

SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR)

What it is, How it Works & Starting a Local Initiative

What is SOAR?

- ▶ A model for assisting persons who are homeless or at-risk of homelessness and likely qualify for SSI/SSDI, with applying for benefits.
- ▶ Can be used by staff in a wide variety of social service situations and programs.
- ▶ Helps SOAR Case Managers to learn about the Social Security and Disability Determination system, and how to document a client's history and functioning in a way that relates to their ability to work and communicates it effectively within the application.
- ▶ It is up to each state, locality, initiative, provider to find or develop funding mechanisms to support service delivery.
- ▶ A lot of work to provide services.
- ▶ An opportunity for collaboration and system and process improvement.

How Does it Work?

- ▶ SOAR Case Manager serves as an official authorized representative for the client.
- ▶ Gathers information for the application from sources that may include:
 - ▶ Interview with client
 - ▶ Medical records
 - ▶ Employment records
 - ▶ Correctional facility records
 - ▶ Treatment facility records
 - ▶ New exams with medical or mental health professionals
- ▶ Case Manager synthesizes information into a high quality application.
- ▶ Communication between client and case manager through the process is essential.

Stats in Marion & Polk Counties

- ▶ 2019 PIT Count: 4,933 chronically homeless
- ▶ Since 2016 16 people have completed the SOAR Online Training in Marion County, no one listing themselves in Polk County has completed the training.
- ▶ Since 2016 a total of 11 applications have been reported in the SOAR Online Application Tracking System (OAT). 6 of those have been in the last 18 months.

The Components of a Local Initiative

- ▶ SOAR trained service providers
- ▶ Collaboration
- ▶ Data collection and tracking outcomes
- ▶ Local Leadership

Getting Started

▶ Roles & Responsibilities

▶ State Team Lead

- ▶ Liaison with the National TA Center.
- ▶ Provide technical assistance for service providers, local leads, local initiatives.

▶ Local Lead

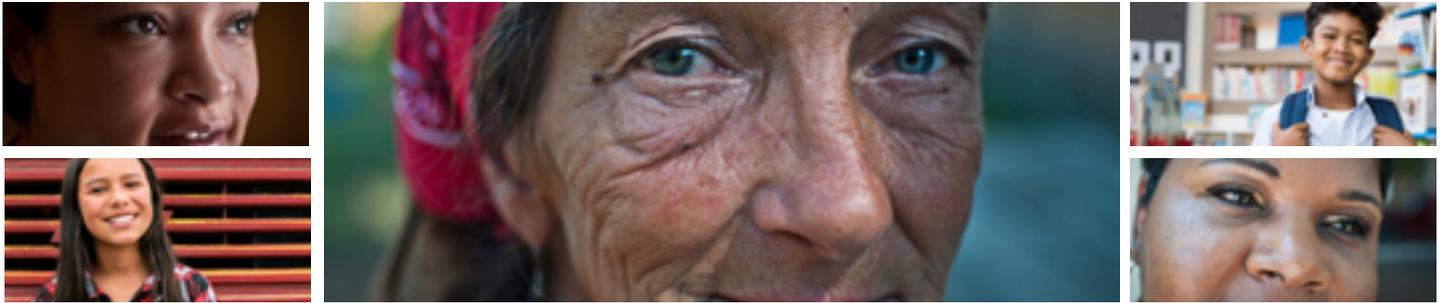
- ▶ Provide training and technical assistance to service providers.
- ▶ Provide leadership for developing, implementing, sustaining local initiatives.

▶ Steering Committee

- ▶ Coordinate and collaborate to provide support for the success of SOAR services.
- ▶ Developing, implementing, managing SOAR Action Plan.

- ▶ Local Leadership Team & Steering Committee can be one group or separate depending on need and status of SOAR initiative.

SSI/SSDI OUTREACH, ACCESS, AND RECOVERY: AN OVERVIEW



THE ISSUE

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) are disability income benefits administered by the Social Security Administration (SSA) that also provide Medicaid and/or Medicare health insurance to eligible children and adults. The application process for SSI/SSDI is complicated and difficult to navigate. Nationally, about 30 percent of adults who apply for these benefits are approved on initial application and appeals take an average of over 1.5 years to complete.

For people who are experiencing or at-risk of homelessness or who are returning to the community from institutions (jails, prisons, or hospitals), access to these programs can be extremely challenging. Approval on initial application for people who are experiencing or at-risk of homelessness and who have no one to assist them is about **10-15 percent**. For those who have a serious mental illness, substance use issues, or co-occurring disorders that impair cognition, the application process is even more difficult – yet accessing these benefits is often a critical first step in building resiliency and supporting recovery.

A SOLUTION

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) developed the SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR) model to address this critical need. SOAR-trained case managers submit complete and quality applications that are approved quickly. By maximizing income supports through benefits access and employment support, individuals experiencing or at risk of homelessness can achieve housing stability. The SAMHSA SOAR TA Center provides a three-step approach to SOAR implementation:

STRATEGIC PLANNING



Strategic planning meetings bring key state/local stakeholders (e.g., SSA and Disability Determination Services (DDS); State Mental Health Agency and Department of Corrections leadership; and community homeless, health, behavioral health providers, youth, family, and adult peer representatives) together to **collaborate and agree** upon a SOAR process for the submission and processing of adult SSI/SSDI and child SSI applications and **develop** an action plan to implement their SOAR program.

TRAINING LEADERS



Training of case managers using the **SOAR Online Course: Adult and Child Curricula**. These free, web-based courses include the development of a practice case using a fictional applicant. A **Leadership Academy** program creates strong local leaders to support SOAR-trained case managers and coordinate local SOAR programs.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE



Individualized technical assistance for supporting **action plan implementation**, identifying funding opportunities for **sustainability**, developing **quality review** procedures, and assisting with **tracking outcomes** to document success and identify areas for improvement and expansion.

OUTCOMES



Since 2006, over **55,210** people are receiving benefits because of SOAR.



The 2020 approval rate on initial SOAR-assisted applications averages **65 percent** in **115 days**.



In 2020 alone, SSI/SSDI brought at least **\$518 million** into the economies of the participating localities.

2020 Outcomes

INITIAL APPLICATIONS - ●

APPEALS - ●

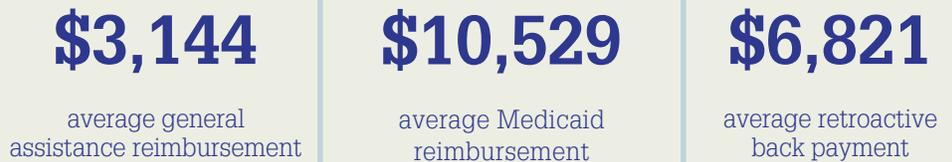


Cumulative Outcomes

CUMULATIVE INITIAL APPROVAL RATE / 65%



Financial Outcomes



\$518M brought into the economies of participating localities

Top States



The SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR) Technical Assistance (TA) Center is funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). SOAR is a national program designed to increase access to the disability income benefit programs administered by the Social Security Administration (SSA) for eligible adults and children who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness and have a serious mental illness, medical impairment, and/or a co-occurring substance use disorder.



Contact SOAR: soar@prainc.com | (518) 439-7415 x2 | <https://soarworks.prainc.com/>

*Inclusion: Highest cumulative approval rates on initial application for states with at least 325 cumulative decisions, at least 24 decisions in 2020 (2 per month), and a 2020 approval rate above the national average. Combined, these states had 26,323 decisions.

Implementing State and Local SOAR Initiatives

State and Local Leads spearhead and coordinate the implementation of SOAR initiatives. These leaders identify and engage stakeholders to participate in steering committees whose goal is to create and implement a SOAR action plan and process for adult SSI/SSDI and/or child SSI application submission. These committees meet regularly to collaborate, report on progress, and troubleshoot challenges.

Introduce SOAR to your community

- Identify and engage agencies and stakeholders to participate in your SOAR initiative. Educate and inform them about the purpose and benefits of SOAR for individuals with disabilities.
- Offer SOAR Orientation presentations for agency leadership and direct service providers.
- Attend existing community meetings and share information about the importance of SOAR.

Train and support staff that assist adult SSI/SSDI and/or child SSI applicants

- Identify programs that are currently assisting adults, children and families experiencing or at-risk of homelessness with Social Security disability applications. Explore reallocation of existing resources to incorporate fully or partially dedicated SOAR benefits specialists.
- Identify staff to complete the SOAR Online Course: Adult and/or Child Curriculum. Provide guidance throughout and following the training. Inform trainees of any state/local-specific processes.
- Establish quality review procedures to assess fidelity to the SOAR model and ensure that applications are complete and high quality. Get feedback from SSA/DDS on SOAR-assisted applications they are receiving.

Collaborate, Collaborate, Collaborate

- *Social Security Administration (SSA) and Disability Determination Services (DDS).* Negotiate a SOAR Process for adult SSI/SSDI and child SSI application submission. Identify SSA/DDS SOAR liaisons in local offices.
- *Medical Providers:* Identify medical providers who can provide physical/psychiatric evaluations and co-sign Medical Summary Reports. Explore using retroactive Medicaid to reimburse for medical evaluations. Set up a process to obtain medical records, free of charge if possible.
- *Other Collaborations:* Think broadly! Include school administrators, vocational service providers, housing agencies, jails/prisons, Veteran services, and representative payee services.

Track and report outcomes

- Identify tracking mechanism to be used (e.g., SOAR Online Application Tracking (OAT) or HMIS).
- Establish procedures for the reporting of outcomes by communities and SOAR-trained staff.
- Report outcomes to the SAMHSA SOAR TA Center as requested.

Fund and sustain

- Use your outcomes to expand or sustain your SOAR initiative.
- Educate stakeholders, influential leaders, and potential funders about the impact SOAR has in your state. Share success stories; report on cost savings (reimbursement/recoupment totals).
- Explore various funding sources. Consider use of federal funds (e.g. PATH, CABHI, Systems of Care); pool and/or realign existing resources; explore local foundations, United Way, corporations, and hospital collaborations; and investigate criminal or juvenile justice funding to implement SOAR in jails, prisons, or detention facilities.

Getting Involved with SOAR

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 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, and we want to be sure that you understand the commitment required – 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.

- The SOAR Online Course: Adult and Child Curriculums 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 CEUs (continuing education units) from the National Association of Social Workers (NASW).

Many SOAR Local Leads offer one-day SOAR Online Course Review Sessions to review key components of the curriculum, discuss local/state practices, and connect new providers to local Social Security Administration (SSA) and DDS (Disability Determination Services) 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 components¹ and submitting high quality applications. Use of these components significantly increases the

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

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) system³ 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 can be a great way to connect with others who are doing similar work. You can seek support, obtain refresher training and help with growing and expanding your local SOAR initiative.

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

Benefit to Your Agency 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!

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>

SOAR Steering Committee Team Composition Matrix

This matrix is a tool for identifying key stakeholders to take part in your SOAR Steering Committee. Steering committee members maintain effective communication between SSA, DDS, local leads, and SOAR case workers to discuss and resolve challenges that arise, identify technical assistance needs, and explore strategies for funding and sustainability.

Stakeholder Category	Agencies	Individuals	Your Local Contacts
SSA	Local Office	Field Office Manager, Homeless Coordinator, Work Incentive Coordinator	
DDS	Local Office	Professional/Medical Relations Officer (PRO/ MRO), Unit Supervisor	
Health Services	Hospitals/ERs, community health centers (FQHCs and Health Care for the Homeless)	Physicians, Psychologists, Medical staff, Social work supervisors, Medical records staff	
Behavioral Health Services	State/county behavioral health agencies, mental health/ substance use clinics, Mental Health Associations (MHAs)	Program managers, clinicians, case workers, peer specialists	
Homeless Service Providers	Shelters, drop-in Centers, transitional housing, CoC providers and representatives	Outreach workers, case managers with SOAR or SSI/SSDI experience, Program Directors	
Social Service Providers	Human services departments, state/local Medicaid/Medicare reps, faith-based organizations	Benefits planners, representative payees	
Peer Advocates	NAMI or other consumer organizations	Persons with lived experience	

Stakeholder Category	Agencies	Individuals	Your Local Contacts
Housing	Housing First organizations, Public Housing Authority (PHA)	Housing specialists	
Public/Private Funding Reps	Foundations	Development specialists	
Legal Services	Legal Aid	Pro-bono attorneys	
Employment Services	Supported employment; vocational Rehabilitation	Employment specialists	
Special Populations			
Veterans	Veterans Affairs, SSVF, Veterans Affairs Medical Centers, HUD-VASH, State VA, VSOs	Social workers, case workers, Network Homeless Coordinator	
Justice Involved Persons	Diversion programs, specialty courts, correctional facilities, probation/parole departments, serving reentry services	Jail/prison officials, Sheriff/police (specialty teams), public defenders staff	
American Indians and Alaska Natives (AIAN)	Native-serving organizations	Tribal leadership, direct-service staff	
Transition Age Youth	Youth-serving organizations	Youth representatives	