

# Increasing participation in Ticket to Work through redesigned mailers

A collaboration with SSA | 2023

## Project summary:

The Ticket to Work (TTW) Program is a federally-funded employment program designed to provide Social Security disability beneficiaries (i.e., individuals receiving Social Security Disability Insurance and/or Supplemental Security Income benefits based on disability) the choices, opportunities and support they need to enter the workforce and maintain employment with the goal of becoming economically self-supporting over time.

## Intervention description:

We collaborated with SSA to increase the number of beneficiaries who participate in the program by developing an evidence-based approach to redesigning outreach materials. In three individual-level randomized trials, conducted between September 2020 and February 2022, we evaluated changes to TTW notices including their timing, the type sent, and the language used across a combined sample of 934,611 beneficiaries. In two of the trials, the intervention was tested in a factorial design (i.e., two-by-two) where the re-designed letter constituted factor 1 and an added cardstock Ticket factor 2. In the third trial, the intervention design compared a group receiving a redesigned mailing to a group that did not receive any mailing.

## Insights from the behavioral and social sciences:

A behavioral diagnosis conducted in collaboration with SSA identified several potential behavioral barriers to TTW participation. These included a perceived inability to work, an unclear participation timeline, and information overload.<sup>1</sup> We redesigned the standard TTW notice to provide less information more concisely (*simplification*), provide beneficiaries a clearer outline of action steps (*implementation prompts*), highlight the benefits of TTW participation up front (*salience*), emphasize that beneficiaries already qualify for this program (*endowment effect*), and treat beneficiaries as ready to return to work (*positive identity priming*).<sup>2</sup> We made similar revisions to the paper Ticket, replacing it with a more durable and eye-catching cardstock Ticket.

## What did we learn?

Redesigning the notice had a null effect on the Ticket assignment rate within 9 months after mailings were sent, but increased calls to the TTW helpline. The cardstock Ticket had a null effect on the Ticket assignment rate and calls to the helpline.

The project page for this impact evaluation can be accessed [on our website](#).

## Insights incorporated:

In this document, we share more details on each of the treatments and capture the evidence-based insights incorporated with the hopes that agencies can continue learning from previous efforts.

<sup>1</sup> Mathematica. *Characteristics, Employment, and Sources of Support Among Working-Age SSI and DI Beneficiaries*. April 30th, 2009. <https://www.mathematica.org/publications/characteristics-employment-and-sources-of-support-among-working-age-ssi-and-di-beneficiaries>.

<sup>2</sup> Office of Evaluation Sciences. How to design effective communications: What has OES learned? PDF file. Accessed November 3rd, 2022. <https://oes.gsa.gov/assets/abstracts/OES%20Learnings%20on%20Writing%20Better%20Communications%202018.pdf>.

Bhargava, S., & Manoli, D. (2015). Psychological frictions and the incomplete take-up of social benefits: Evidence from an IRS field experiment. *American Economic Review*, 105(11), 3489-3529.

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## Cohorts 1 and 2:

Treatment 1: Letter with language changes and cardstock Ticket)

Dear [REDACTED],

Did you know you already qualify for personalized job training or job search support through a program called Ticket to Work? Get free, personalized support finding work and keep your benefits as you explore employment. Talk to trained, knowledgeable agents at the Ticket to Work Help Line at 1-866-968-7842 or (TTY) 1-866-833-2967, or visit <https://chooseworkssa.gov> online.

**What Can the Ticket to Work Program Do For Me?**

- I get free job search and job training services, matched to my needs.
- I can find a job I like and earn income of my own.
- Social Security will postpone medical review of my disability if I participate in the program and make progress.

**Follow these Steps!**

**Step 1: Set a Date:** "I will call the Ticket to Work Help Line at 1-866-968-7842 or (TTY) 1-866-833-2967 on \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_ Time \_\_\_\_\_ a.m./p.m."

**Step 2: Ask the Ticket to Work Help Line.** These may be good starting questions:

- How can the Ticket to Work program help me go to work?
- What kind of help can I get and how can I connect with an employment service provider? Can I get a list of providers?
- Can I keep my benefits and medical coverage while I try working?

See Next Page

**Ticket to Work**

Do you want to...

- feel proud of achieving goals?
- enjoy time with co-workers?
- earn income on your own?

Then you may be ready to explore work. Ticket to Work is here to help. You already qualify!

Ticket to Work service providers will guide you through the process to train for, find, and keep a job. For FREE.

Social Security work incentives help you as you transition to work. You could still receive benefits and keep your Medicaid or Medicare coverage.

Speak with a Ticket to Work Help Line agent and learn more: 1-866-968-7842 (1-866-833-2967 for TTY)

[chooseworkssa.gov/indepth](https://chooseworkssa.gov/indepth)

Treatment 2: Letter with language changes

Dear [REDACTED],

Did you know you already qualify for personalized job training or job search support through a program called Ticket to Work? Get free, personalized support finding work and keep your benefits as you explore employment. Talk to trained, knowledgeable agents at the Ticket to Work Help Line at 1-866-968-7842 or (TTY) 1-866-833-2967, or visit <https://chooseworkssa.gov> online.

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Treatment 3: Original letter and cardstock Ticket

**Your Ticket to Work**

Dear [REDACTED],

This is your Ticket To Work. Social Security is pleased to offer you this ticket under the Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency Program. If you want to go back to work or try working for the first time, the Ticket to Work program can help. The Ticket to Work program gives you choices about where to turn for free help and support. You can take your ticket to any of the Employment Networks approved by Social Security or to your State vocational rehabilitation agency.

If you go to an Employment Network and the Employment Network agrees to work with you, you and the Employment Network will make a plan to help you get a job, keep the job you have, or find a better job. Employment Networks choose how they will help you. Social Security pays them when they provide the services and support help you go to work.

If you qualify for services from your State vocational rehabilitation agency, they can offer you training and other services and supports that you need to work. Your State vocational rehabilitation agency can tell you about its rules for getting help there. You can decide to go to an Employment Network or to your State vocational rehabilitation agency, depending on the type of help you need.

If you are interested, you can get a list of Employment Networks or find the State VR agency in your area by calling toll-free 1-866-968-7842 (TTY 1-866-833-2967).

On the Internet, you can search for Employment Networks and State VR agencies by visiting [www.choosework.net](https://www.choosework.net) and selecting "Find Help." You may receive a call from an Employment Network or State VR agency in your area to see if you are interested in the program.

If you have any questions about this program, please call toll-free 1-866-968-7842 (TTY 866-833-2967).

For general questions about Social Security benefits, please visit Social Security's website at [www.ssa.gov](https://www.ssa.gov). You also may call Social Security toll-free at 1-800-772-6229 (TTY 1-800-327-6577). You may write or visit any Social Security office. They also can give you information about other employment supports that help people with disabilities go to work.

**Ticket to Work**

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Treatment 4: Original letter

Dear [REDACTED],

Did you know you already qualify for personalized job training or job search support through a program called Ticket to Work? Get free, personalized support finding work and keep your benefits as you explore employment. Talk to trained, knowledgeable agents at the Ticket to Work Help Line at 1-866-968-7842 or (TTY) 1-866-833-2967, or visit <https://chooseworkssa.gov> online.

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## Cohort 3:

Treatment: Letter with language changes and cardstock Ticket)

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[chooseworkssa.gov/indepth](https://chooseworkssa.gov/indepth)

Control: No letter

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## Original letter

### Your Ticket to Work

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If you are interested, you can get a list of Employment Networks or find the State VR agency in your area by calling toll-free 1-866-968-7842 (TTY 1-866-833-2967) Monday through Friday from 8:00AM - 8:00PM, EST.

On the Internet, you can search for Employment Networks and State VR agencies by visiting [www.choosework.net](http://www.choosework.net) and selecting "Find Help." You may receive a call from an Employment Network or State VR agency in your area to see if you are interested in the program.

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For general questions about Social Security benefits, please visit Social Security's website at [www.socialsecurity.gov](http://www.socialsecurity.gov). You also may call Social Security toll-free at 1-800-772-1213 (TTY 1800-325-0778), or you may write or visit any Social Security office. They also can give you information about other employment supports that help people with disabilities go to work.

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## Letter with language changes

Dear [name],

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on \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_ :\_\_\_\_ a.m./p.m.”  
Date Time

“It was amazing what they offered! They helped me navigate through the entire job hunt. I got the support I needed.”

Shirley, Ticket participant

### Step 3: Ask the Ticket to Work Help Line.

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## Letter with language changes & insights highlighted

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#### Simplification

Short, simple messages can reduce effort and facilitate action

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on \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_ :\_\_\_\_ a.m./p.m.”  
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#### Implementation prompt

Clearly lays out steps to take action

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## Cardstock Ticket front with insights highlighted



### Positive identity priming

Incorporating language encouraging beneficiaries to think of themselves as ready to return to work

### Endowment effect

Incorporating language emphasizing that this is a benefit they already qualify for

## Cardstock Ticket back



SSA Pub. No. 63-041 | ICN: 942364  
July 2020

Produced and published  
at U.S. taxpayer expense