



# Addressing Barriers to Unemployment Insurance Program Access Through Community-Based Navigation: Findings from New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Pennsylvania

## SUMMARY

This spotlight brief highlights approaches used by three of the Unemployment Insurance (UI) Navigator grantees, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Pennsylvania, to fill gaps in face-to-face UI services for historically underserved populations, including older adults, rural residents, and potential claimants from Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) communities. This brief is part of a study funded by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), Chief Evaluation Office, that explores the implementation of [Unemployment Insurance \(UI\) Navigator Grants](#), which seven states received in 2022. The DOL's Employment and Training Administration funded these three-year competitive grants, which are aimed at supporting efforts to promote equitable access to UI benefits. Visit the [Navigator Evidence-Building Portfolio](#) website for additional information about the study's design and related publications. A full study report will be available in early 2025.

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

- According to UI staff and Navigators in three UI grantee states (New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Pennsylvania), historically underserved populations such as older adults, rural residents, and potential claimants from BIPOC communities face barriers to receiving UI benefits, including 1) a lack of understanding of or knowledge about UI eligibility criteria, 2) a lack of trust, 3) a lack of transportation, and 4) limited proficiency with or access to technology.
- Historically underserved populations such as older adults, rural residents, and potential claimants from BIPOC communities may benefit from in-person services in their communities to increase awareness about UI eligibility and criteria, mitigate technology and transportation barriers, and foster connections to bolster trust.
- Example in-person services include Oklahoma offering UI Navigator services in a grocery store/nonprofit organization, Pennsylvania Navigators meeting rural potential claimants near their homes and at centralized community locations, and New Mexico deploying trusted Community Health Workers to meet potential claimants in their homes and at other community locations.
- State UI agencies that want to support underserved populations who may need in-person services or face transportation or technology challenges could consider implementing similar community-based Navigation strategies.

[SEE FULL STUDY](#)

**TIMEFRAME:** 2023-2024  
**SUBMITTED BY:** Mathematica

**PARTNER AGENCY:** Employment and Training Administration  
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