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## Learning Community Call #1

### SOAR

*SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access and Recovery  
Technical Assistance Initiative*

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**PRESENTED BY:**

SAMHSA SOAR TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTER  
POLICY RESEARCH ASSOCIATES, INC.

**UNDER CONTRACT TO:**

SUBSTANCE ABUSE AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES ADMINISTRATION  
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES



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## Welcome!

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Kristin Lupfer, Project Director

SAMHSA SOAR TA Center





## Agenda

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- Welcome and Introductions
- Pre-Pilot Survey Results and Trends
- The Approval is Only the Beginning
- LC Topic #1: Identifying SOAR Applicants
- LC Topic #2: Supporting High Quality SOAR Applications
- Homework Assignment
- Wrap-Up and Adjourn



## Logistics

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- Downloading materials
- Poll questions
- Chat questions
- Group Discussions
- Q&A





## Introductions

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- SOAR TA Center Staff
- Learning Community Participants
  - State team introductions (2 minutes maximum)
  - AZ, CO, CT, IL, MA, MS, NV, OH, TN, UT, WI
    1. Composition of state team
    2. What you hope to achieve through this pilot



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## Pre-Pilot Survey Results and Trends

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Jen Elder, National Policy and Partnerships Coordinator  
SAMHSA SOAR TA Center





## Pre-Pilot Survey Results

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- 9 states returned the survey
- 5 one-year grants; 4 two-year grants
- Start of services:
  - Five began Fall 2015
  - Three between January and March 2016
  - One will begin in June 2016
- 32 sites (many sites cover numerous counties)



## Pre-Pilot Survey Trends

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How SOAR/IPS Integration will benefit consumers:

1. Increases options for maximizing income
2. Gives providers a more structured approach to assisting individuals
3. Enhances connection to the community and improves self-worth for individuals

Strengths:

1. Knowledge and resources of SOAR and IPS staff
2. Potential to increase income supports for individuals





## Pre-Pilot Survey Trends

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### Reported Barriers to Implementation:

1. Misunderstandings about working while receiving disability benefits and fear of work/losing benefits
2. Infrastructure needs (additional staff, tracking mechanisms, staff turnover), coupled with short time frame

### Other trends:

- No states reported individuals having income from employment before or after SSI/SSDI award (\*see below)
- States are in the beginning stages of collaboration between SOAR and IPS/employment and many lack formal assessment and data tracking procedures for combined services



## How Results Will Guide Learning Community and Pilot

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### Goals:

1. Increase understanding and resources related to working while applying for and after receiving SSI/SSDI
2. Create system-wide assessment and referral procedures and strengthen relationships between SOAR and IPS staff
3. Strengthen data tracking related to income supports from SOAR and employment





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## The Approval Is Only The Beginning: Encouraging Employment, Accessing Housing & Other Services

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Pam Heine, Senior Project Associate  
SAMHSA SOAR TA Center



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## Working for More than Income

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- Self-worth and self-confidence
- Define a role for the person in the community
- Foster a connection to others
- Add structure to daily life
- Critical step in recovery





## Common Myths

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- If you work, your SSI/SSDI application will be automatically denied
- Benefits and health insurance end immediately when you start working
- You can only work part-time while receiving disability
- If Social Security knows you are working, they will say you aren't disabled anymore



## Start Talking About Work

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- Begin the conversations early and have them often
- Remind the individual that it is their decision, let him/her weigh pros and cons
- Provide reassuring and encouraging messages
- Ensure the applicant is equipped with accurate information about working while applying for and receiving SSI/SSDI





## While Applying for SSI/SSDI

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You can work during the application process

SSA looks at the type and amount of work

- Earn up to \$1,130/month\* (SGA for 2016)

### Strategy: Encourage work from the start

- Can help to strengthen the application
- Might find that supported employment works better for individual

*\*Some work incentives can apply to reduce countable income*



## Poll Question

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# Topic #1: Identifying SOAR Applicants

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Jen Elder, SOAR TA Center



## The SOAR Applicant

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### Who can be helped by SOAR?

- Adults who are experiencing or at risk for homelessness
- *And* who have mental illness, co-occurring disorders or other physical disabilities

### Who is considered “homeless”?

- Moving from place to place throughout the month
- Living “doubled-up”
- Living in uninhabitable housing, outside or in shelters

### Who is considered “at-risk for homelessness”?

- Living in unstable or non-permanent housing
  - Exiting jails or prisons with no stable place to live
  - Permanent housing for those recently experiencing homelessness with limited income or relying on grant funding to sustain housing
- Youth transitioning out of foster care





## Definition of Disability

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1. Medically Determinable Physical or Mental impairment
  - Illness must either meet or be equivalent to the “listing” criteria used by DDS. Supporting information must be documented in medical records
2. Duration
  - The impairment tied to the illness(es) must have lasted OR be expected to last 12 months or more OR be expected to result in death
3. Functional Information
  - Applicants must demonstrate that significant functional impairment related to the impairment(s) exists that impede their ability work, i.e.) unable to work at Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA) levels (\$1,130 for 2016)



## Make the Link to Work

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- The question DDS must answer is: “Can the person work and earn SGA (\$1,130 for 2016)?”
- Disability must meet the criteria in SSA’s “Listings of Impairments”
- Must make the link between a person’s illness and his/her *inability to function* in a work setting





## Identifying SOAR Applicants

**Identifying SOAR Applicants**

This tool is intended to help case managers identify adults who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness who may be eligible for Social Security Administration (SSA) disability benefits. While we do not want to discourage anyone from applying for SSA benefits, this tool should help you identify individuals that most need your assistance with their application.

SOAR is designed to serve individuals who are able to apply for benefits as an adult under SSA rules. This includes persons 18 years of age or older as well as individuals who are within one month (90 days for youth who are aging out of the foster care system) of their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. Individuals age 65 or over with low income and resources may be eligible for SSA based on age or be eligible for retirement benefits based on their work history.

**SOAR Fundamentals:** The following 4 characteristics represent key eligibility criteria for SSA disability benefits:

- Applicant has a serious mental illness or exhibits symptoms and/or has serious physical illnesses that affect his/her ability to work at a substantial gainful level (\$1,130/month in 2016)
- The illness(es) or condition(s) have lasted or are expected to last for at least 12 months (or result in death)
- Individual is currently exhibiting symptoms of mental illness or has periods with worsening of symptoms that prevents sustainable employment. For example:
  - o Psychotic symptoms (paranoia or negative)
  - o Depression symptoms (depressed energy, lack of motivation, suicide attempts)
  - o Manic symptoms (racing thoughts, disorganized thoughts)
  - o Anxious feelings (paranoia, nervousness)
  - o Cognitive deficits (brain injury, problems with concentration, memory, etc.)
  - o History of trauma (history of abuse, post traumatic stress disorder, etc.)
  - o Other \_\_\_\_\_
- For applicants with mental illness, he/she has marked restrictions in at least 2 of these functional areas:
  - o Activities of daily living (personal hygiene, cooking, cleaning, transportation, etc.)
  - o Social functioning (getting along with others, anger, avoidance, etc.)
  - o Concentration, persistence and pace (as they relate to the ability to complete tasks)
  - o Repeated episodes of decompensation (hospitalizations, incarcerations, losing jobs/housing, etc.)

**SOAR Recommends:** The following characteristics are not essential, but may strengthen an application

- Applicant is prescribed psychiatric medications and continues to experience symptoms and functional impairments
- Applicant has obtainable medical evidence (for at least part of the past 12 months) that corroborates mental illness and medical complaints. If no medical evidence or large gaps in treatment:
  - o Applicant clearly exhibiting symptoms severe enough that a one-time examination by a physician would demonstrate issues
  - o Can write a medical summary report that details symptoms and functional impairments that demonstrates diagnosed disability
- Applicant is not working due to medical and/or psychiatric conditions (i.e. not because he/she cannot find work or was laid off)
  - o History of failed work attempts (started and stopped employment due to diagnosed disability)
  - o Long work history, but can no longer work up to SSA (\$1,130/month in 2016) due to conditions
  - o Scattered work history due to conditions and other factors

SAMHSA Outreach, Access and Recovery (SOAR) Technical Assistance Center      December 14, 2015



## Make the Tool Work For You

- Identify individuals who most need your assistance
- Do not discourage anyone from applying for SSA benefits
  - Plan for alternative service or referral
- Consider adding your program acceptance criteria
- Use in conjunction with other assessment tools
- Consult with colleagues or the SOAR TA Center





# Group Discussion

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## Topic #2: Quality Review of SOAR Applications

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Kristin Lupfer, SOAR TA Center





## Why Pay Attention To Quality?

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- Ensuring quality applications is a key SOAR Critical Component
- Increases the likelihood of approval on initial application
- Increases the expertise and skills of SOAR case managers
- Identifies challenges that can be resolved by the local SOAR steering committee
- Maintains good relations with SSA and DDS



## How To Spot Quality


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- Complete information
- Online form submission
- Medical records indicating impairment
- Detailed functional summary
- Doctor's co-signature (when possible)
- Timely communication with SSA/DDS





## SOAR Application Checklist



**SOAR Checklist for Initial Claims**

(Complete checklist and place on top of application packet before submitting to SSA.)

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Claimant's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ SSN: \_\_\_\_\_

Caseworker's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_

**Paper Forms**

- SSA-8000: Application for Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- SSA-827: Authorization to Disclose Information to SSA
- SSA-1696: Appointment of Representative


*If applicable:*

- SSA-3373 Function Report (Only needed if a medical summary report according to the SOAR training is NOT submitted).
- SSA-4314 Medical Report on Adult with Allegation of Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) Infection

**On-line Forms**

- SSA-3368: Internet Disability Report – Submitted on: \_\_\_\_\_
- SSA-16: Application for Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) – Submitted on: \_\_\_\_\_
- Medical Summary Report
- Medical Records

SSA/SSDI Outreach, Access and Recovery (SOAR) Technical Assistance Center      October 21, 2014





## A Complete SOAR Packet Includes:

1. SOAR Checklist as a cover sheet for the completed application package
2. SSA-1696 Appointment of Representative form
3. SSA-827 Authorization to Disclose Information to SSA
4. SSA-8000 signed and dated by applicant
5. MSR signed by the SOAR provider as well as the applicant's physician or psychologist
6. Copies of all medical records in chronological order
7. SSA-3368 and SSA-16 submitted on-line **24-48 hours** before turning in completed application package (Items 1-6)





## More SOAR Tools...

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SOAR Website: <https://soarworks.prainc.com/article/soar-tools-and-worksheets>

- Definitions of Homelessness
- Identifying SOAR Applicants
- Steps to Completing an SSI/SSDI Application Using the SOAR Model
- SOAR Checklist for Initial Claims
- Medical Summary Report (MSR) Interview Guide and Template



## Group Discussion

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# Homework Assignment

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Jen Elder, SOAR TA Center



## Homework

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- Outline current identification and quality review practices you have in place.
- Bring existing outcomes, if available
- Prepare 1-2 slides with information and send to Jen Elder ([jelder@prainc.com](mailto:jelder@prainc.com)) by close of business Wednesday, May 11<sup>th</sup>
- States will present findings (3 minutes maximum) to the group on the next call







## Wrap-Up and Adjourn

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- Questions or Comments?
- Next call: May 12, 2016 3:00-4:30pm EDT
- Thanks for your participation!

