

# **W-2 Take-up Study**

## **Final Report**

**Wisconsin Department of Children and Families  
Office of Performance and Quality Assurance  
Bureau of Program Evaluation and Research**

## Acknowledgements

This report was prepared by the Department of Children and Families, Office of Performance and Quality Assurance, Bureau of Program Evaluation and Research. Ron Blascoe conducted the research and analysis and produced the overall report. The report was prepared under the supervision of Michael Soref, Chief, Research and Statistics Section. Julie Kerksick, Administrator, Division of Family and Economic Security and Janice Peters, Director, Bureau of Working Families provided overall guidance and direction. The following people made substantial contributions to this report:

Lisa Bina, Bureau of Child Support; Robert Demaala, BITS-CARES Warehouse Team; Paula Hintze, Heidi Hammes, Jane Kahl, Gerry Mayhew, Bonnie Nagel, Rose Prochazka, Tim Rupinski, Madelyn Scheer, Joyce Simms, Rebecca Swartz, and Amy Wick, Bureau of Working Families; Laurie Stapel, Division of Enterprise Solutions; Carol Padilla, Department of Workforce Development, Bureau of General Services; Marci Ybarra, Institute for Research on Poverty, University of Wisconsin—Madison.

To request more information about this report, contact Michael Soref, Research and Statistics Section, Department of Children and Families, 201 East Washington Avenue, Madison WI 53702, (608) 267-9705, [Michael.Soref@Wisconsin.gov](mailto:Michael.Soref@Wisconsin.gov).

# Contents

Introduction .....	3
Why potentially eligible households are not on W-2 .....	4
Survey methodology.....	6
Survey results .....	7
<i>Never on W-2 but once applied</i> .....	8
<i>Never on W-2 and never applied</i> .....	10
<i>Once on W-2</i> .....	12
<i>Language as barrier</i> .....	13
<i>Duration of episode</i> .....	14
<i>What it means to be “discouraged by staff”</i> .....	15
<i>Influence of “other income”</i> .....	16
Written comments .....	17
<i>“Other reason” responses</i> .....	17
Unsolicited comments .....	21
Telephone interviews.....	23
Appendix A: Survey methodology .....	26
Appendix B: Survey instrument .....	28
Appendix C: Excerpts from unsolicited written comments .....	30

## Introduction

In November, 2008, there were 68,681 families with minor children in Wisconsin that received benefits under the FoodShare (FS) program and had a total household income of less than 115 percent of the federal poverty level (FPL), which is the income limit for eligibility in the state's Wisconsin Works (W-2) program.<sup>1</sup> Yet these families were not receiving benefits from the W-2 program. As indicated in Table 1, 29.3 percent of those families were in Milwaukee County and 70.7 percent were in the balance of the state. Of the 68,681 families receiving benefits from FS but not W-2, 58.1 percent had income under 50 percent of the FPL.<sup>2</sup>

**Table 1: Low income families in Wisconsin in November 2008 by location**

	<b>Number</b>	<b>Milwaukee County</b>	<b>Balance of State</b>	<b>Total</b>
Families under 115% FPL	68,681	29.3 %	70.7	100.0 %
Families with zero income	12,608	35.8 %	64.2	100.0 %
Families in W-2 paid placements	6,535	70.1 %	29.9	100.0 %

Of that group of families receiving benefits from the FS program but not from W-2, 12,608 had no earned or unearned income reported in November 2008. As indicated in Table 1, 35.8 percent were in Milwaukee County and 64.2 percent were in the balance of the state.

During the same month, there were 6,535 families in a paid placement on the W-2 program. Of those, 70.1 percent were in Milwaukee County and 29.9 percent were in the balance of the state.

Not all of the families with zero income would be eligible for the W-2 program. Additional eligibility criteria and participation requirements for W-2 would disqualify many. The Department of Children and Families (DCF) has undertaken the current study with the following objectives:

- To identify reasons why potential participants never apply for the W-2 program

---

<sup>1</sup> There were 73,822 FS "Assistance Groups" (AGs) with income below 115 percent of the FPL in November 2008. However, there are other criteria that would make many of these families ineligible for W-2. For example, if one or more of the parents in the family is receiving benefits from the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program or have assets valued over a specified limit, they are not eligible. In Table 1, cases with a parent on the SSI program and those with suggested excess assets are removed. Since there is no asset test for the FS program, asset information is not collected for this group. Farm families usually are ineligible for W-2 due to excess assets and those families are designated in the FS program as "self-employed." Those families were removed as an approximation of those families that would not be eligible for W-2 due to excess assets. Incomes are self-reported but verified by data-base match.

<sup>2</sup> Households with income under 50 percent of the FPL are sometimes referred to living in "deep poverty."

- To identify reasons why potential participants drop out of the application process
- To identify reasons why former W-2 participants who now meet the potential participant criteria do not re-apply
- To estimate the size and location of the potential participant population

This paper addresses the first three study objectives. The fourth objective will be addressed in other analyses. The survey methodology and instrument, technical notes and excerpts from written comments from the survey appear as appendices.

### ***Why potentially eligible households are not on W-2***

There are a number of possible reasons why families who were receiving benefits from the FS program and have no income may not have been receiving benefits from the W-2 program. Figure A represents the possible routes by which this might happen.

One possibility is that some of these families did not apply for the W-2 program because they did not know about the program or did not know how or where to apply. This lack of knowledge or access to the program also may be influenced by language barriers. There are eligibility criteria in addition to income, so these families may not have become eligible even if they knew about the program. But, of course, knowledge of the program is a prerequisite for becoming eligible.

Of those who had once applied for the W-2 program, some never received benefits. In addition, there are families that were once on the program but were not in November 2008. These families may or may not have been eligible for the program in that month. For example, they may have been in a situation, such as being a full-time college student, where they could not devote the time to meet program participation requirements. Or, they may have had assets such as a moderately valuable vehicle or farm assets that would make them ineligible.

Also, some of these families may have just experienced an episode of no income in November and did begin receiving W-2 benefits in subsequent months. And, some may have experienced a short episode of no income in November but became employed in subsequent months.

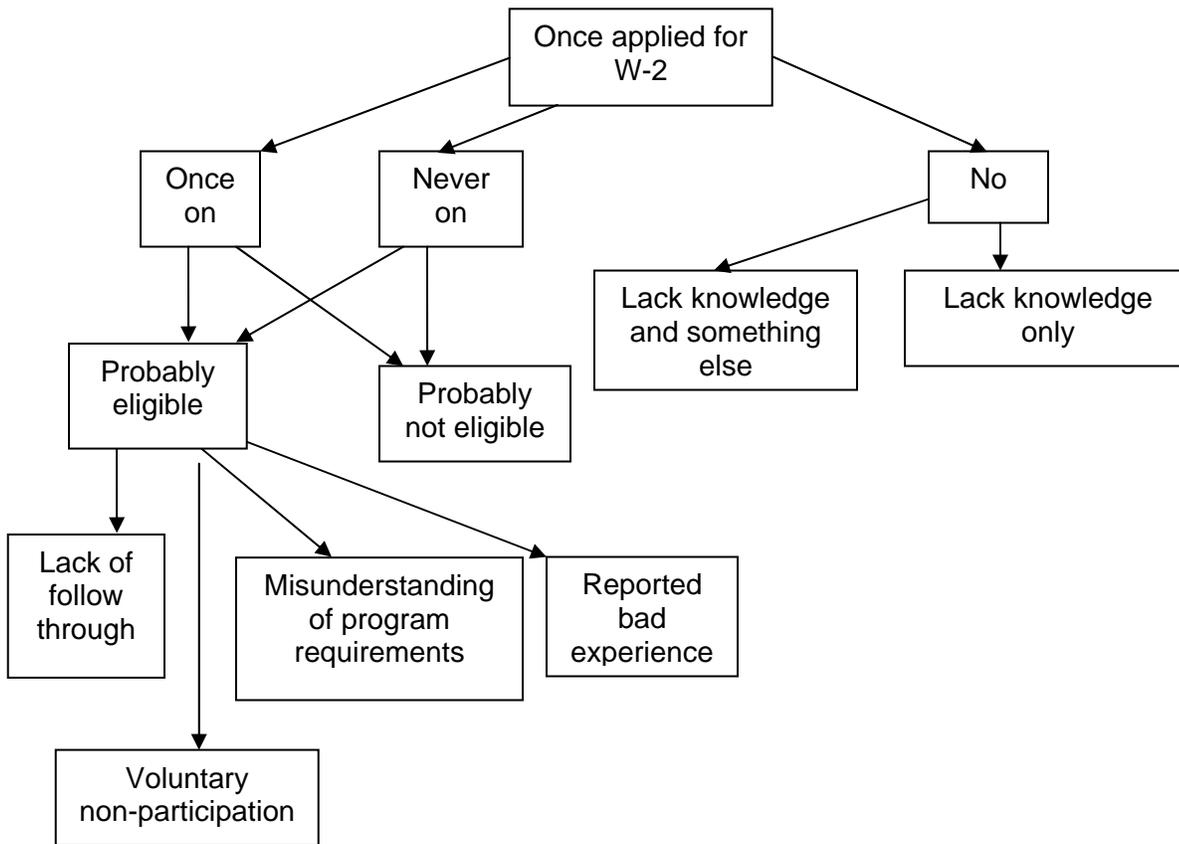
However, it is also possible that at least some of these families who once applied for the W-2 program may have been eligible in November but were not receiving benefits. For example, it is possible that some of these families received incorrect information (from whatever source) that caused them not to pursue eligibility. It also seems possible that some applicants or former W-2 participants felt that they were not treated well in their contacts with the W-2 agency and, therefore, chose not to pursue eligibility. And, it is possible that some simply did not follow through with requirements to become eligible for the program.

It is also possible that some potentially eligible participants decided not to participate in response to information about W-2 policy requirements. This last category is complex because policies have changed over time and the interpretation and application of policies varies over time and from agency to agency. For example, the requirement for

an extended period of job search before being eligible for a cash grant may have dissuaded some potential participants, although the interpretation and application of that policy may vary by agency.

**Figure A:**

**Why eligible families may not be receiving benefits from the W-2 program**



## Survey methodology

The methodology for addressing the first three study objectives is a mailed survey of potentially eligible households, a follow-up telephone survey of selected respondents, an analysis of administrative data and a review of relevant literature.

### *Sample and weighting*

The mailed survey went to a stratified random sample of FS AGs with the following characteristics:

- An open FS case in November 2008
- At least one related minor child in the AG
- Zero reported earned and unearned income in November
- Not on W-2 in November

There were 12,608 families that met the survey population criteria in November 2008. The sampling plan was designed to ensure an adequate number of responses from each of four subgroups:

- those from Milwaukee County who had never been on W-2
- those from Milwaukee County who had once been on W-2
- those from the balance of the state who had never been on W-2
- those from the balance of the state who had once been on W-2

One thousand cases were sampled from each of the four groups. The survey was mailed on January 14, 2009, with a return date of January 27.<sup>3</sup> The overall response rate was 17.0 percent but that varied by stratum.<sup>4</sup> (See Appendix A for details of the response rate.)

The design of the survey follows the major branches in Figure A. The plan was to separately examine the opinions and experiences of three groups: those who applied but never received benefits, those who never applied for W-2 and those who were once on the program but are no longer.

One of the goals of the survey was to look at the experience of people who had applied for the W-2 program but had dropped out somewhere in the process before they were entered into CARES information system.<sup>5</sup> But, by definition, that group could not be identified from the CARES data. Therefore, a bifurcated survey instrument was developed, where respondents were instructed to complete the left side of the survey if they had “EVER applied” for W-2 and the right side if they had “NEVER applied.” Respondents appear to have generally followed the instructions, filling out only one side and appropriately reflecting the “once on” criterion.

The percentages reported in the tables on survey findings are based on a weighting mechanism to more accurately reflect their true occurrence in the population by correcting for differences in population size and return rate. Tables also indicate the

---

<sup>3</sup> While the specified return deadline was January 27, 2009, all surveys returned by March 16 are included in this analysis.

<sup>4</sup> 174 out of the 4,000 mailed surveys (4.3 percent) were returned as undeliverable.

<sup>5</sup> CARES is Client Assistance for Reemployment and Economic Support, Wisconsin's automated case management and information system.

number of actual surveys on which the percentages are calculated as the “n” at the head of each column.

For a more complete description of the survey methodology and the weighting mechanism, see Appendix A. A slightly modified version of the survey instrument is included as Appendix B.

### ***Statistical tests***

Differences between groups in the tables were tested using a chi-square ( $X^2$ ) test of statistical significance. Differences that are significant at the .05 level are indicated by one asterisk (\*) in the tables. Differences that are significant at the higher .01 level are indicated by two asterisks (\*\*). Statistical tests were conducted using unweighted data.

### ***Telephone interviews***

Respondents were asked to include their name and telephone number if we could call them with follow-up questions. Follow-up telephone interviews were conducted with 30 survey respondents to gain more in-depth understanding of the circumstances that resulted in them not receiving benefits from the W-2 program.

### ***Cautions***

As with any survey, these results must be interpreted with caution. First, although the response rate for the mailed survey (17.0 percent) might be considered high for a mailed survey, there is the possibility that respondents may not fairly represent the entire population from which the sample was drawn. For example, there may be a tendency for those who have strong opinions about their experience with the W-2 program to respond at a higher rate than those without strong opinions. While there is no evidence that that occurred in the present survey, it remains a possibility. Survey response percentages are presented in this report, but they may differ from those of the population from which the sample was drawn. And differences in responses between groups (such as Milwaukee County vs. balance of state) reported here might not be found in a study of the entire population.

Second, surveys and interviews record the opinions and present knowledge of respondents, which may not be based on facts. While this may not be important with many of the questions in the current survey (such as whether the respondent knew about the W-2 program), it may be a factor when respondents report on their experiences with W-2 agencies. In this case, we generally only have the respondents' interpretation of events. Without independent verification, results should be interpreted cautiously.

## **Survey Results**

The analysis of survey results creates three mutually exclusive categories of respondents, to coincide with the major branches of Figure A:

Those respondents who were ***never on W-2 but once applied***, which is defined as inclusion in one of the two “never on” sample groups, plus filled out the “ever applied” side of the survey. There are 123 respondents in this category.

Those respondents who were ***never on W-2 and never applied***, which is defined as inclusion in one of the two “never on” sample groups, plus filled out the “never applied” side of the survey. There are 256 respondents in this category.

Those respondents who were ***once, but not currently, on W-2***, which is defined as inclusion in one of the two “once on” sample groups, plus filled out the “ever applied” side of the survey. There are 255 respondents in this category.

As noted above, the percentages in tables reporting survey results are based on weighted data, to correct for differences in sample group size and response rate. The “n” (number of cases) in the tables is the actual number of returned surveys in each category.

### ***Never on W-2 but once applied***

Keep in mind when interpreting the survey data that the selection criteria for inclusion in the survey were that respondents were likely eligible for the W-2 program and for a cash grant as of November 2008. The survey was conducted in January 2009, so that their circumstances may have changed by the time they received the survey, but they were likely eligible as recently as two months before they answered the questions.

As indicated in Table 2, for those who had once applied for W-2 but were never on the program, the most frequent reason was that they were told by staff that they would not get a cash grant. This response was cited by 33.0 percent of respondents statewide. There was no statistically significant difference between Milwaukee County and the balance of state on this question.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> Before August 2007, applicants who were found eligible for the W-2 program but determined to be “job ready” could be placed in a Case Management Services for Unemployed Individuals (CMS) placement, which did not include a cash grant. The CMS placement was eliminated in August 2007. After that date an applicant who is found eligible and “job ready” must be placed in a paid placement. Certainly many of the survey respondents had applied for, or had been on, the program in the period when the CMS placement type was in effect and may be basing their responses on that experience.

**Table 2: For those who applied but were never on W-2, percent checking each reason for not being on W-2 now (n = 123)**

	Milwaukee	Balance of State	Statewide
Question	n = 69	n = 54	n = 123
<i>Told by staff wouldn't get money</i>	24.6%	37.0%	33.0%
<i>Thought could get job</i>	37.7	29.6	32.3
<i>Trouble getting to office</i>	11.6 *	29.6 *	23.7
<i>Unable to complete job search</i>	18.8	22.2	21.1
<i>Discouraged by staff</i>	21.7	20.4	20.8
<i>Told by staff have to search for work</i>	24.6	16.7	19.3
<i>Took too long to get money</i>	29.0 *	11.1 *	17.0
<i>Not what expected</i>	23.2 **	5.6 **	11.3
<i>Have other income</i>	7.2	13.0	11.1
<i>Didn't think worth it</i>	21.7 **	5.6 **	10.9
<i>Got job</i>	10.1	11.1	10.8
<i>Don't think W-2 could help</i>	18.8 **	3.7 **	8.7
<i>Reached time limit, not eligible</i>	10.0	5.6	7.1
<i>Don't want to use clock now</i>	4.3	1.9	2.7
<i>Told by staff to apply elsewhere</i>	5.8	0	1.9
<i>Other</i>	58.0	53.7	55.1

Differences that are statistically significant at the .05 level are indicated by one asterisk (\*). Differences that are significant at the higher .01 level are indicated by two asterisks (\*\*).

Statewide, 32.3 percent of the respondents indicated as one reason for not currently getting benefits from the W-2 program that they thought they could get a job. However, only 10.8 percent said they were not on the program because they had gotten a job on their own.

Statewide, 23.7 percent said they were not receiving benefits from the W-2 program because they had trouble getting to the office. This reason was cited more frequently by those in the balance of the state (29.6 percent) when compared to those in Milwaukee County (11.6 percent).

Statewide, 17.0 percent said they were not receiving benefits from the W-2 program because it “took too long to get any money.” This response occurred more frequently in Milwaukee County (29.0 percent) than in the balance of the state (11.1 percent).

Respondents in Milwaukee County were somewhat more likely to express dissatisfaction with the W-2 program when compared to those in the balance of the state. They were more likely to say they did not think the program could help them or their families, that they did not think the things the program required them to do were worth the money and that the program was not what they expected.

Statewide, 7.1 percent of the respondents in this group said they were not currently on the W-2 program because they had reached time limits and thought they were not

eligible. This is an anomaly because one of the selection criteria for this group is that they were never on the program. A review of survey responses indicates that the respondents may have been confused by the question and some may have been thinking about time commitments required by W-2 participation.

As indicated in Table 2, 5.8 percent of the respondents in Milwaukee County said that one reason they were not on the program is that they were told to apply elsewhere, but this response was not cited by anyone in the balance of the state. The service delivery system in Milwaukee includes five different W-2 offices that serve discrete areas of the county and, until recently, low income families had to go to another agency to apply for the FS program. So, it seems likely that some survey respondents in Milwaukee County were reporting on their experience with this multiplicity of agencies.

### ***Never on W-2 and never applied***

As indicated in Table 3, for those who were never on the W-2 program and reported that they never applied, the overwhelming reason given was that they did not know about the program. Statewide, 74.6 percent of the respondents in this category said they either 1) did not know about the W-2 program, 2) did not know where to apply, 3) did not know how to apply or some combination of these three responses. Lack of knowledge of the program was cited more frequently in the balance of the state (78.3 percent) than in Milwaukee County (60.6 percent). The largest single response category in the entire survey was those in the balance of the state who said they did not know about the program (68.4 percent).

**Table 3: For those who were never on W-2 and never applied, percent checking each reason for not being on W-2 now (n = 256)**

	Milwaukee	Balance of State	Statewide
Question	n = 104	N = 152	n = 256
<i>One lack of knowledge answer<sup>7</sup></i>	60.6% **	78.3% **	74.6%
<i>Didn't know about W-2</i>	48.1 **	68.4 **	64.2
<i>Didn't know how to apply</i>	37.5	38.8	38.5
<i>Didn't know where to apply</i>	33.7	29.6	30.4
<i>Thought could get job</i>	30.8	26.3	27.2
<i>Don't think W-2 could help</i>	24.0	23.0	23.2
<i>Didn't think get money</i>	30.8 *	20.4 *	22.5
<i>Got job</i>	8.7	9.2	9.1
<i>Have other income</i>	7.7	9.2	8.9
<i>Didn't think worth it</i>	10.6	7.9	8.5
<i>Told W-2 doesn't exist in area</i>	6.7	7.9	7.7
<i>Don't like welfare</i>	9.6	7.2	7.7
<i>Trouble getting to office</i>	9.6	5.9	6.7
<i>Friends had bad experience</i>	8.7 *	2.0 *	3.4
<i>Other</i>	17.3	17.8	17.7

Differences that are statistically significant at the .05 level are indicated by one asterisk (\*). Differences that are significant at the higher .01 level are indicated by two asterisks (\*\*).

The second largest response group was those who said they did not apply for the W-2 program because they thought they could get a job (27.2 percent statewide). However, only 9.1 percent said they had not applied because they actually got a job.

The third largest response was that respondents did not think that W-2 could help (23.2 percent statewide) and that response was similar in Milwaukee County and the balance of the state.

Statewide, 22.5 percent of respondents said they did not apply because they thought they would not get a cash grant. That response occurred more frequently for those in Milwaukee County (30.8 percent) when compared to the balance of the state (20.4 percent).

A small number of respondents said they had not applied for the W-2 program because they were told it does not exist in their area. This response was more frequent among those in the balance of the state (7.9 percent) than in Milwaukee County (6.7 percent), but the difference is not statistically significant.

<sup>7</sup> The questions for the “never applied” group include three that go to “lack of knowledge” about the W-2 program: 1) Didn't know about W-2; 2) Didn't know where to apply; 3) Didn't know how to apply. In Table 3, the response category “One lack of knowledge answer” indicates that the respondent checked at least one of the three “lack of knowledge” answers on the survey.

## Once on W-2

As indicated in Table 4, for the group that was once on the W-2 program but no longer is, the most frequently cited reason was that they thought they could get a job, cited by 29.8 percent of the respondents.

**Table 4: For those who were once on the W-2 program, percent checking each reason for not being on W-2 now (n = 255)**

	Milwaukee	Balance of State	Statewide
Question	n = 112	n = 143	n = 255
<i>Thought could get job</i>	33.0%	25.9%	29.8%
<i>Told by staff wouldn't get money</i>	36.6 **	18.9 **	28.6
<i>Reached time limit, not eligible</i>	33.0 **	17.5 **	26.0
<i>Discouraged by staff</i>	33.9 **	14.7 **	25.2
<i>Didn't think worth it</i>	27.7 *	15.4 *	22.1
<i>Unable to complete job search</i>	23.2	18.9	21.2
<i>Took too long to get money</i>	28.6 **	11.9 **	21.0
<i>Told by staff have to search for work</i>	27.7 **	11.2 **	20.2
<i>Not what expected</i>	27.7 **	9.1 **	19.2
<i>Trouble getting to office</i>	20.5	16.8	18.8
<i>Have other income</i>	14.3	16.8	15.4
<i>Got job</i>	14.3	16.1	15.1
<i>Don't think W-2 could help</i>	11.6	10.5	11.1
<i>Told by staff to apply elsewhere</i>	8.0	3.5	6.0
<i>Don't want to use clock now</i>	5.4	4.9	5.1
<i>Other</i>	42.9	53.1	47.5

Differences that are statistically significant at the .05 level are indicated by one asterisk (\*). Differences that are significant at the higher .01 level are indicated by two asterisks (\*\*).

The second most frequently cited reason for no longer being on W-2 is that they were told by agency staff that they would not get a cash grant. This occurred more frequently in Milwaukee County (36.6 percent) than in the balance of the state (18.9 percent). Statewide, 28.6 percent checked this reason.

Of those who were once on the W-2 program, 26.0 percent said they were not currently on the program because they reached time limits and thought they were no longer eligible. This response occurred more frequently in Milwaukee County than in the balance of the state.

There is a pattern of responses that indicates that former W-2 participants in Milwaukee County have a more negative view of the program when compared to those in the balance of the state. Those in Milwaukee County were more likely to say that the things the program made them do were not worth the money and that the program was not what they expected. And respondents from Milwaukee County were about twice as likely to say they were discouraged by staff.

One possible explanation for some difference in experiences reported by respondents in Milwaukee County and the balance of the state is that the mix of placement types is different in the two locations. As indicated in Table 5, W-2 participants in Milwaukee County were more likely to be in a Community Service Job (CSJ) or an “Other” (mostly un-paid) placement<sup>8</sup> while participants in the balance of the state were more likely to be in a “Case Management Caretaker of a Newborn” (CMC) placement. There is a participation requirement of up to 40 hours per week for participants in a CSJ placement and W-2 T placement, but no such requirement for those in a CMC placement.

**Table 5: W-2 placement type November 2008 by location**

Placement type	Milwaukee County n = 6911	Balance of State n = 2323	Total n = 9234
W-2 Transition Job	28.5 %	26.9 %	28.1 %
Community Service Job	29.2	19.2	26.7
Care of newborn	8.1	38.4	15.7
Other	34.1	15.6	29.4
Total	100.0 %	100.0 %	100.0 %

### ***Language as barrier***

Table 6 uses administrative data to examine the possible connection between language and whether a family becomes eligible for the W-2 program. As indicated in Table 6, those with a primary language designated as “other”<sup>9</sup> were far more likely than other groups to currently be on the W-2 program and this was true both in Milwaukee County and in the balance of the state. Those whose primary language is Spanish in the balance of the state were much more likely to have never been on the W-2 program.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Approximately 89 percent of the participants currently in an “other” unpaid placements started out in a paid placement and, therefore, had experienced “job search” and other work requirements.

<sup>9</sup> The “other” language group included: Albanian, Arabic, Bosnian/Croatian, Burmese, Cambodian, Chinese, Farsi, French, Laotian, Native, other, Polish, Russian, Somali, Thai, Ukrainian and Vietnamese.

<sup>10</sup> Only those indicated as legally in the United States in CARES are included in this study.

**Table 6: For families with zero earned or unearned income in November 2008, primary language by W-2 history and location**

		Once on	Never on	Currently on	Total
<i>Milwaukee</i>	Number				
<i>English</i>	13,311	35.2 %	16.1	48.8	100.0 %
<i>Spanish</i>	435	24.6 %	26.2	49.2	100.0 %
<i>Hmong</i>	54	13.0 %	35.2	51.9	100.0 %
<i>Other</i>	218	5.5 %	12.4	82.1	100.0 %
<i>Balance of State</i>					
<i>English</i>	17,638	29.8 %	59.5	10.7	100.0 %
<i>Spanish</i>	148	12.2 %	77.7	10.1	100.0 %
<i>Hmong</i>	118	27.1 %	37.3	35.6	100.0 %
<i>Other</i>	412	2.2 %	4.9	93.0	100.0 %

Differences are statistically significant at the .01 level.

### ***Duration of episode***

As noted above, one possible reason why a family could have no earnings in a month yet not be on the W-2 program is that the episode with no income was brief. As indicated in Tables 2 through 4, a number of respondents said they had other income or had gotten a job as one reason for not being on the W-2 program. Table 7 uses the population of FS Assistance Groups with minor related children who had no earned or unearned income in November 2007 and looks at reported earnings for the primary adult for the subsequent quarter.<sup>11</sup> As indicated in Table 7, 69.0 percent had no reported earnings in the quarter following the “episode” of no income in November 2007 and only 3.4 percent had quarterly earnings that were over 115 percent of the federal poverty level in the subsequent quarter. The average earnings in the subsequent quarter for these principal adults was \$673.

**Table 7: For FoodShare Assistance Groups with no income in November 2007, post-November 2007 earnings of primary person**

Post-Quarter		
No earnings	Average earnings	Earnings over 115% FPL
69.0 %	\$673	3.4 %

<sup>11</sup> Earnings data are from the Unemployment Insurance reporting system. Since there is up to a 12 month delay in reporting these data, the earnings follow-up analysis could not be done on the November 2008 survey population. Therefore, the study sample criteria were applied to the November 2007 FS population and earnings information is based on the 12-month period after November 2007. Participants with zero earnings are included in computing the average and percent over 115% of the FPL. Participants without earnings reported on the UI wage reporting system were treated as having zero earnings in the quarter.

Another possibility is that a family that had no income in November may have subsequently become eligible for the W-2 program. Table 8 uses the population of FS AGs with minor related children who had no earned or unearned income in November 2008 and looks at whether they were on the W-2 program one and two months later. As indicated in Table 8, 2.3 percent of those who had no income and were not on W-2 in November were on the program by January 2009. This was more likely to occur in Milwaukee County than in the balance of the state.

**Table 8: For FoodShare Assistance Groups with zero earned or unearned income in November 2008, subsequent W-2 history**

	Milwaukee	Balance of State	Statewide
On W-2	n = 7,107	n = 15,993	n = 23,100
<i>November 2008</i>	0	0	0
<i>December 2008</i>	2.8 %	0.9 %	1.4 %
<i>January 2009</i>	4.3	1.5	2.3

Differences are statistically significant at the .01 level.

***What it means to be “discouraged by staff”***

Of the respondents who had once applied for the W-2 program, 22.4 percent said they were not currently on the program because they had been “discouraged by staff.” That raises the question of what it was that staff did that made the applicant feel discouraged. In particular, the question is whether it was staff simply explaining some aspect of program policy or whether it was something else that staff did that caused the applicant to be discouraged.

**Table 9: Reasons cited for not being on the W-2 program by whether respondents indicated they were “discouraged from applying by agency staff” (n = 380)<sup>12</sup>**

Question	Discouraged by Staff	
	No n = 295	Yes n = 85
<i>Took too long to get money</i>	17.0 %	28.5 %
<i>Didn't think worth it</i>	15.1 **	29.5 **
<i>Unable to complete job search</i>	19.1	28.0
<i>Not what expected</i>	13.2 **	28.2 **
<i>Told by staff wouldn't get money</i>	23.1 **	52.0 **
<i>Told by staff have to search for work</i>	15.4 **	34.4 **
<i>Told by staff to apply elsewhere</i>	2.5 **	11.6 **

Differences that are statistically significant at the .05 level are indicated by one asterisk (\*). Differences that are significant at the higher .01 level are indicated by two asterisks (\*\*).

<sup>12</sup> This includes those who had once been on the W-2 program and those who had applied but never received benefits from the program.

Table 9 compares those who indicated they were “discouraged by staff” to those who were not to see if there is a pattern to other responses that may indicate whether it is a feature of W-2 or treatment by agency staff that discouraged potential participants. As indicated in Table 9, those who felt discouraged were much more likely to say they were told they would not get a cash payment (52.0 percent) and that they would have to search for work (34.4 percent) when compared to those who were not discouraged by staff.

To a somewhat lesser extent, those who reported being discouraged by staff “didn’t think the things they would make me do were worth the money” (29.5 percent) and that the program “was not what I expected.”

There was no statistically significant difference between the groups on questions about how long it took to get a cash payment or that they were unable to complete job search requirements.

These results suggest that it was the specific information from staff about not getting a cash payment, and perhaps the job search requirement, that dissuaded many of the applicants.

Those who reported being discouraged by staff were more likely to say they had been told by staff to apply elsewhere. As noted earlier, this may reflect the multiplicity of agencies in Milwaukee County.

The pattern of responses in Table 9 suggests that it is information from agency staff about program requirements that is largely responsible for participants saying they were discouraged from pursuing eligibility. In particular, applicants and former participants appear to have been discouraged when they were told they would not get a cash grant.

This raises the question whether agency staff were correctly interpreting and applying policy. For example, under current W-2 policy an eligible family is able to receive a cash grant upon completion of the W-2 application even if the parent is determined to be “job ready.” But, as indicated elsewhere in this paper, at least some potential participants understood that they could not get a cash grant if they were able to work or that they may have to participate in program activities for up to three months before their first check.

### ***Influence of “other income”***

Of all survey respondents, 11.0 percent said that they had other income as one reason for not being on the W-2 program. Table 10 compares responses for those who had other income to those who did not to determine whether the presence of any other income influences opinions about the program.

**Table 10: Reasons cited for not being on the W-2 program by whether respondent reported having other income (n = 681)<sup>13</sup>**

Question	Has Other Income	
	No (n = 606)	Yes n = 75
<i>Don't think W-2 could help</i>	16.3 %	17.1 %
<i>Thought could get job</i>	29.2	23.0
<i>Got job</i>	9.4 **	29.9 **
<i>Didn't think worth it</i>	13.1	18.1
<i>Trouble getting to office</i>	14.7	9.6
<i>Expected not to get money</i>	27.8	19.3

Differences that are statistically significant at the .05 level are indicated by one asterisk (\*). Differences that are significant at the higher .01 level are indicated by two asterisks (\*\*).

As indicated in Table 10, the only statistically significant difference between those with other income and those without other income is whether they reported having a job. The fact that there was no difference on other questions suggests that simply having other income does not influence opinions about the program.

### **Written comments**

The section analyzes written comments from respondents. Comments are in two forms. First, respondents were offered an “Other reason (please explain)” option on the survey. As indicated in Tables 2 through 4, a large number of respondents checked this response and offered a written comment. This ranged from 17.8 percent of respondents who had never applied to 54.2 percent for those who had once been on the program.

The second type of comments is unsolicited, and were written in margins, on the back of the survey or on attached sheets. While distinction between comments solicited by the “Other reason” response and those entirely initiated by the respondent is somewhat arbitrary, there were 141 surveys that were set aside as containing “extensive comments.”

These two forms of comments will be discussed separately below. Comments are categorized as child care, transportation, administrative or medical problems, the respondent appears to misunderstand policy or probably is not eligible for W-2.

### **“Other reason” responses**

Table 11 indicates the “other” responses of those who never applied for the W-2 program and Table 12 the “other” responses for those who had once applied for the program.

Comments are categorized as follows:

<sup>13</sup> This table includes only those who had once applied and those who never applied. The category “Expected not to get money” includes those who never applied but thought they would not get money and those who had applied and were told they would not get money.

The respondent ***misunderstands policy***. This category includes a number of respondents who said they thought they were not eligible because they were disabled, applying for SSI, or were not disabled and, therefore, “job ready.” This category also includes a number of respondents who misunderstood the relationship between W-2 and Child Support, including some who thought that the absent parent was required to pay the W-2 cash benefit. Others believed the W-2 program was for newborns only, not for two-parent families or that it was only for young parents. Finally, a number of respondents in this category said they thought they were not eligible because they had a part-time job, even though that job resulted in a very low income.

The respondent indicated ***child care problems***, usually expressed as difficulty securing or transporting children to child care to meet W-2 obligations.

Respondents indicated ***transportation problems***, usually in terms of a lack of transportation to meet W-2 obligations and sometimes the need to travel great distances in rural areas.

Respondents indicated ***administrative problems*** with the W-2 program. This category includes several who said they had a bad experience with an agency (the terms “rude” or “demeaning” were often used) and who were told they were not eligible for W-2 when they apparently were eligible. It also includes responses where the applicant or participant was terminated from the program but said they did not know why.

Respondents reporting ***medical problems***, which prevented them from meeting W-2 program obligations.

Respondents indicating that they objected to some aspect of ***W-2 policy***, such as the length of time required to receive a first payment or some variation on the statement that W-2 was a “waste of time.”

Respondents who are ***probably not eligible*** for the W-2 program. The largest number in this category indicated they are full-time college students (or the spouse of a full-time student). Others indicated they currently receive Unemployment Compensation,<sup>14</sup> SSI payments or were receiving benefits from the W-2 program at the point of the survey.

In considering these responses one should keep in mind that these are perceptions of the respondents, and not necessarily undisputed fact. For example, some of the responses categorized as “Administrative problems” are based on respondents’ perception that the agency made a mistake or treated them unfairly. In some cases this seems indisputable, such as the statement that agency staff did not return phone calls for three months. But it may also be possible that agency staff took an action that was entirely in accordance with policy but that the respondent misunderstood or disagreed with the policy. On the other hand, one should keep in mind that these are the perceptions of the respondents, regardless of their validity.

---

<sup>14</sup> Income from Unemployment Compensation does not automatically disqualify an applicant from getting benefits under the W-2 program, but it is treated as income in calculating eligibility.

**Table 11: For those who never applied, “other” reasons for not currently being on the W-2 program (n = 293)<sup>15</sup>**

	Percent
Comment	n = 293
<i>No “other” reason</i>	82.8 %
<i>Misunderstands policy</i>	2.9
<i>Child care problems</i>	0
<i>Transportation problems</i>	1.8
<i>Administrative problems</i>	2.2
<i>Medical problems</i>	.9
<i>Don’t like W-2</i>	.7
<i>Probably not eligible</i>	7.0
<i>Other reason</i>	2.0

Keep in mind that the respondents reported in Table 11 are those who said they had never applied for the W-2 program. As indicated in Table 11, 82.8 percent of those who never applied did not include “other” reasons for not being on the program. Referring back to Table 3, 74.6 percent of the respondents in this category said they did not know enough about the program to apply, so it is not surprising that they would tend to have no “other” reason.

The most frequently cited “other” reason for those who never applied for the W-2 program (7.0 percent) was that they probably are not eligible for the program at the time of the survey. The largest number of cases in this category reported that they, or a spouse, were full-time college students. Others reported that they had begun receiving income from some other source since the survey sample date in November.

The second most frequent reason (2.9 percent) was that the potential participant misunderstood policy. This includes disabled people who thought they could not get W-2 benefits because they were not able to work and people without disabilities who said they thought the W-2 program was only for disabled people. Also, there was confusion about the relationship between W-2 eligibility and Child Support. Some respondents thought that they had to be receiving Child Support payments from an absent parent to be eligible for W-2 benefits or that the absent parent actually paid the W-2 cash benefit.<sup>16</sup> This category also includes some respondents who were under-employed,

<sup>15</sup> Table 11 adds to 100.3 percent due to rounding.

<sup>16</sup> Current federal policy requires that Child Support arrearages be assigned to the agency as a condition of eligibility. A portion of the amount of any cash benefit is then deducted from the arrearage owed to the custodial parent. Therefore, although it appears that survey respondents misunderstood this policy, there is a factual basis for their concern. This policy is scheduled to change in September 2009 so that arrearages will no longer be assigned to the W-2 agency. Two respondents indicated that they were unwilling to pursue Child Support with an absent

with very low monthly earnings, but thought that any employment made them ineligible for the program.

The third most frequent reason cited in Table 11 is administrative problems, indicated by 2.2 percent of the respondents. Note that respondents in this category had never actually applied for the W-2 program. However, some included statements that they had been given misinformation by the W-2 agency or otherwise dissuaded from applying.

Of those who never applied, 1.8 percent described transportation problems that prevented them from applying for the W-2 program. These included long travel distances and the high cost of gas in rural areas and long bus commutes (including taking children to day care) in urban areas.

A smaller number (0.9 percent) described medical problems that prevented or interfered with participation in the W-2 program, such as “going through chemo.”

Only a small number (2.2 percent) indicated reasons they never applied was because they did not like the W-2 program. For example, one respondent wrote: “Have to provide too much info (personal) and go thru too many hoops to get vary little funds.”<sup>17</sup>

**Table 12: For those who once applied for W-2, “other” reasons for not currently being on the W-2 program (n = 380)**

	Percent
Comment	n = 380
<i>No “other” reason</i>	51.3 %
<i>Misunderstands policy</i>	11.6
<i>Child care problems</i>	3.6
<i>Transportation problems</i>	1.6
<i>Administrative problems</i>	9.6
<i>Medical problems</i>	2.8
<i>Don’t like W-2</i>	2.2
<i>Probably not eligible</i>	12.4
<i>Other reason</i>	4.9

Keep in mind that the respondents reported in Table 12 are those who said they had once applied for the W-2 program. This includes those who were once on the program and those who applied but never received benefits. As indicated in Table 12, 51.3

---

parent. This may legitimately have made them ineligible for the W-2 program. Therefore, they are included in the “probably not eligible” category.

<sup>17</sup> Written comments from the surveys are quoted verbatim. Spelling errors are not corrected.

percent of the respondents in this category cited no “other” reason for not being on the W-2 program.

Of those who did cite an “other” reason, the largest category (12.4 percent) consists of those who probably were not eligible. This group included full-time college students and people with income from other sources. Two reported being recently married, one reported now having income from a boyfriend who recently got out of jail and one had moved out of the state.

The second most frequent response was that the respondent misunderstood policy (11.6 percent). Most of the respondents in this category believed they would not be found eligible or not get a cash grant. Frequently cited reasons are that the respondent simply assumed they were not eligible. Note that the sample criteria for the survey were such that most of the respondents probably were eligible for the program in November 2008. Furthermore, those who probably were not eligible and those who reported being told by an agency staff member that they were not eligible are included in other categories. Therefore, this group likely simply misunderstands current W-2 eligibility policy.

This group, again, includes respondents who misunderstood the relationship between W-2 and Child Support. For example, one respondent said “I don’t receive child support to repay the money back to W-2 program.” Others believed there were age restrictions on eligibility. For example, more than one respondent indicated that she thought the program was only for newborns or children under five years old. One respondent wrote that “I was on it for 3 months after I had my son then I was told I couldn’t be on it any longer.” Another said that, even though she has a 10-year old child, she thought her age (52 years old) made her “too old to participate.”

The third most commonly cited reason for those who had once applied for W-2 was administrative problems, cited by 9.6 percent of the respondents. These include respondents who reported having a bad experience at a W-2 agency. Since these respondents had applied for W-2 (unlike those in Table 6), they had actual experience with agency staff. Some included extensive notes, attached or on the back of the survey, explaining their experience with program staff. In addition to those who reported having a bad experience, this category includes those who were told the program was only for disabled people or that it was not for disabled people, that they were not eligible (when they presumably were) and those who tried to apply for W-2 but were not given information about the program.

A smaller number said they had applied but were not currently receiving benefits because of child care problems (3.6 percent) or because of transportation problems (1.6 percent).

A few (2.2 percent) indicated that they were not receiving benefits because they did not like some aspect of the W-2 program.

### **Unsolicited comments**

Of the 681 returned surveys, 145 (21.3 percent) included written comments. Some were merely short explanatory notes next to a response on the survey. Others were extensive and detailed descriptions of problems respondents experienced with the W-2 program.

Note that there was nothing in the survey instructions that suggested or encouraged this type of response, so they were entirely unsolicited.<sup>18</sup>

A systematic analysis of the written comments is difficult because they often cover several topics and require interpretation and selection by the analyst. In addition, it is difficult to draw conclusions from one or two comments on a particular topic since we do not know how representative those responses are of the survey population. However, those comments may provide insight into the experience people have had with the W-2 program, and may provide a better understanding of how policy and practice affects potential W-2 participants.

Written comments were divided into five categories: those having to do with delays in getting a cash grant, those in which the respondent reported having a bad experience with a W-2 agency, those in which a participant's disability may have been an issue, those where there may have been a disagreement over eligibility and those for which transportation was an issue.

Finally, comments should be considered in the context of whether the respondents had ever applied for the W-2 program, was ever actually on the program, whether their experience was recent or in the distant past and where they live. These distinctions are not made in this summary section. However, status and location are included in an expanded version of the comments, included as Appendix C.

*Delays* Several respondents wrote that it took too long to get cash assistance so that they left the program, dropped out of the application process or did not even apply. For example, one respondent said, "I went to the classes for two-three months but I never received any money. So I just applied for food stamps." Another said that she could not spend the time necessary to meet program participation requirements because she needed to get money to support her children.

*Reported bad experience* Several respondents wrote comments that indicated they had a bad experience at a W-2 agency. The words "rude," "disrespect" and "demeaning" were often used. One said he was told by W-2 agency staff to leave his home county and move into a homeless shelter in another county. His story was corroborated by a review of CARES case notes.

*Disabilities* A number of survey respondents wrote that they were told by agency staff that they were not eligible because the W-2 program was for people with disabilities. Some said they were told to apply for Supplemental Security Income (SSI). At the same time, some respondents said they understood that the program was only for people who were able to work so that, because they were disabled, they were not eligible for the program. One respondent described a situation where an apparent disability was not addressed in the application process.

*Eligibility issues* A number of respondents described situations in which it appears that they may have been told, apparently incorrectly, they were ineligible for the program. Of course, we only have the respondents' point of view and an independent

---

<sup>18</sup> FoodShare and W-2 recipients can be served by workers from several programs. It is possible that a few of the comments could have confused a W-2 worker with a worker from another program.

verification of this is beyond the scope of this study. Some of the stories are credible, given state experience with W-2 agencies. For example, one respondent said she was told by agency staff that the program is only for single-parent families and she was not eligible because her under-employed husband lived in the household. Others seemed to misunderstand the relationship between W-2 eligibility and Child Support. Three respondents volunteered that they were told by agency staff that the W-2 program did not exist in their area.

*Transportation* A number of respondents described transportation problems. The most frequent was from respondents who live in rural areas and lack a reliable car with which they could get to the agency to participate in activities, take children to child care or apply for jobs. One urban resident told of the difficulty in managing various busses so that she could take children to child care and still meet her W-2 participation obligation.

## Telephone interviews

In order to better understand information gathered from the mailed survey, follow-up telephone interviews were conducted with selected respondents. Eight categories of responses were identified for the follow-up interviews, those who described a situation where they:

- were discouraged by W-2 agency staff
- were not interested in the program
- said they were not eligible because they were “job ready”
- reported not on the program because of a disability
- indicated they were only on for a short period after the birth of a child
- reported transportation problems
- reported child care problems
- described problems having to do with Child Support

Survey respondents had to fill in their name and telephone number.<sup>19</sup>

Fifty-nine (59) cases were selected that met these criteria. Interviews were conducted by DCF staff with special program knowledge in the area. Calls were made in mid-March, 2009. Twenty-five (25) interviews were completed.<sup>20</sup>

### *Discouraged*

Interview respondents described situations where they were discouraged by agency staff from applying or following through with the application process. One said she was told in the W-2 orientation session that the program paid only the equivalent of \$2 or \$3 per hour and she would not get a cash payment for two or three months. She said she dropped out of the program, lost her home and she and her child are now living with her parents.

---

<sup>19</sup> 90.0 percent of the mailed survey respondents included a name and telephone number or address. This varied only slightly by sample group.

<sup>20</sup> The interview protocol required at least ten attempts to contact the respondent by telephone at various times of the day. Several telephone numbers were not in service by the time of the interviews and a number of respondents did not answer at the number they provided after ten attempts.

Another person said she was told by agency staff that she would not be eligible so she did not apply. Another thought she would not be eligible for the W-2 program because she had a criminal background and, therefore, had trouble getting a job.

Another respondent said the application process took four months, during which time she did not receive a cash payment. So, she dropped out and prefers to live on FoodShare, some Child Support and assistance from family members.

Another respondent said she had a long-term disability and had been on the W-2 program. But, when she moved to another county they told her she had reached her time limit and could not re-apply. She is currently receiving FS for herself and her child and is in the process of applying for SSI.

#### *Not interested*

One person who indicated on the survey that she was not interested in the W-2 program said in the interview that she was not willing to engage in the required level of activities for the amount of the grant. Another person said she had been discouraged from applying, moved in with a parent and is now about to graduate as a Registered Nurse. And another indicated she is not interested because she is currently a full-time college student.

Another respondent indicated he was not interested because he had other income, and another said the children's father is now supporting the family.

#### *Child Support*

A number of the people interviewed misunderstood the relationship between Child Support and W-2 eligibility. One common misunderstanding was that the W-2 program somehow takes Child Support payments made by the absent parent. One respondent said the absent father owed a substantial amount in arrearages and she thought the W-2 agency would take that if she applied. She also said that she was unwilling to apply for child care for the same reason.

Another respondent reported that the absent father is in prison and so is not paying Child Support. She thought this would make her ineligible for the W-2 program.

And another respondent appeared to understand the requirement that she cooperate with collecting Child Support but she chose not to do so. She said she did not want to disclose her present address to the Child Support agency for fear that the absent father would find out where she lived. Therefore she was willing forego both Child Support and benefits from the W-2 program.

One respondent reported he was still paying Child Support to an absent parent under a court order even though he has full-time custody of his two children.

#### *Disabilities*

One group selected for follow-up interviews were those who indicated in the mailed survey that they were not eligible for W-2 because they were disabled. One respondent said she was waiting for a hearing on her SSI application. She was told by the W-2 agency that it would take three months to get on the program so she dropped out of the application process.

One respondent expressed gratitude that the state eliminated the welfare program that fostered dependency. She was in the process of appealing her application for SSI. Another said she had once been on W-2 but left because she could not find a job. She is also applying for SSI.

#### *Child Care*

One respondent reported that the W-2 agency did not help her find a certified child care provider so she had to find child care on her own. And, since it was not certified care, she had to pay for it out of pocket.

Another respondent refused to leave her child in day care due to “all of the injuries reported in the news.” She preferred to forego W-2 and a cash grant.

#### *Transportation*

Respondents who reported on the mailed survey that they had experienced transportation problems tended to report other problems besides transportation in the telephone interview.

#### *Newborns*

The W-2 program provides a cash payment, with no participation requirement, for 12 weeks after the birth of a child. After the 12 weeks, the participant may be eligible for continuation in another W-2 placement. Responses to the mailed survey indicated that a number of former W-2 participants had received this payment but believed they were not eligible for the W-2 program after their child was 12 weeks old.

Some W-2 participants said they were told that their eligibility ended when the child was 12 months old. One person said she tried to re-apply after being terminated after 12 weeks and was told there was nothing the agency could do for her. Another tried to re-apply but was denied because she did not have a rent receipt.

Another said she was told that she would need a medical excuse to stay on the W-2 program after 12 weeks. She reported subsequently being homeless (living in a truck) for three months last summer.

Another reported her W-2 case was closed in September 2008, after the 12 week period, but she re-applied in February 2009.

Most of the respondents who had their benefits terminated when their child reached 12 weeks old reported working intermittently and part-time since being terminated.

## Appendix A: Survey Methodology

The methodology for addressing the first three study objectives is a mailed survey of potentially eligible households, a follow-up telephone survey of selected respondents and a review of relevant literature.

The mailed survey went to a stratified random sample of FoodShare assistance groups (AGs) with the following characteristics:

- An open FS case in November 2008
- At least one related minor child in the AG
- Zero reported earned and unearned income in November
- Not on W-2 in November

A preliminary examination of the population indicated a very uneven distribution between those who had ever been on the W-2 program and those who had never been on the program. In addition, there were many more people in the balance of the state who met the study population criteria. A straight random sample would have yielded relatively few cases from those in Milwaukee County who had never been on the W-2 program and relatively more from the balance of the state who had never been on the program.

Therefore, the sample was stratified into four groups:

- Milwaukee County, never on W-2
- Milwaukee County, once on W-2
- Balance of state, never on W-2
- Balance of state, once on W-2

One thousand cases were sampled from each of the four groups. The survey was mailed on January 14, 2009, with a return date of January 27.<sup>21</sup> The overall response rate was 17.0 percent but that varied by stratum.<sup>22</sup>

The percentages reported in the tables in this report are based on a weighting mechanism to more accurately reflect their true occurrence in the population by correcting for differences in population size and return rate. Tables also indicate the number of actual surveys on which the percentages are calculated as the “n” at the head of each column.

The percentages reported in the tables in this report are based on a weighting mechanism to more accurately reflect their true occurrence in the population by correcting for differences in population size and return rate. For example, as indicated in Table 14, there were 1,811 cases on the FoodShare caseload that met the selection criteria and were in Milwaukee County and never on the W-2 program. A total of 178 people returned a survey from that sampled group. By dividing the number in the population by the number of returns, we calculate the “weight.” Then, when calculating the percentages in the tables, each case from the “Milwaukee, never on” stratum is multiplied by the weight, 10.2. Note that we also have included the number of actual cases on which the percentages are calculated (the “n” in the table column). Table 1

---

<sup>21</sup> While the specified return deadline was January 27, 2009, all surveys returned by March 16 are included in this analysis.

<sup>22</sup> 174 out of the 4,000 mailed surveys (4.3 percent) were returned as undeliverable.

indicates the number of cases in the population, the number sampled from each group, the number of returned surveys and the weight for each group.

**Table 14: Survey population size, sample size, number of returns and calculated weight by strata**

<b>Sample strata</b>	<b>Population</b>	<b>Sample</b>	<b>Returns</b>	<b>Weight</b>
<i>Milwaukee, never on</i>	1,811	1,000	178	10.2
<i>Milwaukee, once on</i>	2,707	1,000	120	22.6
<i>Balance of state, never on</i>	5,529	1,000	207	26.7
<i>Balance of state, once on</i>	2,561	1,000	174	14.7

Differences between groups in the tables were tested using a chi-square ( $X^2$ ) test of statistical significance. Differences that are significant at the .05 level are indicated by one asterisk (\*) in the tables. Differences that are significant at the higher .01 level are indicated by two asterisks (\*\*). Statistical tests were conducted using unweighted data.

## Appendix B: Survey instrument

### Wisconsin Works (W-2) Program Survey

Please fill out the section that best fits your situation.

---

If you **EVER** applied for W-2, please fill out this box:

**Why aren't you getting W-2 now? Check all that apply.**

- Have other income
- Don't think W-2 could help me or my family
- Thought I could get a job on my own
- Got a job on my own
- Discouraged from applying by agency staff
- Took too long to get any money
- Didn't think the things they made me do were worth the money
- Unable to do the job search or other assignments
- W-2 program was not what I expected
- Had trouble getting to the office
- Don't want to use time limits now
- Reached time limits and thought I was not eligible
- Told by agency staff that I would not get any money
- Told by agency staff I would have to search for work before getting money
- Told by agency staff to apply elsewhere
- Other reason (please explain)

If you **NEVER** applied for W-2, please fill out this box:

**Why haven't you applied for W-2? Check all that apply.**

- Have other income
- Didn't think W-2 could help me or my family
- Thought I could get a job on my own
- Got a job on my own
- Didn't know about W-2
- Didn't know where to apply
- Didn't know how to apply
- Didn't think the things they would make me do were worth the money
- Had trouble getting to the office
- Didn't think I'd get any money
- Friends have had bad experiences in the W-2 program
- Have been told the W-2 program doesn't exist in my area
- Don't like the idea of welfare
- Other reason (please explain)

**We may have a few brief follow-up questions. If it is ok for us to call you, please give us your name and phone number.**

Name (print) \_\_\_\_\_ Phone number (\_\_\_\_)  
\_\_\_\_\_

**When is the best time to call you?**  Daytime OR  Evening  
 Weekday OR  Weekend

**Thank you for participating in this survey.**

**Put this completed survey in the blue postage-paid envelope and drop it in the mail by January 27.**

## Appendix C: Excerpts from unsolicited written comments

As indicated in the text, a number of respondents to the written survey included unsolicited written comments on the survey. This section includes excerpts from those comments. Comments may be excerpted from a larger text, but are reproduced without editing. They are divided into five categories: those having to do with delays in getting a cash grant, those in which the respondent reported having a bad experience at a W-2 agency, those in which a participant's disability may have been an issue, those where there may have been a disagreement over eligibility and those for which transportation was an issue.

The note in parentheses after each quote indicates whether the respondent had ever applied for the W-2 program, had once been on the program and whether they live in Milwaukee County or the balance of the state. The four-digit number in parentheses is a unique survey identifier.

### *Delays*

"I went to the classes for two-three months but I never received any money. So I just applied for food stamps." (Respondent 2164. Applied, never on, balance of state.)

"I heard about the W-2 program my understanding was that you don't receive anything for a long time. So that's why. I need money so I can get out have gas and support my son." (Respondent 1023. Former participant, balance of state.)

"I think W-2 should not take a month and half or 2 months to get a payment! If your in a desperate situation, with no money or job, it should be available within 2 weeks, if you are making an honest effort to find a job!" (Respondent 1013. Former participant, balance of state.)

"I am a 24 yr old single mom of 2 boys, one is 2 yrs and the other is 6 months. I left their father in September with no income or place to go. When I went to my social worker for advise on how to get help all she told me was that I lost some money on my food share account and there was nothing else to offer. She gave me the number for Burnett County housing Authority which I did apply and got excepted but was then notified there is a 2 yr. waiting list. So here I sit with no stable home for me and my boys, no job because there is nothing around here, and no vehicle to get around in even if I had a job. No Im not asking for sympathy but you asked for my opinion and Im gonna give it to you." (Respondent 2172. Applied, never on, balance of state.)

"It takes so much and so long to even get a cash payment it takes anywhere from 4 to 6 weeks to obtain a payment. But in the mean time I have to find other ways to pay my bills, which takes time from the things that I have to do for the W-2 program, therefore I will be denied. (Respondent 3080. Former participant, Milwaukee County.)

"Your W-2 program takes way too long to receive help financially and it isn't even guaranteed if you complete the [unreadable] assignments. It shouldn't be so hard to get financial help and it shouldn't take so long either. I agree to do a screening process and do the job assignments. I am at risk of loosing my home and need a little help to pay my rent while looking for jobs, not months later. We have children we love and need desprately for some help. I've never asked or applied before this and seems like the

people who really deserve it and wouldn't abuse it don't receive it. Change the program to fit the economical times!!!" (Respondent 4007. Applied, never on, Milwaukee County.)

"...I had to wait a full 90 days plus before they could help me and it wouldn't be guaranteed." (Respondent 3032. Former participant, Milwaukee County.)

#### *Reported bad experience*

"Told I wasn't eligible and staff was very judgemental." (Respondent 4155. Applied, never on, Milwaukee County.)

"They're rude, disrespectful and liars. They tell you one thing and do totally different" (Respondent 1015. Former participant, balance of state.)

"My case worker is a real rude lady and doesn't help me with anything. So figured forget it." (Respondent 2045. Never applied, balance of state.)

"My caseworker never told me about the program or anything that pertains to it. I feel as if she is not doing her job. When I ask for help, she makes me feel like I'm a piece of scum asking for a million bucks...." (Respondent 1152. Former participant, balance of state.)

"Workers are smart allecky and demeaning." (Respondent 3029. Former participant, Milwaukee County.)

"Would I qualify? Any advice would be appreciated because any calls I've made and messages I've left have gotten me nowhere and I don't want to lose my home. Thanks you!" (Respondent 3062. Former participant, Milwaukee County.)

"Very rude. Made me feel bad. Talked down to me." (Respondent 4031. Applied, never on, Milwaukee County.)

"When I applied for W-2 they wanted me to take GED classes and I didn't need to take those classes cause I have a high school diploma. I also was kind of ashamed." (Respondent 4033. Applied, never on, Milwaukee County.)

"I left several msgs for my worker [name deleted] and she wouldn't call me back. I finally got ahold of her 2 ½ months later. She was rude to me and then she transferred me to another worker. She knew I had no income an infant to take care of...." (Respondent 1142. Former participant, balance of state.)

"Very mean staff. No money ever came. I tryed, but something was always done wrong." (Respondent 1107. Former participant, balance of state.)

"Went to scheduled appt and was told there was no record of it so I would have to start the whole process again." (Respondent 4093. Applied, never on, Milwaukee County.)

"The staff makes it difficult to apply from my experience. I feel they look down on those of us who apply.... I have been very discouraged and have pretty much gave up on the

whole W-2 system. I could go on and on but I will end here.” (Respondent 3080. Former participant, Milwaukee County.)

“In every meeting I had with my worker, she tore me down every time, and I really don’t have the time for someone to tell me how low my life really is.” (Respondent 1161. Former participant, balance of state.)

“Staff are so rude, unpleasant and treat customers poorly and like you owe them money personally. The process is so unorganized and extremely slow and delayed in getting answers; responses and phone lines busy literally all day long.” (Respondent 3108. Former participant, Milwaukee County.)

“I was hurt on January 2 2007 working for dairy factory in Richland Center WI. Since then I have the ride of one life time already. In the last two years me and my boys have been homeless, broke, sleeping in our car. Right in the Richland Center town. We were in the homeless shelter in RC for eighty days. And while we were there I had two surgeries. And was put out with no were to go. So I went back to DHS and there I was told by [name deleted] there are homeless shelters in Madison or Rockford IL. So I had no choice but to go to my sister’s basement in Rockford IL. Then I was informed by [name deleted] that my benefits were stopped cuz I left Richland County. Knowing that was the only thing keeping us afloat, I have been back in RC.” (Respondent 1080. Former participant, balance of state.)

“There are some agents who seem angry and rude all the time. Please train agents to know the system and be more nice. At least to people who are nice to begin with.” (Respondent 4018. Applied, never on, Milwaukee County.)

### *Disabilities*

“Was told by my worker that W-2 is only for those who have severe disabilities.” (Respondent 1129. Former participant, balance of state.)

“They said to apply for SSI.” (Respondent 1146. Former participant, balance of state.)

“They do not tell you about, and waiting for SSD.” (Respondent 1027. Former participant, balance of state.)

“...I explained this problem to her as well. The response I received was ‘I don’t know what to tell you then,’ the way she responded was as if she was annoyed with my questions. I had more questions and had my hand up, I was overlooked while she made time to answer others’ questions. Now I have a slight reading/comprehetsion problem. I was always told that if I had questions to not be afraid to ask. I don’t appreciate feeling like this was a futile effort but I do.” (Respondent 3073. Former participant, Milwaukee County.)

“Unable to work because of health problems.” (Respondent 4094. Never applied, Milwaukee County.)

"I really need W-2. I have a 8 year old and we have no income but food card. I'm in poor health. Maybe you could help." (Respondent 1122. Former participant, balance of state.)

"I was employed as a CHA but became ill in April 2007 and was told I was unable to work. I did apply for W-2 but they told me I had to go to classes but I couldn't because of my condition." (Respondent 3068. Former participant, Milwaukee County.)

"My daughter has very bad asthma and breathing problems. She needs my 24 hour supervision so I would not be able to come in every day as she needs a mandatory 5-6 breathing treatments daily, along with other medications." (Respondent 4096. Applied, never on, Milwaukee County.)

"[Name deleted] just got done seeing a phyconurologist for evaluation for disability check. They claim she's got mental retardation and is considered a slow learner. Any questions, please call her dad at.... I pay [name deleted] bills and buy her needs for her and [name deleted] her son." (Respondent 1095. Former participant, balance of state.)

[Former participant recently found eligible for SSI] "My last visit was terrible my case worker was rude and had a short temper.... She sat at her desk 10 ft away and never answered my questions while she had her back to me and talked to the computer and then told me I had to leave and take my issues somewhere else." (Respondent 4023. Former participant, Milwaukee County.)

### *Eligibility issues*

"...My case worker said we would not qualify for it because it is a 2 parent home that my children live in. I have not applied for it this time around because she thinks I will not qualify. It is a shame because even though there is 2 parents living with the children only the father of my children is able to work at this time and it is only odd jobs and minimal work. He barely makes enough for the rent. But I understand that there are certain requirements for the benefits that are available, and just glad we're getting help with the food stamps we receive." (Respondent 1052. Former participant, balance of state.)

"Apply more than three times and was told was not eligible. And I did not have no income." (Respondent 3092. Former participant, Milwaukee County.)

"Told by agency I was able to work, could not find full-time steady employment. Became homeless for 3 months." (Respondent 3083. Former participant, Milwaukee County.)

"Only have 6 mo. left in 5 yr. limit.... Having baby in March.... Need 6 mo. for baby." (Respondent 1149. Former participant, balance of state.)

"Last time I asked, I was told the program did not exist anymore in my county (Vilas)." (Respondent 1135. Former participant, balance of state.)

"I was told there was no W-2 program in Watertown." (Respondent 1101. Former participant, balance of state.)

“The main reason were not is people told me it don’t exist.” (Respondent 1071. Former participant, balance of state.)

### *Transportation*

“At the time my car was broke down and there was no way for me to get the transportation I would of needed and also didn’t have a babysitter I could afford or even count on.” (Respondent 2181. Applied, never on, balance of state)

“Have no car a child and no way of getting around. They tell us we can’t bring our kids. Well, what are we supposed to do most of us do?” (Respondent 1125. Former participant, balance of state.)

“I do not have a car to do job searches. I live in the country w/no bus service.” (Respondent 2005. Never applied, balance of state.)

“Burnett County is the biggest county in Wisconsin and I’ve been told there’s no funding for gas vouchers....” (Respondent 1152. Former participant, balance of state.)

“And my children had be on school bus at 7:40 a.m. I had to learn bus route. I live West Town. Took 1 hour 20 minutes to get to Aberg Office. I was at least 20 or 30 minutes late once. 5 minutes late and got turned back around each time. I didn’t have anyone to take my children to bus stop and no one to drive me there.” (Respondent 2158. Applied, never on, balance of state.)

“We live way out in the country. My husband applied for many jobs in 5 different towns/cities which took a long time because of travel distance. Only the time it took to fill out the applications is counted—not travel time. This meant only about ¼ of the time he spent looking for a job was counted for. Then we were told he would only receive about \$100 - \$125 per month if he had qualified. This would only cover gas for job hunting.” (Respondent 1119. Former participant, balance of state.)

“Have no transportation to W-2 office or to get to a job. Also I was told I could not get child care benefits.” (Respondent 2020. Applied, never on, balance of state.)