

Building and Sustaining SOAR Relationships with SSA and DDS

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration
(SAMHSA) SOAR Technical Assistance (TA) Center
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SAMHSA
Substance Abuse and Mental Health
Services Administration

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Dorrine Gross
PATH Program Coordinator, SOAR COR
Division of State and Community Systems Development
Center for Mental Health Services

Welcome!

Purpose and Objectives

- Understand why building and sustaining relationships with the Social Security Administration (SSA) and Disability Determination Services (DDS) is essential to SOAR implementation.
- Apply strategies for working collaboratively with key representatives from your SSA and DDS offices.
- Learn about available tools to support your relationship building efforts with your SSA and DDS representatives.

Agenda

Presenters

- Shawn Fordham, JD, MPA, MAPM, Regional Communications Director, Philadelphia Regional Office, Region III, SSA
- Georgi Fisher, MSW, Housing and Benefits Coordinator/Virginia SOAR State Lead, Office of Community Housing, Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, Richmond, Virginia
- Millie Rothwell, BS, Social Security Administration (SSA) Area Work Incentives Coordinator (AWIC), Springfield, Virginia
- Kate Baasch, MA ATR-BC, LPC, SOAR Program Manager and Washington, DC SOAR Co-Lead, Bread for the City, Washington, DC
- Jennifer Forde, Quality Assurance (QA) Examiner, Disability Determination Division (DDD), Washington, DC
- SOAR Beneficiary, Bread for the City, Washington, DC

Questions and Answers

- Facilitated by the SAMHSA SOAR TA Center

Kristin Lupfer, MSW, Project Director, SAMHSA SOAR TA Center

History and Importance of SSA & DDS Collaborations

History of Collaborations with SSA & DDS

- You might think that after 17 years, we'd have this collaboration thing already down pat...
- And there should be little that you need to do locally except tell SSA you are ready to start SOAR, right?
- Since SOAR began, we have worked hard developing and maintaining relationships at SSA and DDS
- Our collective work over the years has resulted in collaborations with SOAR being encouraged by staff at SSA headquarters, regional, and area SSA offices

Importance of Collaborations with SSA & DDS

- SSA's administrative style encourages local field office autonomy (as long as the rules are followed, of course!)
- Actual on-the-ground collaboration with SOAR only happens with local field office buy-in
- Collaboration with SSA and DDS is almost never in writing
- And always requires careful and frequent communication, care, and maintenance
- So, a lot depends on YOU!

SAMHSA SOAR TA Center Tools

- What do you do if you don't have collaborations established or contacts at SSA and DDS and are just getting started?



Guide to Collaborating with the Social Security Administration and Disability Determination Services

Purpose of the Guide

- Develop successful working relationships with the Social Security Administration (SSA) and Disability Determination Services (DDS).
- Provide examples of how successful relationships benefit SOAR-trained case managers, SSA and DDS.

Strategies for Collaborating with the Social Security Administration

Strategy #1. Designated SSA Liaison – Identify a liaison at the local SSA office to communicate with SOAR-trained case managers. The liaison is the main point of contact for checking current claim status, setting the applicant's protective filing date and troubleshooting any issues that may arise during the application process.

Benefits to SSA	Benefits to SOAR Case Managers	Examples
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• SOAR case manager serves as the applicant's representative• SOAR case manager maintains regular communication with SSA liaison• SSA has better communication with applicants experiencing, or at risk of, homelessness• Claim may be processed more quickly because SSA will get immediate responses to requests for additional information• SSA liaison will become experienced with SOAR and working with people who are homeless• SSA liaison will build relationships with SOAR provider agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• SSA liaison gives SOAR case managers a single contact for seamless receipt of the application• SSA liaison becomes familiar with SOAR and SOAR case managers in the community• SSA liaison can facilitate communication within SSA to resolve issues as they arise	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Boston, Massachusetts has identified a SOAR liaison at one of the area's many SSA offices (which includes Boston and the surrounding areas); SOAR-trained case managers submit all applications to one office where they are processed by the designated SOAR liaison.• Pittsburgh, PA 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

Strategy #2. Community Meetings – A representative from local Social Security offices participates in community planning meetings and SOAR Steering Committee meetings to identify areas of collaboration, resolve barriers and share best practices.

Beginning the Conversation with SSA

SOAR WORKS HOW TO CONTACT SSA

You are ready to submit your first SOAR-assisted SSI/SSDI application packet. Use this tool to decide the best way to contact the local Social Security Administration (SSA) field office.

Contact your SOAR State or Local Lead and ask if your area has an established SOAR process and designated SSA contacts.

<https://soarworks.prairc.com/directory>

Yes, your area has a SOAR process and/or SSA contacts!

Follow your local SOAR process and file the application as indicated.

No, there are not yet SSA contacts in your area.

File the iClaim and iSSI (when applicable) online and then file the complete SOAR-assisted SSI/SSDI application packet at your local SSA office (Include all SSA forms, medical records* and the Medical Summary Report). The SSA claims representative

Key questions for your SSA field office:

- What is the best way to communicate about applications submitted?
- Who is the Homeless Coordinator for the SSA Field Office?
- How should you turn in signed forms?
- Who should you send the SSA-3288 to?
- When should you expect the claim to be transferred to DDS?
- Have you associated the SSA-1696 with the application to ensure communication with DDS?

Beginning the Conversation with DDS

Disability Determination Services Collaborations: Five Tips for Engagement

Here are five practical tips that may help SOAR providers establish stronger and more successful working relationships with their state DDS.

[Home](#) > [Library & Tools](#) > [Disability Determination Services Collaborat...](#)

Tips for Engagement with DDS

Due to the residual impact of COVID-19 and staffing shortages, it is not uncommon to experience delays in days to decisions for submitted SOAR applications. State Disability Determination Services (DDS) agencies have faced challenges that impact processing times, and many SOAR providers across the country have expressed interest in establishing stronger relationships with DDS partners. Stronger partnerships help SOAR providers to understand these challenges and facilitate a mutually beneficial working relationship to alleviate some of the burdens that DDS is facing.

Here are five practical tips that may help SOAR providers establish stronger and more successful working relationships with their state DDS.

1. Understand the role of DDS

The Social Security Administration (SSA) reviews non-medical information before forwarding claims to DDS. Once at DDS, the examiner reviews medical information and determines if the applicant is medically eligible for benefits. It is important for SOAR providers to understand the difference between SSA and DDS to ensure that questions or challenges are directed to the appropriate representative. This will help to avoid delays in processing.

2. Follow the SOAR model with fidelity and track your outcomes

Gaining buy-in from DDS is much more promising when SOAR providers can present SOAR outcomes confidently. Adhering strictly to the

Key questions for your DDS Professional Relations Officer (PRO):

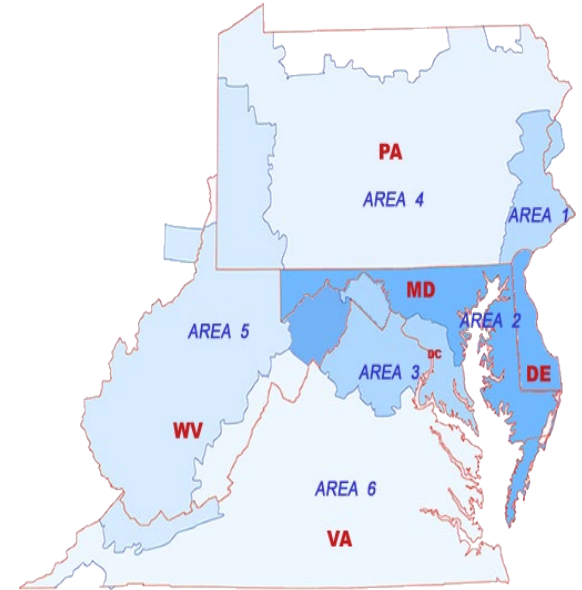
- What is the best way to find out the DDS Examiner who is assigned to the application?
- How can you register for Electronic Records Express (ERE)?
- If you aren't using ERE, should you submit records with the bar-coded cover sheet?

Shawn Fordham, MPA, Social Security Administration (SSA) Philadelphia
Regional Communications Office Director, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

SSA Regional Collaborations

Region 3: Philadelphia Region of the Social Security Administration

- Guidance and support for local/regional operations around SOAR
- Participation in quarterly SOAR meetings for Region 3, including Pennsylvania, Maryland, District of Columbia, West Virginia and Virginia
 - Allows for larger collaboration to expand successful partnerships and address barriers





Georgi Fisher, MSW, Housing and Benefits Coordinator/Virginia SOAR State Lead, Office of Community Housing, Virginia Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services, Richmond, Virginia

Millie Rothwell, BS, Social Security Administration (SSA) Area Work Incentives Coordinator (AWIC), Springfield, Virginia

Communication and Collaboration: SSA & DDS

Structure of SOAR in Virginia

Social Security Administration

- Utilizes a collaboration between local Social Security offices, Area Work Incentive Coordinators (AWIC) & Public Affairs Specialists (PAS)
- Assigned local contacts assist with tracking and addressing barriers
- PAS/AWIC ensure local process runs smoothly and intervenes when there is a hiccup with the local process

Disability Determination Services

- Developed with our Virginia DDS Office
- Applications are tracked by regional Public Relations Officers (PROs)
- PROs ensure applications are routed to SOAR units for processing and assist with addressing issues when they arise

Virginia SOAR Claims Submission

SSA Claims Submission

- Developed with our SSA Area Director's Office and Area 3 AWIC
- Applications are hybrid of online/fax submissions
- Utilize specialized cover sheets to assist with identifying and routing claims at the local office

DDS Claims Submission

- PROs are emailed claim information when SOAR claims are submitted
- PROs work with analysts in SOAR Units to assist with timely processing and address issues with applications, when they arise

Building Strong Relationships: Communication

- PAS/AWIC and PROs are available via email and phone to SOAR workers at any time
- SOAR State Lead meets with the SSA Area Director's Office monthly to discuss SOAR process and troubleshoot any issues
- SSA PASs, AWICs and DDS PROs attend bi-monthly local SOAR meetings, answering questions and alerting to any issues with claims submission in the region
- Ongoing communication via email and phone between meetings



- SOAR Leadership Summit allows SSA, DDS, and state SOAR leadership to gather for processing, strategic planning, and celebration of the hard work of this team!

Building Strong Relationships: Collaboration

- Having immense respect for the role that each person plays in the success of SOAR
 - This includes recognizing the unique challenges each agency faces and working to develop solutions that meet the needs of all players
- Welcoming and soliciting feedback
 - Even after years of collaboration, there are always places for improvement
 - Feedback allows the program to continue to grow



Celebrating Success

- Recognize and celebrate successes at local meetings
- Celebrate yearly outcomes
- Consistently thank our partners for their dedication to our clients and to SOAR
- Recognize SSA and DDS partners with awards at the annual Housing Virginia's Most Vulnerable Conference



Building Strong Programs: Expansion

- The successful partnerships, built through collaboration, have allowed for the expansion of SOAR to include:
 - Pre-release claims for individuals leaving state psychiatric hospitalization
 - Pre-release claims for individuals leaving local and regional jails
 - Using the SSA-1699 and Appointed Representative Services
 - Using Secure Email Partnership for efficient communication
- Expanded collaboration allows for us to increase the number of highly vulnerable individuals served through this partnership

Presenter Contact Information

- Shawn Fordham
 - Shawn.fordham@ssa.gov
- Millie Rothwell
 - milagros.rothwell@ssa.gov
- Georgi Fisher
 - georgi.fisher@dbhds.virginia.gov



Kate Baasch, MA ATR-BC, LPC, SOAR Program Manager and Washington, DC SOAR Co-Lead, Bread for the City, Washington, DC

Communication and Collaboration: DDS

What Makes SOAR Unique?

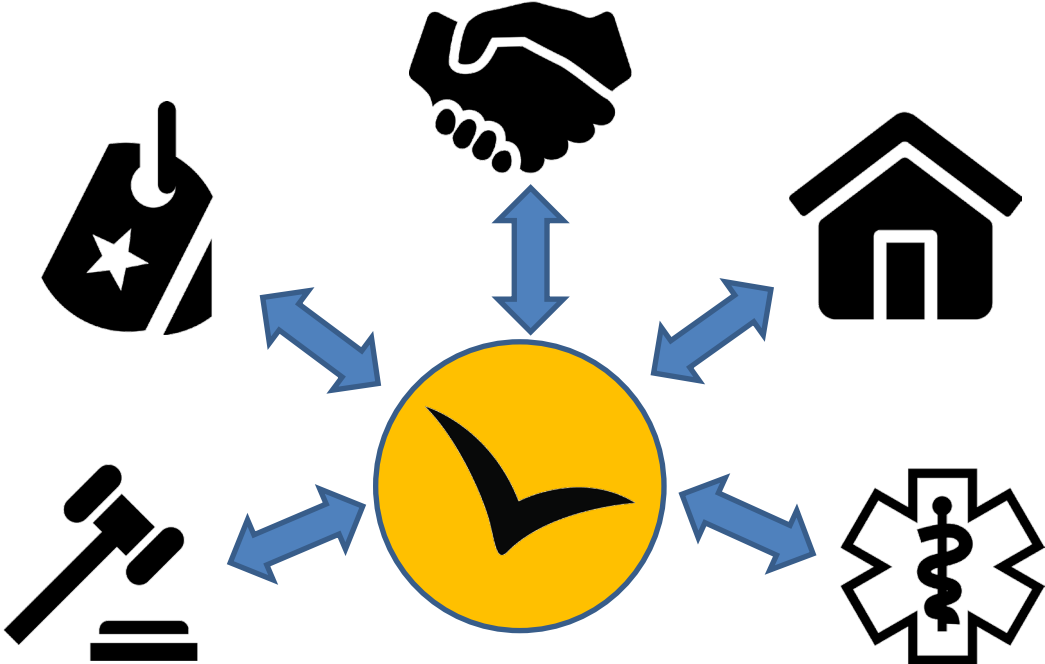
SOAR-trained case workers are the heroes!



SOAR WORKS CRITICAL COMPONENTS



Community Collaborations



Keys to Successful SOAR Collaboration with DDS

- Gaining buy-in from leadership at DDS and examiners willing to be points of contact who understand/want to understand the SOAR model
- Building relationships via good communication
- Establishing secure server set-up with SSA to allow for email communication
- Setting-up and using Electronic Records Express (ERE)
- Ensuring the homeless flag and SSA-1696 are on the claim
- Following-up about collecting records and what is needed/outstanding
- Understanding steps 4 and 5 of the Sequential Evaluation to collaborate on making the link

Flexibility and Patience

- DDS has the expertise in how SSA rules are applied to medical evidence
- SOAR Providers have the expertise about the claimant's circumstances/history/current treatment/symptoms
- Commit to learning together in each case

Jennifer Forde, Quality Assurance (QA) Examiner, Disability
Determination Division, Washington, DC

SOAR Critical Components: Medical Records Collection and Electronic Submission to DDS for Quick Decisions

SSA Disability Defined

- The Social Security Administration (SSA) considers a claimant disabled:
 - if they have medically determinable physical or mental impairment (or combination of impairments);
 - that prevents them from doing any substantial gainful activity (SGA), and;
 - has lasted or is expected to last for a continuous period of at least 12 months, or is expected to result in death
- <https://www.ssa.gov/disability/professionals/bluebook/general-info.htm>

The Listings

- There are medically determinable physical and mental impairments, called Listings, where if the evidence in file supports the allegations, the claimant is found disabled.
 - <https://www.ssa.gov/disability/professionals/bluebook/AdultListings.htm>
 - A medically determinable impairment is defined as an impairment that results from anatomical, physiological, or psychological abnormalities that can be shown by medically acceptable clinical and laboratory diagnostic techniques.
 - The medical evidence must establish that an individual has a physical or mental impairment; a statement about the individual's symptoms is not enough.

- **Medical Records Are Critical to the Disability Evaluation Process!**
- They function to:
 - Determine if the claimant's allegations of disability meet SSA criteria
 - Document the duration and severity of the claimant's allegations

Electronic Records Express (ERE) Registration

- How to Register for ERE:
 - Contact the State Agency Sponsor, usually the Office Medical Relations/Professional Relations Officer
 - Provide a Username and a Primary Email Address

Benefits of ERE

- **No Snail Mail:** The request for medical records goes to the primary email provided. This saves time and money!
- **Rapid Receipt of Medical Records:** The uploaded medical records are quickly associated with the claimant's case!

Case Development Tips

- **Medical Records are critical to quick case decisions!**
- Any medical records you can provide helps.
- Details to keep in mind:
 - Include an SSA-1696 to document the claimant has a SOAR representative
 - Complete any forms sent to the claimant thoroughly and timely
 - Provide accurate contact information for the claimant to the DDS
 - Inform the Disability Examiner of any additional medical treatment sources
 - Attend any Consultative Examinations (CEs) scheduled for the claimant

Kate Baasch, MA ATR-BC, LPC, SOAR Program Manager and Washington, DC SOAR Co-Lead, Bread for the City, Washington, DC

Joann, SOAR Beneficiary, Bread for the City, Washington, DC

Bread for the City: SOAR Success Tips for Collaborating with DDS Partners

A Conversation
with Joann,
SOAR Beneficiary

“How SOAR helped
me be successful.”



Presenter Contact Information

- Kate Baasch
 - kbaasch@breadforthecity.org
- Jennifer Forde
 - Jennifer.Forde@ssa.gov

Questions and Answers

Please type your questions into the Q&A box.



Additional Resources

- [SSA and DDS Collaboration Tools](#)
- [How to Contact SSA: Decision Tree](#)
- [Collaboration with SSA and DDS: Something for Everyone](#)
- [Disability Determination Services Collaborations: Five Tips for Engagement](#)



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