Standard SOAR Process

STEPS TO COMPLETING AN SSI/SSDI APPLICATION USING THE SOAR MODEL

After completing the *SOAR Online Course: Adult Curriculum*, case workers assisting adult SSI/SSDI applicants should complete the following steps as part of a standard SOAR workflow. In many states and communities, there is an established *SOAR Process*[i] for the submission and processing of SOAR-assisted SSI/SSDI applications. In other areas, the Social Security Administration (SSA) and Disability Determination Services (DDS) may not yet know about the SOAR initiative. Either way, case workers can use the SOAR model to submit quality and complete SSI/SSDI applications efficiently and effectively.

Step One: Receive Referral

- Request that external providers use the *SOAR Referral Tool*[ii] to make referrals. Track referrals received in the *SOAR Referral Tracking Worksheet*.
- Review the *Identifying SOAR Applicants* document, SSA's Listing of Impairments, and medical records shared by the referring source to help determine whether the applicant is potentially eligible.
- If applicable:
  - If the applicant is unsure whether they have any prior or pending applications, this can be determined by submitting the SSA-3288: Consent for Release of Information[iii] to SSA. This must be mailed or hand-delivered to the local SSA field office, unless a prior agreement has been established to submit via fax or a secure email partnership. Alternatively, you can call SSA with the applicant present at 1-800-772-1213 to gather basic information about pending claims.
  - If you need additional medical information before deciding whether to assist with the claim, request treatment records (see Step 3).
- If it is an appropriate referral, schedule an intake meeting and proceed to Step 2. If you are unable to assist with the application, provide information on alternative resources, including the Applicant Self-Help Guide.

Step Two: Complete SOAR Intake

- Use the *SOAR Initial Meeting Worksheet* to gather information and take notes.
- Have the applicant sign agency releases for all collateral sources, (i.e., family members, employers, etc.).
- Have the applicant sign **two** release forms for each treatment provider: your agency release (*Sample Agency Authorization for Release of Information*) **and** an SSA-827: Authorization to Disclose Information to the Social Security Administration. Signing both releases provides HIPAA-compliant "compound authorization" which allows you to gather records and re-release them to SSA.
- Complete and have the applicant sign the SSA-1696: Appointment of Representative. YOU WILL SUBMIT THIS FORM WITH THE COMPLETE APPLICATION PACKET (STEP 9).
- Schedule weekly meetings with the applicant before the end of the SOAR intake meeting.

Step Three: Request Records from Treatment Sources

- Request treatment records from two years prior to the onset of disability (date the applicant last earned Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA)) and any older records that may have information supporting the onset of the applicant's symptoms.
- Send a records request packet to each treatment source:
  - Cover Letter (*Sample Medical Records Request Cover Letter*)
  - Your agency release
  - SSA-827: Authorization to Disclose Information to the Social Security Administration
  - Provider-specific release (if applicable)
- Record the submitted requests in the *Medical Records Tracking Spreadsheet*.
  - Follow up after one week for any records not yet received.
- Review all records received. Confirm symptoms correspond with SSA's Listing of Impairments.
  - If symptoms are documented in the records, continue to Step 4.
  - If symptoms are not documented but are easily observed, continue to Step 4 and recommend a consultative exam in the Medical Summary Report (MSR).
  - If symptoms are not documented and not easily observed, encourage the applicant to seek treatment and revisit the application process when additional supporting records are available.

Step Four: Establish Protective Filing Date (PFD)

- Establish the PFD by **initiating** the Online Disability Benefits Application.
  - Go to SSA's website and click "Apply for Benefits."
  - Select "An Adult (age 18 and over)," "Disability," and "Supplemental Security Income for Disability." Click "Learn how to apply" and then "Apply Online."
  - Agree to the Benefits Application Terms of Service, click "Next" and then "Start a New Application."
- You will need to indicate whether the applicant is with you.
  - If the applicant is with you, choose "I am applying for myself." The applicant will then be prompted to sign-in to or create their *my* Social Security account.
  - If the applicant is not with you or cannot create a *my* Social Security account, choose "I am helping someone who is not with me." You will be able to proceed to the next step, but SSA will need to follow up with the applicant after the application is submitted.
- After providing basic identifying information about the applicant, a **re-entry number** will be assigned.
  - DO NOT PROCEED PAST THIS SCREEN until you are prepared to submit the complete application packet (Step 8).
  - PRINT THE WEBPAGE AND WRITE DOWN THE RE-ENTRY NUMBER. You will not be able to get back into the application without it!
  - Choose "Save & Exit."
- **You now have 60 days** to complete and submit the application.
- You may receive a Protective Filing Closeout letter from SSA. This is simply a notice that they have not received the complete application. You can proceed with preparing the application.

Step Five: Continue to Gather Supporting Documentation

Steps 5 and 6 will be done in conjunction with one another. Best practices recommend completing one form at each weekly meeting.

- Meet with the applicant weekly using the *Medical Summary Report (MSR) Interview Guide*.
- Gather information and record it in the appropriate section of the *MSR Template*.
- Review medical and mental health records as they come in.
- Continue follow-up efforts for any outstanding records requests.

Step Six: Complete SSI/SSDI Application Forms

Sign forms in blue ink to distinguish them as originals. Keep a copy of each signed form in the applicant's file.

- SSA-8000: Application for Supplemental Security Income: The applicant will sign the paper form and submit it with the complete packet (Step 9).
- SSA-16: Application for SSDI: Use the paper form as a worksheet and transfer information to the online application when ready to submit (Step 8).
- SSA-3368: Adult Disability Report: Use the paper form as a worksheet and transfer information to the online application when ready to submit (Step 8).
- SSA-3369: Work History Report (upon request from DDS): Collect as much information as possible and use the Remarks section to describe the applicant's functional struggles throughout their work history.
- SSA-3373: Function Report-Adult (upon request from DDS): Collect as much information as possible and use the Remarks section to describe the applicant's functional struggles.
- SSA-821: Work Activity Report (if applicable): Submitted if the applicant is working or has worked since the alleged onset date.

Step Seven: Complete the Medical Summary Report

- Finish writing the MSR and send it to your Nebraska SOAR State Lead for review.
- Send the final MSR to the applicant's treatment provider for review and a co-signature.
  - Plan for at least a one-week turnaround time for obtaining a provider's co-signature.
  - A co-signature by an Acceptable Medical Source (AMS) raises the MSR from "collateral information" to "medical evidence."

Step Eight: Submit the Online Disability Benefits Application

- Complete the Online Disability Benefits Application **within 60 days** of setting up the PFD.
  - Follow the steps outlined in Step 4.
  - Choose "Return to Saved Application Process" instead of "Start a New Application."
  - Enter the applicant's SSN and the re-entry number you received when you set the PFD.
- Use the information collected on the paper SSA-16 and SSA-3368 to complete the online application:
  - Part 1: Background Information (SSA-16)
  - Part 2: Disability Information (SSA-3368)
    - Enter the following information in the Remarks section:
      - ➢ "SOAR Application – Packet to Follow on or before [Date]"
      - ➢ "Represented by [SOAR case worker name]"
      - ➢ "Applicant is experiencing homelessness" (if they meet SSA's definition).

- • THE APPLICANT MUST BE WITH YOU TO ELECTRONICALLY SIGN THE APPLICATION.
  - o Part 3: Electronically sign the Medical Release (SSA-827)

Step Nine: Submit the Paper Application Packet

- Submit the complete paper packet to SSA **no more than two days** after submitting the Online Disability Benefits Application. Include the following documents:
  - o *SOAR Checklist for Initial Claims*
  - o SSA-827: Authorization to Disclose Information to the Social Security Administration
  - o SSA-1696: Appointment of Representative
  - o SSA-8000: Application for Supplemental Security Income
  - o SSA-3369: Work History Report (upon request from DDS)
  - o SSA-3373: Function Report-Adult (upon request from DDS)
  - o SSA-821: Work Activity Report (if applicable)
- Submit the packet via **one** of the following methods:
  - o Mail to the local SSA field office.
  - o Deliver to an SSA drobox (where available).
  - o Deliver the packet in person: Contact SSA and request an appointment. *This is not a request for an applicant interview; it is only for the case worker to submit the application packet.* Begin attempts to contact SSA at least 1-2 weeks before the 60-day deadline to allow for potential scheduling conflicts. (This may not be an option at all offices.)
- *NOTE*: Medical records and the MSR are **not** submitted to SSA, but rather to DDS once a disability examiner has been assigned.
  - o Use Electronic Records Express (ERE) or request a bar-coded cover sheet from DDS and submit via fax.

Step Ten: SSA and DDS Process the Claim

Once the online **and** paper application packet has been submitted, the disability determination process begins:

- **SSA** will assign the case to a claims specialist to determine non-medical eligibility. If the applicant meets non-medical eligibility for either SSI or SSDI, SSA will transfer the case to DDS.
- **DDS** will assign the claim to a disability examiner to determine medical eligibility. DDS will review all medical records submitted, including the MSR. If necessary, DDS can request additional treatment records or schedule a consultative exam (CE). The applicant may also be asked to submit additional forms.

While the claim is being processed, the **SOAR case worker** must follow up with SSA and DDS:

- Obtain contact information for the SSA claims specialist and DDS examiner and stay in contact!
- Let them know you are available to answer questions or provide additional information.
- If more than 60 days have passed since medical records have been submitted to DDS, follow up with the examiner to inquire whether additional information is needed.
- If a CE is scheduled, the SOAR case worker and the applicant will be notified by mail. Contact DDS to confirm that the applicant will attend the appointment.

SOAR practitioners should reach out to their Nebraska SOAR State Lead if they experience any difficulties maintaining this communication.

Local or Customized SOAR Process

In many states and communities, SOAR Leaders have collaborated with SSA and DDS to establish a *SOAR Process* for the submission and processing of SOAR-assisted SSI/SSDI applications. This may include additional steps or special handling procedures that would be implemented by SSA/DDS during the application processing, such as:

- Dedicated SSA Claims Specialists/DDS Disability Examiners
- Homeless Flag with "SOAR" in the Remarks for special handling
- Secure Email Partnership
- Designated contacts for communication about claims

Step Eleven: A Decision is Made

- SSA will send a letter to the SOAR case worker and the applicant notifying them of the decision.
- If the applicant is not eligible for SSDI (because they are not currently insured by the program), they will receive an SSDI denial letter while the SSI application is still pending with DDS.
- If the case is approved, the benefits will go into pay status, and the money will be directly deposited into the applicant's bank account.
    - If there is additional information to be confirmed (including if the applicant does not have a bank account), SSA will schedule a Pre-effectuation Review Contact (PERC) appointment to set up payments.
    - If SSA determines that the applicant requires a payee to help manage their benefits, the applicant and the payee must attend an in-person appointment to set up payee arrangements.
- If the case is denied, SSA will send a letter explaining why the unfavorable decision was made.
    - Read more about reviewing denial notices and the appeals process.

Step Twelve: Track Your Outcomes

- Track the outcomes of your SOAR-assisted SSI/SSDI applications in the SOAR Online Application Tracking (OAT) system.
- OAT is a free, web-based program that is easy to use, and HIPAA-compliant.
- Contact your Nebraska SOAR State to find out more.

---

[i] See Best Practices for Collaborating with SSA and DDS and Benefits of SOAR Collaboration with SSA and DDS.
[ii] SOAR Tools and Worksheets are *noted with italics*.
[iii] Review sample completed forms and guidance for completing forms.