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RESEARCH BULLETIN

REASONS FOR FAILURE TO ACCEPT ASSIGNMENTS TO WORKS PROGRAM EMPLOYMENT
IN URBAN AND RURAL COMMUNITIES OF OHIO

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Preface

A series of studies was undertaken by the Division of Social Research in December 1935 to ascertain the validity of reports that large numbers of relief clients certified as eligible for Works Program employment were refusing to accept jobs to which they had been assigned. The series of studies was divided into two parts; the first included inquiries in Cincinnati, Toledo, and the rural and town portions of Stark and Athens Counties, Ohio. The second part, to be discussed in a subsequent research bulletin, consisted of studies in 13 cities^{1/} distributed throughout the country.

The reassignment forms used by the W. P. A. labor offices and the original assignment forms used by the United States Employment Service, the National Reemployment Service, or the state employment services provided a means of ascertaining the names of clients who had at any time failed to accept referral to a W.P.A. job or failed to report to a job to which they had been referred. From these forms random samples were drawn for the purpose of intensive study. After necessary information regarding family composition, usual occupation, and recent income for each referred worker, had been transcribed from the W.P.A. records and from relief agency files, the specific reason for the client's failure to take a W.P.A. job was obtained by means of a home interview. Whenever the validity of the reason given by a client was open to doubt, it was followed up by interviews with family case workers, employers, and doctors.

These studies of failures to accept W.P.A. assignments are somewhat similar to the series of surveys conducted in the summer of 1935 for the purpose of ascertaining whether relief clients were refusing to take private jobs. Analysis of failures to take Works Program jobs is considerably simplified by the fact that all assignments are made through official agencies and that the hours of work, conditions of employment, and rates of pay are matters of record.

The study in Cincinnati was conducted by Edward J. Webster, that in Toledo by Daniel Scheinman, and that in the rural areas of Stark and Athens Counties by Bryce Ryan, members of the Special Inquiries Section. The three sections of the Ohio study are presented in this bulletin in summary form; a somewhat fuller statement is presented for the Cincinnati findings followed by brief descriptions for Toledo and for the rural areas, since it seemed unnecessary to repeat in detail the points upon which the findings were similar.

^{1/} The cities are: Atlanta, Georgia; Baltimore, Maryland; Bridgeport Connecticut; Butte, Montana; Chicago, Illinois; Detroit, Michigan; Houston, Texas; Manchester, New Hampshire; Omaha, Nebraska; Paterson, New Jersey; St. Louis, Missouri; San Francisco, California; Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania.

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SUMMARY

Taken in relation to the total number of assignments to W.P.A. jobs, the proportion of unsuccessful assignments is not unduly large. In Toledo 70 percent and in Cincinnati 68 percent of all assignments to W. P. A. jobs resulted in placements, while 30 and 32 percent respectively of the assignments were unsuccessful.

	Cincinnati (as of Nov. 22, 1935.)	Toledo (as of Dec. 2 1935)
Total Assignments	19,901	16,572
Unsuccessful Assignments	6,516	5,034
Percent Unsuccessful	32	30

Analysis of samples drawn from the failures to report shows that these were not refusals of jobs, as they have been erroneously called, since in practically all cases the client was unable to accept the job for some entirely valid reason, such as "already employed at a private job", "notification of job not received", or "unemployable". The impossibility of keeping complete up-to-the-minute records on all certified workers accounts for the issu-

1/ Comparable figures are not available for the rural sections of Stark and Athens Counties. The fragmentary data that do exist indicate a proportion of unsuccessful placements somewhat higher than that recorded in either Toledo or Cincinnati. Data for various other communities, however, reveal a generally lower proportion than that in the two Ohio cities.

ance of assignment slips to those who should have been classified as temporarily unassignable.

Only a negligible number of cases involved clearly unjustified refusals to work. In Cincinnati three out of the 546 cases studied refused to work. Seven out of 420 Toledo cases were considered to involve clearly unjustified refusals of W.P.A. employment. No case occurred in the rural sample studied in Stark and Athens Counties which was clearly unjustifiable. The unjustified refusals in the two cities, as compared with the total number of assignments, show that only three out of every 500 persons assigned in Toledo and one out of 500 in Cincinnati were deliberately and unjustifiably refusing W.P.A. assignments. In a few cases where doubt existed as to the validity of the client's reason, definite decision was practically impossible, but in any event the total number of doubtful cases was small.

The chief factor accounting for the inability of workers to accept W.P.A. jobs was private employment. The average proportion of such cases in the total of unsuccessful assignments investigated was about 40 percent. The percentages in the three communities were: Cincinnati, 30 percent; Toledo, 41 percent; and Stark and Athens Counties, 52 percent. Since one of the objectives of the Works Program is to further the return of workers to private employment, the end is already accomplished in these cases.

Difficulties in the process of notifying clients of their assignments provided the next most important group of reasons. Workers who

had moved and could not be located, who were temporarily away from home, whose local addresses had changed, who had not received notification, or whose notification came too late, constituted 25 percent of the cases of unsuccessful referrals studied in Cincinnati, 19 percent in Toledo, and 16 percent in Stark and Athens Counties.

About 12 percent of the workers interviewed had been unable to take the jobs assigned them because of temporary or permanent disabilities. Some of them were temporarily ill at the time of referral and others had been erroneously certified as eligible for Works Program employment despite disabling physical handicaps. Still others had become unemployable since certification. Taken as a whole, these cases constituted 13 percent of the sample in Cincinnati, 11 percent in Toledo, and 12 percent in the rural and town portions of Stark and Athens Counties.

Among the other reasons for failure to accept jobs were; already engaged in W.P.A. or relief work; no longer a member of relief household; excessive distance to job or excessive transportation costs; needed to care for dependents at home; deceased; in school; and in jail. These rea-

sons were believed valid in practically all the cases interviewed on the grounds that the clients who gave them showed their inability, and not their unwillingness, to take W.P.A. employment.

There would have been fewer unsuccessful referrals if prompt reports had been available so that all men with regular private employment could have been classified as temporarily unassignable, addresses corrected promptly, and records of disabling injuries and illnesses kept up to date. However, the Works Program procedure was devised to avoid the periodic family visits required under usual relief procedure. Revisions in W.P.A. district office records must await official notification from relief agencies and federal or state employment offices. Upon the regular burden of keeping official records up to date there was superimposed, during the few weeks prior to December 1, 1935 the task of placing more than two million men upon W.P.A. projects, and clearance of records among agencies was subordinated to other operations. Under these circumstances, the fact that two out of every three men assigned were successfully placed on Works Program jobs is believed to represent a creditable record.

REASONS FOR FAILURE TO ACCEPT ASSIGNMENTS TO WORKS PROGRAM EMPLOYMENT
IN URBAN AND RURAL COMMUNITIES OF OHIO

CINCINNATI

From the inception of the Works program to November 22, 1935 there were recorded in Hamilton County, Ohio, 13,385 placements on W.P.A. jobs and 6,516 referrals for which placements were not made. Since a number of the records of such referrals were in process of clearance when this study was undertaken, some of them were not at that time available in the Labor Inventory office. A random 10 percent sample was drawn from the Available 5,460 cases^{1/}. Of the 546 cases so selected, all were within the corporate limits of Cincinnati except 65, or 12 percent, which were distributed in outlying towns of Hamilton County within a radius of 20 to 25 miles from the city.

In the following table is shown a classification of the 546 unsuccessful assignments according to reason for failure:

Total.....	546
Employed.....	264
In private industry.....	165
On W.P.A. jobs.....	87
In C.C.C.....	6
On local relief adm. staff.....	6
Failure of notification.....	138
Moved from city.....	52
Moved from state.....	16
Temporarily away from home.....	6
Incorrect local address.....	44
Notice delayed or mis-carried.....	20

^{1/} There is no reason to believe that the cases awaiting clearance would differ in any important way from those already in the Labor Inventory office.

Physically unfit.....	70
Permanent disability.....	25
Temporary disability.....	14
Unfit for job assigned.....	31
Ineligible.....	33
Deceased.....	8
Non-relief cases.....	4
No longer a member of relief household.....	18
In jail.....	3
Assigned occupation inferior to usual.....	7
Transportation.....	13
No transportation facilities.....	1
No funds for transportation.....	2
Transportation costs too high.....	10
Other reasons.....	18
Insufficiency of income from W.P.A. employment.....	5
Refusal to accept sub-union wage.....	1
Lack of necessary equipment.....	2
Anticipating private employment.....	3
Unable to leave home.....	1
In school.....	1
Woman assigned to man's job.....	1
Error in referral records.....	4
Refused without cause to accept referral.....	3

Employed. Of the 546 placement failures in the study, 264, or 48 percent, represented persons already at work. The 165 in private industry, the six in the Civilian Conservation Corps and the six employed on the local relief staff may be accounted for by the simple fact that,

regardless of their employment status, their names remained in the file of those certified for W.P.A. employment, or "eligible" for it, in that they had, presumably, been on relief sometime between May 1 and November 1, 1935. However, could all records have been kept strictly to date, most of these cases would have been classed as temporarily unassignable, and hence would not have received referral notices. The 87 cases of workers already employed on W.P.A. jobs illustrate the failure of reports to clear promptly. Sufficient information was not secured to reveal precisely what happened in each case when the first referrals were sent out; but the basic facts are of later record and are indisputable--namely, these persons had taken W.P.A. jobs.

Failure of Notification. Referrals were sent to 16 persons who had left the state, to 52 who had left the city, and to six who were temporarily away from home. In 44 cases notifications were unsuccessful because sent to incorrect local addresses. The basic explanation of these 118 cases is that the Ohio State Employment Service had not been informed of such address changes for its records. Although incorrect local address has in this report been regarded as the primary cause for failure of notification in only 44 cases, the total number of discrepancies in address discovered in the field was much larger. Counting only one per case--in numerous instances interviewers found it necessary to trace two, three, or even as many as four addresses--there were 177 discrepancies. Nevertheless, in all but 44 of these cases notification reached the worker.

However, these discrepancies represent a seven months' accumulation

of changes on which the local relief administration might be expected to have incomplete information. It follows that the Ohio State Employment Service would have no information covering these cases unless the individual workers reported changes of address directly to that office. A large number apparently neglected to make such reports.

The declaration by 20 workers that their referral notices had either been delayed or not received might occasionally be open to question, but the number of such claims was so small that indiscriminate suspicion would seem to be unwarranted. The statements of some of these workers were amply verified, and none of the eight who were known to have received later referrals refused to accept them.

Employability Involved. Twenty-five of those certified for work and referred for placement were permanently unemployable and probably should not have been certified for Works Program employment. The facts concerning temporary unemployability--usually due to minor illness or injury--were, as a rule, readily established. However, delays in presenting and filing physician's statements were frequent. Thirty-one workers were physically unfit for the particular job to which they were assigned. In 21 of these cases foremen and workers concurred. In 10 cases, the workers considered themselves able to work at the referred job but were overruled and rejected by the foremen.

Ineligible. Referral notices were addressed to eight deceased persons. Four others to whom referrals were sent had never been on relief. Eighteen had ceased to be members of relief units prior to May

1, so that they should not have been certified for Works Program Employment^{2/}. Such information as was secured indicated that they were not interested in W.P.A. employment. Three other persons were in jail.

Inferior Jobs. Seven skilled workers declined inferior jobs (i.e. jobs below their trades). Notwithstanding the fact that many such workers have accepted common labor assignments, the reasons why some are reluctant to do so are cogent. First, they fear that if they once accept an "inferior" job they may not be reassigned. Second, they are apprehensive that such occupational change will be detrimental to their status both in the unions and in the trades to which they belong. From a number of interviews with such men, it was evident beyond doubt that unwillingness to work was not involved. "I am good for a number of years as an electrician", said one man, "but if I get out of my trade, I won't last very long in anything else."

Transportation. One worker, who lived in an outlying town, was assigned to a project which could not be reached by local transportation facilities. Two others lacked funds for transportation and were unable to secure them in time to accept their referrals. In 10 cases the excessive cost of transportation was the primary factor involved, the range being from 40¢ to 80¢ per day. Had the workers accepted these jobs, which were from 15 to 25 miles from their homes, it would have been necessary for them to spend from three and a half to four and a half hours daily in travel. These workers reported at the W.P.A. office, the justice of their complaints was recognized, and they were all later reassigned to projects nearer home.

^{2/} Only persons receiving relief in some month between May 1 and November 1 were certified for Works Program employment.

Other Reasons. In five cases, which, for special reasons, would require continuation of direct relief grants by local welfare agencies, income from part-time private employment was such that those responsible for the supervision of these cases advised against acceptance of W.P.A. employment. In only one case, that of a structural iron worker who declined a job at a sub-union wage, was the union wage scale the issue. Two workers lacked necessary equipment for the jobs to which they were assigned, one having no tools and the other having no clothing suitable for outdoor work. Three had already been promised employment in private industry and were awaiting calls to work. One, whose wife was in the hospital, was obliged to remain at home and care for four small children. One was in school. As a result of confusion of name, one woman was assigned to a man's job. Four cases involved clerical errors which were later detected and corrected.

Refused Without Cause to Accept Referrals. Only three of the 546 workers refused without cause to accept referrals. Two of these, who were single homeless men, immediately left the state. The third simply said, "I will not work," and further direct relief was withheld.

It is significant that, although interviewers were instructed to seek independent verification of the reasons given by workers for failing to report or to accept referral, in only seven cases was the validity of the reasons doubted, and in none of these cases could specific facts to support interviewers' doubts be secured.

Tendency to Prefer Private Employment. The earnings of 14 of the 165 workers employed in private industry, or 8.5 percent of those so employed, were somewhat less than the W.P.A.

wage of \$55 per month. However, if the costs of transportation to the W.P.A. jobs were deducted, the differences would, in most cases, tend to be small.

Preference for private employment was due to various reasons. Three persons, all young men, were learning trades; two believed their jobs held prospects of future advancement; four were on part-time jobs which promised soon to become full-time permanent jobs; one, a street huckster, wished to develop his own business; one had a job for which, because of its permanency, he was willing to sacrifice both relief and W.P.A. work eligibility; and three preferred to sacrifice both relief and work eligibility in order to continue at lower wages on jobs of uncertain duration.

Conclusions. This survey of reasons for unsuccessful referrals to the Works Program in Cincinnati clearly refutes the claims frequently inferred that workers were refusing to take Works Program jobs. The reason for this inference was that prior to this study reports merely recorded the difference between the number of referrals and the number of placements, providing no information on circumstances surrounding unsuccessful referrals.

The second conclusion of this study is that as a result of the magnitude of the W.P.A. program and the speed with which it was put into operation, all agencies involved in it were inevitably subjected to great pressure. The making of assignments involved the use of records which fell short of the usual standards maintained in regular employment agencies not operating

under emergency conditions. Thus, there were 412 cases, or 75 percent of the unsuccessful referrals studied, which were, for the various reasons given in the table on page 1, unassignable at the time that the work notice was issued.

As experience, and the passing of the tremendous surge of "first placements" on the Works Program makes possible the development of a more closely articulated administrative organization, it is to be expected that most of the difficulties referred to will in large measure disappear^{3/}. Meanwhile, unwillingness to work, and refusals without cause, to accept job referrals are undoubtedly of minor importance in the problem.

TOLEDO

Up to December 2, 1935 out of the total 16,572 assignments in Lucas County, Ohio, 5,034 or 30 percent, had not resulted in placements of relief clients in Works Program employment. The records on 4,200 unsuccessful cases were available in

^{3/} Could an adequately close and accurate check have been maintained on all certified workers in the labor placement files, at least 90 percent, or all except 54 of the 546 cases, might have been cleared and no assignment notice issued. The 54 remaining cases were: seven in which referrals to inferior jobs were refused, one refusal of a job at a sub-union wage, 31 in which workers were physically unfit for the particular job to which they were assigned, 13 involving transportation difficulties, and two in which workers lacked necessary equipment for the job.

the district office when the study began, and from these a 10 percent sample was drawn at random. Three hundred and fifty-one cases, or over 80 percent of the sample, were located within the city limits of Toledo, and the remaining cases were in the adjoining townships within a radius of 30 miles from the city.

The following table gives in detail the reasons why the 420 assignments in the sample proved unsuccessful:

Total.....	420
Employed.....	232
In private industry.....	173
On W.P.A. jobs.....	37
In C.C.C.....	12
On relief work.....	10
Failure of notification.....	81
Temporarily out of town.....	5
Not located.....	23
Incorrect address.....	12
Notices not received.....	41
Physically unfit.....	45
Permanent disability.....	10
Temporary disability.....	24
Physically unfit for job assigned.....	11
Rejected by foreman.....	17
All other.....	45
Occupation assigned inferior to usual.....	13
Skills not possessed by client.....	2
Distance from project.....	9
Part-time employment plus relief better than WPA.....	3
Lack of adequate equipment.....	2
No longer a member of relief household.....	8
Needed at home to care for sick persons.....	2
Miscellaneous.....	6

It is evident from the preceding table that the Toledo workers interviewed were unable to accept referral to W.P.A. jobs for reasons similar to those reported in the Cincinnati survey. Fifty-three percent of those who did not accept referral in Toledo were employed, as compared with 48 percent employed in Cincinnati.

Whereas 30 percent of the workers included in the Cincinnati sample were unable to accept their assignments because they already had private jobs, the corresponding percentage in Toledo was 41. In this connection it may be noted that factory employment in Toledo showed some improvement in the month immediately preceding the period of most active assignment^{4/}.

Forty-nine of the 173 employed in private industry were working for a wage lower than that offered for W.P.A. work. Undoubtedly prospects of permanent employment and of eventual higher wages influenced some to forego an immediate increase in income. For others, however, the explanation is simply that they preferred private employment and were willing to accept a lower income in the effort to become self-supporting.

Twenty percent of the Toledo sample failed to accept assignments because they had not received their notices of referral, had moved, could not be located, or were out of town. The notification difficulties in Toledo were increased by the fact that assignments were made under

^{4/} Factory employment in Toledo increased 9.6 percent between September and October according to figures in the Toledo Business Review, November 1935, page 6.

considerable pressure of time, and by the fact that several organizations participated in delivering the notices.

In the Toledo study some of the workers were rejected by the foremen for reasons other than physical unfitness; some of them lacked skills necessary for the job, and others were not needed on the project. These cases have been grouped separately in this study because they did report to the project and showed their readiness to take W.P.A. jobs

Thirteen Toledo workers, out of the sample of 420, refused assignments to jobs which were inferior to their usual occupations. Twelve of them were white-collar and professional workers who had been assigned to laboring jobs and one was a skilled worker who had been instructed by his union to refuse a job as unskilled laborer.

The other reasons why workers failed to report to projects in Toledo were similar to those reported in Cincinnati; distance from project, lack of skill, lack of equipment, no longer a member of relief household, and needed at home. In three cases workers interviewed in the Toledo study had refused W.P.A. jobs because their current part-time employment supplemented by relief grants provided a higher income than would a W.P.A. job.

Unjustifiable Refusals. The absence of any satisfactory objective criterion for judging the justification of failures to accept referral to W.P.A. makes discussion of this subject somewhat inconclusive. There were but seven cases, or less than 2 percent of the entire sample, which were considered to have had

unjustifiable reasons for failure to accept referral. A few examples are cited below.

An auto mechanic, who was earning \$8.00 per week at odd jobs in his back yard, refused a W.P.A. job although he might have accepted it and continued to earn the \$8.00 per week. His refusal resulted in discontinuance of relief, and after reconsideration this worker was prepared to accept any job offered him.

Another man refused referral to a W. P. A. laboring job because he wanted a job as a painter. It was discovered, however, that his experience as a painter was limited to three months.

One worker claimed he had never received assignment, but investigation revealed that the assignment had been delivered to him personally by a social worker. He was apparently attempting to conceal the fact that he preferred the higher income which he was receiving from part-time employment plus direct relief.

Difficulties in Assignment Procedure. Some of the difficulties encountered in notifying clients have already been discussed in the section pertaining to Cincinnati. In Toledo the pressure of assignment work during the last two weeks of November required deviations from the regular procedures and resulted in an increase in the number of inaccuracies and duplications. The Ohio State Employment Service and the W.P.A. alternated in making assignments on several successive days. When the employment service made assignments in the morning and the W.P.A. made assignments in the afternoon, neither organization could be currently informed as to the assign-

ments made by the other.

STARK AND ATHENS COUNTIES

The third study of unsuccessful assignments to W.P.A. employment was conducted in the rural and town districts of Stark and Athens Counties, Ohio. Urban centers of 5,000 or more inhabitants were excluded.

Only a small proportion of the workers interviewed were usually engaged in agricultural pursuits. Forty-two percent of the workers interviewed in Athens County indicated their usual occupation to be in the mining industry, and the usual occupations of those in Stark County were for the most part in the iron and steel industries.

Private employment increased during the autumn months in both counties, particularly in Athens where coal mining was resumed to an extent unequaled in recent years. Information regarding the employment situation is important in interpreting the results of this study, since the increase occurred at the same time that activity in assignment to W.P.A. projects was greatest.

The 273 failures to accept Works Program employment which were studied represent a 100 percent enumeration of the 134 such cases in the rural and town sections of Athens County and about three fourths of the Stark County rural and town cases.

The following table shows the reasons for the failure of the 273 assignments:

Total.....	273
Employed.....	166
In private industry.....	143
Home farm employment....	3
Already on W.P.A. jobs..	3
In C.C.C.....	13
On relief work.....	4

Failure of notification.....	45
Temporarily out of town....	9
Not located.....	19
Late notification.....	4
Notice not received.....	13
Physically unfit.....	33
Permanent disability.....	12
Temporary disability.....	18
Physically unfit for job assigned.....	3
Distance excessive.....	12
Other reasons.....	17
Erroneously listed as failures to report.....	4
No longer a member of relief household.....	3
Occupation assigned inferior to usual.....	1
In jail.....	2
In school.....	2
Miscellaneous.....	5

As was true in the Cincinnati and Toledo studies, the main reason for failure to accept referral was private employment. Such employment accounted for more than half the cases included in the sample. There were in addition three farm operators who preferred to forego W.P.A. employment in order that they might work on their farms.

Sixteen percent of the sample indicated notification difficulties. This was a considerably smaller proportion than in the Cincinnati and Toledo studies. However, the group of those not physically fit was proportionately the same, although relatively few of the unsuccessful assignments in Stark and Athens Counties involved unfitness for a particular job.

The factor of distance from project naturally assumed greater importance in this rural study than in the two urban studies. Twelve failures to accept referral, or 4 percent of the sample, were the result of

excessive distance from the worker's home to the project. The average distance for five workers who would have had to walk was twelve miles daily. The remaining seven, who could have obtained transportation, would each have incurred a substantial cost averaging five dollars weekly, had they accepted their assignments. In one extreme case, a worker would have been obliged to travel 130 miles daily.

When assignments are unsuccessful because the men receiving assignment slips are already engaged in private or W.P.A. employment, are too ill to

work, or are no longer living in the community, it is manifest that the workers have not "refused" W.P.A. jobs. Cases which fall outside this "unassignable" category are relatively few and must be considered in the light of surrounding circumstances. In 12 instances the investigators indicated uncertainty with respect to the validity of the reason given, but it is practically impossible to formulate criteria by which justification can be determined. Not one case interviewed offered a reason which in itself was patently unjustifiable.

