

## **A New Approach for Collecting Data from Long-Term Non-Respondents in the Multiple Worksite Report**

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*Any opinions expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not constitute policy of the Bureau of Labor Statistics.*

### **Abstract**

The Bureau of Labor Statistics' Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW) is a federal/state cooperative program that publishes a count of monthly employment and total quarterly wages. The survey is reported quarterly by employers covering 98 percent of U.S. jobs. Estimates are available at the county, MSA, state and national levels by industry. The Multiple Worksite Report (MWR) asks most multi-location employers to provide employment and wage data for all of their establishments covered under one Unemployment Insurance (UI) account in a State. They are encouraged to report MWR data online through the MWR Web system, however those that do not report online are sent a paper form twice per quarter (an initial request, and a follow-up). There are two subsets of employers being targeted in the new approach: long-term non-respondents, and those that do not fill out the form but instead send in a print-out listing. In lieu of an initial mailing form, a one-page letter was sent out with web credentials to encourage these respondents to report on the web. This paper summarizes the procedures and response results associated with the Web Only Letter.

**Keywords:** online solicitation; online data collection; non-respondents

### **Background**

As internet access for businesses becomes more widespread, programs within the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) are increasingly implementing web-based data collection. The Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW) is a federal/state cooperative program that publishes a count of monthly employment and total quarterly wages and is among the programs that offers web-based data collection.

Data from the QCEW program serve as an important input to many BLS programs. The QCEW data are used as the benchmark source for employment by the Current Employment Statistics program and the Occupational Employment Statistics program. The UI administrative records collected under the QCEW program serve as a sampling frame for BLS establishment surveys.

The Multiple Worksite Report (MWR) asks respondents with more than one worksite location within a State to report employment and wage data on a quarterly basis. Respondents are mailed an MWR form and a follow-up form every quarter. The MWR Web Letter Pilot study offers a new approach to data collection, as a means of improving response rates, lowering respondent burden, and decreasing collection costs. In lieu of an initial mailing form, a one-page letter with web credentials was mailed to a subset of respondents to encourage them to report on the web.

### **Multiple Worksite Report**

The Multiple Worksite Report is designed to collect employment and wages by individual worksite location in a State. This information allows QCEW to properly distribute the employment and wages of business establishments by industry and geographic area. Information on the MWR form is used to more accurately classify employment and wage data of multiple establishment employers by industry and by location within a State. By collecting and storing employment and wage data by worksite, States can disaggregate these data below the county level for more extensive and detailed analysis of business and economic conditions within their State, including local and regional employment totals. These data are

used to ensure an equitable distribution of Federal funds through grant programs that use county economic indicators as a basis for allocations. No other sources are available to obtain this information.

Respondents currently have three options for reporting MWR data. The purpose of this pilot study is to increase participation in the web reporting option (number 3 below). Data reporting options are as follows:

1. Multiple Worksite Report (MWR) State Forms
2. Electronic File Transfer
3. Web Reporting

MWR State forms are the most traditional means of MWR data collection. A paper form with worksite information is sent to respondents every quarter. The respondents are asked to write in their monthly employment and quarterly wage totals for all of the listed worksites. The respondents then mail back the paper form in the return envelope and the State analyst will manually process the data. If the first mailing is not returned, States send out a second follow-up mailing each quarter. Almost all MWR paper forms provide an MWR Web ID and Password, which the respondent can use to login to the website if they choose to report via the web rather than on paper. An example of an MWR State Form can be found in Appendix 1.

The Electronic File Transfer is available for respondents to report their multiple worksite information using an electronic/magnetic medium. A standardized electronic/magnetic medium reporting format was developed by the Bureau of Labor Statistics to submit MWR information directly to the BLS Electronic Data (EDI) Collection Center in Chicago, IL. Instead of reporting individually to many States, businesses can simply report all States' information on a single electronic transmission, tape, or diskette and submit it to the data collection center in Chicago where it will be routed to the respective State agencies. This is generally reserved for large accounts, with 100 or more worksites.

The MWR Web reporting allows respondents to enter all of their employment and worksite data online, rather than on paper. The website prepopulates the worksites under a respondent's UI number(s) and will take them through with step-by-step instructions on setting up their account and submitting MWR data quarterly. To initially setup a web account, respondents must create their account using the Web ID and password printed on their MWR State Form. Once data is submitted on the web, respondents will no longer receive paper forms to complete. Each quarter they are sent a reminder e-mail that data collection for the quarter has begun. Because web collection does not require sending a paper form, this method saves on printing and postage costs. It also reduces respondent burden, as they are not required to hand write any data, but instead can login and are prompted through their worksites. Lastly, it increases timeliness of data collection since it does not require a form to go through the mailing process.

For 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter 2015, more than 45% of employers that completed the MWR did so via the EDI Center and MWR Web. MWR electronic data collection represented well over one-half (55.92%) of national MWR worksites and just under one-half (48.39%) of national employment as shown in the table below.

4th Quarter 2015 MWR Collection						
4 <sup>th</sup> Quarter 2015	# of Employers	%	# of Worksites	%	Month 3 Employment	%
EDI Center	14,117	10.09%	442,153	25.89%	12,444,989	20.92%
MWR Web	49,302	35.22%	512,656	30.02%	16,341,316	27.47%
<i>Total Electronic</i>	<i>63,419</i>	<i>45.31%</i>	<i>954,809</i>	<i>55.92%</i>	<i>28,786,305</i>	<i>48.39%</i>
Total Non-Electronic	76,557	54.69%	752,707	44.08%	30,705,473	51.61%

### Respondents Targeted in MWR Web Letter Pilot Test

A web letter was sent in lieu of an initial MWR form for accounts that fit the criteria of not having reported MWR data for a predetermined amount of quarters. These accounts fit into one of two categories:

- Non-respondents
- Respondents that send in listings to the State

If a respondent prefers to print out a computer generated list of their worksites along with the corresponding employment and wages, they can provide this listing in lieu of manually filling out the paper form.

The idea behind choosing these accounts to target with the MWR Web Letter is because the traditional MWR Paper Form was not working to get these respondents' data. In the case of non-respondents, they are not responding to the form at all. In the case of the listing being mailed in, they are not writing their data in on the form, but instead using their own means of mailing in the data. In both of these cases, the MWR paper form is not being used and requires unnecessary printing and postage. The MWR Web Letter is only one page and is not designed to look like a form, but rather as a letter. The majority of the MWR Web Letters were sent to non-respondents, with a small group being sent to those not using the MWR Forms. The idea was not to interrupt the flow of consistent MWR State Form respondents; any respondent that had consistently reported via MWR paper form was not eligible for the MWR Web Letter.

Any respondents that respond to the MWR Web Letter and report data via MWR Web are considered a success, because otherwise, one of the following cases would occur:

- No data received at all from the account (based on respondent history)
- The State analysts would have to manually key in data from a listing.

In the case of MWR Web Letter responses, the data is uploaded via MWR Web and the respondents will now receive email reminders to submit their data via the web, further cutting down on manual data entry.

### Pilot Test Phase 1

The Pilot Test phase began during 3Q 2015 MWR Collection, and consisted of one State, which was a Mandatory MWR State and volunteered to do a test run of the MWR Web Letter. The State had 2,929 MWR State Forms to be mailed. The most four recent quarters of MWR Web Response data was compared to determine the status of the UI accounts and identified each account as either regular MWR Paper respondents, or among the group of MWR Web Letter eligible respondents. The MWR Web Letter eligible accounts were broken out based on four consecutive quarters of non-response or those that historically mailed in a listing. The State office was given the list of MWR Web Eligible respondents and was able to remove any eligible accounts that they wished to receive a traditional MWR State Form.

A final 967 MWR UI accounts were chosen for the pilot test and were mailed an MWR Web Letter with information on setting up an MWR Web account. An example of the MWR Web Letter is attached as Appendix 2. Of the 967 accounts, approximately 85% were mailed to non-respondents and 15% to respondents that sent in a listing rather than using the form.

The Phase 1 Pilot Test resulted in a 15.3% MWR Web response rate for MWR Web Letter accounts, or more specifically 117 non-respondents reported and 31 respondents that historically sent in a listing reverted to MWR Web Reporting.

### Pilot Test Phase 2

With positive results from the initial quarter of Pilot Testing, the MWR Web Letter was opened to more States. A 4Q 2015 MWR Collection Web Letter Pilot was made available to 27 States (those participating in an MWR Print Contract). Out of the 27 States, 7 States opted in to participate in the MWR Web Letter Pilot. States were once again given a list of MWR Web Letter eligible accounts based on the four most recent quarters of MWR response data, and were able to remove any UI accounts from the list that they preferred to receive a Paper Form. There was a mix of States choosing to review and remove accounts, and those that preferred to mail a Web Letter to the entire eligible list.

A total of 3,937 MWR Web Letters were mailed in lieu of the first mailing of the MWR State Forms. 3,815 of these were mailed to non-respondents and 122 were mailed to respondents that historically have sent in a listing. Out of the 3,937 Web Letters, a total of 286 respondents reported data via MWR Web. 11 of the listing respondents reverted to MWR Web reporting, and 275 non-respondents reported their data via MWR Web. This made for a total of 7.2% response rate among non-respondents and 9.0% response rate among historical listing respondents.

More specifically, because the reporting laws differ among States, there was a difference in the response rates of Mandatory and Non-Mandatory MWR States. The response rates are shown in the table below.

4Q 2015 MWR Web Letter Pilot Results				
State	Mandatory?	Responses	Total Mailed	Response Rate
1*	Yes	52	854	6.09%
2	No	1	62	1.61%
3	Yes	29	167	17.37%
4	No	100	1532	6.53%
5	No	43	657	6.54%
6	No	35	519	6.74%
7	Yes	26	146	17.81%

\* Indicates original Pilot State

The response rates show an interesting pattern of mandatory versus non-mandatory States as far as the effectiveness of the MWR Web Letters. The mandatory States had response rates between 17%-18%, while non-mandatory States had response rates between 6-7%. In States where the MWR is mandatory, non-respondents were more likely to begin reporting online after receiving the MWR Web Letter. For States where MWR is not mandatory, this non-mandatory status could be one of the factors contributing to their non-response, so the web letter was less effective. Anecdotally, a non-mandatory State reported that they received many phone calls from MWR Web Letter recipients in their State, asking if their response was mandatory. This gave the State analyst the opportunity to explain the importance of reporting and gave them the opportunity to at least verify that the current list of worksites is accurate, even if the respondent was unwilling to report data.

Another interesting finding was the original pilot State's decrease in response rate from 15.3% to 6.09%. This is not necessarily surprising, nor indicative of the MWR Web Letter Pilot not working correctly, but in fact the opposite. Because 15.3% of the MWR Web Letter eligible UI accounts on the original list reverted to MWR Web reporting during 3Q 2015 MWR Web Collection, they were no longer on the list of Web Letter accounts (they were not mailed anything at all since they are now web respondents). Each quarter it would be expected that any respondent receives the MWR Web Letter and is willing to report data will join the MWR Web Collection. After a certain (yet to be determined) number of quarters, the list of willing respondents will ultimately be exhausted and the MWR Web eligible list will ultimately consist of refusals.

### **Overcoming Obstacles in Pilot Testing**

The purpose of Pilot Testing for the MWR Web Letter is to address any potential problems or issues that may arise during the process, prior to a full implementation for all States. Also to ensure that there was no disruption to normal MWR data reporting by introducing a new reporting mode. During and after each Pilot quarter of testing, States are encouraged to give feedback on the processes as well as to offer any suggestions.

An issue arose during the 2<sup>nd</sup> quarter of Pilot Testing in the determining the list of Non-respondents and respondents that historically have sent in listing. The original programming checked against the most previous four quarters of data collection and determined the status of an account based on collected data files. After reviewing the list of MWR Web Eligible UIs, a State found that some of the accounts were incorrectly being marked as non-reporters. After further review, it was found that because different States mark UI accounts as having reported data differently, some States' lists of non-respondents were including a group of active reporters. Because this was caught early in the process, and with only a few States participating, the program was updated to correctly identify respondents and non-respondents.

Other issues arose with an underlying concern for respondents that regularly send in a listing using the MWR Paper Form's pre-paid envelope. There were worries that these respondents would not report at all because they do not have means to send in their listing with no pre-paid envelope. The idea is to encourage these respondents to revert to Web Reporting, in order to save on postage and manual data entry, however the process should in no way hinder current response rates among the subset that sends in a listing. In order to correct for this based on State feedback, each State was given a specific list of non-respondents and a specific list of respondents that send in a listing. Each State was given the option to exclude any of the listing accounts, or opt to not include any of the listing accounts in the MWR Web Letter Pilot. Responses varied among the States. Some opted to only send the MWR Web Letter to non-respondents, and keep sending the MWR State Form to those that send in a listing. Other States chose specific listing accounts to remove from the MWR Web Letter Pilot, while others chose to keep all eligible accounts in the Web Letter Pilot.

Most of the process of the MWR Web Letter Pilot Testing has been getting feedback and suggestions from all parties involved, and working on solutions to result in the most efficient cost savings, while still improving response rates and in no way hindering current respondents. The Pilot Testing Phase is still ongoing, and it's possible that future issues may arise which will be resolved as they arise.

### **Future of the MWR Web Letter Pilot**

The States that participated in 4Q 2015 collection provided feedback, and based on their suggestions, changes were made for the next collection quarter. The goal moving forward is to expand the MWR Web Letter collection to more groups, and potentially to groups beyond non-respondents. Changes for future quarters include:

1. Eligibility was determined based on non-response for the past four consecutive quarters. States wanted to increase the number of eligible non-respondents, and suggested changing the eligibility

based on the non-response for the past two quarters, rather than four. This was implemented for 1Q 2015 Pilot Testing.

2. An additional group of accounts was added to the MWR Web Pilot eligible list. The current MWR Web process drops MWR Web accounts that do not report for two consecutive quarters. Often these respondents contact the helpdesk wanting to reinstate their account, but once they are dropped, they must wait on their MWR State Form to setup their new account with a temporary ID/PW. These accounts that are being purged from MWR Web due to two quarters of inactivity are now being offered as group to send MWR Web Letters for 1Q 2016 Pilot Testing.
3. Rather than provide one large file, three separate spreadsheets for the States are being provided for States to review: non-respondents, respondents that send in a print-out listing, and the Purged MWR Web accounts. This allows States to distinguish between the different types of eligible accounts and review the UI accounts and choose any they prefer to remove from the Web Letter and send the regular MWR State Form.

Based on implementing these changes, an additional six States volunteered for a total of thirteen States participating in the MWR Web Letter Pilot Testing for 1Q 2016 collection.

### **Conclusion**

Because non-response among survey data is an ongoing concern, it is important to find ways to address the issue and improve the response rate of those that are not providing data. While Multiple Worksite Report respondents have a choice in their mode of reporting (either electronically or on paper), they may not necessarily realize they have other options. For that reason, it's important to reach these respondents by different means, other than a traditional form. The MWR Web Letter proved successful at improving the response rates among former non-respondents. The increase in response rates as well as the cost savings associated with print and mail costs have further proven that new and innovative ways to reach the respondent are increasingly imminent.

Implementation of the changes suggested by the States who participated is critical. By periodically changing our efforts for the better, including learning from the obstacles we faced in the past, we will be able to further decrease non-response rates and hope to increase the number of web respondents.

Looking towards the future, the hope is to further expand the use of MWR Web Letters. Because the Web Letters have resulted in increased response rates, it is worth further research to determine other groups that may benefit from Web Letters as well. The ongoing concern will be to ensure that consistent respondents are not hindered in the process of transitioning to an expanded Web Collection.



## Appendix 2: MWR Web Letter

Utana Department of Labor  
Labor Market Information  
123 Main Street  
Citysville, UT 12345-6789  
(555)-123-4567



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF LABOR  
Bureau of Labor Statistics  
Postal Square Building, Suite 4840  
2 Massachusetts Ave., N.E.  
Washington, DC 20212-0001

### MANDATORY

ABC COMPANY  
ATTN: ACCOUNTING  
999 1<sup>ST</sup> STREET  
MAINVILLE, UT 99999-1234

September 2015

Dear Employer,

The Utana Dept of Labor and the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) request that you provide your company's employment and wages each quarter using the BLS 3020 - Multiple Worksite Report (MWR).

To reduce costs and save tax dollars, this report has been moved online. Please use the User ID and password below to log into our secure website: <https://idcf.bls.gov/>

**USER ID:** 106000123456 **PASSWORD:** Ab123456

This report is mandatory under Utana Law A.B.C. 9-888-76 and is authorized by law, 29 U.S. Code, Section 2. It is approved by O.M.B. No. 1220-0134.

MWR data enable BLS to monitor and analyze conditions of business activities by geographic area and industry. Information collected in this report by BLS and State agencies cooperating in its statistical programs will be used for statistical and Unemployment Insurance program purposes, and other purposes in accordance with law. Additional information can be found online: <http://www.bls.gov/cew/cewmwr00.htm>.

The due date for your response is **October 31, 2015**. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Emily Thomas".

Emily Thomas  
U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics

