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Support for the Unemployment Insurance
Call Center Operations**



UI Call Center Final Assessment Guide

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Prepared for:

**U.S. Department of Labor
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Introduction

This *Assessment Guide* has been developed by Coffey Consulting, LLC to assist the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) in conducting a study of UI Call Center Operations and Technologies in each State. This will be accomplished by an analysis of study findings that will emerge in **two phases**:

1. A short turnaround survey of the 53 UI programs designed to capture basic information about functions performed by today's call centers and comparative data on how the Centers are organized and operated [OMB Control No. 1205-0436].
2. Interviews held with Administrators in the 53 states and territories that will make it possible to understand each State's current operating challenges, critical technologies, performance management practices, management priorities, and plans for the future.

In order to make the interviews with UI Administrators as productive and efficient as possible, Coffey Consulting interviewers will review each state's responses to the questions in the short turnaround survey to gain initial insight into the state's operations prior to conducting the in-depth interview(s) by telephone.

The objectives of the telephone interviews conducted using this *Assessment Guide* are to:

- Gather additional information and detail about the evolution, functions and activities performed; workloads; staffing; and workflow;
- Determine how the Call Centers handle both anticipated and unanticipated workloads;
- Discover how States hire and train staff, monitor their performance and provide technical assistance to call Center staff and operations, as needed;
- Review the performance of the Call Center(s) to determine whether it is (are) meeting agency goals and/or performance standards;
- Explore new methods undertaken and/or old methods discarded that have led to improved customer service and/or efficiencies;
- Identify best practices that could be shared with Call Centers in other states to assist them in improving performance;
- Determine the Call Center utilization and interface with other technologies to file and process claims and/or obtain information on the status of a claim (Internet, web, web chat, mobile, etc.); and
- Obtain information on future plans for the Call Centers regarding structure, process, organization (people) and technologies.

The perspectives and insights of State UI staff will be most useful in achieving study objectives. The *Assessment Guide* has been divided into topics so that the State Administrator can 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.

The *Assessment Guide* is 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

	<i>Coffey Consulting questions</i>	<i>In the space below, Coffey Consulting researchers have recorded the State's responses to the UI Call Center Survey for States (May2015)</i>
1.0	Current State – Call Center Operations	
1.1	<p>The questions in this section will help us understand how you are operating today.</p> <p>1.1.1 Are your Call Centers configured differently than they were prior to or during the “Great Recession” that began in 2008?</p> <p>1.1.2 What are the primary organizational units housed within the Call Center (e.g., UI claims intake, customer service, UI tax operations/functions, adjudications, back office operations, etc.)?</p> <p>1.1.3 Are staff assignments determined based on:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Grade level b. Seniority c. Expertise in certain types of claims (e.g., combined wage claims, Trade Readjustment Allowances (TRA), etc.) d. Recent subject-matter training e. Other considerations <p>1.1.4 Are staff in these units cross-trained and supporting multiple units?</p> <p>1.1.5 Are staff rotated through different functions on a systematic schedule?</p> <p>1.1.6 If yes, what units are involved in this</p>	

	<p>approach?</p> <p>1.1.7 Is the Call Center staffing organized in a traditional hierarchical structure or in teams, where members of the team are mutually accountable for related tasks?</p> <p>1.1.8 If in teams, on average, how many people are assigned to a team?</p>	
1.2	<p>Are customers routed to and within the Call Center differently (e.g., prioritized) based on their claim status (e.g., initial claim, pending claim, in adjudication process, etc.)?</p>	
1.3	<p>What percentage of initial claims processed in the Call Center provide all data needed to allow the monetary eligibility determination process to begin, and what portion requires further handling by other functional areas (e.g., special program claims, back office operations, etc.)?</p>	
1.4	<p>1.4.1 Does the Call Center play a role in registering claimants for work?</p> <p>1.4.2 If so, please describe the process.</p> <p>1.4.3 What role does the Call Center play in providing benefit rights to claimants?</p> <p>1.4.4 How are claimants made aware of the available services in the American Job Centers and method(s) of contacting them for services?</p> <p>1.4.5 Overall, what role does the Call Center play in providing reemployment services to claimants?</p>	
1.5	<p>1.5.1 Do Call Center staff taking claims also handle customer service calls, such as claim status or general inquiries?</p>	

	<p>1.5.2 Are all customer service staff trained and "empowered" to resolve problems, or are there specific problems that must be resolved by a specialist or supervisor?</p> <p>1.5.3 Does the state track the reasons for customer service calls?</p> <p>1.5.4 If so, what reason(s) constitutes the majority of customer service calls (reason for call)?</p> <p>1.5.5 What report(s) provide these data?</p>	
1.6	<p>1.6.1 Are certain integrity-related activities (ID authentication, overpayment offset, SSA cross-match, corrections x-match, etc.) automatically integrated in the claims taking process?</p> <p>1.6.2 If so, which activities?</p>	
1.7	<p>1.7.1 What hours of operation are Call Centers generally staffed?</p> <p>1.7.2 In a typical non-peak week, are the hours that the Call Center is operational generally sufficient to allow all customers (whether seeking to file initial claims and/or resolve problems) to complete their requests satisfactorily?</p>	
1.8	<p>1.8.1 Is there a plan in place (Continuity of Operations Plan) that allows for expanding hours and/or adding additional staff, either through use of intermittent staff, temporary and/or use of staff from other UI units to assist customers, to satisfactorily complete their business?</p> <p>1.8.2 What are the most effective components of the plan?</p> <p>1.8.3 What was your experience in attempting to add staff as the Great Recession took hold?</p> <p>1.8.4 Reflecting on that experience, what</p>	

	<p>lessons were learned that might inform future efforts?</p>	
1.9	<p>1.9.1 Does the Call Center provide the option to callers of receiving a “call-back” as an option to holding for an estimated period of time?</p> <p>1.9.2 If so, are they scheduled calls or a commitment within “X” amount of time?</p> <p>1.9.3 Does the call-back option apply only to certain functions, such as filing a new claim, etc.?, or,</p> <p>1.9.4 is it available only if the wait time exceeds X amount of time?, or,</p> <p>1.9.5 Is it available at all times for any purpose when a caller is placed on hold?</p> <p>1.9.6 Explain the automated outbound technology used for callbacks.</p>	
1.10	<p>1.10.1 Are callbacks and written requests for information handled in separate units from the Call Center?</p> <p>1.10.2 If handled by operating units outside the Call Center operations, what steps are taken to ensure that requests are responded to expeditiously?</p>	
1.11	<p>1.11.1 Does the Call Center operate in a virtual environment, meaning multiple geographically dispersed Centers are handling calls as one large Call Center?</p> <p>1.11.2 Are any Call Center staff working from home or in State offices not co-located with the main UI Centers?</p> <p>1.11.3 If so, how many; what functions do they perform specifically; and</p>	

	<p>1.11.4 how are they selected, trained, supported, monitored and managed?</p> <p>1.11.5 What IT arrangements are required?</p>	
2.0	Technologies and Tools Supporting Call Center Operations	
2.1	<p>2.1.1 When were current Call Center technologies/tools last updated/implemented?</p> <p>2.1.2 Are vendors used for the various technologies that exist within the Call Center?</p> <p>2.1.3 If so, which technologies?</p> <p>2.1.4 Do you have a central control center that manages technology and Call Center operations (staffing, scheduling, reporting, technology administration)?</p> <p>2.1.5 Do you use other applications in addition to core UI applications (e.g., CRM – customer relationship management or case management) to support customer interaction and call tracking and other workflow related activities?</p> <p>2.1.6 Please describe.</p> <p>2.1.7 How long can a call remain in the queue before being dropped?</p> <p>2.1.8 If calls are dropped, is dropping done automatically by the phone system (ACD)?</p> <p>2.1.9 Describe the tools available for managers/supervisors to evaluate queue volume, wait time, agent availability, volume, call length, follow-up time, etc.</p>	

2.2	<p>2.2.1 Can claimants, employers, agency staff, or other outside agency staff contact the Center by means other than phone (email, web, fax, chat, SMS, white mail)?</p> <p>2.2.2 If yes, describe the purpose allowed, process and technology in place for each.</p> <p>2.2.3 Does the state offer a mobile application as a method for interacting with UI?</p> <p>2.2.4 If yes, please describe the process (e.g., weekly certifications).</p> <p>2.2.5 When were these applications developed and launched?</p>	
2.3	<p>2.3.1 Does the Call Center staff use outbound tools to communicate with claimants, employers, other agencies, etc.?</p> <p>2.3.2 What technology is used (email, fax, SMS, outbound dialer, live calls, etc.)? Describe the process.</p> <p>2.3.3 Are usage statistics tracked for future planning purposes?</p>	
2.4	<p>2.4.1 What is the age of the Call Center technologies currently in place at the Center (phone and core systems)?</p> <p>2.4.2 When last updated, were the Call Center technologies included in a totally remodeled UI system designed to function together?</p> <p>2.4.3 Or were they added to an existing UI system and patched in?</p> <p>2.4.4 What is the age and general condition of the center facility?</p> <p>2.4.5 Does the facility's condition, layout, environmental conditions, or anything else act</p>	

	as a barrier to providing services efficiently?	
2.5	<p>2.5.1 How are IT services handled in relation to the Call Center, i.e., as an integrated part of the Call Center or as an outside service provider to the Center?</p> <p>2.5.2 Is there an IT presence in the Center for primary UI applications, workstation/desktop support, or other?</p> <p>2.5.3 If yes, please describe and estimate what amount of time is dedicated to on-site support.</p> <p>2.5.4 Are the IT staff agency employees, and are they dedicated to UI?</p> <p>2.5.5 Is any part of the UI application (mainframe or other) supported by cloud computing and/or a managed service provider?</p>	
2.6	<p>2.6.1 If your agency has more than one Center, or employs a virtual Center, can calls be moved between Centers to balance workload and reduce queue/waiting time?</p> <p>2.6.2 If yes, describe the process.</p> <p>2.6.3 Do you have a similar ability to share workload with Call Centers belonging to other state agencies?</p> <p>2.6.4 If yes, describe the relationship and process.</p>	
2.7	<p>2.7.1 Do you have a business continuity and disaster recovery plan that covers Call Center operations?</p> <p>2.7.2 Has the plan been tested?</p> <p>2.7.3 If so, when was it last tested?</p> <p>2.7.4 Is the plan part of a larger statewide plan?</p>	

3.0	Call Center Management	
3.1	What is the most significant challenge you face in managing the Call Center(s)?	
3.2	<p>3.2.1 What is your general method for managing the overall workload of the Call Center and related functions (e.g., adjudication cases) when many of these work units become burdened with calls and cases that exceed capacity and undermine the ability to meet federal performance standards?</p> <p>3.2.2 Do you maintain an operations manual that relates to managing the Call Center operation?</p>	
3.3	<p>3.3.1 If your agency allows in-person filing, or web based filing, does the Center play a role in supporting these functions and,</p> <p>3.3.2 if so, how?</p> <p>3.3.3 Do Call Center staff play a role in this function?</p>	
3.4	<p>3.4.1 How are staff hired/replaced?</p> <p>3.4.2 Does the agency draw from: other areas within UI?</p> <p>3.4.3 Other agencies within the state?</p> <p>3.4.4 External new hires with Call Center experience?</p> <p>3.4.5 Has the HR section modified the job description for entry level UI intake workers to reflect contact center duties, and have the knowledge, skills and abilities (KSAs) required for the position changed?</p>	

	<p>3.4.6 Does the agency have a formal training program for Call Center staff?</p> <p>3.4.7 What is the normal duration of training required before taking calls from individuals seeking UI benefits?</p> <p>3.4.8 Is a training manual maintained and available to all staff?</p> <p>3.4.9 Does the agency's training program work for both new hires and existing staff moving into new roles?</p> <p>3.4.10 To what extent is it classroom style, computer based/online, conducted from home online?</p> <p>3.4.11 What is the duration of training before a new hire is permitted to take the first call?</p> <p>3.4.12 How is coaching used to enhance staff performance on a continuing basis?</p> <p>3.4.13 Who provides coaching to Call Center agents once they complete basic training?</p> <p>3.4.14 In order to increase the KSAs of Call Center staff and enhance promotional opportunities, does the state agency provide and encourage developmental assignments?</p>	
3.5	<p>3.5.1 How are technical assistance needs such as training, process reengineering, IT, HR, or other needs provided to the Call Center?</p> <p>3.5.2 Please describe the type, provider, and how these services are delivered.</p>	
3.6	<p>3.6.1 How does the Call Center provide services to individuals with physical disabilities (vision, hearing, mobility, etc.)?</p>	

	<p>3.6.2 Is staff trained to enable the provision of assistance to individuals with special needs?</p> <p>3.6.3 How does the Call Center provide services to individuals with limited English proficiency?</p> <p>3.6.4 Do you have multilingual staff and/or use outside language translation services (e.g., Language Line)?</p>	
3.7	<p>3.7.1 How many Call Centers do you have and where are they located? (City/town)</p> <p>3.7.2 What is the ratio of supervisors to agents?</p> <p>3.7.3 How many agents are in the Call Center(s)? Please provide for each location.</p> <p>3.7.4 Professional ___ FT</p> <p>3.7.5 Professional ___ PT</p> <p>3.7.6 Para-Professional ___ FT</p> <p>3.7.7 Para-Professional ___ PT</p> <p>3.7.8 Support Staff ___ FT</p> <p>3.7.9 Support Staff ___ PT</p>	
3.8	<p>3.8.1 During peak/seasonal periods do you use staff from the back office (e.g., adjudication, etc.)?</p> <p>3.8.2 During peak/seasonal periods do you use staff from other functional areas or other departments within the agency? (i.e., UI Tax or Revenue, Benefit Payment Control or Benefit Accuracy Measurement program staff)</p> <p>3.8.3 Do you use staff from other state agencies?</p> <p>3.8.4 Do you use staff from outside sources, such as staffing companies?</p> <p>3.8.5 Do you utilize overtime for current staff,</p>	

	<p>and</p> <p>3.8.6 if so, what kind of limits do you place on overtime usage?</p> <p>3.8.7 How do you manage intermittent “spikes” in call volumes (non-peak/seasonal)?</p>	
3.9	<p>3.9.1 Do you monitor agents while they are on calls?</p> <p>3.9.2 If so, how is it performed and how frequently?</p> <p>3.9.3 How do you provide feedback to staff and how often?</p>	
3.10	<p>3.10.1 What reports do you use to monitor Call Center performance and</p> <p>3.10.2 How often do you use them?</p> <p>3.10.3 What management software is used to provide reports?</p> <p>3.10.4 Are calls recorded?</p> <p>3.10.5 If so, why and how often are they reviewed?</p>	
3.11	<p>3.11.1. If you could change anything in the way the Call Center is managed, what would it be and what objectives would you seek?</p> <p>3.11.2 What would it take to improve Call Center performance?</p> <p>3.11.3 Describe what you consider to be a “best practice” in operation of your UI call center.</p> <p>3.11.4 Describe what you consider to be any shortcomings in call center operations.</p>	

4.0	Performance Management and Measures	
4.1	<p>4.1.1 Describe the current Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in place including their purpose, frequency of use, how reports are produced, and current levels of performance against these KPIs.</p> <p>4.1.2 Have you used other KPIs in the past that are no longer being used?</p> <p>4.1.3 If yes, why did management stop using them or make changes?</p>	
4.2	<p>4.2.1 Describe the process used to identify and select current KPIs for use.</p> <p>4.2.2 Are KPIs and related performance data shared with Center staff?</p> <p>4.2.3 How and when are they shared?</p> <p>4.2.4 Do the staff generally understand the relationship between the KPIs and the Call Center's operational goals?</p> <p>4.2.5 How is it accomplished?</p>	
4.3	<p>4.3.1 Do all major Call Center functions and activities have KPIs in place?</p> <p>4.3.2 How do the KPIs relate to UI Federal Performance standards for timeliness, quality, and accuracy?</p> <p>4.3.3 Which KPIs have no relationship to current Federal Performance Standards?</p>	
4.4	<p>4.4.1 Describe the process used to identify the root causes of non-performance in measured areas and the process to design and implement corrective measures.</p> <p>4.4.2 What role does staff play in these processes?</p>	

	<p>4.4.3 Are Call Center employee performance appraisals tied to Call Center performance metrics?</p> <p>4.4.4 If so, how?</p>	
4.5	<p>4.5.1 Is KPI performance against goals subject to measurement by staff from outside the Center, i.e., Benefit Accuracy Measurement, Benefit Quality Control, technical assistance staff, etc.?</p> <p>4.5.2 Is KPI performance routinely reported to agency senior and executive level management?</p> <p>4.5.3 Do you inform the public of the goals of the Call Center and attainment of those goals?</p> <p>4.5.4 If so, how?</p>	
4.6	<p>4.6.1 In broad terms, describe when you, your staff, and your customers think you have done a good job.</p> <p>4.6.2 Are processes or tools in place to capture feedback from claimants or employers relative to their experience with the Center and/or customer satisfaction levels?</p> <p>4.6.3 If yes, please describe.</p> <p>4.6.4 Has an average time been established to respond to customer inquiries and to resolve them?</p> <p>4.6.5 Is the Call Center meeting the standard?</p>	
5.0	Future State – Call Center Operations	
5.1	5.1.1 What are the most important lessons	

	<p>learned from the last recession?</p> <p>5.1.2 How have you prepared for the next recession?</p> <p>5.1.3 Has the operation of Call Centers been recently affected by the development and implementation of a new UI system?</p> <p>5.1.4 If so, how?</p>	
5.2	<p>5.2.1 Is there a strategic plan in place for guiding the long-range planning for Call Center operations, service strategies, technology upgrades, staff development, and management?</p> <p>5.2.2 If yes, please describe.</p> <p>5.2.3 How is the plan developed, executed, maintained and updated?</p>	
5.3	<p>5.3.1 Do you currently utilize claimant self-service options for filing claims?</p> <p>5.3.2 If so, what are they and what is the plan for using them in the future?</p> <p>5.3.3 Is web-based and mobile filing a key component of your future service strategy?</p> <p>5.3.4 If yes, how does the Call Center fit into that strategy?</p>	
5.4	<p>5.4.1 Other than Call Center functions mentioned in above sections of this guide, are there any functions currently being performed in Call Centers that will be phased out over time?</p>	

	<p>5.4.2 If so, what are they?</p> <p>5.4.3 When are they scheduled to be phased out?</p> <p>5.4.4 Do you have plans to expand or contract the number or size of the Call Center(s)?</p> <p>5.4.5 How many additional staff were added to handle the increased volume associated with the recession and temporary emergency unemployment programs and</p> <p>5.4.6 How has these staff been utilized as claim and call volumes have dropped?</p>	
5.5	<p>5.5.1 Do you intend to make any significant changes to the Call Center operation (location, outsourcing, etc.) within the next two to three years?</p> <p>5.5.2 If yes, please describe the changes and why they are being made.</p>	
5.6	<p>5.6.1 Does the agency intend to replace or upgrade any Call Center technology in the near future?</p> <p>5.6.2 If yes, please describe and why.</p>	
5.7	<p>5.7.1 Is your state currently involved in a modernization of the UI system?</p> <p>5.7.2 If so, are Call Centers involved or affected?</p> <p>5.7.3 If not currently involved in a modernization program, do you have any plans to do so in the near future?</p>	

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