the possibility of a state hiring freeze and have developed a plan to seek waivers or other exemptions to meet our staffing capacity needs during a recession.	3	We will review state polices and waiver request process.

Staffing

The items in this section focus on the ability to quickly hire and/or retrain staff to be responsive to sudden increases in unemployment and/or demand for workforce services.

Staffing Levels & Hiring Options

Topic Area	Rating	Notes & Next Steps
1. We have anticipated potential staffing level needs for multiple recession scenarios.		
2. We have explored and understand the agency's options, flexibilities, and requirements for temporarily reassigning staff to new duties.		
3. We are familiar with and have a sufficient understanding of the hiring approval process – including identifying who needs to be involved in the approval process and what is required to obtain approval to hire.		
4. We have all the necessary paperwork required in the state hiring process and can immediately proceed with the hiring process.		
5. We have considered the possibility of a state hiring freeze and have developed a plan to seek waivers or other exemptions to meet our staffing capacity needs during a recession.		

Topic Area	Rating	Notes & Next Steps
6. We have explored the state agency's flexibility/authority to add full-time equivalent (FTE) during economic downturns. We have considered whether the agency needs to request and obtain legislative approval to expand FTE; how to process such positions if the full legislature is out of session; and whether the agency carries a certain number of vacant FTE as a contingency in the event of significant/prolonged workload increases.		
7. We have researched and identified the full array of hiring options allowed under state human resources regulations or policies, including avenues for quickly hiring staff. Also, we have reviewed and identified requirements, barriers, opportunities allowed in any collective bargaining agreements (if applicable) regarding alternative or quick hiring options.		
8. We maintain a list with current contact information of retirees that may be interested in future temporary work.		
9. We have a plan and processes in place for returning to baseline staff levels as the economy recovers.		
10. We have assessed whether current agency staff can be deployed to temporarily assist the UI program and identified a list of staff throughout the agency who have prior UI experience.		

Training and Upskilling

Topic Area	Rating	Notes & Next Steps
1. We have determined how quickly we can train newly hired staff.		
2. We have identified ways we can increase training capacity by simplifying or condensing the training process and making it available online or through recordings and printed materials where possible.		
3. We have ensured that staff is being adequately cross trained where there is a need (unemployment insurance [UI] claims taking and adjudication, reemployment, all functional areas of an American Job Center [AJC], etc.).		
4. We are maintaining a pool of UI trained workers that can be drawn upon quickly when assistance with the UI program is needed. This could include cross-trained staff who rotate through business units in UI, a permanent pool of intermittent workers, or some other approach.		

Topic Area	Rating	Notes & Next Steps
5. We have reviewed and, if needed, updated our training materials in the event of an expedited increase in UI staff. We have identified sources of training materials for UI intake staff, UI adjudication staff, and UI appeals staff. For each area, we have identified available trainers.		
6. We have provided training on labor market information to all staff as a refresher and we require all new staff to have training.		
7. We have provided customer service training to all staff as a refresher and we require all new staff to have training.		
8. We have expanded our staff training around dislocated worker services, rapid response, and business services to address the added need.		
9. We have the capacity to deliver trainings to staff remotely (through Skype, WebEx, or other virtual tools).		

Staffing Resources

- Mathematica Report: Summary of Literature Review: Challenges and Strategies Used to Operate Unemployment Insurance Programs During the Great Recession (pages 4-6)
- NASWA Post-Recession Report: Staffing section (pages 193-200)
- UIPL 18-09: Application of State-Wide Personnel Actions, including Hiring Freezes, to the UI Program
- OSHA: Guidance on Preparing Workplaces for COVID-19
- OSHA: Guidance on Returning to Work
- Wage and Hour: COVID and the American Workplace
- 10 Ways COVID-19 Could Change Office Design: World Economic Forum article
- A Common Sense Guide for Returning to The Post COVID-19 Workplace: Work Design magazine
- Suddenly Virtual: A Practical Guide for Frontline Service Providers: Guide from the Heldrich Center
- 4 Ways To Onboard New Hires Quickly Without Harming The Employee Experience: Forbes
- Strategies for Integrating the Workforce System: Best Practices in Six States: Mathematica
- NASWA State Workforce Agencies Respond to Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Technology

The items in this section focus on the increased strain on technology due to higher staff and customer use.

System Capacity (increased volume of calls, web traffic, more staff, etc.)

Topic Area	Rating	Notes & Next Steps
1. We have tablets or laptops for staff to use while delivering services outside of the office.		
2. We have sufficient resources to provide mobile hotspots for remote service delivery.		
3. We have access to tools to deliver training to staff and services to participants remotely.		
4. We have sufficient bandwidth to handle more customers using electronic resources in our offices.		
5. Does your system have software to protect participant PII data?		
6. We have evaluated and tested our technology's readiness for increased traffic and identified any steps we must take to assure service in the event of dramatic increases in workloads.		
7. We have thought through and developed plans to ensure we have the capacity to ramp up information technology (IT) support in the event Congress passes a temporary program to provide additional unemployment benefits or an extension of benefits or more reemployment services.		
8. We have an inventory of equipment and licensing durations and have assessed whether we have enough equipment and licenses to support anticipated increased staffing levels; or we have a plan on how to accommodate quick increases, if needed.		
9. We have considered how to use technology to streamline staff work, such as automating tasks and production of reports, or helping cluster similar work so that staff can gain specialized knowledge more quickly.		
10. We have considered the following call center strategies (if applicable) and made plans to adopt those we find helpful: virtual holds for phone-based claims; adding more phone lines; redirecting calls to low volume offices; increasing online capabilities; software or programing modification; and routing calls based on staff skill levels.		

Self-Service Options

Topic Area	Rating	Notes & Next Steps
1. We have self-service triage for customers, such as a high-level flow chart of all available programs).		
2. We have sufficient self-service terminals to meet the increase in participant traffic.		
3. We have updated fact sheets for job seeking and business customers.		
4. We have an updated central FAQ, easily located on our website. This includes resources related to accessing Unemployment Insurance benefits, online job search assistance and tools, resume and interview assistance and tools, and other resources and tools that may aid in reemployment efforts.		

Technology Resources

- Mathematica Report: Summary of Literature Review: Challenges and Strategies Used to Operate Unemployment Insurance Programs During the Great Recession (pages 6-8)
- NASWA Post-Recession Report: Technology section (pages 201-204)
- U.S. Government Accountability Office Report. Unemployment Insurance: States' Customer Service Challenges and DOL's Related Assistance report to the Ranking Member, Committee on Finance, U.S. Senate. Washington, DC, U.S. Government Accountability Office, May 2016 page 23)
- Effective Case Management and Counseling – The Role of Triage and Documentation
- Workforce Connect: Software that acts as a common front door for workforce agencies' programs and systems
- Report from Jobs for the Future: State Data Systems and Privacy Concerns: Strategies for Balancing Public Interests
- Building and Strengthening State Data Systems to Measure Community College and Workforce Outcomes
- Data Sharing for Policy Analysis & Program Evaluation
- ETA's online tools, including:
  - CareerOneStop
  - mySkills myFuture
  - My Next Move
  - Worker ReEmployment Portal
  - Service Locator
  - My Reemployment Plan

Infrastructure & Service Delivery

The items in this section discuss increased needs for infrastructure capacity, physical space, and service delivery.

Infrastructure & Space

Topic Area	Rating	Notes & Next Steps
1. We have considered and are prepared for regional variation in the impact of an economic downturn and demand for services.		
2. We have plans to coordinate with state and local partners to share resources, including optimizing office space, IT resources, and assignments for cross-trained staff.		
3. We have reviewed leases and facilities to determine what space is currently available and if there are options for expansion. In addition, we have researched state policy regarding emergency leases and have developed a plan to quickly increase office space and workstations.		
4. We have assessed and developed plans or appropriate workarounds concerning our IT systems' ability to accommodate and equip new staff where these staff would work (e.g., claims centers, American Job Centers, and telecommuting).		
5. We have reviewed our current telecommuting policies and the level of telecommuting activity. And, we have developed a plan to expand telecommuting, where appropriate, if we encounter limited availability of needed workspace.		
6. We have determined whether to have UI staff physically present in American Job Centers (if not already present) to assist with UI claims-taking during times of significant claims workloads and determined what, if any, changes to MOUs with local workforce boards would be necessary.		

Expanded Service Delivery

Topic Area	Rating	Notes & Next Steps
1. We have reviewed our virtual service delivery options for job seekers, and we link to our own tools and resources or the national job seeker tools and resources (e.g., CareerOneStop, mySkills myFuture, My Next Move, National Labor Exchange, etc.).		

Topic Area	Rating	Notes & Next Steps
2. We have plans for accommodating increased capacity in our Short-Time Compensation (STC)/Work Sharing program to serve additional employers (if applicable). Or, we are considering adopting/pursuing the adoption of a state STC program to provide employers in our state a layoff aversion option in future recessions.		
3. We have reviewed overtime rules and other factors related to extending operational hours and have developed a plan to extend hours to support key processes. Also, we have reviewed and identified requirements, barriers, opportunities allowed in any collective bargaining agreements (if applicable) regarding overtime and expanded hours of operation.		
4. We have identified community partners and/or staff at community hubs such as libraries that can provide basic UI information and have a plan to provide them with remote or in-person training.		
5. We have identified how we will implement and track any extensions to UI benefits as well as any new UI programs.		
6. We have reached out and engaged the state's public library association to develop relationships and discussed the role public libraries can play in assisting job seekers and UI claimants during a recession.		
7. The MOU with service providers accounts for potential increased demand during a recession or includes the ability for revisions.		
8. We are looking at policies and procedures to establish subsidized employment strategies with TANF, SNAP, and other partners.		
9. We are looking at partnerships to address emotional, mental health, and behavioral health issues of program participants (e.g., referral partners, resources available, etc.).		

Infrastructure and Service Delivery Resources

- NASWA Post-Recession Report (service delivery processes are listed on page 201 and business processes are listed on pages 203-205)
- RESEA Resources on the Reemployment Connections Community of Practice
- Short-Time Compensation Community of Practice
- UIPL 14-18: Unemployment Insurance and the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act
- NASWA Post-Recession Report (promising practices are identified throughout the report)

- The Roadmap for Navigating the CareerOneStop Suite of Career Tools explores the range of tools available to job seekers, employers/industry, and workforce professionals. The Service Delivery – Virtual Tools resource provides job seekers with access to virtual services, resources, and support including CareerOneStop tools like mySkills myFuture, Worker ReEmployment Portal, and Career Advisor
- The Heldrich Center developed the Virtual Services Toolkit: The Basics to help organizations communicate virtually as well as Suddenly Virtual: A Practical Guide for Frontline Service Providers During the COVID-19 Pandemic National Labor Exchange for Job Seekers to find jobs and Businesses to post jobs
- National Labor Exchange for job seekers to find jobs and businesses to post jobs

Communication

The items in this section discuss communication. Developing a clear communication plan allows states to quickly communicate the right information to the right people.

Communication Planning

Topic Area	Rating	Notes & Next Steps
1. We have identified all vendors, contractors, partners, and agency staff (e.g., IT, facilities management, unions, etc.) who will be impacted by increased demand for services, compiled their points of contact and contact information, and developed a communication plan.		
2. We have identified and are collaborating on communications with other state and local agencies impacted by a recession.		
3. We have identified key partners across state government who are impacted by a recession, compiled their contact information, and discussed our recession planning activities with them, as appropriate.		
4. We have shared information with our governor's office and/or executive branch budget office to ensure they have an appropriate understanding of the need for state labor/workforce agencies to quickly ramp up staff and operations during a recession.		

Communication Messaging (About Services)

Topic Area	Rating	Notes & Next Steps
1. We have ensured that all American Job Centers and local public libraries have the most current information/customer assistance materials on how to file UI claims.		

Topic Area	Rating	Notes & Next Steps
2. We have considered alternatives to the traditional call center structure, including using cell phones and email forms for inquiries, and telecommuting to support a rapid expansion of capacity.		
3. We have created a system for addressing common questions and routing an increased volume of phone calls. We have reviewed processes to ensure we can quickly add or change messages on our agency's website and to the in-bound telephone callers while on hold.		
4. We have reviewed messages/tutorials associated with our customer self-service options to ensure they are working properly and are easily understandable and helpful to users.		
5. We have reviewed and updated our claimant materials, making them more user-friendly and understandable to support claimants exercising self-service options.		
6. We have considered including a social media campaign to inform job seekers and business customers about needed services and self-service options.		

Communication Tools

Topic Area	Rating	Notes & Next Steps
1. We have assessed whether our current communication channels are sufficient and have a plan to add any additional lines of communication needed in times of significant claims demand (e.g., dedicated inquiry phone line(s), call-back (virtual hold) options, additional telephone lines, additional email boxes, and/or social media presence).		
2. We have planned for the need to add messages to our agency's website and to be played during holds on incoming telephone calls. These messages will provide relevant information to address common issues and frequently asked questions that may arise in times of increased workloads.		
3. We have calculated and developed plans for the quick implementation of an increased print load for UI and reemployment forms, mailers, etc.		

Messaging

Topic Area	Rating	Notes & Next Steps
1. We have discussed and outlined possible expanded access options and accompanying messaging content and strategies to help inform claimants and employers on how best to navigate access to the UI program during a recession.		
2. We have identified appropriate messaging methods to keep agency staff informed of changes that may develop because of increased workloads or new/additional benefits programs.		
3. We are prepared to respond to constituent complaints from a wide array of stakeholders, including worker advocates, the governor's office, the state legislature (committees and individual members), and our state's congressional delegation. We have identified the person or team to handle responses to inquiries from these stakeholders.		
4. We have assembled contact information for state and local media.		

Communication Resources

- MDRC's Center for Applied Behavior Science checklist: Getting Your Message Across with the Effective Communications Checklist
- Report from the Heldrich Center: Virtual Services Toolkit: The Basics
- Blog from Hootsuite: Social Media in Government: Benefits, Challenges, and How it's Used
- Facebook for Government, Politics and Advocacy
- The Art of Positive Communication TEDx Talk
- STC Business Outreach Toolkit

Funding

The items in this section are designed to help states anticipate and plan for increased funding needs.

Administrative Funding

Topic Area	Rating	Notes & Next Steps
1. We have completed a cost analysis of the activities anticipated in this QSAP for recession planning.		

Topic Area	Rating	Notes & Next Steps
2. We understand how to calculate the amount of funding needed, when the funding needs to be obligated, and the potential sources of funding to address increases in UI claims workload and demands for UI services.		
3. We understand how to calculate the amount of funding needed, when the funding needs to be obligated, and potential funding sources to increase AJC services for dislocated workers and business services.		
4. We have identified the appropriate team for planning and developing supplemental budget request(s) and submissions for grant opportunities, if any such opportunities are made available during a recession.		
5. We have communicated with statewide finance entities on our resource needs and identified options on how resources can be made available quickly, if needed.		
6. We have discussed with the governor's office or appropriate State executive-branch budget office the possible need for short term funding to increase capacity to meet heightened workloads during the gap in time before federal above-base funding is available.		

UI Trust Fund Solvency

Topic Area	Rating	Notes & Next Steps
1. Our state has sufficient funds in its UI trust fund to get through a 12-month recession.		
2. Appropriate staff have been trained on the new forecasting model and are able to use it to calculate the impacts of increased demands on the trust funds in recessionary periods.		
3. We have researched options for funding benefits payments, including Title XII borrowing and/or alternative borrowing options should our trust fund become depleted in a recession.		

Funding Resources

- Mathematica Report: Summary of Literature Review: Challenges and Strategies Used to Operate Unemployment Insurance Programs During the Great Recession (pages 8-9)
- NASWA Post-Recession Report (UI Administrative Financing and UI Claims Workload is described on pages 175-182)
- TEN 12-18: New State Unemployment Insurance (UI) Forecasting Model Available
- NASWA post-recession Report (pages 229-235)