



SOAR Certification: Policy and Procedures

1. Introduction

This guide provides details about the certification process. The purpose of the Maryland SOAR Certification Program is primarily to provide recognition for all the hard work that goes into completing SOAR applications. It also provides case managers with evidence of professional development and so enhances professional credibility.

Additionally, it provides beneficial information about individuals' experiences of using the SOAR process and therefore helps to ensure that SOAR continues to be implemented effectively.

have additional questions; please contact your local SOAR Lead.

2. Obtaining SOAR Certification

2.1 Submitting an Application

In order to gain SOAR certification, the applicant must first have completed approved SOAR training provided by Behavioral Health Administration (BHA) and be included on the SOAR trained provider list as maintained by BHA. It is recognized that in some instances an individual might complete similar SOAR training in a different state. In this situation, prior to submitting any SOAR cases in Maryland, he/she must provide evidence of the training received to the Director: SOAR Initiative who will ascertain whether it is sufficient, or whether the individual is required to undertake Maryland's own training prior to being added to the SOAR trained provider list. In all cases, the individual must also meet with the relevant local SOAR Lead to obtain information about relevant local processes and procedures.

Following the training, the applicant has three years in which to complete five SOAR applications and participate in at least three SOAR related activities (for example, attend a SOAR case manager meeting, participate in a National TA SOAR webinar, participate in the local work group). It is recognized that in some cases it may take more than three years following the training to complete five SOAR cases and this in itself will not preclude an individual from applying for certification. Reasons for the additional time period should be included in the submission.

An application for certification can only be made once the Disability Determination Services (DDS) has reached a decision on five SOAR cases, and at least four out of the five cases must have been approved. At least one of the cases must have been submitted in the last 12 months prior to applying for certification.

In order to be considered a SOAR case, the case must have been flagged as SOAR at DDS and the key components of SOAR should have been implemented (for example, the collection of medical records, completion of 1696, writing of medical summary report, submission of data

tracking form etc). There may be occasions when it is appropriate to deviate from the standard procedure, and if this is the case, the reasons for this should be noted on the SOAR Certification form.

If an individual wishes to apply for certification status he/she should:

- Complete the SOAR Certification Form
- **Remove any personal identifying information from both the medical summary reports and the data forms**
- Complete and sign the SOAR Certification Submission Checklist

The applicant should then electronically submit the documents listed above to their local SOAR Lead and the State SOAR Lead. The Local Lead should consider whether the applicant has followed local procedures and should be assessed for SOAR certification. If the Local SOAR Lead does not believe this is the case, for example, he/she believes the individual has consistently submitted SOAR cases without implementing the key components of SOAR, he/she should contact the Director: SOAR Initiative and detail his or her concerns about the application. The Director: SOAR Initiative will then convene a meeting with the applicant and local SOAR Lead to discuss the raised concerns and agree how they should best be addressed.

2.2 Reviewing the Application

On receipt of the application, the State SOAR Lead will check that all the listed documentation has been received and that all personal identifying information has been removed. If items are missing, or if all personal identifying information has not been removed, the State SOAR Lead will inform the applicant of the actions that need to be taken before the application can be submitted to the SOAR Certification Review Committee.

Once the package has been assessed as satisfying the conditions to be reviewed, the Director: SOAR Initiative will form a SOAR Certification Review Committee (Review Committee). This should consist of at least three members and all must have a significant involvement in Maryland's SOAR Initiative (for example, be the State SOAR Lead, a local SOAR Lead, a SOAR trainer, a certified SOAR case manager actively submitting applications under SOAR, National SOAR TA Liaison etc.) Review Committee members should also consider if there are any conflicts of interest (or perceptions of these) which would make it difficult for them to participate in the decision making process for a particular case.

The Director: SOAR Initiative will then distribute the application and the Certification Review form electronically to the Review Committee members. Each committee member will review the submitted documentation and verify whether what is provided is sufficient (for example, has the data form been completed in full; have all of the questions on the SOAR Certification Form been answered.) He/she will also provide feedback on the quality of the medical summary reports and make a recommendation as to whether the application should be approved or denied, or whether more information is needed. This information will be recorded on the completed Certification Review form and returned to the Director: SOAR Initiative, normally within two weeks of having received the application.

2.3 Reaching a Decision

The Director: SOAR Initiative will review the completed Certification Review forms. Due to the robust quality review processes that are implemented at the local level, it is anticipated that the

majority of applications will be approved by all reviewers. In these cases, the Director: SOAR Initiative will collate and summarize the reviewers' comments on the Certification Review Summary form and send this to the applicant and his or her local SOAR Lead.

If all of the reviewers recommend that the application is denied or all state that the information presented is insufficient to reach a decision, the Director: SOAR Initiative will again collate and summarize the reviewers' comments on the Certification Review Summary form and send this to the applicant and his or her local SOAR Lead. In addition, a phone call or meeting will be arranged with the applicant and Local SOAR Lead to provide a clear explanation about why the decision was made and what the applicant needs to do to rectify the situation.

If the applicant does not agree with the group's decision, he/she has the right to appeal this. (See section: Appeal Process)

If there is a disagreement between the reviewers as to whether an application should be approved or not, the Director: SOAR Initiative will convene a meeting to discuss the differing points of view. If the group is unable to come to an agreement about whether the applicant should be approved or not, the case will be referred to BHA's Director, Clinical Services Division, Adults and Older Adults or nominated representative whose decision will be final.

3. Maintaining Certification

In order to maintain both the quality and credibility of the certification process, there will be a bi-annual re-certification process.

The Director: SOAR Lead will regularly identify all those who are coming up to the second anniversary of gaining certification or being re-certified and notify the individuals and their Local Leads that re-certification is required if they wish to maintain certified status.

If an individual wishes to maintain their certified status, he/she must have completed at least one additional approved SOAR application since gaining certification or being re-certified and have participated in at least one SOAR related event during that time. SOAR related events can include attending local work group meetings, attending a National SOAR webinar, or attending a SOAR Symposium.

In order to apply for re-certification, the individual should complete the SOAR Re-Certification form and submit it to the local SOAR Lead and the Director: SOAR Initiative. The Director will review the form and take note of any issues or suggestions for improvements. Providing the individual has met the criteria of having completed one approved SOAR application and participated in one SOAR related event, the applicant will retain their certified status. If this is the case, the Director: SOAR Initiative will let the applicant know this in writing and amend BHA's certification records accordingly.

If individuals are unable to retain their certification status because they do not meet the criteria at that time, they will have the option of reapplying for certification status once they are able to demonstrate that they now meet the criteria, providing that they reapply within three years of their certification status lapsing.

4. Appeal Process