



Tech Executive Leadership Initiative

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The National Unemployment Crisis Playbook

Defining procedures for a coordinated and efficient unemployment crisis response

PROBLEM

To support workers through the COVID-19 pandemic, Congress passed the \$2.2 trillion Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act in March 2020. The Act significantly altered the terms for conventional unemployment assistance and provided assistance to previously ineligible workers through a new category of Pandemic Unemployment Assistance (PUA). As a result, states rushed to update their systems for processing unemployment assistance claims to deliver benefits to newly-eligible workers. Regrettably, states have been overwhelmed by massive demand. As a result, millions of Americans have not received the support they qualify for. These burdens exacerbate the strain unemployment agencies already face due to fluctuating funding. **How might the federal government help states deliver unemployment assistance to people faster as the program and nature of the work change?**

To learn more about this
project, please visit
aspenpolicyhub.com/teli.



Tech Executive Leadership Initiative

ABOUT TELI

This project was completed as part of the pilot Tech Executive Leadership Initiative (TELI), a skills-building initiative to prepare experienced technology leaders to engage effectively with public sector challenges. Each team was given the opportunity to tackle one of two policy challenge prompts. Over the course of eight weeks, the teams conducted research, narrowed their focuses to particular aspects of the prompts, and proposed solutions. Learn more at aspentechpolicyhub.com/teli.

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FOCUS

The federal government lacks an effective process for integrating state unemployment insurance (UI) agencies' feedback into crisis UI legislation and executive orders. This both impedes state agencies from implementing crisis UI programs in a timely manner and dashes expectations of unemployed workers eligible for benefits. During the two unemployment crises in the last 15 years (2008 and 2020), there was no cohesive “playbook” the federal government could refer to. As a result, there were meaningful gaps in communication between the federal government and state unemployment agencies and a lack of responsiveness to state agencies' input. Unfortunately, this led to legislative mandates that had no clear way for states to implement them.

SOLUTIONS

The US needs a playbook for national unemployment crises. The [National Unemployment Crisis Playbook](#) is a first draft of such a playbook. The playbook is based on research and interviews with stakeholders from several state unemployment agencies, the National Association of State Workforce Agencies, the federal government, and technology or policy professionals with extensive government experience. Broken into four chapters, the playbook includes actionable guides to:

- Prepare robust, resilient, and dependable unemployment crisis response systems;
- Identify and declare a National Unemployment Crisis (NUC) when one is underway;
- Optimize state and federal collaboration to respond to constituent needs effectively and in a timely fashion; and
- Determine key learnings after an unemployment crisis to iterate the playbook.

This playbook will help ensure alignment between federal and state agencies. Most importantly, this will help government stakeholders respond more adeptly to each NUC as it happens.