



Ticket Work

The Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency Program

Overview of the Ticket to Work Program

**Reference Guide for Employment Networks and State Vocational
Rehabilitation Agencies**

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Overview of the Ticket to Work Program

This unit describes the background and purpose of the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999 and will serve as a broad overview of the Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency Program. Please note that most references to Employment Networks (ENs) include State Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Agencies functioning as ENs unless otherwise noted.



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Learning Objectives

The learning objectives of this module are to:

- Describe the events leading to the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act,
- List the four noted purposes of the legislation,
- Cite the stated goal of the legislation,
- Describe the major features of the legislation,
- Describe the purpose of the Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency Program,
- Describe the objectives of the Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency Program,
- Describe the mission of MAXIMUS as the Operations Support Manager,
- Describe the basic components of the Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency Program, and
- Identify various resources that support disability beneficiaries' return to work efforts.

PART I: BACKGROUND OF THE TICKET TO WORK AND WORK INCENTIVES IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 1999

The National Organization on Disability/Harris Survey conducted in 1998 found that only 29 percent of individuals with disabilities were working full or part time. From 1986 to 1989, the number of individuals receiving disability benefits rose 80 percent, with about half receiving Social Security disability insurance (SSDI) benefits and half receiving Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits. A number of factors contributed to this increase, including expanded eligibility for benefits, Social Security Administration outreach efforts, economic conditions during the late 1980's and early 1990's, increased demand for benefits resulting from a lack of affordable and adequate health care insurance, and a demographically changing work force. In 1999, the Federal government spent \$51.3 billion on Social Security disability benefits and \$22.9 billion in Supplemental Security Income. In addition, many states use state funds to supplement Supplemental Security Income payments.

According to findings of the U.S. General Accounting Office, less than 1 percent of SSDI and SSI beneficiaries attain paid employment that would enable them to be economically sufficient without Social Security benefits. Approximately 1/3 of those who leave the rolls return within three years. It is estimated that if approximately one half of one percent of those individuals currently receiving SSDI or SSI benefits were to attain self-supporting employment, the savings in cash assistance would total \$3.5 billion over the work life of these individuals.

The findings cited in the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act (Public Law 106-170) provide possible explanations for the rise in the number of individuals with disabilities continuing as SSDI and SSI beneficiaries. Health care insurance is cited as a main contributing factor to the need for individuals with disabilities to remain as beneficiaries and as an obstacle to attaining self-supporting employment. As described in the findings, individuals with disabilities and special health care needs:

- Often cannot afford the insurance available to them through the private market, are uninsurable by the plans available in the private sector, and are at great risk of incurring very high and economically devastating health care costs;
- Are unable to attain health care coverage that provides services that enable them to live independently;
- Fear losing health care coverage thus limiting the opportunity to maximize earnings potential and independence; and
- Risk losing Medicare or Medicaid coverage that is linked to their cash benefits presenting a greater risk than the loss of cash assistance.

These disincentives to employment remained in spite of technological, social, and political changes that have occurred over the course of the last half of the 21st Century, which were designed to increase the capacity of individuals with disabilities to attain independence. Representative of these changes is the Americans with Disabilities Act that eliminated many barriers confronting individuals with disabilities from fully participating in the social environment.

To further assist individuals with disabilities in their efforts to achieve self-sufficiency and social and economic independence, the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999 (Public Law 106-170) was signed into effect on December 17, 1999.

PART II: PURPOSE OF THE TICKET TO WORK AND WORK INCENTIVES IMPROVEMENT ACT

The Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act has four purposes:

- To provide health care and employment preparation and placement services to individuals with disabilities to reduce dependence on cash benefits.
- To encourage states to adopt the option of allowing individuals with disabilities to purchase Medicaid coverage that is necessary to enable them to maintain employment.
- To provide individuals with disabilities the option of maintaining Medicare coverage while working.
- To establish a Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency Program that allows Social Security disability and disabled or blind Supplemental Security Income recipients to seek the employment services, vocational rehabilitation services, and other support services needed to obtain, regain, or maintain employment and reduce dependence on cash benefit programs.

To address the first three identified purposes, the Act amended several provisions of the Social Security Act to make it possible for people with disabilities receiving Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) to work and still receive monthly payments and Medicare or Medicaid.

To achieve the fourth purpose, the legislation served to amend the Social Security Act by establishing the Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency Program.

PART III: GOAL OF THE TICKET TO WORK AND SELF-SUFFICIENCY PROGRAM

The general goal of the Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency Program is to expand the universe of service providers who are available to those individuals who are entitled to Social Security benefits based on disability and for those who are eligible for SSI benefits based on disability or blindness. This must be done to facilitate obtaining the services beneficiaries need to find employment, enter the workforce, and retain that employment opportunity over the long term. The Ticket to Work Program, with the other provisions of the Act, should increase the number of beneficiaries who increase their work effort and leave the beneficiary rolls. By expanding employment opportunities for this population the likelihood that beneficiaries will be able to reduce their dependency on SSDI and SSI cash benefits is increased.

In addition to leaving the rolls as beneficiaries, it can be expected that a number of individuals will secure employment that provides access to group health coverage, thereby reducing the expense of Medicare and Medicaid programs. An increase in the number of individuals with disabilities securing employment should also decrease costs associated with other programs such as public assistance, housing subsidies, and food stamps. Most significantly, increased employment rates of individuals with disabilities should increase their independence and strengthen communities and the workforce.



PART IV: OVERVIEW OF THE TICKET TO WORK AND SELF-SUFFICIENCY PROGRAM

The Ticket to Work Program provides beneficiaries with even more choices for receiving employment services while increasing provider incentives to serve these individuals. Under the Program, the Social Security Administration provides disability beneficiaries with a Ticket they may use to obtain vocational rehabilitation (VR) services and/or support from an Employment Network (EN) or State Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Agency of their choice. This presents the beneficiary with more consumer options for employment services and enables an SSDI or SSI beneficiary to go to a participating public or private EN to secure these services.

Social Security Administration

The Social Security Administration is the federal agency selected by Congress to oversee the administration of the Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency Program. The Social Security Administration writes the regulations for the Ticket to Work Program, in addition to monitoring the Program. The Social Security Administration also makes modifications/amendments to the Program regulations as necessary. The Ticket to Work and Work Improvement Act legislation required that the Social Security Administration select and enter into contract with a program manager(s), an organization in the public or private sector, to assist in the administration of the Ticket to Work Program. While the program manager(s) oversee much of the day to day functions of the Ticket to Work program, including Ticket assignments, payment authorizations, and dispute resolutions, the Social Security Administration has the final say on all decisions. The Social Security Administration is also responsible for determining beneficiary eligibility for the Ticket to Work Program and mailing beneficiaries their initial Ticket.

Operations Support Manager and Ticket Program Data Operations Center Manager

As the Operations Support Manager (OSM) for the Ticket to Work Program, the mission of MAXIMUS is to assist the Social Security Administration by carrying out the following objectives:

- Facilitating access by beneficiaries to ENs and state VR agencies;
- Training and assistance to ENs and state VR agencies;
- Facilitating payments to ENs and state VR agencies; and
- Carrying out administrative requirements such as reviewing Individual Work Plans (IWPs) and processing EN reports.

MAXIMUS also manages the Ticket Program Data Operations Center (TPDOC) to maintain all automated, electronic systems supporting daily Ticket Program operations and provides system support services and management information to the Social Security Administration and contract staff.

It is the duty of MAXIMUS to inform beneficiaries and Employment Networks about the Ticket to Work Program. Beneficiaries need to know how the Program will affect them and their benefits and that they can now access services that may not have previously been available to them. It is also important that they understand that the Ticket to Work Program is geared toward beginning or continuing a “career” versus “getting a job” and that there are protections available. ENs need to know about the Program, how it affects the services they deliver, and how and when they will be eligible for revenue.

MAXIMUS will provide beneficiaries with a list of Employment Networks that covers all areas of service and gives them the opportunity to make informed decisions about Program participation while ensuring follow-up and quality monitoring of the services beneficiaries receive.

It is also important to note that MAXIMUS is prohibited from directly participating in the delivery of employment services, vocational rehabilitation services, or other support services to beneficiaries with Tickets. MAXIMUS is also prohibited from holding a financial interest in an Employment Network or service provider that provides services under the Ticket to Work Program. This is meant to ensure that MAXIMUS is impartially carrying out the intended purpose of serving all parties involved to the best of its ability.

Program Manager for Recruitment and Outreach

The Social Security Administration awarded a five-year Program Manager for Recruitment and Outreach (PMRO) contract to Cherry Engineering Support Services, Inc. (CESSI), a division of Axiom Resource Management Inc., to provide marketing services for the Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency Program.

As the marketing contractor, the PMRO will design, implement and support nationwide marketing and outreach campaigns to accomplish several objectives:

- Market Social Security's work incentives programs (including the Ticket to Work Program) to beneficiaries with disabilities and community-based service providers;
- Recruit new Employment Networks; and
- Energize existing non-active Employment Networks to provide vocational rehabilitation, employment and other support services necessary for Social Security beneficiaries with disabilities to be successful in their employment efforts.

In addition, the PMRO will promote the creation of community-based partnerships to support and sustain Social Security's work incentives programs, as well as assist local provider organizations in marketing their services to beneficiaries with disabilities to help them succeed in their return to work efforts.

One of the PMRO's primary responsibilities is to support Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA) Program awardees in marketing their services, project activities, Social Security's work incentives, and other related employment support services and assisting with periodic Work Incentives Seminars (WISE) nationwide that provide beneficiaries with disabilities the information and support their need to make informed choices about work.

Work Incentives Planning and Assistance

The Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA) Program, formerly referred to as the Benefits Planning, Assistance and Outreach (BPAO) Program disseminates accurate information to beneficiaries with disabilities (including transition-to-work aged youth) about work incentives issues and programs. This information enables beneficiaries to make informed choices about working and whether or when to assign their Ticket to Work, as well as how available work incentives can facilitate their transition into the workforce. Benefits Specialists under the new WIPA Program will be referred to as Community Work Incentive Coordinators (CWICs). In addition to work incentives planning assistance, CWICs also provides information on the availability of protection and advocacy services to beneficiaries with disabilities, including beneficiaries participating in the Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency Program and the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program and other programs that are designed to encourage beneficiaries with disabilities to seek, maintain and regain employment. The ultimate goal of the WIPA projects is to assist Social Security beneficiaries with disabilities to succeed in their return to work efforts.

Protection and Advocacy

The Social Security Administration's Protection and Advocacy (P&A) Program, known as Protection and Advocacy for Beneficiaries of Social Security (PABSS), was created to serve SSDI and SSI beneficiaries

who want to work despite their continuing disabilities.

The goals of the P&A program are 1) to assist beneficiaries with disabilities in obtaining information and advice about receiving vocational rehabilitation and employment services and 2) to provide advocacy or other related services that beneficiaries with disabilities may need to secure or regain gainful employment.

Tickets

A Ticket under the Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency Program is a symbolic document which provides evidence of the Social Security Administration Commissioner's agreement to pay an Employment Network or a State Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Agency to which a beneficiary's Ticket is assigned for providing employment services, vocational rehabilitation services, and/or other support services to the beneficiary. The left side of the Ticket includes the beneficiary's personal information, including the name, claim account number, the date the Ticket was issued, and Ticket number.

The Ticket number will be the beneficiary's Social Security number with the letters 'TW' and a number indicating whether it is the first, second, third, etc., Ticket the beneficiary has received. The right side of the Ticket includes the Commissioner's signature and an explanation of the Ticket to Work Program. Beneficiaries will also receive instructions to call the MAXIMUS Ticket to Work Help-line for additional information.

The Social Security Administration distributed Tickets in graduated phases. The first phase was rolled out in 13 states: Arizona, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Illinois, Iowa, Massachusetts, New York, Oklahoma, Oregon, South Carolina, Vermont, Wisconsin. Tickets were issued to eligible beneficiaries in these 13 states beginning in February 2002. The second phase was rolled out in 20 states and the District of Columbia beginning in November 2002. Beneficiaries in the following states received their Tickets during phase II of the Program: Alaska, Arkansas, Connecticut, Georgia, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Michigan, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New Mexico, North Dakota, South Dakota, Tennessee and Virginia, and in the District of Columbia. The final roll out began in November 2003, to beneficiaries in Alabama, California, Hawaii, Idaho, Maine, Maryland, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Texas, Utah, Washington, West Virginia and Wyoming, as well as in American Samoa, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands. The Ticket to Work Program was fully implemented nationwide by the end of 2004. Tickets continue to be mailed each month to beneficiaries who become eligible to receive a Ticket.

Beneficiaries

The Ticket is available to every SSDI and SSI beneficiary who is between the ages of 18-64 and in an active pay status.

Eligible beneficiaries (Ticket-holders) receive a Ticket from the Social Security Administration. The Ticket to Work Program is voluntary, meaning beneficiaries are not penalized if they are unable or decide not to use their Ticket. Also, since there are no timelines within which a beneficiary must use the Ticket, a beneficiary may choose not to use the Ticket initially but decide to use it at a later date. In choosing to participate in the Ticket to Work Program, a beneficiary will be able to assign the Ticket to the EN or State VR Agency of his/her choice. Also by participating, in the Program, the beneficiary is protected from any medical Continuing Disability Reviews (CDRs).

Disability Program Navigators

The Department of Labor (DOL) and the Social Security Administration established the Disability Program Navigator (DPN) initiative to better inform beneficiaries and other people with disabilities about the work support programs now available at DOL-funded One-Stop Career Centers. The Disability Program Navigator helps people with disabilities “navigate” through the enormous challenges of seeking work. The Department of Labor’s Employment and Training Administration and the Social Security Administration’s Office of Program Development and Research signed an Interagency Agreement in September 2002 and 2005 to jointly fund, implement, pilot, and evaluate the Navigator initiative. Disability Program Navigators are hired and employed by the state or local workforce system.

Employment Networks

An Employment Network (EN) is any qualified entity that has entered into an agreement with the Social Security Administration to provide and/or coordinate employment services, vocational rehabilitation services, or other support services to beneficiaries who have assigned their Ticket to that EN. These qualified entities become ENs through a simple application process.

The ultimate goal of Employment Networks is to assist beneficiaries to become self-sufficient through employment and thus, no longer dependent on cash benefits from the Social Security Administration. As an incentive to ENs to accomplish this goal, the Social Security Administration will offer payments to ENs for Milestones or Outcomes that each beneficiary whose Ticket is in their assignment achieves.

State Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Agencies

State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies, located in each state (81 nationwide), operate under Title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended. Each State VR Agency must participate in the Ticket to Work Program if it wishes to receive payment from the Social Security Administration for serving disabled beneficiaries, however, State VR Agencies do not have to function as ENs. State VR Agencies functioning as ENs will operate differently, in some aspects, than other ENs.

Individual Work Plans

An Individual Work Plan (IWP) is an agreement between the beneficiary and the EN that states the beneficiary’s vocational goal and outlines services necessary to achieve that goal. It represents an agreement between the two parties, showing a mutual understanding to work together to pursue the goal of gainful employment for the beneficiary. The document includes the services necessary to attain the employment goals, which can include transportation services, adult education, resume writing classes, job placement, and more. Both the beneficiary and the EN must sign an IWP before a beneficiary’s Ticket is considered assigned to that EN. State VR Agencies use a similar document called an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). Rather than submitting the IPE to MAXIMUS to assign a beneficiary’s Ticket, the state VR agency will submit the State Agency Ticket Assignment Form 1365, more commonly referred to as the Form 1365.

Employment Network Payment Methods

As incentive for entities to become ENs and assist beneficiaries with disabilities to become self-sufficient, the Ticket to Work Program provides payment options the ENs can consider when determining how best to receive payment for the successes of the beneficiaries served. There are two payment options: the Outcome Payment Method and the Milestone-Outcome Payment Method. In addition to these two options, State VR Agencies may also choose to be paid under the traditional Cost Reimbursement Payment Method. State VR Agencies that do not function as ENs will continue to provide services to beneficiaries, but will be reimbursed under the Cost Reimbursement Payment Method. MAXIMUS will administer the payment process for ENs under the Outcome and Milestone-Outcome

Payment Methods, but will not administer the payment process for State VR agencies that choose to be paid under the Cost Reimbursement Payment Method.

Outcome Payment Method

Payments are made to the EN for each month in the outcome period. The outcome period is the period in which SSDI cash benefits are not payable to the beneficiary because of work or earnings, or are sufficient, with exclusions, to reduce the Federal Benefit Rate (FBR) to zero for individuals receiving SSI payments. The outcome period for beneficiaries is 60 non-consecutive months.

Outcome-Milestone Payment Method

Under the Outcome-Milestone Payment Method, an EN may receive the same 60 monthly payments (under the same conditions) as described in the Outcome Payment Method plus additional payments received when a beneficiary completes up to Milestones directed toward the goal of permanent employment. The Milestones occur after the beneficiary starts work and are based on earning levels, however, a beneficiary can still receive his/her cash benefits for the month in which a Milestone is paid. In other words, Milestones can be paid to the EN even though the beneficiary's cash-benefits have not been reduced to zero, as is required for the EN to receive Outcome payments. These Milestones were designed to help ENs cover the initial costs of providing services while waiting to qualify for Outcome payments.

PART V: KEY POINTS

The key points of this unit include the following:

- It is estimated that if approximately one half of one percent of those individuals currently receiving Social Security disability benefits (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI) were to attain self-supporting employment, the savings in cash assistance would total \$3.5 billion over the work life of these individuals;
- Prior to the Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act, individuals receiving SSDI and SSI benefits risked losing their cash benefit and medical coverage if they returned to work;
- The Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999 (Public Law 106-170) was signed into law on December 17, 1999;
- The Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act has four purposes designed to assist individuals with disabilities in attaining economic independence;
- The general goal of the Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency Program is to expand the universe of service providers who are available to those individuals receiving SSDI and SSI to assist them in attaining employment;
- MAXIMUS is the Operations Support Manager and the Ticket Program Data Operations Center Manager for the Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency Program;
- CESSI is the Program Manager for Recruitment and Outreach;
- The Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency Program was phased in nationally over a 3-year period, beginning in February 2002 and fully implemented by the end of 2004;
- An entity can become an Employment Network (EN) by submitting a Request for Proposal to the Social Security Administration;
- State Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Agencies must participate in the Ticket to Work Program, but do not have to function as ENs;
- ENs may select from two payment options by which they will receive revenue when Ticket-holders reach outcomes of milestones attributed to services the EN has provided;
- The two payment options available to ENs are the Outcome Payment Method and the Outcome-Milestone Payment Method;
- State VR Agencies may choose to serve a particular beneficiary as an EN and receive revenue through their selected EN payment method, or they may choose to be paid for services through the traditional Cost Reimbursement Payment Method; and
- Various resources support disability beneficiaries in their return to work efforts, such as WIPA, Protection and Advocacy programs, Disability Navigators, state Medicaid buy-in options, and continued Medicare coverage.