Guide to Collaborating with the Social Security Administration and Disability Determination Services

Purpose of the Guide

- Develop successful working relationships with the Social Security Administration (SSA) and Disability Determination Services (DDS).
- Provide examples of how successful relationships benefit SOAR-trained case managers, SSA and DDS.

Strategies for Collaborating with the Social Security Administration

Strategy #1. Designated SSA Liaison -- Identify a liaison at the local SSA office to communicate with SOAR-trained case managers. The liaison is the main point of contact for checking current claim status, setting the applicant's protective filing date and troubleshooting any issues that may arise during the application process.

Benefits to SSA	Benefits to SOAR Case Managers	Examples
- SOAR case manager serves as the applicant's representative - SOAR case manager maintains regular communication with SSA liaison - SSA has better communication with applicants experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness - Claim may be processed more quickly because SSA will get immediate responses to requests for additional information - SSA liaison will become experienced with SOAR and working with people who are homeless - SSA liaison will build relationships with SOAR provider agencies	- SSA liaison gives SOAR case managers a single contact for seamless receipt of the application - SSA liaison becomes familiar with SOAR and SOAR case managers in the community - SSA liaison can facilitate communication within SSA to resolve issues as they arise	- Boston, Massachusetts has identified a SOAR liaison at one of the area's many SSA offices (which includes Boston and the surrounding areas); SOAR-trained case managers submit all applications to one office where they are processed by the designated SOAR liaison. - Pittsburgh, PA has multiple SSA offices that serve the city. The Local SOAR Lead works with an identified SOAR liaison at each SSA field office, who assists in processing SSI/SSDI applications for SOAR applicants

Strategy #2. Community Meetings -- A representative from local Social Security offices participates in community planning meetings and SOAR Steering Committee meetings to identify areas of collaboration, resolve barriers and share best practices.

Benefits to SSA	Benefits to SOAR Case Managers	Examples
▪ Regular communication with the planning group ensures that all parties are included in the planning process ▪ Communication with SOAR providers ensure that applications are processed in a timely manner ▪ For those applicants experiencing or at risk of homelessness, a direct point of contact is established	▪ SOAR case managers can communicate more easily and regularly with SSA representatives, leading to better collaboration and information sharing	▪ San Diego's HOPE program holds regular steering committee meetings that include SSA and DDS representatives who provide updates and give feedback on the process. HOPE also holds monthly meetings with SSA representatives and case managers who are completing applications to discuss the general status of claims, completeness of applications and where improvements in the process can be made.

Strategy #3. Flagging -- SSA flags applications as "homeless" and adds a special handling flag with SOAR in the remarks to notify DDS that this should be a complete packet (including medical records and Medical Summary Report).

Benefits to SSA	Benefits to SOAR Case Managers	Examples
▪ A SOAR application is flagged as "homeless" in the SSA field office and identified as a "SOAR" claim in the electronic remarks ▪ Indicates that the application is from a SOAR-trained case manager and SSA/DDS should expect a complete and well-documented claim ▪ Ensures access to a SOAR-trained case manager who will respond quickly if additional information is needed	▪ Ensures that applications are being processed in a timely manner ▪ Ensures communication with a specific SSA claims representative or DDS examiner regarding the claim	▪ In Albany and Schenectady, New York, the head of the local SSA field offices provided training to their claims representatives to recognize a SOAR application through the electronic remarks sections and the materials submitted. Once identified, the claims representative immediately communicates with the provider regarding the claim and begins the evaluation process

Strategy #4. Troubleshooting -- Ensure regular communication between SOAR-trained case managers and local SSA offices to provide updates on the status of challenging applications to ensure that applications are processed in a timely manner.

Benefits to SSA	Benefits to SOAR Case Managers	Examples

■ The SOAR case manager works to keep the application for Social Security disability benefits progressing toward completion ■ The SOAR case manager becomes the applicant's representative using the SSA-1696 ■ The SOAR case manager regularly communicates with SSA on the status of the applicant (changes in housing status, income, etc.) and progress of the application	■ When working with individuals experiencing or at risk of homelessness additional engagement time may be needed. An unstable living situation may often challenge the communication and engagement process. Communication with SSA regarding the status of an applicant's claim will allow the SOAR-trained case manager to effectively communicate with the applicant about the process	■ A critical component and best practice of SOAR is to serve as the applicant's SSA-1696 representative. Through this, SOAR-trained case managers communicate with SSA and DDS about the status of the applicant's claim. The SOAR process also trains case managers in how to set an applicant's protective filing date, use the 60 day protective filing date window and provide complete information to SSA prior to processing.

Strategy #5. Pre-Release Agreements -- Allow SOAR-trained case managers working with justice involved persons to apply for SSA disability benefits 90 days prior to release. See also, *Best Practices for Increasing Access to SSI/SSDI upon Exiting Criminal Justice Settings* https://soarworks.prainc.com/sites/soarworks.prainc.com/files/bestpracticesCJ-508.pdf

Benefits to SSA	Benefits to SOAR Case Managers	Examples
■ An expanded timeframe will allow the SOAR case manager to ensure a complete application for persons who are incarcerated	■ Allowing people to apply up to 90 days prior to release will ensure that SOAR case managers providers have time to provide SSA with a complete application prior to release ■ Getting an SSA decision before release enables community providers to put housing and other supports in place so that applicants are not homeless upon release	■ Sing Sing prison in New York collaborated with the Center for Urban Community Services (CUCS) in New York City to complete SSA disability claims for eligible applicants and submit the applications up to 90 days prior to release. Using SOAR's critical components and an established prerelease agreement, CUCS had an approval rate of 96% on initial applications in an average of 31 days.

Strategy #6. Certified SOAR Providers -- The SOAR Local Lead provides quarterly updates to SSA with a list of active SOAR-trained case managers.

Benefits to SSA	Benefits to SOAR Case Managers	Examples
■ SSA knows who is SOAR-trained and completing applications in each locality ■ If SSA receives a SOAR application from someone who is not listed as SOAR-trained, the SSA liaison	■ By providing the names of active SOAR-trained case managers to SSA the community is ensuring that applications	■ The state of Kansas instituted a SOAR certification process which ensures that SOAR-trained case managers are up to date and regularly submit applications.

can reach out to the SOAR Local Lead to determine whether the claim is, in fact, a SOAR claim	are only submitted by those trained in the SOAR process ■ This helps to build trust and communication between SSA and local SOAR programs	The Kansas State Team Lead provides quarterly updates to SSA and DDS regarding active SOAR-trained case managers. This list indicates case managers that have maintained their SOAR certification and are able to complete and submit SOAR applications. ■ North Carolina's SOAR certification process ensure that SOAR-trained case managers provide quality and complete applications to SSA and DDS. Once a case manager completes the training they are considered 'provisionally certified' and their applications are reviewed by the State Team Leads. Once six applications have been reviewed the case manager is considered fully certified.

Collaboration with Disability Determination Services

Strategy #1. Medical Records -- DDS will accept medical records provided as part of the complete SOAR application. Case managers will let DDS know when they are unable to gather records from a source so that DDS can pursue. SOAR providers will submit records electronically through a bar-coded cover sheet or Electronic Records Express (ERE) upon case assignments at DDS.

Benefits to DDS	Benefits to SOAR Case Managers	Examples
■ SOAR case managers spend time interviewing the applicant and collateral sources to ensure that treatment sources are fully identified ■ Case managers follow up with unresponsive medical providers and send medical records they receive to DDS ■ SOAR case managers reach out to SSA and DDS staff to find out if there is anything else needed for the applicant's file	■ Getting the medical records enables the SOAR case manager to write a comprehensive Medical Summary Report accurately outlining the applicant's treatment history and functional abilities	■ Maryland's SOAR State Team Lead finds that SOAR applications allow for timely and accurate decisions at the front end, avoiding appeals, reconsiderations, repeat applications and unnecessary denials. There are fewer technical denials due to insufficient medical evidence because more evidence is gathered and treatment can be arranged or provided by the case manager's agency.

▪ With more complete applications, DDS examiners can make more accurate and better documented decisions than otherwise possible		

Strategy #2. Local Processing -- Disability Determination Services will request that all applications submitted by SOAR-trained case managers (and flagged appropriately as above) will be processed in state whenever possible.

Benefits to DDS	Benefits to SOAR Case Managers	Examples
▪ As DDS examiners become more familiar with the SOAR critical components and the SOAR-trained case managers who are completing the applications, evaluating the applications in state will be a key component of maintaining positive communication between the case managers who will be serving as the applicant's representative and the DDS adjudicators who are evaluating the claims.	▪ SOAR-trained case managers will have frequent communication with DDS adjudicators which will allow them to build relationships and streamline the process. Allowing claims to remain in state will ensure continued collaboration.	▪ During times of high application volume Missouri DDS was sending applications to other states to review. SOAR-trained case managers noticed that many applications that were flagged as SOAR were being sent out of state and set up a meeting with DDS to request that the applications remain in Missouri with DDS examiners that are familiar with the SOAR process. The agreement resulted in not only SOAR applications remaining in state but also decreased processing time.

Strategy #3. Consultative Exams -- DDS and SOAR case managers will work to limit consultative exams (CEs) whenever possible and when CEs are needed, DDS and SOAR providers will work together to ensure timely scheduling and attendance

Benefits to DDS	Benefits to SOAR Case Managers	Examples
▪ When examiners are provided with a complete application, DDS adjudicators can more often make decisions without a consultative exam, which reduces processing time and saves federal dollars on these examinations	▪ SOAR case managers who have regular communication with the DDS examiner can offer assistance in collecting additional medical records or collateral information ▪ This ensures that the examiner has the most accurate and up-to-date information to make a decision	▪ The state of Maryland reported that the rate of consultative exam requests on SOAR applications was 30%, this compares to a rate of 57% on non-SOAR applications.

Strategy #4. Function Reports -- Limit the requirement to provide the SSA-3373 when a complete Medical Summary Report is provided with detailed functional information.

Benefits to DDS	Benefits to SOAR Case Managers	Examples

▪ The Medical Summary Report provides a succinct, comprehensive summary of the claimant's impairments, treatment history, and the impact of the impairments on his or her life. It also clearly describes the impairment-related factors affecting functioning and ability to work. In some states or specific field offices, SSA and DDS have agreed that the MSR can take the place of Form SSA-3373: Function Report. As part of the SOAR process, even if the SSA- 3373 is required, the MSR is included as part of the application packet as additional evidence to support the claim.	▪ Since DDS will never see or often even speak to claimants, the SOAR MSR is intended to "paint a picture" of the claimant and his or her disability, addressing the functional areas that are of concern to DDS in its determination of disability. For people experiencing homelessness who may have difficulty recalling or discussing the nature of their disabilities, the service provider can play a crucial role in providing the DDS with the information necessary to make accurate disability determinations.	▪ The Nashville, TN SOAR program works closely with the TN DDS, which has a dedicated unit that processes SOAR-assisted applications. Based on the comprehensive information provided in MSRs written for SOAR applicants in Nashville, DDS limited the requirement to also complete the SSA-3373. This reduces time spent on paperwork, which ensuring that DDS has all of the evidence needed to make an accurate disability determination. The Nashville SOAR program has served over 1,000 individuals, with a 98% approval rate on initial applications.

Strategy #5. Community Meetings -- Local Social Security offices and DDS will participate in community planning meetings to identify areas of collaboration, resolve barriers and share best practices. *Also see, SOAR TA Center Issue Brief: Collaboration with SSA and DDS: Something for Everyone https://soarworks.prainc.com/sites/soarworks.prainc.com/files/SSAandDDScollaboration-508.pdf*

Benefits to DDS	Benefits to SOAR Case Managers	Examples
▪ Regular communication with the SOAR Steering Committee will ensure that all parties are included in the planning process. On the ground level, communication with SOAR-trained case managers will ensure that applications are processed in a timely manner and for those applicants experiencing or at risk of homelessness, a direct point of contact is established.	▪ Through regular communication, SOAR-trained case managers will be able to more easily communicate with DDS claims specialists, leading to better collaboration and information sharing on cases.	▪ San Diego's HOPE program, which is based on the SOAR model and best practices, holds regular steering committee meetings with representatives from SSA and DDS, who provide updates and give feedback on the process. HOPE also holds monthly case manager meetings. Providers are able to communicate with SSA representatives regarding the status of claims, completeness of their applications, and where improvements in the process can be made.

SSA Resources

People Experiencing Homelessness and Their Service Providers. SSA endorses local implementation of SOAR and provides information about SOAR on their website: https://www.ssa.gov/homelessness/

Key Strategies for Connecting People Experiencing Homelessness to SSI and SSDI Benefits. Social Security, the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs outlined strategies shown to help people experiencing homelessness apply for and receive SSI/SSDI benefits. SOAR is included as a key strategy: http://www.ssa.gov/homelessness/docs/Final_Key-Strategies-for-Connecting-People-Experiencing-Homelessness.pdf

Filing for Benefits Online. As of April 1, 2017, applicants who meet certain criteria can now complete the iSSI application (a limited, deferred SSI application) online as part of SSA's online disability application (iClaim). The iSSI application consists of questions that are common to both the SSDI application (SSA-16) and the SSI deferred application (SSA-8001) and is not the same as the SSA-8000. As such, the applicant will need to answer additional questions from SSA outside of iSSI about income and resources. For more information, visit: https://www.ssa.gov/disabilityssi/

Services for People Currently Receiving Benefits. Individuals can create a *my* Social Security account and sign in with SSA to: request a replacement Social Security card online, check application or appeal status, get a benefit verification letter, check benefit and payment information and earnings record, change address and phone number, start or change direct deposit of benefit payments, get a replacement Medicare card; and get a replacement SSA-1099 or SSA-1042S for tax season. https://www.ssa.gov/myaccount/