

SOAR and Peer Support Conversation Guide

IDEAS FOR RESPONDING TO CHALLENGING QUESTIONS

SOAR-trained peer support workers can play a vital role in increasing community capacity to assist more applicants, support existing SOAR-trained staff, and improve the quality of Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) applications. However, integrating peer support into SOAR programs can be challenging when there is a limited understanding of the peer role and how SOAR work aligns with peer competencies, ethics, and values. The questions and possible responses in this guide will illustrate ways that SOAR leads, agency administrators, peer support workers, and others can navigate these important conversations. Take inspiration from these suggestions to form your own responses.

The Benefits of Integration

Peer support workers can become involved and assist at any or all [intercepts in the SOAR process](#). Generally, when peers get involved, there are two primary roles they play; 1. Directly assisting with SSI/SSDI applications using the SOAR model, and 2. Supporting the process through additional applicant engagement and information gathering. As with any member of the team, peer support workers should be integrated into the planning, case conferencing, and supervisory activities of the SOAR team. The tasks in the process do not change when peer support workers complete them, but rather they are enhanced by the uniqueness of the peer relationship.

In addition to the stronger connections made based on similar experiences, peers provide examples of recovery and empowerment. They can also help foster trust in systems that have often disenfranchised many of those whom they serve. As the peer movement continues to grow, the peer workforce is increasingly seeking opportunities, like SOAR training, to demonstrate the specialized knowledge and skills peers possess.

LET'S TALK ABOUT PEERS AND SOAR!

Category	Questions to Ask	Responses	References
Peer Support Basics	I'm not familiar with peer support workers. What do they do?	Peer support encompasses a range of activities and interactions between people who share similar experiences of being diagnosed with mental health conditions, substance use disorders, or both. Peers also include parents/caregivers who have children with a diagnosis or disability and are navigating systems on their behalf. By sharing their lived experience and practical guidance, peer support workers help people develop their goals, create strategies for self-empowerment, and take concrete steps towards building fulfilling, self-determined lives. Depending on their practice setting, peer support workers may be referred to by different names. Common titles include Peer Specialists, Peer Recovery Coaches,	SAMHSA: What is Peer Support Guide

		Peer Navigators, Youth/Family/Older Adult Peer Advocates, and Peer Recovery Support Specialists. The role of a peer support worker complements but does not duplicate or replace the roles of therapists, case managers, and other treatment team members.	
Peer Support Basics	How does SOAR work align with Peer Core Competencies?	The end goals of peer work and SOAR work align – specifically in that individuals will have the tools and support they need to live meaningful lives in our community. Peer workers seek to support the recovery of individuals, which includes having the tools to provide practical assistance related to the individual’s desired goals. SOAR-trained peer workers provide a bridge between community agencies/systems and individuals who desire assistance in accessing benefits-related services.	Core Competencies for Peer Workers SOAR Spotlight on Peer Support Workers
Value and Benefit	How does benefits acquisition help individuals in recovery?	Peer workers support individuals in envisioning and achieving a meaningful and purposeful life. Recovery goals are very individualized and are not one size fits all. However, for many in recovery, access to a stable income is an unmet need, and not having it can be a barrier to achieving those goals. Within the SOAR process, SOAR-trained peer providers can collaborate with individuals to enable them to access financial systems to support recovery. Sharing information about and providing access to services, such as SOAR, helps to empower individuals to make decisions about their financial needs. While recovery goals may all look different, access to financial resources makes nearly all of them easier to achieve!	SAMHSA Recovery and Recovery Support
Connection with SOAR	In what ways can peer support workers be involved in SOAR? Can they do full SSI/SSDI applications?	Peer roles are diverse and encompass numerous activities, including advocating for people in recovery, sharing resources, building skills, developing resources, and providing services such as benefits/entitlements acquisition. The unique nature of the peer relationship, combined with the peer worker’s lived experience, can help enhance the SOAR process at every intercept. Depending on the job duties and the work settings, some peer roles are better suited for supportive tasks, while other peer roles are suitable for completing full SSI/SSDI applications. Learn more about the SOAR Critical Components which make up the SOAR process. We also encourage you to check out the Peers Across SOAR infographic for examples of how peers can participate in SOAR initiatives.	SOAR Critical Components Peers Across SOAR Infographic
Peer Support Roles	That sounds like a lot of work! What is the time required?	The goal of a SOAR-assisted SSI/SSDI application is to put together a quality and complete application. We estimate that each SOAR-assisted SSI/SSDI application will take approximately 20-40 hours to complete (over 60-90 days). Initially, that may seem like a lot, but consider this: The time spent on each application will vary depending	Getting Involved with SOAR

		<p>on the nature of the engagement the individual needs. Engaging the individual may involve outreach to share information about SOAR, talking through concerns, utilizing conversation-based, active listening skills to build trust and understanding, and completing intakes – all tasks that peer workers already engage in as part of their work. Community partners can review the <i>Getting Involved with SOAR</i> document to familiarize themselves with the various time commitments associated with being a SOAR provider.</p>	
Peer Support Roles	<p>What about role drift? Some of this sounds outside the scope of peer workers. Are any parts of this process considered clinical?</p>	<p>The SOAR community recognizes that the peer support role is unique and constitutes its own distinct occupation. Any potential community partners interested in collaborating with peers are encouraged to become familiar with the <i>National Practice Guidelines for Peer Supporters</i>. While SOAR initiatives often include many collaborative partners, such as medical and behavioral health providers, the process itself is non-clinical. It does not involve any subjective opinions from the SOAR-trained provider. The Medical Summary Report does not ask the SOAR provider to make any diagnoses or subjective judgments on the applicant’s impairments. The report captures objective information (e.g., documentation of existing information from medical records, case notes, and first-hand information from the applicant) to help present their story. The SOAR Online Course provides the necessary training and best practices for completing the Medical Summary Report – there is no additional training or education requirement.</p>	<p>National Practice Guidelines for Peer Supporters</p>
Peer Support Roles	<p>I’m worried about having peers encourage the people in our program to apply for disability. We don’t want to perpetuate harmful stereotypes or make people feel limited.</p>	<p>Helping individuals access income support, such as SSI/SSDI, is just one brick in the foundation of recovery. Receiving SSI/SSDI benefits does not mean that employment and/or educational goals must end. The Social Security Administration (SSA) offers multiple employment supports and services throughout the application process and once benefits are obtained. Engaging with these SSA employment supports allows the recipient to try out work while having the security of keeping some or all of their disability payments. All states have benefit planning resources to help get started.</p>	<p>SOAR Topic: Employment/Work Incentives</p> <p>SSA Red Book</p>
Training and Workforce	<p>How does this training benefit the peer workforce? Can peers expect to</p>	<p>While basic peer certification lays the groundwork for peer support roles, opportunities to participate in advanced training, such as the SOAR Online Course, can allow peer workers to acquire additional valuable skills and knowledge. The hands-on approach of the SOAR process allows the peer worker to gain advanced writing,</p>	<p>Hiring and Supervising SOAR Case Workers Toolkit</p>

	receive more pay once they get trained?	computer skills and in-depth knowledge of SSA’s disability determination process. The acquisition of specialized skills contributes to increased marketability of the peer worker but also expands available services offered by the employing agency. It should be noted that not all peer support roles are suited to engage in SOAR work. Organizations should review the <i>Hiring and Supervising SOAR Case Workers Toolkit</i> for more information about the specialized elements of SOAR positions and the importance of pay equity.	National Survey of Compensation Among Peer Support Specialists (2016)
Training and Workforce	Can the SOAR Online Course be counted as continuing education credits for peer certification?	As with all aspects of the peer certification process, it varies and depends on your specific state! Some states have incorporated aspects of SOAR education within their initial peer training curriculums, while others have approved the SOAR Online Course to meet continuing education requirements, and others directly convert the NASW-approved CEUs for peer CEUs. Please contact your State Team Lead or SAMHSA SOAR TA Center liaison for state-specific information. In our <i>Integrating SOAR with Peer Certifications</i> issue brief, you can also read about various SOAR collaborations with State Peer Specialist Certification Boards.	SOAR Issue Brief: Integrating SOAR within State Peer Certification Processes
Peer and SOAR Integration	I’m interested in having peer staff complete applications in my agency. What are my next steps?	That’s great to hear! Involving peers within SOAR initiatives is a win for the individuals we serve, their communities, and the peer providers themselves. It’s important to have a clear understanding and defined expectations of the unique role of the peer supporter. We recommend familiarizing yourself with peer roles and current SOAR initiatives in your agency/community/state. What problems are you looking to address, and where can peers fit in to help provide support? For example, is the issue: limited staff capacity to complete SOAR applications, underutilization of SOAR in your community/state, underdevelopment of the peer workforce in your community/state, stigma experienced by individuals seeking SSI/SSDI, etc.? Many supports are available to ensure best practices for SOAR implementation with peers, including your Local Leads, State Team Lead, and your SAMHSA SOAR TA Center liaison.	SOAR Overview SOAR Online Courses SAMHSA SOAR TA Center: Contact Us
Peer and SOAR Integration	How can I have peer staff support current SOAR-trained staff in my agency?	The role of a peer support worker can complement other provider team members and be a wonderful asset in supporting SOAR work! We recommend reviewing the <i>Peers Across SOAR Infographic</i> and familiarizing yourself with existing peer support roles within your agency or community to help clearly define what support role they will play in the SSI/SSDI application process.	Peers Across SOAR Infographic