

Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages Multiple Worksite Report

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Background

The Quarterly Census of Employment and Wages (QCEW) program publishes a quarterly count of employment and wages reported by employers covering more than 95 percent of U.S. jobs, available at the county, MSA, state and national levels by industry. The program originated in the 1930s, and was known as the ES-202 program until 2003 when the current QCEW name was adopted. The primary economic product is the tabulation of employment and wages of establishments which report to the Unemployment Insurance (UI) programs of the United States. Employment covered by these UI programs represents about 97% of all wage and salary civilian employment in the country.

QCEW data are collected through a Federal State partnership with the UI programs. UI data are collected at the company level by state. When a company has more than one location in a state, UI data provides only a statewide total for the company. This information alone is insufficient to accurately tabulate local data by industry. To rectify this, QCEW uses the Multiple Worksite Report (MWR). The MWR asks most multi-location employers to provide employment and wage data for all of their establishments covered under one UI account in a State. Most multi-location employers with a total of 10 or more employees combined in their secondary locations are required or requested to complete the MWR. An employer's primary location is the location with the most employment in a State. All other locations within the State are secondary locations.

The Multiple Worksite Report is designed to collect information showing the distribution of 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.

Eligibility for the MWR is determine through the Annual Refiling Survey (ARS) and through employment edits. The ARS is a survey conducted to verify or update information about the establishments in QCEW. One question on the ARS asks companies that are currently considered to be a single-unit if they have multiple locations. If they do, they are set up as a new MWR account and QCEW will attempt to collect MWR data. Additionally, new MWRs are identified through employment edits that identify trends indicative of potential new MWRs. The MWR is collected via paper forms or electronically through either an online web collection system or via file upload to our electronic data interchange center (EDI).

MWR in QCEW

The MWR is focused on businesses with more than one location within a state. The MWR serves as a follow up to the QCEW to add sub-state data to state level UI reports. It is augmenting the UI data to add a sub-state dimension when it is missing. These data are collected through a multimodal process including web surveys, large data file transfers and paper surveys. The MWR covers 1.4% of respondents while accounting for 17.3% of worksites and 41.9% of employment in QCEW.

Overview of MWR Response Rates

MWR response rates for 2017, quarter 4 were reviewed by state, size class and supersector. One crucial note about response rates, is that since the MWR is a more detailed breakdown of the state totals that the firm already reports to UI, the MWR has a validity check in the UI totals. Additionally, if a respondent fails to report the MWR, their data can be prorated to the individual worksites based on the reported UI totals. This is an important tool particularly for states where the MWR is voluntary. It is far preferable to maintain worksite level data and prorate it to the UI totals in the case of an MWR refusal. In these instances, local data at the industry level is more accurately represented by the multiple worksites and prorated employment and wages than it would be without the data broken out by worksite.

The MWR is mandatory in 31 states and the results show response rates were higher in those states compared to the voluntary states. For voluntary states the response rates were: 63.5% for employment and 61.9% for wages. For mandatory states the response rates were: 81.4% for employment and 80.8% for wages.

MWR responses by size class are roughly evenly distributed with rates ranging from 68.4% to 73.3%.

Supersector response rates reveal some interesting differences. Public administration displaying the highest whereas Natural Resources and Mining had the lowest rates. One likely reason for the high response rates in public administration is the successful push over the last decade to get all federal and many state reporters to provide data to our EDI center.

MWR Initiatives to Improve Response Rates

QCEW has implemented several initiatives to improve response rates in this survey. The response modes that promote the highest rates are web surveys and Electronic Data Interchange (EDI) file transfers. The fourth quarter 2017 MWR web report had an overall response rate of 88.4%. In order to promote the website, annual letters have been sent to employers who are not currently using the web or EDI to complete the report. The letter is typically sent prior to the survey in order to convert a paper reporter, or a refusal into a web reporter. For EDI an email blast is sent 3 times per quarter to remind the large employers who are participating in the program to submit their data files.

Conclusion and Future MWR Initiatives

Overall the MWR program achieves a high rate of response, but there are areas which can be improved. Specifically the voluntary states and within supersectors with lower than average response (Natural Resources and Mining for example). One initiative that has been very

successful is the annual web letter solicitation. At this time state participation is voluntary, and not all states participate. We expect more states to participate in the future given the success of this initiative.

A second initiative that may improve rates is an option for employers to provide QCEW with an electronic file that is not in our typical load file format. Some firms may be unwilling to dedicate technical resources to creating our load file format, but may have electronic MWR data available in some other format. Rather than printing out their data and returning it with their MWR form via mail, we would allow the reporter to securely upload their data file in whatever format. Data would still need to be processed manually at BLS, but the employer may be more willing to submit data if this option is made available. This initiative is currently in the pilot phase.

Providing as many options to employers as possible to complete the MWR is important to our success. The various payroll systems and software in use make it difficult to create a one size fits all approach, and offering a multitude of options makes it easier for employers to provide the data to us.