

# CONNECTING FAMILIES TO THEIR STIMULUS PAYMENTS

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In response to the pandemic, the US government automatically disbursed federal stimulus payments, including three rounds of Economic Impact Payments (EIPs) and the newly expanded Child Tax Credit (CTC), via the tax system. However, policy makers are concerned that some low-income Americans might not receive these benefits. By law, families whose earnings fall below the filing threshold are not required to file a return. These “non-filers” must actively claim their payments by filing a return. The Possibility Lab (formerly The People Lab) is partnering with the California Policy Lab (CPL), the California Department of Social Services (CDSS), and Code for America (CfA) to conduct and evaluate targeted outreach aimed at delivering stimulus payments to low-income Californians.

## What we're doing

In Fall 2021, Possibility Lab (formerly The People Lab) and CPL supported a state-wide outreach effort that targeted approximately 430,000 families who had not filed their taxes in 2018 or 2019 and who are current beneficiaries of the CalFresh and CalWORKs programs. Californians who meet these criteria are income-eligible for stimulus payments, and may not have received them via the tax system.

From September to November 2021, CDSS sent about 380,000 voice messages and 50,000 emails to encourage recipients to claim their stimulus payments. Outreach messages directed most recipients to a simplified non-filer tool created by CfA to assist non-filers with claiming federal stimulus payments and advanced payments of the federal Child Tax Credit. In addition to offering a simplified filing process, CfA also established a hotline through which recipients of the outreach messages could receive live assistance with the filing process.

All outreach messages were sent as part of a randomized evaluation aimed at answering three key research questions:

1. Does receiving information about available stimulus payments via voice message or email increase claiming relative to not receiving any information?
2. Does emphasizing the availability of live assistance increase claiming relative to an information-only message?
3. What type of messaging delivered via email is most effective at increasing claims of available stimulus payments, a message that reduces the perceived difficulty of the process or a message that emphasizes psychological ownership?

## Next Steps

Results of the full evaluation will be available in early 2022. The Possibility Lab and CPL plan to continue partnering with CDSS to conduct and rigorously evaluate targeted outreach aimed at increasing take-up of stimulus payments among low-income Californians.

## ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY LAB

At Possibility Lab, we are launching a national movement to mobilize community-engaged, data-driven innovation for the public good. Through sustained partnerships between public sector changemakers and academic research teams, we're able to tackle big questions that cut across traditional research and policy boundaries and help move us all towards an equitable, sustainable future. Visit us at [possibilitylab.berkeley.edu](https://possibilitylab.berkeley.edu).

## ABOUT THE CALIFORNIA POLICY LAB

The California Policy Lab (CPL) seeks to improve the lives of Californians by working with the government to generate evidence that transforms public policy and to help address California's most urgent issues, including homelessness, poverty, criminal justice reform, and education inequality. CPL facilitates close working partnerships between policymakers and researchers at the University of California to evaluate and improve public programs through empirical research and technical assistance.