

TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT NOTICE	NO. 20-07
	DATE December 12, 2007

**TO: ALL STATE WORKFORCE AGENCIES
ALLSTATE WORKFORCE LIAISONS
ONE-STOP CAREER CENTER LEADS**

FROM: GAY GILBERT
Administrator
Office of Workforce Investment System

SUBJECT: Ticket to Work Program-Employment Networks

- 1. Purpose.** The purpose of this Training and Employment Notice (TEN) is to provide information on the Social Security Administration's (SSA) proposed Ticket to Work Program regulations.
- 2. References.** Training and Employment Notice No. 6-02, January 6, 2003, "The Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act (TWWIIA) and Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency Program Implementation."
http://wdr.doleta.gov/directives/corr_doc.cfm?DOCN=1447
- 3. Background.** The TWWIIA, Public Law 106-170, was enacted in 1999 to expand the employment opportunities for Social Security disability beneficiaries receiving Social Security Income (SSI) or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) benefits through providing incentives and options for them to enter or re-enter the world of work. The Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency Program (The Ticket Program) is the centerpiece of the TWWIIA. The Ticket Program is intended to provide SSI and SSDI beneficiaries with greater choices in obtaining employment, vocational rehabilitation, or other support services from public and private providers through the implementation of Employment Networks (ENs). This voluntary program will enable these beneficiaries to obtain, regain, or maintain employment and to reduce their dependency on cash assistance.

The Ticket Program is also a key component of President Bush's New Freedom Initiative (NFI). The President announced the NFI on February 1, 2001, as part of a nationwide effort to remove barriers to community living for people with disabilities. The NFI goals are to: integrate Americans with disabilities into the workforce; increase access to assistive technology and universally-designed technologies; expand educational opportunities; promote home ownership; expand transportation options; and promote full access to community life.

The SSA issues Tickets to eligible beneficiaries (ages 18-64). Tickets can be used to obtain rehabilitation and employment services from any EN a beneficiary selects, as long as the EN agrees to accept that person's Ticket. The EN, in conjunction with the beneficiary, establishes an Individual Work Plan and agrees to provide the planned services. Once the beneficiary reaches the Ticket Program's key outcome, which is employment at the Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA) level for defined periods, the EN becomes eligible for payment from the SSA. ENs can be a single entity, a partnership, or alliance of entities (public and/or private), or a consortium of organizations collaborating to combine resources to serve Ticket holders. This includes One-Stop Career Centers and Local Workforce Investment Boards (LWIBs). TEN No. 6-02 provides additional details on the TWWIA and Ticket Program.

4. Proposed Rule Changes for the Ticket Program. On August 13, 2007, the SSA issued a Notice of Proposed Rule Making (NPRM), Federal Register, Volume 72, No. 155, 20 CFR Part 411. The purpose of this NPRM was to make additional improvements to the Ticket Program regulations and address public comments received in response to an NPRM issued by SSA on September 30, 2005 (70 Federal Register 5722). This NPRM proposed revisions to the reimbursement process and greater financial incentives and flexibility to make the Ticket Program more attractive for providers, including One-Stop Career Centers and Local Workforce Investment (LWIBs) to become ENs. It makes a clear distinction between The Ticket Program and services provided to beneficiaries through Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agencies. Under the new proposed regulations, VR agencies would not be recipients of a Ticket, and EN services under the Ticket Program would take place prior to, instead of, or following services provided by VR. This change clarifies the respective roles of ENs and VR agencies, as well as eliminates the necessity of negotiating memorandums of understanding regarding the Ticket Program.

Both NPRMs represent an effort by SSA to launch a new and improved Ticket to Work Program, including the elimination of some barriers to agencies becoming ENs. **One significant proposed change in the NPRM issued on August 13 is that the SSA proposes to recognize the workforce investment system as qualified ENs and simplify the process for the One-Stop Career Centers and LWIBs to become ENs.**

The NPRMs identify the following changes to strengthen the Ticket to Work Program:

- Simplifies the EN Request for Proposal application process;
- Provides for more frequent EN payments and earlier payment milestone;
- Extends the eligibility for the Ticket to SSI and SSDI beneficiaries who are categorized as "Medical Improvements Expected (MIE), without first requiring a continuing disability review; thereby allowing ENs to provide beneficiaries with Tickets prior to three years;

- Allows ENs to receive milestone payments for lower levels of beneficiary earnings, thereby recognizing that some beneficiaries may work part-time and/or earn lower wages before they become self-sufficient;
- Adds educational and technical training requirements to supplement the work requirement, (technical and vocational schools junior and community colleges, and universities will be eligible to be training providers);
- Streamlines procedures for processing and making payment to ENs;
- Creates a “Help Desk” at the SSA to provide ENs the immediate status of their payment requests; and
- Implements aggressive outreach and assistance to beneficiaries who may be good candidates for employment, who are either unfamiliar with or reluctant to take advantage of available work incentives, including the Ticket to Work program.

The SSA estimates that the NPRM will become final by spring of 2008. The NPRM can be found at the Employment and Training’s Web site:
<http://www.doleta.gov/disability>.

The comprehensive nature of the One-Stop Career Center System makes it a natural service provider as an EN. One-Stop Career Centers and LWIBs should consider becoming ENs because this program provides a potential funding source for any entity that provides return-to-work services to Social Security beneficiaries with disabilities. It is likely that you are already providing such services to your customers with disabilities. This makes good business sense, and will enable you to leverage funding to maximize services for your customers with disabilities and better respond to the needs of your business customers.

Participation as an EN also provides an additional revenue source to the One-Stop delivery system since outcome or outcome-milestone payments are not considered program income and will not replace existing funding sources.

- 5. How Can One-Stop Career Centers and LWIBs Become ENs?** One-Stop Career Centers and LWIBs can become ENs. The most effective way for One-Stop Career Centers and LWIBs to become ENs is to work with the Disability Program Navigators (DPNs).

The Disability Program Navigator (DPN) Initiative was launched in 2002 as a joint effort of the U. S. Department of Labor’s Employment and Training Administration and the Social Security Administration. This Initiative funded a new position, the DPN, within the One-Stop Career Centers. There are now DPN Programs in 45

states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico, with approximately 500 Navigators in local workforce investment areas throughout the country.

The DPN Program's primary objective is to increase employment and self-sufficiency of people with disabilities by: enhancing the linkage between employers and the state workforce investment boards through the One-Stop Career Centers; informing people with disabilities about the work support programs available at the One-Stop Career Centers; developing partnerships to achieve integrated services, systems change, and expand capacity to serve customers with disabilities; assisting employees to meet the demands of the 21st century workforce; guiding One-Stop Career Center staff in helping people with disabilities to navigate the services and benefits system which impact on their ability to gain and retain employment; and conducting outreach to organizations and agencies that serve people with disabilities.

DPNs are currently working closely with Community Work Incentive Coordinators (CWIC), established under SSA's Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA) Program (formerly the Benefits Planning, Assistance, and Outreach (BPAO) Program). The BPAO Program was established across the country through cooperative agreements with SSA to provide assistance to SSA beneficiaries on the impact of employment on their benefits. The purpose of the WIPA project is to disseminate accurate information about work incentive programs and issues related to such programs to people with disabilities (including transition-to-work aged youth). This will help them make informed choices about working, how available work incentives can facilitate their transition into the workforce, and whether and when to assign their Ticket to Work. The ultimate goal of the work incentives planning and assistance projects is to assist SSA beneficiaries with disabilities to succeed in their work efforts.

For an entity to receive SSA funding under the WIPA Program, it needs to document how it will work with One-Stop Career Centers. Several DPNs assisted their One-Stop Career Centers and/or WIBs to apply for WIPA projects, and several have succeeded in obtaining these SSA-funded cooperative agreements. A list of WIPA Projects is available at: <http://www.ssa.gov/work/WIPA.doc>.

A list of DPN contacts can be found at: <http://www.doleta.gov/disability>

If there is no DPN in your One-Stop Career Center, contact the SSA's Employment Network Contracts Team at: EnContracts@SSA.Gov; 866-584-5180; 866-584-5181 (TDD). This Team will assist you with beginning the process for becoming an EN.

- 6. Additional Information.** Information on the Ticket to Work Program is available at: www.ssa.gov/work. Specific information about the Ticket to Work's business process for ENs, a list of current ENs, EN FAQs, EN Promising Practices, and other materials are available from the Ticket Program Operations Support Manager, MAXIMUS Web site: www.yourtickettowork.com.

7. **Action Required.** Recipients are requested to distribute this TEN to the state and local Workforce Investment Boards and other workforce investment partners.

8. **Inquiries Contact.** Questions on this TEN should be directed to Randee Chafkin at (202) 693-2723.