

SOAR (SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery) Reentry to What? Using SOAR as a Reentry Tool to Post Release Success

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
(SAMHSA) SOAR Technical Assistance Center
Policy Research Associates, Inc.

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SAMHSA
Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration

Disclaimer

The views, opinions, and content expressed in this presentation do not necessarily reflect the views, opinions, or policies of the Center for Mental Health Services (CMHS), the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), or the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS).



SOAR: SSI/SSDI Outreach Access and Recovery

SOARWorks for Reentry

Discussion

- What are individuals that are released from jail/prison expected to do (to avoid further interaction with the legal system) when they return to communities?

Discussion

- What are some basic requirements/expectations for post release success?
- What do you believe are the barriers to post release success?

Discussion

- How successful do you think that people without mental illness/physical disability that are returning from jail/prison are at meeting those expectations?

Discussion

- How successful do you think that people **WITH** mental illness/physical disability that are returning from jail/prison are at meeting those expectations?

Discussion

- No income
- No housing/housing insecurity
- No access to treatment
- Limited to no medication
- Limitations in functioning
- Inability to maintain employment

Reentry to what?

What is SOAR?

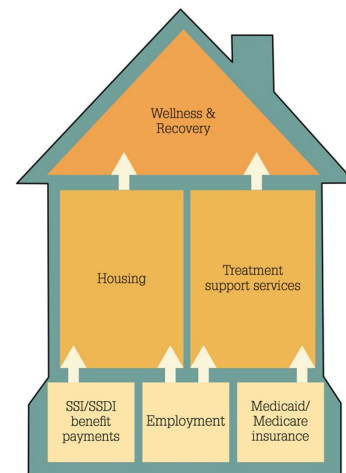
- SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery
- A model for assisting eligible adults and children to apply for Social Security Administration (SSA) disability benefits
- For individuals who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness and have a serious mental illness, co-occurring substance use disorder, or other physical disabilities
- Sponsored by SAMHSA in collaboration with the Social Security Administration (SSA) since 2005
- All 50 states and Washington, DC currently participate

A Foundation for Recovery, Resiliency and Reentry Success

More Than Income

- Access to health care and housing
- Increased education and employment opportunities
- Decrease in incarcerations and hospitalizations

SSI/SSDI: One Brick in Foundation



Social Security Disability Benefits

The Basics

SSI/SSDI Eligibility: SSA's Definition of Disability

- The law defines disability as:
 - The inability to engage in any substantial gainful activity (SGA = \$1470/month for 2023)
 - By reason of any medically determinable physical or mental impairment(s)
 - Which can be expected to result in death, or which has lasted or can be expected to last for a continuous period of not less than 12 months.
 - <https://www.ssa.gov/disability/professionals/bluebook/general-info.htm>

Establishing Facts to Dispel Myths

- FACT: A person can apply for benefits while incarcerated
- FACT: Prior history of incarceration alone does not make someone (in)eligible for benefits
- FACT: Warrants (other than escape) should not hinder a person from applying or receiving payment

SSI and SSDI: The Basics

Supplemental Security Income (SSI)

- Eligibility based on need: low income and resources; living arrangement
- Monthly amount based on Federal Benefit Rate: \$783/month (2020)*
- Date of eligibility based on Protective Filing Date/Application Date
- Health insurance: Medicaid

Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI)

- Eligibility based on insured status (FICA payments)
- Monthly amount based on earnings history
- Date of eligibility based on “date of onset” of disability, 5 month waiting period
- Health insurance: Medicare

*<https://www.ssa.gov/ssi/text-general-ussi.htm>

SOAR Eligibility: Decision Tree

SOAR Eligibility: Decision Tree



SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR) is funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and 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.

Should I complete a SOAR-assisted SSI/SSDI application?

Does the individual (child, youth, or adult) have a disabling condition?

One or more serious mental illness(es), medical condition(s), and/or a co-occurring substance use disorder that meets or equals the [SSA Listings of Impairments](#).

Y

N

Is the individual experiencing or at risk of homelessness?

The SAMHSA SOAR initiative is intended for individuals experiencing or at risk of homelessness. These terms are defined differently by SOAR and the Social Security Administration (SSA). The SOAR model follows the [definitions of "homeless" and "at risk of homelessness"](#) used by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

Explore employment support options and other local resources for economic support.

N

The individual is stably housed and is not receiving a voucher or rental assistance.

Y

Use the SOAR model and all five SOAR Critical Components for assisting with SSI/SSDI applications.

Use the Critical Components as outlined in the SOAR model to assist with a quality SSI/SSDI application. Do not flag as a SOAR application with SSA and DDS. Do not track the outcomes in the SOAR OAT program.

Flag the application as SOAR with SSA and Disability Determination Services (DDS).

Track the outcome of the application in the [SOAR Online Application Tracking \(OAT\)](#) program!

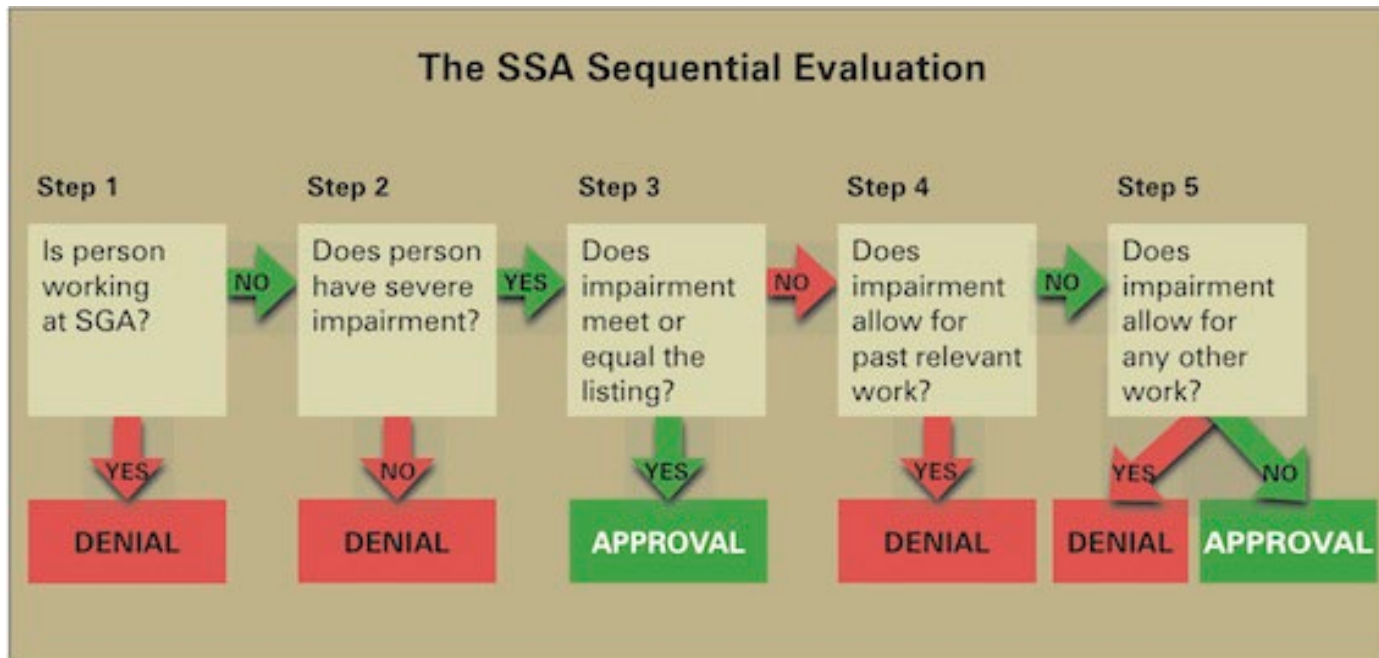
SOAR Critical Components

Using these five SOAR Critical Components, case workers play a central role in gathering complete, targeted, and relevant information for SSA and DDS, resulting in high-quality SSI/SSDI applications. These components significantly increase the likelihood of an approval for those who are eligible.

1. Serving as the Applicant's Representative
2. Collecting and Submitting Medical Records
3. Writing and Submitting a Medical Summary Report (MSR)
4. Obtaining a Co-signature on the MSR by an Acceptable Medical Source
5. Completing a Quality Review of Applications Prior to Submission

For more information: soar@prainc.com | (518) 439-7415 | soarworks.prainc.com

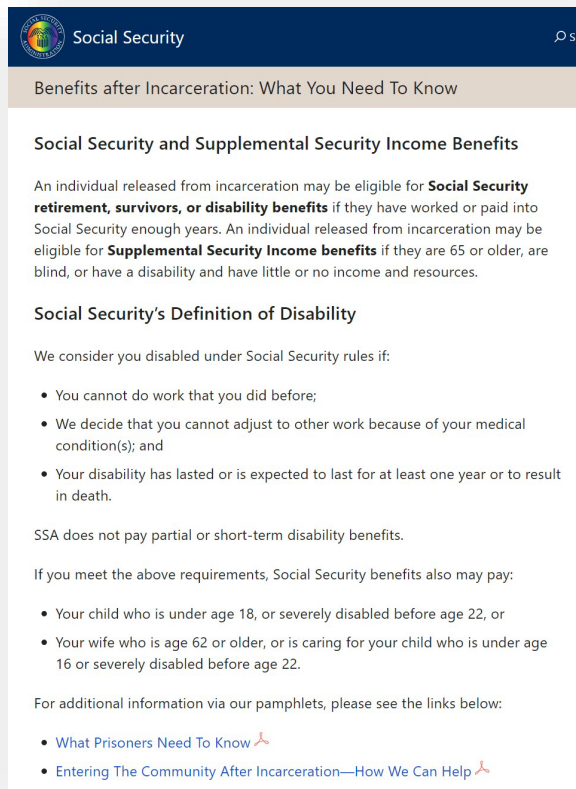
The Sequential Evaluation for Adults



Step 3 is Key!

- Person can be found disabled at Step 3 and begin receiving benefits
- If adequate evidence is presented that impairment meets or equals the Listings and the applicant is unable to work
- Connecting functional limitations to their inability to maintain work at a substantial gainful level, using appropriate medical documentation, is key

SSA Benefits for People that are Incarcerated



The screenshot shows the Social Security Administration's website. At the top is the SSA logo and the text 'Social Security'. Below this is a navigation bar with the title 'Benefits after Incarceration: What You Need To Know'. The main content area is titled 'Social Security and Supplemental Security Income Benefits'. It contains a paragraph explaining eligibility for Social Security retirement, survivors, or disability benefits, and Supplemental Security Income benefits. Below this is a section titled 'Social Security's Definition of Disability' which lists criteria for being considered disabled. It also mentions that SSA does not pay partial or short-term disability benefits. A section titled 'If you meet the above requirements, Social Security benefits also may pay:' lists benefits for children and spouses. At the bottom, it provides links to 'What Prisoners Need To Know' and 'Entering The Community After Incarceration—How We Can Help'.

Social Security and Supplemental Security Income Benefits

An individual released from incarceration may be eligible for **Social Security retirement, survivors, or disability benefits** if they have worked or paid into Social Security enough years. An individual released from incarceration may be eligible for **Supplemental Security Income benefits** if they are 65 or older, are blind, or have a disability and have little or no income and resources.

Social Security's Definition of Disability

We consider you disabled under Social Security rules if:

- You cannot do work that you did before;
- We decide that you cannot adjust to other work because of your medical condition(s); and
- Your disability has lasted or is expected to last for at least one year or to result in death.

SSA does not pay partial or short-term disability benefits.

If you meet the above requirements, Social Security benefits also may pay:

- Your child who is under age 18, or severely disabled before age 22, or
- Your wife who is age 62 or older, or is caring for your child who is under age 16 or severely disabled before age 22.

For additional information via our pamphlets, please see the links below:

- [What Prisoners Need To Know](#)
- [Entering The Community After Incarceration—How We Can Help](#)

- Specialty Courts take a collaborative approach to
 - engage participants in long-term treatment,
 - agree to court supervision, and
 - divert from traditional court proceedings.
- It is important to understand what happens when beneficiaries become incarcerated.
- <https://www.ssa.gov/reentry/benefits.htm>

Receiving Benefits: Supplemental Security Income (SSI)

Incarceration Time	Effect on Benefits	Action Needed Upon Release
< 1 full calendar month	No effect	N/A
1 - 12 calendar months	Suspended	Can be reinstated upon release
12+ consecutive calendar months	Terminated	Must reapply*

*As a general rule, reapplication can be made 30 days prior to expected release date but benefits cannot begin until release. With a pre-release agreement, this time can be extended to 120 days prior to release.

Receiving Benefits: Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI)

Incarceration Time	Effect on Benefits	Action Needed Upon Release
< 30 days	No effect	N/A
> 30 days* *convicted and confined	Suspended	Can be reinstated upon release

*Recipients are eligible to continue receiving their benefits until they are convicted of a criminal offense and confined to a penal institution for more than 30 continuous days.

Pre-Release Applications

- New applications can be made prior to release
- The general rule is 30 days prior to the expected release date
- Pre-release agreements between SSA and the institution can be extended to as many as 120 days prior to release

Collaborations with Legal Settings



SOAR WORKS SOAR and Criminal Justice Technical Assistance Awards



2017

- A. Maricopa County Correctional Health Services
- B. Burrell, Inc.
- C. Elgin Police Dept.
- D. Mecklenburg County Criminal Justice Services
- E. Consumer Health Coalition
- F. The Kent Center



2018

- A. Mississippi Dept. of Corrections
- B. Directions for Living
- C. Martin Girls Academy
- D. Delaware Dept. of Corrections
- E. Newark Community Solutions
- F. New Hour for Women and Children



2019

- A. California Dept. of State Hospitals
- B. Riverside University Health System in collaboration with Riverside County Jail
- C. Volunteers of America Southeast Louisiana
- D. Chattanooga City Hamilton County Mental Health Court
- E. Legal Council for Health Justice in collaboration with Cook County Dept. of Corrections
- F. Second Chance Reentry

SOAR and Jail Collaboration: Davidson County

- Davidson County, Tennessee SOAR DCSO (Department of Corrections/Sheriff's Office)
- Collaboration through the Mayor's Office of Innovation, Sheriff's Office, and Metro Social Services
- Initiative within the Jail was established July 2014
- Sole mission of SOAR at DCSO:
 - Assist incarcerated individuals with a severe and persistent mental illness who are without income and/or experiencing homelessness to re-enter into society
- Outcomes: 89% of applications approved
- Average stay in jail of 48 days



Criminal Justice Services-Forensic Evaluations Unit



- Mecklenburg County, NC 6 SOAR Trained staff at Criminal Justice Services (Forensic Evaluations Unit, Reentry Services, Treatment Court)
- 2 SOAR Trained staff at Jail Inmate Services
- 2 SOAR Trained Social Workers at the Public Defender's Office
- All working in collaboration with SOAR trained community partners

Success: Miami/Dade, Florida

- Diversion courts, in-reach initiatives, reentry planning, and SOAR trained corrections staff
- Reduces recidivism, prevents incarceration, saves money

Miami / Dade Jail Diversion Program

- Housing and treatment provided upon release based on likelihood of SSI approval
- Recidivism dropped from 70 to 22 percent comparing the year before and after SSI approval; demonstrated \$7 million in savings to the State of Florida
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TBT_p0GrqYE&ab_channel=OneMind



SOAR and Prison Collaboration: Oklahoma

- Funded by the Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services
- Oklahoma Department of Corrections staff trained to assist with accessing public benefits, e.g. SSI/SSDI
- Built and nurtured relationships with state and federal partners
 - Held regular meetings with all stakeholders
- Collaboration on 4 federal re-entry grants
 - These grants target people with co-occurring disorders
 - Also includes applying for public benefits when applicable
- Over the past 11 years, approval rates have been >80%



SOAR Use in Jails/Prisons: Cumulative Outcomes

707

Cumulative total of SOAR-assisted
initial SSI/SSDI applications
for people residing in
correctional facilities

71%

Approval rate

99

Average days
to decision

What we already know....

- People with mental illnesses remain in jail eight times longer than other offenders at a cost that is seven times higher (Mental Health America, 2008).
- At least three quarters of incarcerated individuals with mental illness have a co-occurring substance use disorder (Council of State Governments, 2012).
- More than 20 percent of prisoners with mental illness experienced homelessness in the months before their incarceration, compared with 10 percent of the general prison population (Greenberg & Rosenheck, 2008).
- The intersection of criminal justice and behavioral health not only affects the justice-involved person but all systems involved in their care (treatment, housing, employment, and supervision).

Yet.... Benefits Acquisition is an Underutilized Reentry Tool

- For eligible individuals, benefits acquisition increases access to income and health insurance and promotes successful reentry
 - Income = Access to housing security
 - Insurance = Access to treatment
 - Housing + Treatment = Reduction in recidivism
 - Reduction in recidivism = Reduced financial burden to states, counties, and agencies

Specialty Court Participation

- Specialty Courts can be used as a tool to avoid the negative impact that incarceration could have for people involved in the legal system that already have their benefits in place.

SOAR Success: Tulsa Treatment Court

- Tulsa Treatment Court was able to secure funding for a full time SOAR specialist to serve their clients.
- The specialist was hired July 2023!



Continue SOAR Success in Specialty Courts

- Behaviors that result in the participants' interaction with legal systems may be connected to the symptoms of a diagnosed/undiagnosed mental health issue
 - Substance use may be evidence of other struggles
 - Strong connection between substance use, trauma, and serious mental illness
- We share the same clients!
 - SOAR assistance for individuals within the community that have support from the courts is a great benefit
 - Specialty court participants are encouraged to engage for longer terms which enables SOAR providers to continue engagement to complete the application process
- Using the SOAR model as a resource for specialty court participants can encourage continued treatment (insurance) and address basic needs and housing barriers (income)

Benefits of the SOAR Online Courses

- Standardized training provided across all geographic areas
- SOAR Leaders can coordinate follow-up training and support
- Courses are FREE, web-based, and self-guided
- 20 CEUs from National Association of Social Workers (NASW)



SOAR Online Course: Adult Curriculum

This course trains case workers to assist adults (age 18+) who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness and have a serious mental illness, medical impairment, and/or a co-occurring substance use disorder to apply for the Social Security Administration's (SSA) disability programs, Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI).





SOAR Online Course: Child Curriculum

This course trains case workers to assist children (under age 18) who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness and have a serious mental illness, medical impairment, and/or a co-occurring substance use disorder to apply for Supplemental Security Income (SSI), a Social Security Administration (SSA) disability benefit program.

SOAR Online Course: Articles and Practice Case

Articles and Content

Course: **SOAR Online Course: Adult Curriculum** Exit

Class 01: The Need for SOAR

SSA: What is Disability?

Federal and state agencies, including SSA define the term "disability" in various ways. It is important to understand how SSA defines disability.

Print Page Acronyms & Quick Facts

Pages in this Course:

- Course Introduction
- 01. The Need for SOAR
- 01. What is SOAR?
- 02. Overview of Social Security Disability Programs: SSI and SSDI
- 03. SSA: What is Disability?**
- 04. Access to SSA Disability Programs: Players, Roles & Tasks
- 05. Steps in the SSA Disability Application Process
- 06. Disability Determination: The SSA Sequential Evaluation
- 07. The SOAR Model: Critical Components
- 08. The SOAR Process: Critical Components in Action
- 09. Definitions of Homelessness
- 10. Identifying SOAR Applicants
- 11. SOAR Values
- 12. Try It: Key Concepts of Class 1
- 13. Class 1 Conclusion
- 14. Meet Your Client - Practice Case
- 02. Initiating the Application
- 03. Exploring Basic Eligibility
- 04. Medical Information
- 05. The Link to Functioning
- 06. Completing the Application Packet

Disability and Work

The Social Security Administration (SSA) recognizes that a person can have a serious illness or condition yet still be able to work. For example, many people with serious mental illnesses in recovery are able to work. Many enjoy the benefits of work, including:

- An income that goes beyond meeting the most basic needs
- A sense of accomplishment and identity
- The satisfaction of being productive members of their communities

SOAR helps people to access SSI/SSDI in the hope they will eventually be able to enjoy these benefits.

SSA's Definition of Disability

The Social Security Administration (SSA) defines disability as:

- The inability to engage in *substantial gainful activity* (SGA)
- Because of *medically determinable* physical or mental *impairment(s)*
- That has lasted or is expected to last for a continuous period of *at least 12 months* OR is expected to result in *death*

Substantial gainful activity (SGA)



- SSA term with specific criteria and calculations
- Activities that are productive (mental or physical)
- "Gainful" – work activity for pay or profit, even if profit is not realized
- Earnings of \$1,350/month in 2022*
- SSA and DDS need to know: Can the person work at levels of SGA?

Medically determinable

- Physical or mental health conditions
- Must be documented with clear evidence by an acceptable medical source as defined by SSA

Impaired functioning

Practice Case

Course: **SOAR Online Course: Adult Curriculum** Exit

Class 03: Exploring Basic Eligibility

Practice Case: Collect and Review Medical Records

Print Page Acronyms & Quick Facts

Pages in this Course:

- Course Introduction
- 01. The Need for SOAR
- 02. Initiating the Application
- 03. Exploring Basic Eligibility
- 01. Exploring Basic Eligibility: "Non-Medical" Information**
- 02. SSA and VA Disability Benefits: Tips for Veterans
- 03. SSA-16: Application for Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI)
- 04. Information Requested on the Online Disability Benefit Application
- 05. SSA-8000: Application for Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- 06. SSA-8000: Living Arrangements
- 07. Try It: Living Arrangements
- 08. SSA-8000, Parts 1 & 2: Basic Eligibility and Living Arrangements
- 09. SSA-8000, Parts 3 & 4: Income and Resources
- 10. SSA-8000, Parts 5, 6, 7 & 8
- 11. Class 3 Conclusion
- 12. Collect and Review Medical Records - Practice Case**
- 04. Medical Information
- 05. The Link to Functioning
- 06. Completing the Application Packet
- 07. Supporting Resiliency and Recovery
- Course Completion

Welcome to the SOAR Online Course Practice Case!

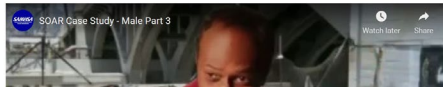
Tasks for this Class:

- Learn about your applicant**
 - View the interview video.
 - Read the progress notes and medical records.
- Begin to fill out forms SSA-8000 and SSA-16**
 - Open the blank forms you saved to your computer on the Class 1 Practice Case page, *Meet Your Client*.
 - Begin to fill in the forms electronically and **save your changes**.
 - You will upload these completed forms on the Class 4 Practice Case page.
- Begin writing the Medical Summary Report (MSR)**
 - Use the MSR Template provided on the Class 1 Practice Case page, *Meet Your Client*.
 - Use the information you have learned about your applicant to begin writing the Personal History Section.
 - You will upload the completed MSR on the Class 6 Practice Case page.

Need help? Read our [troubleshooting tips](#) or [watch this video](#) about saving/completing forms. You can also email us at soaronline@vaivinc.com.

Step 1: Watch the Video

Watch the Interview Video and take notes on what you observe. Come back to this page at any time to view the video again.



Getting Involved: Time Commitment

- Training: 20 hours
- 20-40 hours per complete application
- SOAR Critical Components
- Outcome Tracking
- Benefit to Your Agency and the Individuals You Serve



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.prairc.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.

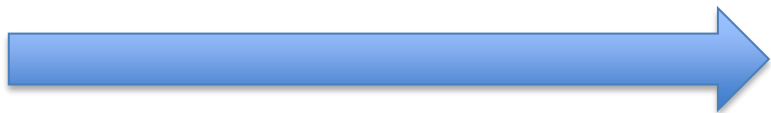
SOAR Critical Components

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

Online Application Tracking (OAT)



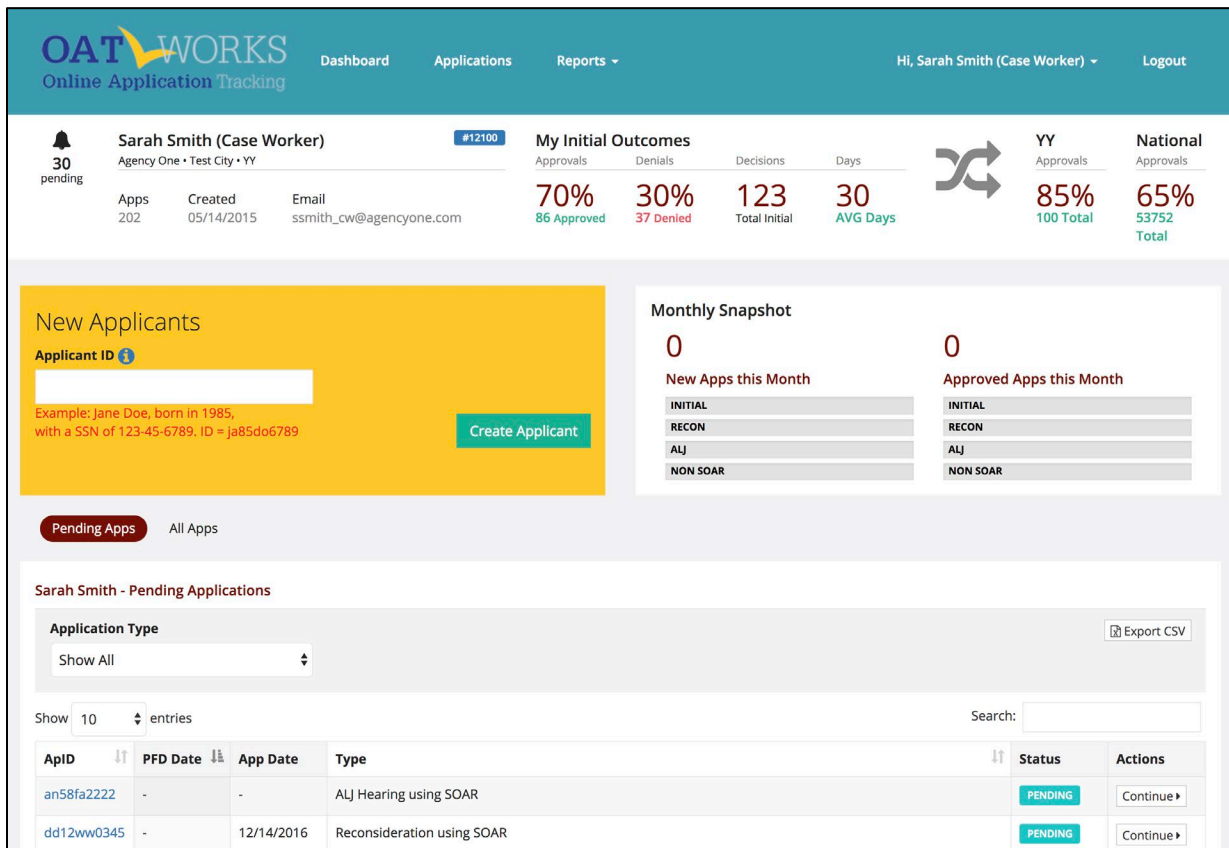
All the reasons
OAT is awesome!



- Web based
- User friendly
- HIPAA compliant
- Monitors quality
- Takes only 3-5 minutes
- It's FREE!

<https://soartrack.samhsa.gov>

OAT Case Worker Dashboard



Next Steps

- ✓ Learn more about SOAR
- ✓ Get in touch with your SAMHSA SOAR TA Center liaison
 - Discuss how SOAR participants will be selected
 - Decide who will assist with applications
- ✓ Reach out to your local or state SOAR leads
- ✓ Register for the SOAR Online Course



Questions?

- What are you still wondering about?
- What can be your next step?



Resources

Learn more about SOAR: <https://soarworks.prainc.com/>

To assist with applications for individuals that are incarcerated/reentering communities:

<https://soarworks.prainc.com/topics/criminal-justice>

- Infographic
- FAQs
- Sample tools
- Issue Brief

Thank You

SAMHSA's mission is to reduce the impact of substance abuse and mental illness on America's communities.



www.samhsa.gov

1-877-SAMHSA-7 (1-877-726-4727) • 1-800-487-4889 (TDD)