

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT DIVISION
Workforce Policy and Service Delivery Branch
Technical Assistance Bulletin 186

Program: All Programs

Subject: Ticket to Work Program

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This Technical Assistance (TA) Bulletin provides Local Workforce Development Boards (Boards) with updated information on the Ticket to Work Program.

On May 20, 2008, the Social Security Administration (SSA) revised the regulations of the Ticket to Work Program. Authorized by the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act (Act) of 1999, the Ticket to Work Program provides Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and disabled Supplemental Security Income (SSI) beneficiaries with expanded access to employment services, vocational rehabilitation services, and other support services. The new regulations, effective July 21, 2008, are located at <http://edocket.access.gpo.gov/2008/pdf/E8-10879.pdf>.

A short synopsis of the new regulations is available at: http://www.socialsecurity.gov/work/documents/SSA-08-008_Overview_of_Final_Regs_052008.pdf

Under the Ticket to Work Program and Title II and Title XVI of the Act, SSA issues “tickets” to SSDI and SSI blind or disabled beneficiaries. In this voluntary program, each beneficiary who receives a ticket can use it to obtain services from a provider, known as an employment network (EN), or from a state vocational rehabilitation (VR) agency. The VR agency in Texas is the Texas Department of Assistive and Rehabilitative Services (DARS): <http://www.dars.state.tx.us/>.

The intent of the Ticket to Work Program is to:

- establish a system in which qualified ENs provide employment and other support services (e.g., case management, benefits counseling, and job training);
- provide individualized tickets to beneficiaries for the “purchase” of services from approved ENs; and
- give beneficiaries a real choice in obtaining the services, education, and technology needed to find, enter, and maintain employment within an expanding universe of service providers.

The Ticket to Work Program rolled out in Texas in November 2003. As of May 2008, there are an estimated 675,166 ticket holders in the program in Texas. This figure is expected to increase now that the revised SSA regulations include as qualifying beneficiaries those individuals previously required to have a Continuing Disability Review before ticket eligibility determination.

Other key changes to the Ticket to Work Program include the following:

- Boards, as one-stop delivery systems under Title 1, subtitle B of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998, can participate as ENs without responding to a request for proposal;
- All disability beneficiaries age 18 through 64 are now eligible to receive tickets;
- ENs can now earn milestone payments earlier, more often, and at higher rates;
- For the first time, SSA can pay milestone payments to ENs when beneficiaries' earnings are equivalent to earnings for part-time employment;
- Milestone payments will be based on gross earnings, encouraging the use of various beneficiary work incentives;
- Total payments available on behalf of beneficiaries under the SSDI and SSI programs are now almost equal;
- Payments to ENs and state VR agencies can now be made for providing sequential services to the same beneficiary—i.e., the state VR agency provides initial, intensive rehabilitation services, and an EN follows up by providing the ongoing support many individuals need to maintain education, employment, and training activities; and
- Contractors who operate federally funded veterans programs may qualify as ENs.

Timely Progress Guidelines

SSA provides timely progress guidelines for each 12-month progress certification period.

Timely progress in the Ticket to Work Program is defined as the ability to work at levels that reduce dependence on SSDI and SSI benefits. The certification period begins with the month following the month in which a ticket is first assigned. SSA provides a description of the timely progress guidelines, included as Attachment 1, which outlines the incremental, obtainable goals that SSA has determined will lead to self-supporting employment.

Payment Options

As part of recent revisions to the SSA regulations, the Ticket to Work Program payment system also was revised. This revision addresses concerns that the initial phase of the program was the most expensive for an EN to provide, discouraging organizations from applying to be ENs. The revision also addresses challenges to retaining current ENs.

The Ticket to Work Program provides two payment options for which an EN may be eligible if a beneficiary is making timely progress toward self-supporting employment. These payment options include an outcome payment method and an outcome-milestone payment method, which parallel the steps beneficiaries take toward self-sufficiency. These options increase the financial incentives for new or undercapitalized ENs by:

- increasing the percentage of the payment calculation base;
- reducing the differential between outcome payments and outcome-milestone payments;
- equalizing funding for SSDI and SSI beneficiaries;
- increasing outcome-milestone payments;
- making payments earlier in the return-to-work process;
- recognizing that trial work earnings (\$670 a month in 2008) constitute initial efforts at self-sufficiency for many beneficiaries;
- allowing beneficiaries to combine initial services provided by VRs with ongoing support from ENs; and

- allowing ENs to use outcome payments or outcome-milestone payments to make payments to beneficiaries as a work incentive.

Both Ticket to Work payment methods are described in Attachment 2, 2008 EN Payments-at-a-Glance.

Benefits to Boards

Under the Ticket to Work Program, Boards are eligible to provide services as ENs. Boards that elect to operate as an EN will enter into an agreement with the SSA and maintain compliance with both general and specific selection criteria. General and specific selection criteria are available at the following Web sites:

http://www.socialsecurity.gov/OP_Home/cfr20/411/411-0305.htm

http://www.socialsecurity.gov/OP_Home/cfr20/411/411-0315.htm

Participating as ENs may provide Boards with an additional, unrestricted revenue source. For example, when a ticket beneficiary is eligible for and enrolled in a particular federal or state program, and receives services that are allowable under that program, the costs incurred in providing those services are allowable and may be funded under that particular program. When a Board subsequently receives an outcome payment or outcome-milestone payment for that ticket beneficiary from SSA, the payment is not considered program income, and its use is therefore not subject to program requirements. (*Note:* No federal or state funds may be used at any time to fund the cost of services provided to a ticket beneficiary—or any other individual—if such costs are not allowable under those federally or state-supported programs.)

To become ENs, Boards complete and submit the SSA's EN Proposal Documentation Requirement, available at: http://www.yourtickettowork.com/program_info.

Note: SSI and SSDI beneficiaries are eligible for core and intensive services and training in accordance with WIA Chapter 188, regardless of whether or not they participate in the Ticket to Work Program.

In addition, the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) may be used as a marketing tool for ENs. WOTC provides employers with an incentive to hire individuals with disabilities who receive employment services and other support services under the Ticket to Work Program.

Additional Resources and Contact Information

- Boards interested in becoming ENs and being compensated for assisting SSDI and SSI beneficiaries in entering or reentering the workforce can contact CESSI (Cherry Engineering Support Services, Inc.), SSA's Program Manager for Recruitment and Outreach, at 1-877-743-8237.
- For more information on the Ticket to Work Program or to register for an Application Walk-Through (available biweekly) call CESSI at 1-877-743-8237 or e-mail application@cessi.net.
- To learn more about how ENs request payments for beneficiary outcomes and milestones, contact Maximus, SSA's Operations Support Manager for the Ticket to Work Program. Maximus sponsors Ticket Training Tuesdays. Call 1-866-968-7842 and press 1-2-1.

Key SSA Definitions:

Payment Calculation Base (PCB)—The national average disability benefit payable under each of the two SSA disability programs, based on Social Security formulas. PCB for 2008 is \$981.17 for SSDI and \$563.35 for SSI.

Trial Work Period—After an individual becomes eligible for disability benefits, that individual may attempt to return to the workforce. As an incentive, SSA provides a trial work period in which a beneficiary may have earnings and still collect benefits.

Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA)—To be eligible for disability benefits, an individual must be unable to engage in SGA. An individual who is earning more than a certain monthly amount (net of impairment-related work expenses) is ordinarily considered to be engaging in SGA. The amount of monthly earnings considered as SGA depends on the nature of an individual's disability. Under SSDI and SSI, SSA uses earnings guidelines to evaluate work activity and to decide if work activity qualifies as SGA and whether SSA may consider individuals disabled under the law.

Please distribute this information to appropriate staff. Direct inquiries regarding this TA Bulletin to wfpolicy.clarifications@twc.state.tx.us.