



## Connecting with Rural Job Seekers During the Coronavirus Pandemic

In times of a pandemic, health providers and workforce service providers can align communication streams to effectively reach those in need, particularly in rural communities.

This quick reference guide demonstrates how outreach strategies for essential health services can be refined and leveraged with the workforce system. It stems from rural outreach strategies defined by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services for youth-based programs in rural communities and is enhanced with workforce system expertise.

Centered on using “where they are” behaviors in times of the coronavirus, this guide identifies potential points of contact where messaging can be delivered.

Communications with workforce system partners in rural areas can be enhanced, and any limited broadband internet access situations can be overcome with the strategies outlined in this guide.

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### A ‘Reach Them Where They Are’ Strategy

#### Workforce and Unemployment Service Providers

In times of a pandemic and economic uncertainty, communities rely on workforce and unemployment service of these providers to give timely and accurate information related to unemployment insurance benefits available and access to those benefits.

American Job Centers and state unemployment insurance agencies can make information available online and in public service announcements. Also, connect to people where they are through healthcare service providers, essential businesses, and community-based groups and service-providers (examples provided below).

#### Healthcare Service Providers

In times of a healthcare crisis such as a pandemic, health providers—doctors, nurses, lab technicians, pharmacists, and local community health centers or primary care associations—are trusted resources to tap into.

Communities rely on the services of these providers and engage with them for much needed support.

Distributing workforce service messaging in the form of tangible palm aids and checklists, waiting area signs/posters, or via appointment confirmations and billing communications (text, email, mail) is a viable way to get important messages to this audience during healthcare exchanges.



#### **EXAMPLES OF PROVIDERS**

- ▶ Coronavirus Testing Centers
- ▶ Independent Labs
- ▶ Hospitals
- ▶ Medical Centers / Clinics
- ▶ Pharmacies

### **Essential Businesses**

Rural populations rely heavily on getting information through “word-of-mouth” making these ideal places to spark conversations or share simple outreach materials.

Leave-behinds can be on checkout counters, posters and signs can be positioned at entrances, and inserts can be added to carryout bags or placed in invoices.

Local businesses may also allow you to use their business as a venue for outreach or even enrollment events.

#### **EXAMPLES OF ESSENTIAL BUSINESSES**

- ▶ Grocers
- ▶ Restaurants (to-go or limited seating)
- ▶ Food Delivery Services (Uber Eats, Door Dash, etc.)
- ▶ Utility Providers

### **Community-Based Groups and Services**

There are various opportunities to engage with families. Participate in local events that are part of their day-to-day routine, and share information at community locations such as libraries, churches, laundromats, and grocery stores – environments where families work, play, and pray.

Consider connecting with community partners including schools, childcare centers, faith organizations, and government agencies that serve eligible families. Share materials for posting at their locations, join in events to conduct enrollment, or hold information sessions with organization employees.

#### **EXAMPLES OF COMMUNITY-BASED GROUPS AND SERVICES**

- ▶ Food Banks
- ▶ Churches / Faith-based Organizations
- ▶ Nonprofits (mental health, addiction recovery, etc.)
- ▶ Community Health Departments
- ▶ Postal Service
- ▶ Professional Associations
- ▶ School Districts
- ▶ Sports and Arts Associations



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## Existing Communication Channels

### Local Vehicles for Information Sharing

There are a variety of local communications channels to tap into. Local newspapers and radio stations can run public service announcements, which can also be delivered via their “on-hold” messaging.

Scheduling on-air interviews with center leadership is a strategy to reach rural employers and job seekers, should budget be a concern.

An effective means of distributing simple yet specific service information is via SMS channels or texts. This method of communication has become more and more customary and is quite useful.

Mailing inserts from UI, SNAP/TANF, utility bills, etc., that detail workforce services can be added to checks distributed by other system providers and included in billing statements mailed from local utilities.

An established and effective mode of communicating within rural communities is the use of billboards. There is a greater need for road travel to and from work and essential businesses within these localities, which lends itself well to this method of visual communication.

### EXAMPLES OF LOCAL COMMUNICATION VEHICLES

- ▶ Radio
- ▶ Local Television
- ▶ Community Hotlines
- ▶ Newspapers
- ▶ SMS Channels
- ▶ Inserts in Mailings
- ▶ Billboards