SOAR WORKS

Getting Involved with SOAR in Tribal Communities:

You want to be a SOAR provider? That's great! Here's what to expect.

SOAR promotes recovery and wellness through increased access to Social Security disability benefits for eligible American Indian and Alaska Native (AI/AN) individuals who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness and have a serious mental illness, medical impairment, and/or a co-occurring substance use disorder. SOAR providers assist individuals with complete and quality applications. This is not an easy task, but we believe it is well worth the effort!

Training

The SOAR Online Course trains providers to assist individuals with the Social Security disability application process. The course includes an Adult Curriculum for assisting with Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) claims for adults and a Child Curriculum for assisting with SSI claims for children (under the age of 18).

- The SOAR Online Course: Adult and Child Curricula are free and are located on the SOARWorks website (https://soarworks.prainc.com/content/soar-online-course-catalog).
- Each curriculum consists of seven classes, each of which has a series of articles, short quizzes, and a practice case component. The practice case provides an opportunity for trainees to apply what they have learned in the course by completing a sample application packet for a fictitious applicant using SOAR techniques.
- It takes approximately 20 hours to complete each curriculum and participants can work at their own pace, starting and stopping as they wish. However, we encourage students to complete the curriculum within 30 days to retain the information learned.
- Upon successful completion, participants will receive 20 continuing education units from the National Association of Social Workers.

Many SOAR Local Leads offer 1-day SOAR Online Course Review Sessions to review key components of the curriculum, discuss tribal, state and local practices, and connect new providers to local Social Security Administration (SSA) and Disability Determination Services (DDS) offices.

Time Commitment

We estimate that each SOAR application will take approximately 20-40 hours to complete, from initial engagement to receiving a decision on a claim. This generally occurs over the course of 60-90 days.

- The time spent on each application will vary depending on the amount of engagement that is needed as well as other variables such as the experience level of the SOAR worker. For example, engagement with an applicant who is residing in an institution may take 20 hours, while it may take longer to connect with someone who is living outside or difficult to contact.

SOAR Critical Components

SOAR providers with higher approval rates credit their success to implementing the SOAR critical components[1] and submitting high-quality applications. Use of these components significantly

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1   https://soarworks.prainc.com/article/soar-model-critical-components

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increases the likelihood of an approval on initial application for those who are eligible.[2] The five SOAR critical components of application assistance are:

- Serve as the applicant's appointed representative using the SSA-1696: *Appointment of Representative* form.
- Complete all required SSA application forms online, when available.
- Collect medical records, assessments, case management notes, and collateral information.
- Write a comprehensive Medical Summary Report that includes psychosocial, treatment, and functional information and is co-signed, when possible, by an acceptable medical source.
- Perform quality review of application prior to submission.

Follow-Up

The work of a SOAR provider does not end after submitting an application. SOAR providers are expected to:

- Communicate regularly with SSA and DDS regarding the status of applicants' claims.
- Continue ongoing outreach to stay connected throughout the determination process.
- Help individuals obtain other needed services (e.g., housing, employment, health care).

Outcome Tracking

Tracking SOAR outcomes is a critical way to document successes and target technical assistance needs.

- Use the SOAR Online Application Tracking (OAT) system[3] or your state's preferred method to track applications submitted, critical components used, approvals/denials, and time to decision (i.e., from application submission to receipt of SSA's decision).
- Tracking outcomes is an essential piece of funding and sustainability efforts.

Local Involvement

Many SOAR communities have local steering committees and/or SOAR practitioner meetings. Getting involved locally and within your tribal community can be a great way to connect with others who are doing similar work. You can also seek support, obtain refresher training, and assist with growing and expanding your community's SOAR initiative.

- Find your state and local SOAR leads at: https://soarworks.prainc.com/directory

Benefit to Your Organization and the Individuals You Serve

Access to SSI/SSDI can be a major tool in recovery, both from mental illness and homelessness. With the income support and health insurance that SSI/SSDI provides, individuals are able to meet their basic needs, maintain housing, and pay their bills. As a result, they are more likely to keep appointments and engage in treatment. If your agency is Medicaid (or Medicare) reimbursable, you can recoup the cost of uncompensated care and receive payment for future services.

Without the support of a SOAR provider, it can take as long as 1-3 years to obtain approval for SSI/SSDI, during which time people are often lost to the process and require a great deal of community support simply to survive. With the SOAR approach, providers are achieving a national approval rate of 65 percent in an average of 100 days. The rewards are great for all involved!

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2   Based on data from January 15, 2005, to February 14, 2014, obtained from the SOAR Online Application Tracking (OAT) system. Data includes 4,200 application outcomes from 35 states.
3   https://soartrack.prainc.com

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