

Benefits of SOAR Collaboration with the Social Security Administration and Disability Determination Services

This guide outlines the various ways your SOAR program can develop successful working relationships with the Social Security Administration (SSA) and Disability Determination Services (DDS). Examples are provided to illustrate how successful collaborations can benefit SOAR-trained case workers, SSA, and DDS.

SOAR Process Development

Establishing a [SOAR Process](#) is the first step in building collaborations with SSA and DDS. The SOAR Process outlines the SSI/SSDI application submission steps for case workers and how SSA and DDS can support their efforts. Developing this process together helps achieve the common goal of efficient and effective SSI/SSDI application processing. Representatives from local SSA/DDS offices should be invited to participate in initial and ongoing SOAR Planning/Steering Committee and Provider meetings to maintain communication, identify areas of collaboration, resolve barriers, and share best practices. See also, [Best Practices for Collaborating with SSA and DDS](#) and [SOAR Collaboration with SSA's Office of Hearings Operations \(OHO\)](#).

Benefits to SSA and DDS	Benefits to SOAR Case Workers	Examples
• Included in the development of a SOAR Process in their community. • Opportunity to communicate their needs and preferred methods of application/medical record submission. • Ability to raise any concerns moving forward regarding the quality of applications submitted as "SOAR."	• Regular communication with SSA/DDS representatives leads to better collaboration and information sharing. • SOAR Local/Agency Leads can use SSA/DDS feedback to determine follow-up training or TA needs for SOAR case workers.	• The Texas DDS has a specialty unit (Unit 22) that processes SOAR claims. The Unit supervisors attend bi-monthly SOAR Community Leads meetings and provide feedback and help address barriers. • State Leadership worked with the SSA field offices in each of Nebraska's 7 regions to establish an agreed-upon submission process for each office. The individualized guidance for each office has been incorporated into Nebraska's Standard SOAR Process. • The South Carolina State Team Leads worked very closely with SSA and DDS to determine a process for submitting SOAR-assisted claims throughout the state. All SOAR case workers are provided a workflow for application submission. SSA and DDS attend bi-monthly statewide SOAR steering calls to provide feedback on application quality and outcomes.

Designated SSA/DDS Liaisons

Regular communication between SOAR-trained case workers and SSA/DDS representatives helps ensure that applications are processed in a timely manner. To facilitate this communication, local offices can identify a SOAR liaison to serve as the main point of contact for SOAR providers and/or to process SOAR-assisted claims. Communication with SSA/DDS about specific claims is contingent upon case workers serving as the applicant's *Appointed Representative* via the SSA-1696: Appointment of Representative form, a critical component of the SOAR process.

Benefits to SSA and DDS	Benefits to SOAR Case Workers	Examples
• Become familiar with the SOAR Process and the components of a SOAR-assisted claim. • Build relationships with SOAR provider agencies and case workers through frequent communication. • Receive timely responses to requests for additional information, reducing processing time. • Receive regular communication from SOAR case workers about the status of the applicant (changes in housing status, income, etc.). • Establish a line of communication with SOAR Local/Agency Leads to address any concerns.	• Have a single point of contact for seamless receipt of applications and follow-up communication. • Obtain timely updates about the status of claims, allowing you to keep the applicant informed. • Designated SSA/DDS liaisons/examiners gain an increased understanding of the barriers faced by applicants who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness. • SSA liaison can facilitate communication within SSA to resolve issues as they arise.	• Boston, Massachusetts identified a SOAR liaison at one of the area's many SSA offices; SOAR-trained case workers submit all applications to one office where they are processed by the designated liaison. • Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 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. • During times of high application volume Missouri DDS was sending applications, including those flagged as SOAR, to other states to review. SOAR-trained case workers 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 SOAR applications remaining in state and decreased processing time. • Michigan has a designated SOAR liaison at every SSA field office, and dedicated SOAR examiners within DDS. SSA and DDS update their contact lists and share with SOAR case workers. SSA employees attend a one-hour SOAR orientation before becoming designated SOAR liaisons. • Kentucky has designated a DDS Unit for processing SOAR-assisted applications. The SOAR State Team Lead shares updated SOAR Online Course completion reports with the DDS unit. The Designated DDS Liaison attends quarterly SOAR Steering Committee Meetings and encourages SOAR practitioners to register in OAT.

Certified SOAR Providers

The SOAR Local/Agency Leads provide SSA with a list of active SOAR-trained case workers who have met any state-specific requirements.

Benefits to SSA/DDS	Benefits to SOAR Case Workers	Examples
- SSA knows who is trained/certified to submit “SOAR” applications in each locality. - If SSA receives a SOAR application from someone who is not listed as SOAR-trained, the SSA liaison can reach out to the SOAR Agency or Local Lead to determine whether the claim is, in fact, a SOAR claim.	- By providing SSA with the names of active SOAR-trained case workers, the community ensures that applications are only submitted by those trained in the SOAR process. - This helps to build trust and communication between SSA and local SOAR programs.	- The state of Kansas instituted a SOAR certification process that ensures that SOAR-trained case workers are up to date and regularly submit applications. The Kansas State Team Lead provides quarterly updates to SSA and DDS regarding active SOAR-trained case workers. This list indicates case workers who have maintained their SOAR certification and are able to complete and submit SOAR applications. - North Carolina’s SOAR certification process ensures that SOAR-trained case workers provide quality and complete applications to SSA and DDS. Once a case worker completes the training, they are considered “provisionally certified,” and the State Team Leads review their applications. Once six applications have been reviewed, the case worker is considered fully certified. - Louisiana requires all SOAR case workers to sign an agreement to use all critical components and follow Louisiana’s SOAR Process for submitting claims. Only case workers who sign this agreement are permitted to submit SOAR-assisted applications. This ensures fidelity to the SOAR model and strengthens relationships with SSA and DDS partners who know that a SOAR label means a high-quality application.

SOAR Flagging

The inclusion of “SOAR” in the Remarks section of the SSI/SSDI online application and paper forms is intended to inform SSA/DDS that this will be a complete and thorough claim submitted by a SOAR-trained case worker. When established as part of the SOAR Process, SSA can add a special handling flag with “SOAR” in the electronic remarks before transferring the application to DDS.

Benefits to SSA/DDS	Benefits to SOAR Case Workers	Examples
A SOAR flag indicates that SSA/DDS can expect a complete and well-documented claim, including medical	Ensures that applications are being processed according to the established SOAR Process.	In Albany and Schenectady, New York, the head of the local SSA field offices trained their claims representatives to recognize a SOAR application through the electronic remarks sections and the materials submitted. Once

- records and Medical Summary Report. - SSA/DDS will assign the claim to designated staff when applicable. - Ensures access to a SOAR-trained case worker who will respond quickly if additional information is needed.	Ensures communication with a specific SSA claims specialist or DDS examiner regarding the claim.	- identified, the claims representative immediately communicates with the provider regarding the claim and begins the evaluation process. - In Michigan, all applications with “SOAR” in the Remarks Sections on forms are assigned to designated SOAR liaisons at SSA and SOAR-trained examiners at DDS. SSA’s SOAR liaisons make sure to expedite processing of nonmedical information, and DDS SOAR Examiners understand the value of a Medical Summary Report.
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Medical Record Submission

Medical records are gathered and submitted to DDS as part of a complete SOAR application. Case workers let DDS know when they are unable to gather records from a treatment source so that DDS can pursue. SOAR providers submit records via fax using a bar-coded cover sheet provided by DDS or electronically via Electronic Records Express (ERE).

Benefits to DDS	Benefits to SOAR Case Workers	Examples
- SOAR case workers spend time interviewing the applicant and collateral sources to ensure that treatment sources are fully identified. - Case workers follow up with unresponsive medical providers and send medical records they receive to DDS. - SOAR case workers 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 worker 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 worker’s agency.

Medical Summary Report Submission

When a SOAR-trained case worker submits a complete Medical Summary Report (MSR) with detailed functional information, it can reduce the need for the SSA-3373: Function Report.

Benefits to DDS	Benefits to SOAR Case Workers	Examples
The MSR provides a succinct, comprehensive summary of the claimant’s treatment history,	The MSR provides case workers the opportunity to “paint a picture” of the	The Nashville, Tennessee SOAR program works closely with DDS, which has a dedicated unit that

symptoms, and functional impairments as they relate to the applicant's ability to work.

- In some states or field offices, SSA and DDS have agreed that the MSR can take the place of the SSA-3373: Function Report.
- If the SSA- 3373 is required, the MSR is still submitted as part of the SOAR Process.

claimant for DDS and share critical information that may not be found in the medical records.

- 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 DDS with the information necessary to make accurate disability determinations.

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, while ensuring that DDS has all 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.

Avoid Consultative Exams

DDS and SOAR case workers work to limit consultative exams (CEs) whenever possible and when CEs are needed, DDS and SOAR providers work together to ensure timely scheduling and attendance.

Benefits to DDS	Benefits to SOAR Case Workers	Examples
• When DDS examiners are provided with a complete application, they can more often make decisions without a consultative exam, which reduces processing time and saves federal dollars on these examinations.	• SOAR case workers who have regular communication with the DDS examiner can offer assistance in collecting additional medical records or collateral information. • If necessary, SOAR providers can ensure attendance by accompanying applicants to CE appointments.	• The state of Maryland reported that the rate of consultative exam requests on SOAR applications was 30%, compared to a rate of 57% on non-SOAR applications.

Pre-Release Agreements

SSA allows people in institutional settings (e.g., jails, prisons, or state hospitals) to apply for SSA disability benefits 30 days prior to release. SOAR case workers can facilitate pre-release agreements between institutions and local field offices to increase this time frame to as many as 120 days. See also, [Working with Applicants Involved in Legal Settings: Frequently Asked Questions](#).

Benefits to SSA/DDS	Benefits to SOAR Case Workers	Examples
• An expanded timeframe allows the SOAR case worker to submit a	• SOAR case workers can utilize this time to gather all necessary information and provide SSA with a complete application prior to 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

complete application for applicants who are currently in institutions.

- 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.

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.

SSA Resources

- [People Experiencing Homelessness and their Service Providers](#).
- [SSA Advocates](#). SSA provides a list-serv and webpage to engage with third-party groups and organizations.
- [SSA Resources on Representing Claimants](#). SSA offers information and resources for appointed representatives.
- [SSA Communications Corner](#): SSA offers information and links to information for their blog, newsletters, audio series, advocates, program policy, and research.