Austin Travis County Homeless

SOAR Written Standards

(SOAR-SSI/SSDI, Outreach, Access, & Recovery)

The Austin/Travis County SOAR Written Standards is upheld by Ending Community Homelessness Coalition, Inc. (ECHO)

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Austin/Travis County Homeless SOAR Written Standards Index & Best Practice

Austin/Travis County Homeless SOAR Written Standards & Best Practices

Purpose: The purpose of this document is to implement written standards and best practices for organizations which provide SOAR services for Austin/Travis County. Organizations are required to follow the SOAR model for applicants, SOAR Written Standards, and Best Practices.

What is SOAR:

- SOAR is a model for assisting eligible individuals to apply for Social Security Administration (SSA) disability benefits.

- SOAR is 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.

- SOAR is sponsored by SAMHSA in collaboration with the Social Security Administration (SSA) since 2005

All 50 states and Washington, DC currently participate, per SAMHSA. SAMHSA stands for Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. [(SOAR Works! (samhsa.gov))](SOAR Works! (samhsa.gov))

SOAR Definition of Homelessness and At Risk of Homelessness: HEARTH Act and SOAR

The SOAR model follows the definitions of "homeless" and "at risk of homelessness" used by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). The statutory language of these definitions is derived from the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act, as amended by the Homeless Emergency Assistance and Rapid Transition to Housing (HEARTH) Act of 2009.

The definition of those who are **experiencing homelessness** includes:

Experiencing Homelessness

- Lacks fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence, **or**

- Will lose primary nighttime residence (<14 days), **or**

- Unaccompanied youth (<25 yrs.) or families with youth who qualify under other Federal statutes, **or**

- Fleeing domestic violence
  (SAMHSA.gov/SOAR Online Course Review PowerPoint).

At-Risk of Homelessness

- Earns <30% of median family income, **and**

- Insufficient resources/support networks immediately available to prevent homelessness, **and**

Exhibits 1+ risk factors of homelessness (e.g., recent housing instability, exiting publicly funded institution or system of care) (SAMHSA.gov/SOAR Online Course Review PowerPoint).

Social Security Administration Office's Definition of Disability for Adults:

- The inability to engage in any *substantial gainful activity (SGA)* ($1,470/month in 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.

What are the five critical components of SOAR and why are they important?

SOAR Critical Components:

SOAR consists of five critical components which differentiates it from the standard way of applying for Supplemental Security Income, SSI, and Social Security Disability Insurance, SSDI and increases the chance of the approval rate on the initial claim. In addition, SOAR claims are decided in less time. Using these critical components increases the rate of an approval and shortens the approval time.

These critical components are the following:

- Serving as the applicant's representative
- Collecting and submitting medical records
- Writing and submitting a medical summary report
- Obtaining a co-signature on the Medical Summary Report by an acceptable medical source
- Completing a quality review of applications prior to submission

[(SOAR Works! (samhsa.gov)](#)

Including the SOAR Critical Components are vital to higher approval rates. There are ten states who include all the critical components in each application. Their approval rate is at 81 percent and above for 2022 outcomes.

Best Practices:

The above SOAR Critical Components must be completed prior to submission of an application and the check sheet must be signed by a supervisor or upper management at the organization the person is employed at. The SOAR Local Lead or someone the SOAR Local Lead delegates these duties can also sign off.

Acceptable Medical Sources, AMS,

SAMHSA provides a list of acceptable medical source who can sign off the Medical Summary Report.

Best Practice :

AMS Documentation

The diagnosis must be documented in medical records, laboratory reports, or other clinical findings of an Acceptable Medical Source, per SSA. It is highly suggested that ongoing treatment come from treatment provider. The examiner assigned to the applicant's claim will review the evidence for the severity of the illness, injury, and/or condition. Any of the below AMS can sign off on the Medical Summary Report. Always check the Social Security Administration website for the most up to date information on AMS. Social Security Administration website: The United States Social Security Administration | SSA

AMS may be any of the following:

- Doctor (MD/DO/PhD, EdD, PsyD)
- Doctor of Medicine, MD
- Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine, DO
- Physician Assistant, PA
- Psychiatrists
- Psychologists
- Doctor of Education, EdD
- Audiologist, AUD
- Licensed Speech Language Pathologist, SLP
- Optometrist
- Advanced Practice Registered Nurse (APRN), which includes Certified Nurse Midwife, Burse Practitioner, Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetist, and Clinical Nurse Specialist

(Disability Determination Services, DDS).

Duration

SSA has requirements for the duration of the impairment for the applicant to file for disability.

Best Practice:

SSA's Definition of Duration & Requirements

The impairment tied to the illness(es) must have "lasted or be expected to last 12 months or more or results in death." SSA does not cover short-term disability. (SSA.gov).

SSA Forms:

SSA forms are available here: Social Security Administration (SSA) Forms and Resources | SOAR Works! (samhsa.gov)

Social Security Forms | Social Security Administration (ssa.gov)

Also, you can receive updated forms from ssa.gov/forms.

Best Practice SOAR & SSA/DDS Forms:

The following are documents, guide, and template to complete the SOAR application process.

- SOAR Checklist for Initial Claims (used as cover sheet of application package)
- SSA-3288: Consent for Release of Information (if needed , see below)
- SOAR Medical Summary Report (MSR) Interview Guide and Template
- SSA-827: Authorization to Disclose Information to SSA
- Agency Release of Information
- SSA-1696: Appointment of Representative
- SSA-8000: Application for Supplemental Security Income (SSI)
- SSA -16: Application for Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI)
- SSA-3368: Adult Disability Report
- SSA-3369 Work History Form
- SSA-3373 Function Report Form

[(SOAR Works! (samhsa.gov)](SOAR Works! (samhsa.gov))

According to the local field office, also known as the local Social Security Administration Office in your area, they may have different requirements of which forms to submit with the SOAR application. The list above is what is included in the SOAR application package except for the Medical Summary Report and medical records. The Medical Summary Report and medical records must be submitted to Disability Determination Services by the SOAR Representative after the application is assigned an examiner.

Time Expectation for Completing the SOAR Online Course:

Completing the SOAR Online Course in a timely manner for full-time employees is essentials. More positive results have been reported when individuals can solely focus on completing their SOAR Online Course without any distraction from starting and stopping the course

Best Practice Time Expectation for Completing the SOAR Online Course:

The SOAR Online Course approximately takes 20 hours to complete. We recommend completing the SOAR Online Course during the first week or two of employment to allow time for the new case worker to receive feedback, a certificate of completion, and begin meeting with potential applicants within the first month of employment. (Hiring and Supervising SOAR). The reviewer has up to 10 business days to review the application and notify the applicant, if any revisions are needed. (SOAR Works! (samhsa.gov)/Hire and Supervise SOAR).

Organizations noticed SOAR Specialist who wasn't allowed to focus on the course taking double and triple the time to complete the course.

Caseload:

The SOAR model's intensive engagement process necessitates a lower caseload to provide comprehensive SSI/SSDI application assistance. The focus of this caseload should be on identifying and engaging with appropriate applicants, submitting high-quality and complete applications, and tracking outcomes. (Hire and Supervising).

Best Practice Caseload:

Full-time SOAR case workers will have an estimated seven or more SOAR claims at any given time. We estimated that a newly trained, full-time dedicated SOAR case worker can complete approximately 25 SOAR-assisted applications in the first year, which considers the time to complete the SOAR Online Course and become familiar with the SSI/SSDI application process. (SAMHSA.gov/Hire and Supervise SOAR).

Full-time, experienced, dedicated SOAR case workers can be expected to complete approximately 35 or more SOAR applications per year. (SAMHSA.gov/Hire and Supervise SOAR).

SOAR-assisted SSI/SSDI applications have a large part of the work in the beginning stages of the application process. To not overwhelm SOAR case workers with new applications, caseloads need to be assigned on a rolling basis. We recommend that a newly trained, dedicated SOAR case worker start [2-3] applications per month and a more experienced SOAR caseworker start [3-4]applications per month. Additional claims can be added on at a reasonably level.

As needed SOAR caseworker should work at least 1-2 applications per year to keep their knowledge and skill set.

The expectation is that SOAR Representatives approval rate will be 68 percent or higher. (The initial outcomes approval rate for 2022 were 68 percent with 153 days for an approval on average.)

Generally, SOAR-assisted SSI/SSDI applications take approximately 20-40 hours over the course of 60 days. ((SOAR Works! (samhsa.gov)/Hire and Supervise SOAR).

These numbers can be to the capacity and knowledge of the SOAR Representative.

Requirements before working with SOAR applicants:

Potential SOAR Representatives are required to complete all requirements before working with applicants on their disability claim.

After, completing and passing the SOAR Online Course, it is required that all individuals take the SOAR Online Course Review before working with applicants. (SAMHSA.gov/Hire and Supervise SOAR).

A SOAR Online Course Review Refresher is required each year for SOAR Representatives names to stay active on the list of SOAR Representatives at the Social Security Administration Office.

All SOAR Representatives must attend additional trainings offered by the SOAR Local Lead.

Best Practice Requirements before working with SOAR applicants:

Additional Trainings:

In addition to the SOAR Online Course Review Session, there are additional trainings required SOAR Representatives to develop their skills and promote applicants buy-in, assistance with pre-screening applications, walking through their first claim, training on forms, viewing their first application before submitting it to SSA, and proper communication with SSA and DDS.

Additional Trainings:

Applicants Buy-in agreement.

 Pre-screening on their first set of applicants including Head-to-Toe Assessment

Setting the Protective Filing Date

Necessary SSA & DDS form

Review the application package before submitting their first application.

Next, steps after package were submitted to SSA and communications with DDS.

On-going staffing of their first applicant

Course of Action:

Below are steps one through seven on how to complete a SOAR application including what forms are needed. The critical components are included.

Best Practice Course of Action: Steps to Completing an SSI/SSDI Application using the SOAR Model:

Provided below is a guide with a suggested layout explaining how to complete a SOAR application using the SOAR Model. Representatives have 60 days from the protective filing date to submit a complete application packet to the Social Security Administration (SSA). Documents can be completed sooner if all the required forms are completed and included in the SOAR package.

Day-to-Day Operation Guide for SOAR Representative:

Use the pre-screening form to determine if the applicant is eligible for the SOAR program. The Head-to-Toe assessment can be used in conjunction with the pre-screening form.

Step One

- If you need to verify whether the applicant has a pending SSI/SSDI application, complete and submit the SSA-3288 or call the local SSA office while with the applicant. The SSA-3288 can also be used to request records from SSA about prior SSI/SSDI applications.
- Review the Applicant Buy-in form with the applicant and complete the SSA-16.

- Assist applicant in setting a protective filing date (PFD) by calling SSA to establish a date for an in-person or telephone interview; OR visiting a local SSA office without an appointment; OR initiating the Online Disability Benefit Application at Apply for Benefits, Social Security (ssa.gov) (recommended). Take note, you will need to indicate whether the applicant is with you.

- The preferred and most efficient way to set the protective filing date by going online.

- If you choose "I am helping someone who is not with me," do not proceed beyond the re- entry number page. If the applicant is with you, choose "I am applying for myself." The applicant will then be prompted to sign-in to, or create, their "my Social Security" account.   Once the PFD is set, you have 60 days to submit the application packet to SSA. Again, do not proceed past the re-entry number page. Print or make a copy of the re-entry number to get back into the claim before the 60 days to submit the SOAR claim to SSA.

- Make a SOAR Entry in HMIS for your client and continue to update entries per, HMIS SOAR Workflow.

Step Two
- Have applicant sign both an SSA-827 and an Agency Release of Information form for each hospital, clinic, and/or doctor's office at which they remember being treated. Make as many copies as needed of the SSA-827 form. Fax a signed SSA-827 and Agency Release, and ,Request Letter, to each treatment source within 24-48 hours of initiating the application process. The applicant does not sign the request letter. The SOAR Representative signs the request letter.
- Contact applicant's primary medical provider and inform them that you are assisting the applicant to apply for SSI/SSDI. Ask for input and let them know you will be requesting the provider's signature on a summary of how the applicant's illness and symptoms affect his/her/they ability to work.
- Utilize the Medical Summary Report (MSR) Interview Guide and Template to begin writing the applicant's MSR. Begin this report immediately so that you have the full 60 days to complete it.

Step Three
- Complete and have applicant sign an SSA-1696 appointing you as the authorized representative.
- Note: Do not submit the SSA-1696 to SSA before completing the initial SSI/SSDI application, as SSA requires an application to be in progress to file an SSA-1696.
- Meet with the applicant 1-2 times per week to gather information using the MSR Interview Guide; enter information into the appropriate sections on the MSR Template as you go.
- As you collect information about the applicant's medical treatment and work history, fill in the paper versions of the SSA-3368. You will transfer information from these paper forms to the Online Disability Benefit Application in Step Five. - Continue to work with applicant's primary provider to obtain additional information and get a commitment for a co-signature on the MSR. This allows the MSR to be considered medical evidence.

Step Four
- Complete and have applicant sign the SSA-8000 and obtain any needed supporting documentation (e.g., bank statements, documentation of resources, etc.). -Note: You will complete the SSA-8000 on paper and submit the SSA-8000 in the SOAR application package to your local SSA office.
- Continue to revise the MSR:
- Incorporate information about functional impairments and severity of symptoms.
- Include direct quotes from the applicant as well as your observations.
- Ask a colleague or the SAMHSA SOAR TA Center to review the report for clarity and grammar.

Step Five

- Continue to work with applicant's primary provider to obtain additional information and get a commitment for a co-signature on the MSR (this allows it to be considered medical evidence).
- Once you are ready to submit the completed initial application packet (about 24-48 hours before the SSA appointment): -Transfer information from the paper SSA-16 and SSA-3368 to the Online Disability Benefit Application and submit. -In the remarks, note any treatment sources that have not sent information so Disability Determination Services (DDS) can follow up. Include "SOAR application" in the remarks.* - Complete the online medical release form (e827). Be sure that the applicant is present with you and clicks to "sign" the e827 or turn in the SSA-827 with your package.

Step Six
- Submit complete initial application packet to your local SSA office:
- Always check with your SOAR Local Lead for Specific on submitting claims in your area.
- Use the SOAR Checklist for Initial Claims as a cover sheet for the completed application package - SSA-1696 signed and dated by the applicant and representative - SSA-8000 signed and dated by applicant -SSA-827 signed and dated by applicant -include the SSA 3373 Function Form Report -SSA-3369 Work History Report (The SSA-16, SSA-8000, and SSA-1696 need wet signatures.)
- SOAR Representatives have two options to submit claims. They can mail or drop the claims off in the Social Security Administration Drop Box. Please check with your SOAR Local Lead to see if any changes in submitting claims have changed. After completing the SOAR Online Course, attending the Online Course Review Session, and SOAR Specifics for Austin/Travis County area, additional information will be disclosed.
- After the initial application packet is transferred to DDS, submit the following documentation using Electronic Records Express (ERE) or fax using a bar-coded cover sheet provided by DDS: -MSR signed by the SOAR provider as well as the applicant's medical provider -Copies of all medical records in chronological order.

Step Seven
- Report the outcome of the application in the SOAR Online Application Tracking (OAT) program (https://soartrack.prainc.com/) and HMIS to close the claim. *These steps are reliant upon the SOAR Process established in your community.
- Update HMIS and make an exit after a decision on the SOAR application is made.

Logistical Considerations:

SOAR stands for SSI/SSDI, **Outreach**, Access, and Recovery. Providing SOAR **outreach** to our neighbors will result in better outcomes.

SOAR Representatives who can adjust to the environment of the applicant, provide transportation, and attend appointments with the applicant are able to build a more solid application. It's important for organizations to allow their SOAR workers to provide outreach. Organizations need to have proper equipment and materials ready, and keep files stored confidential. ([(SOAR Works! (samhsa.gov)](#)

/Hire and Supervise SOAR).

Best Practice

SOAR caseworkers must be comfortable in the following work environments:

- Non-traditional settings and unstructured environments

- Work in the community and meet individuals experiencing homelessness where they are, including in the woods, under bridges, and in abandoned houses.

- A private space to interview SOAR applicants, complete SSA forms, review medical records, and write the Medical Summary Report (MSR)

- Access to a laptop computer to complete the online Social Security disability application in the field with SOAR applicants. If a laptop is not available, SOAR case workers can complete paper SSA forms with SOAR applicants in the field and transfer the information in a timely manner.

([(SOAR Works! (samhsa.gov)](#)/Hire and Supervise SOAR)

- A locking filing cabinet is necessary to store SOAR applicants' protected health information.
- Store protected health information under two locked areas.

Transportation

 SOAR case worker may need to transport or provide transportation resources to applicants to ensure they get to appointments. Agencies need to consider their current transportation policies to make sure it supports a SOAR case worker's need. ([(SOAR Works! (samhsa.gov)](#)Hire and Supervise SOAR).

Must be able to adjust to the environment of the target population including making visits to encampments, shelters, and personal living environments when needed. ([(SOAR Works! (samhsa.gov)](#) Hire and Supervise SOAR).

Experience with providing outreach and successful engagement to a diverse population, includes working with clients, developing trust, and conducting interviews in non-traditional settings and unstructured environments conditions, include but are not limited to frequent travel by foot, car, or other means appropriates for contacting population. ([(SOAR Works! (samhsa.gov)](#)Hire and Supervise SOAR).

- SOAR Representatives are required to have a valid state driver's license with a clean driving record. (SAMHSA.gov/Hire and Supervise SOAR).

- SOAR Representatives needs to communicate with the organizations regarding transportation and milage reimbursement.

Best Practice

- Spending appropriate time inside and outside the office conducting outreach, attending mental health and medical appointments with applicants, visiting the Social Security Administration field office, and anything else that is needed to develop the SOAR claim.

Suggestions for Supervising SOAR Workers:

The following are tips for supervising SOAR workers and providing ongoing support.

Best Practice Suggestions for Supervising SOAR Workers:

- [Supervisors] completing the SOAR Online Course: Adult or Child Curriculum will help supervisors better understand the SOAR model and its application.

- Scheduling weekly or bi-weekly case consultations and supervision.

- Ongoing communication between the SOAR case worker and supervisor will be essential to tracking workloads and time in and out of the office for appointments.

- Support SOAR case workers will need support talking through challenging cases, proofreading MSRs, and requesting records and signatures from acceptable medical sources.

([(SOAR Works! (samhsa.gov)/](Hire and Supervise SOAR).

Responsibilities for SOAR Representative:

The SOAR Representative will also attend all required trainings and complete all certifications as required by the state team lead, local lead, and SAMHSA.

Best Practice for Responsibilities for SOAR Representative:

- Complete interviews and forms with applicants to gather information to complete SOAR applications.
- Obtain medical and supporting evidence for the application.
- Write SOAR Medical Summary Reports for individual applications.
- Coordinate individuals to appointments at the Social Security Administration, to medical doctors, psychiatrists, and other specialists.
- Coordinate case management services with partners and help with providing case management services to individuals when needed .
- Familiarity with Social Security Administration's Listings of Impairments

Monitoring for Quality

Most SOAR program managers and supervisors are registered in the SAMHSA SOAR TA Center's Online Application Tracking (OAT) system. The information gathered from OAT can be used by SOAR managers to monitor quality SOAR applications as well as to provide additional training as needed. (SAMHA.gov).

Managers can:

- Track the number of applications submitted.
- Assess the use of SOAR critical components.
- Review SSI/SSDI application approval rates and reasons for denial
- Measure the timeframe to complete applications.
- Calculate retroactive payment and monthly benefits amounts If your state does not use the OAT system, please contact the State Team Lead to determine how to access this information.
- SOAR Representatives report to the Case Management Supervisor

(SAMHSA.gov).

Tracking Data for SOAR

All individuals who provide SOAR are required to track data and outcomes. Tracking outcomes can lead to additional SOAR funding positions.

Best Practice for Tracking Outcomes:

Homeless Management Information Services (HMIS)

All SOAR trained individuals are required to track their outcomes in five business days in the Homeless Management Information Services, HMIS. Please see Austin/Travis County Homeless Management Information System Policies and Procedure Manual. This is located at: SECTION 1: (netdna-ssl.com). The HMIS is a tool that collects, stores, and reports information on the Continuum of Care services, outcomes, and clients. It's on a shared database called Shared Point for Austin/Travis County. SOAR Providers are required to follow the HMIS SOAR Workflow. An addendum of the HMIS SOAR is attached to this document. (Whitney Bright).

Online Application Tracking (OAT)

All SOAR trained individuals are required to track their outcomes before the deadlines in the Online Application Tracking, OAT. OAT is a web-based program that requires all SOAR certified individuals to track their outcomes. OAT uses a secure server and is HIPAA compliant. SOAR certified individuals should record Applicant ID in the case file for cross reference. To register for OAT please visit the following website: https://soartrack.prainc.com.

– Free

– Easy to use

– Accessible from any web browser

– Nothing to download.

– No personal identifying information is collected.

Outcomes in OAT

• The data tracked for initial applications and appeals are below:

– Approval rates

– Time to decision

– Critical components

– Housing

– Employment

– Medicaid and other public benefit reimbursements

Generally, SOAR-assisted SSI/SSDI applications take approximately 20-40 hours over the course of 60 days.

Austin/Travis County Homeless SOAR Written Standards

The signing of this document certifies you agree and abide with the terms and conditions agreed upon by all parties hereto; no other agreement, oral or otherwise shall be deemed to exist or be binding.

AGENCY:

Signature and Title of Agency Representative   Date

Ending Community Homelessness Coalition:

SOAR Manager/ Austin/Travis County Local Lead   Date

Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO)

Acronyms and Definitions

"SAMHSA SOAR program increases access to Social Security disability benefits for eligible children and adults who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness and have a serious mental illness, medical impairment, and/or co-occurring substance use disorder.

SOAR stands for SSI/SSDI/Outreach/Access/& Recovery.

SSI stands for Supplemental Security Income.

SSDI stands for Social Security Disability Insurance Program.

SAMHSA stands for Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

SSA stands for Social Security Administration.

Local Field Office stands for the Social Security Administration Office in the local area.

Homeless Management Information Services (HMIS)- The HMIS is a tool that collects, stores, and reports information on the Continuum of Care services, outcomes, and clients. It is on a shared database called Shared Point for Austin/Travis County.

Online Application Tracking (OAT)- OAT is a web-based program which SOAR certified individuals are required to keep track of their outcomes. OAT uses a secure server and is HIPAA compliant.

AMS- stands for Acceptable Medical Source.

Cite:

The information above was taken out of the Hiring-Supervising-SOAR-Case-Workers-Toolkit.

*This information is from the SOAR Works website and was composed for the purpose of creating written standards for Austin/Travis County. SOAR Works! https://soarworks.samhsa.gov/ SOAR Works! May 4, 2022.

Disability Determination Services were contacted for current list of Acceptable Medical Sources, AMS.

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The United States Social Security Administration | SSA

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Addendum