



Ticket Work

The Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency Program

Understanding Timely Progress

Reference Guide for Employment Networks and State Vocational Rehabilitation Agencies

January 2007



Understanding Timely Progress

This unit focuses on the Social Security Administration’s reviews of Ticket-holders’ Timely Progress and the guidelines used when determining successful Timely Progress. The section includes the definitions of Timely Progress and active/inactive beneficiary status and outlines the consequences when a beneficiary fails to meet Timely Progress standards.



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Learning Objectives

The learning objectives of this module are to:

- Define Timely Progress toward self-supporting employment;
- Understand the guidelines for determining Timely Progress;
- Define active and inactive Ticket-holder status;
- Describe the stages for which Timely Progress is reviewed and the results of failure; and
- Describe the conditions under which a beneficiary is given an extension period.

PART I - TIMELY PROGRESS TOWARD SELF-SUPPORTING EMPLOYMENT

Timely Progress refers to the guidelines used by the Social Security Administration to determine if a beneficiary is making progress toward self-supporting employment. The Social Security Administration considers the beneficiary to be making Timely Progress toward self-supporting employment when a beneficiary shows an increasing ability to work at levels that will reduce or eliminate his/her dependence on their cash benefits. MAXIMUS will determine if a beneficiary is meeting the Timely Progress guidelines via Progress Reviews. The timeline for Progress Reviews and guidelines for Timely Progress are as follows:

- Active participation in the employment plan within the initial 24-month period of Ticket assignment. Active Participation means engaging in activities outlined in the employment plan on a regular basis and in the approximate timeframes specified in the beneficiary's Individual Work Plan (IWP). The initial 24-month period is the 24-month period beginning the month following the month a beneficiary first assigned his/her Ticket;
- During the first 12-month progress review period, work must occur in at least 3 of the 12 months. These months do not need to be consecutive; and
- During the second 12-month progress review periods, and in later 12-month progress review periods, work must occur in at least 6 of these months. These months do not need to be consecutive.

While work is not required during the initial 24-month period to meet timely progress, an employment plan may include employment if agreed upon by the beneficiary. If the beneficiary worked one or more months during the initial 24-month period at the level of work applicable to the work requirement for the first 12-month progress review period, each such month of work may be used to reduce by one month the number of months of work required for the first 12-month progress review. This banking of months worked in one progress review period to count toward the work requirements for the next progress review period may only occur between the initial 24-month and first 12-month progress review periods.

Any month(s) in which the Ticket is not assigned to an EN or State VR Agency or any month in which a Ticket is not in-use is not counted toward the timelines described for Timely Progress.

Earnings Toward Self-Supporting Employment

For the purpose of determining if TP toward self-supporting employment requirements are being met, work is defined as a month in which earnings are met at specific levels depending on the benefits the individual is receiving. The following sub-sections describe the earnings level according to benefits being received.

SSDI Beneficiaries

The following describe Timely Progress Toward Self-Supporting Employment for individuals receiving SSDI benefits.

During the first and second 12-month progress reviews, a beneficiary will be considered working in a month in which he/she has earnings from employment or self-employment at the SGA level for non-blind beneficiaries (\$900.00/month).

If a beneficiary is statutorily blind or in a trial work period, the following are considered as fulfilling this requirement:

- Gross earnings from employment, before deductions for impairment-related work expenses,

that are more than the SGA threshold amount for non-blind beneficiaries, or

- Net earnings from self-employment, before any deductions for impairment related work expenses, which are more than the SGA threshold amount for non-blind beneficiaries.

NOTE: If a beneficiary worked at the level of work applicable to the work requirement for the first 12-month progress review, those months of work may be used to meet the requirements of the first 12-month progress review.

- During the third 12-month work review period, and during any later 12-month progress review periods, a beneficiary will be considered working in a month which SSDI benefits are not payable due to work or earnings.

SSI Beneficiaries

The following describe timely progress toward self-supporting employment for individuals receiving SSI benefits.

- During the first and second 12-month progress review periods beneficiaries will be considered working in a month in which:
- Gross earnings from employment, before any SSI income exclusions, that are more than the SGA threshold amount for non-blind beneficiaries, or earnings that are sufficient to reduce the federal SSI benefit to zero; or
- Net earnings from self-employment, before any SSI income exclusions, that are more than the SGA threshold amount for non-blind beneficiaries.

For example, if Thomas, an SSI beneficiary, earned \$950.00 in February 2003, but excluded \$200.00 of this income in a Plan for Achieving Self-Support, Thomas would still be considered to be working in that month.

NOTE: If a beneficiary worked at the level of work applicable to the work requirement for the first 12-month progress review, those months of work may be used to meet the requirements of the first 12-month progress review.

- During the third 12-month progress review period, and during any later 12-month progress review periods, a beneficiary will be considered working in a month in which earnings from employment or self-employment are sufficient to preclude the payment of SSI cash benefits for that month.

Concurrent SSDI and SSI Beneficiaries

The following describe timely progress toward self-supporting employment for individuals receiving concurrent SSDI and SSI benefits.

- During the first and second 12-month progress reviews beneficiaries will be considered working in a month in which earnings from employments or self-employment are at the SGA level for non-blind beneficiaries.

If a beneficiary is statutorily blind or in a trial work period, the following are considered as fulfilling this requirement:

- Gross earnings from employment, before any SSI income exclusions or deductions for im-

pairment related work expenses, that are more than the SGA threshold amount for non-blind beneficiaries; or

- Net earnings from self-employment, before any SSI income exclusions or deductions for impairment related work expenses, which are more than the SGA threshold amount for non-blind beneficiaries.

NOTE: If a beneficiary worked at the level of work applicable to the work requirement for the first 12-month progress review, those months of work may be used to meet the requirements of the first 12-month progress review.

- During the third 12-month progress review period, and during later 12-month progress review periods, a beneficiary will be considered to be working in a month in which earnings from employment or self-employment are sufficient to preclude the payment of SSDI benefits and Federal SSI cash benefits for a month.

PART II - DETERMINATION OF TIMELY PROGRESS TOWARD SELF-SUPPORTING EMPLOYMENT

The guidelines for determining timely progress toward self-supporting employment vary depending on which progress review period the beneficiary is in when his/her TP is evaluated.

During the Initial 24-month Period

During the initial 24-month period after a beneficiary assigns his/her ticket, he/she must be actively participating in his/her employment plan (engaging in activities outlined in his/her employment plan on a regular basis and in the approximate timeframes specified in the employment plan). During the first 24-month period, the beneficiary receives full benefits under SSDI or SSI. The individual has no work requirement during this period and thus is not expected to have work-related earnings. If the beneficiary does work, it must be included in the IWP. Active participation will be presumed unless the beneficiary or the EN/State VR agency tells MAXIMUS that the beneficiary is not actively participating.

If the beneficiary or the EN/State VR agency reports to MAXIMUS that the beneficiary is temporarily unable to participate or is not actively participating in his/her employment plan during the initial 24-month period after the beneficiary assigns his/her ticket, MAXIMUS will give the beneficiary the choice of placing his/her ticket in inactive status or resuming active participation in the employment plan.

Inactive Status

If the beneficiary chooses to place his/her Ticket in Inactive Status, then he/she must submit a written request to MAXIMUS. This written request must include a statement from the EN or State VR Agency that the beneficiary will not be participating in his/her employment plan or receiving services from them during the period of Inactive Status. The beneficiary's Ticket will be placed in Inactive Status beginning with the first day of the month following the month the beneficiary made his/her request. A beneficiary is not considered to be using a Ticket during months in which his/her Ticket is in Inactive Status; therefore, the beneficiary will be subject to Continuing Disability Reviews during these months. Months in which a Ticket is in Inactive Status do not count toward the time limitations for making Timely Progress. There is no limit to the number of months that a beneficiary may remain in Inactive Status or to the number of times that a beneficiary may enter Inactive Status within the initial 24-month progress review period. A beneficiary may not place his/her Ticket in Inactive Status after the initial 24-month period.

If the beneficiary's Ticket is still assigned to an EN or State VR Agency, the beneficiary may reactivate his/her Ticket and return to in-use status at any time by submitting a written request to MAXIMUS. The beneficiary's Ticket will be reactivated beginning on the first day of the month following the month in which MAXIMUS received the beneficiary's request.

If the beneficiary wants to re-enter in-use status, but his/her Ticket is no longer assigned to an EN or State VR Agency, the beneficiary must assign his/her Ticket to a new EN/State VR Agency before MAXIMUS will change his/her Ticket status to in-use.

Resuming Active Participation

If the beneficiary chooses to resume active participation in his/her employment plan, he/she will be allowed three months to demonstrate this active participation to MAXIMUS. During this period the beneficiary will be considered to be making Timely Progress toward self-supporting employment, and these months will count toward his/her initial 24-month period. This three-month period can be thought of as a probationary period for the beneficiary. MAXIMUS will contact the EN/State VR Agency after the three months to determine whether he/she has been actively participating in the employment plan during these three months. If the EN/State VR Agency reports to MAXIMUS that the beneficiary has been actively participating in the employment plan, the probationary period will end and the beneficiary will continue to be considered to be making Timely Progress toward self-supporting employment. Evaluations of the beneficiary's Timely Progress would continue as scheduled (i.e. Initial 24-month progress review and subsequent 12-month progress reviews). If the EN/State VR Agency reports that the beneficiary has not been actively participating in his/her employment plan, MAXIMUS will find that the beneficiary is no longer making Timely Progress toward self-supporting employment. MAXIMUS will send a written notice to the beneficiary at his last known address. This notice will explain the reasons for the decision and inform the beneficiary of his right to ask for a review of the decision. The decision will become effective 30 days after the date which notice is sent to the beneficiary, unless a request for review is made.

The 24-Month Progress Review

At the end of the 24-month period there is a 24-month progress review. During this review MAXIMUS determines whether the beneficiary is making TP toward self-supporting employment. To make this determination MAXIMUS considers three questions:

- Is the beneficiary actively participating in the IWP/IPE? "Actively participating in the employment plan," means that the beneficiary is engaging in activities outlined in his/her employment plan on a regular basis and in the approximate time frames specified in the plan. These activities may include employment if agreed to in the employment plan.
- Does the IWP/IPE have a goal of at least 3 months of work during the next 12-month progress review period?
- Given current progress in the IWP/IPE, can the beneficiary be reasonably expected to reach the goal of at least 3 months of work during the next 12-month work review period? (If the beneficiary worked during the initial 24-month period at the level of work applicable to the work requirement of the first 12-month progress review, each such month of work may be used to reduce by one month the number of months of work required in the first 12-month progress review.)

If the answer to all three of these questions is "Yes," MAXIMUS will find that the beneficiary is making TP toward self-supporting employment. Progression through the program continues with the beneficiary moving into the next 12-month progress review period until the first annual work review. The

beneficiary will be considered to be making timely progress toward self-supporting employment until his/her first 12-month progress review.

If the answer to any of these questions is “No,” MAXIMUS will find that the beneficiary is not making TP toward self-supporting employment. MAXIMUS will send a written notice of this decision to the beneficiary at his last known address. The notice will explain the reasons for the decision and inform the beneficiary of his right to appeal. The decision will be effective 30 days after the notice is sent unless the beneficiary requests a review of the decision. The beneficiary will be considered to be making Timely Progress toward self-supporting employment until his/her first 12-month progress review.

The First 12-Month Progress Review

Once the beneficiary successfully completes the initial 24-month progress review, he/she will enter the first 12-month period after which MAXIMUS will conduct a 12-month progress review. During this period, the beneficiary is expected to work 3 months out of the 12-month period with earnings from employment or self-employment at the SGA threshold for non-blind beneficiaries, before any deductions. The 3 months do not need to be consecutive. If the beneficiary worked during the initial 24-month progress review period at the level of work applicable to the work requirement for this progress review, those months of work may be used to meet these requirements.

The 12-Month Progress Review is a Two-Step Process

Step One- Retrospective Review

MAXIMUS asks the following question – Did the beneficiary complete the work requirements in the just completed 12-month progress review period?

- If the beneficiary has not completed the work requirements, MAXIMUS will find that the beneficiary is not making timely progress toward self-supporting employment,
- If the beneficiary has completed the work requirements, MAXIMUS will go on to Step Two.

Step Two- Anticipated Work Level

MAXIMUS asks the following question - Do both the beneficiary and his/her EN/State VR agency expect that the beneficiary will work at the required level during the next 12-month progress review period?

- If NO, MAXIMUS will find that the beneficiary is not making TP toward self-supporting employment,
- If YES, MAXIMUS will find that the beneficiary is making TP toward self-supporting employment. The beneficiary will be considered to be making TP toward self-supporting employment until the next 12-month progress review.

The Second 12-month Progress Review

During the second 12-month period, the beneficiary must work 6 months out of the 12-month period with earnings at the SGA level for non-blind beneficiaries. At the end of the second 12-month period, MAXIMUS asks the same questions as were asked during the first 12-month progress review period with regard to the retrospective review and anticipated work level.

The Third 12-month Progress Review and Future 12-month Progress Reviews

The third 12-month review process is similar to that completed after the first and second 12-month progress review periods, except the beneficiary is required to have worked 6 months out of the 12-month period with earnings sufficient to preclude Social Security disability and federal SSI cash benefits. In later 12-month progress review periods, the work and earnings requirements are the same as in the third 12-month progress review period.

Guideline for Timely Progress Toward Self-Supporting Employment

The following table summarizes the three ways a beneficiary may demonstrate that he/she is making Timely Progress toward self-supporting employment:

If Beneficiary:	Beneficiary is in this period	Beneficiary must work	With this level of earnings	At the end of the period, MAXIMUS will conduct the:
First assigned Ticket less than 24 months ago (Not including any months in which the ticket was unassigned or not in use) ¹	Initial 24-month period	No work required, but allowed if included in the IWP/IPE. Must be actively participating in employment plan.	Not Applicable	24-month progress review
First assigned Ticket 25-36 months ago (Not including any months in which the ticket was unassigned) ¹	First 12-month progress review period	3 months out of 12	SGA level for non-blind beneficiaries ^{3, 4}	First 12-month progress review
First assigned Ticket 37-48 months ago (Not including any months in which the ticket was unassigned) ¹	Second 12-month progress review period	6 months out of 12	SGA level for non-blind beneficiaries ^{3, 4}	Second 12-month progress review
First assigned Ticket 49-60 months ago (Not including any months in which the ticket was unassigned) ¹	Third 12-month progress review period	6 months out of 12	Earnings sufficient to preclude Social Security disability and Federal SSI cash benefits for a month	Third 12-month progress review

Note to table: In later 12-month progress review periods, the work and earnings requirements are the same as in the third 12-month progress review period.

¹ In counting the 24 months which make up the initial 24-month period that begins after a beneficiary assigns his/her Ticket, the Social Security Administration does not count any months during which the beneficiary's Ticket was unassigned or was not in use. In counting the 12 months, which make up any subsequent 12-month progress review period, the Social Security Administration does not count any

months during which the beneficiary's Ticket was unassigned.

² If the beneficiary worked one or more months during the initial 24-month period at level of work applicable to the work requirement for the first 12-month progress review, each such month may be used to reduce by one month the number of months required for the first 12-month progress review period.

³ For a month in which the beneficiary is in a trial work period, or if the beneficiary is statutorily blind, during the first and second progress reviews Social Security Administration will consider the beneficiary to be working when he/she achieves gross earnings from employment, before any deductions for impairment related work expenses, that are more than the SGA threshold amount for non-blind beneficiaries; or net earnings from self-employment, before any deductions for impairment related work expenses, that are more than the SGA threshold amount for non-blind beneficiaries.

⁴ For SSI beneficiaries, during the first and second progress reviews Social Security Administration will consider the beneficiary to be working when he/she achieves gross earnings from employment, before any SSI income exclusions, that are more than the SGA threshold amount for non-blind beneficiaries; or net earnings from self-employment, before any SSI income exclusions, that are more than the SGA threshold amount for non-blind beneficiaries.

Failure to Make Timely Progress Toward Self-Supporting Employment & Reentering In-Use Status

If it is determined that a beneficiary is not making Timely Progress toward self-supporting employment, MAXIMUS will find that the beneficiary is no longer using his/her Ticket. If this happens the beneficiary will once again be subject to CDRs. The beneficiary however, may continue participating in the Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency Program. The EN or State VR Agency may receive any Outcome or Milestone payments for which it is eligible, or the State VR Agency may receive payments under the Cost-Reimbursement system.

If the beneficiary failed to meet the Timely Progress guidelines for continuing to use a Ticket, the beneficiary may re-enter in-use status. If the beneficiary feels that he/she meets the requirements for re-entering in-use status described in the following sections, he/she may submit to MAXIMUS a request that he/she be reinstated to in-use status; this request must be in writing. MAXIMUS will decide whether the beneficiary has satisfied the applicable requirements for re-entering in-use status. The requirements for re-entering in-use status depend on how far the beneficiary progressed before they failed to meet the Timely Progress guidelines.

If a beneficiary fails to meet the Timely Progress requirements at any given step in the process, he/she may reenter in-use status by completing the requirements of the next Timely Progress period within a rolling 12-month period. The rolling 12-month period must begin after the effective date of the decision that the beneficiary failed to meet the Timely Progress guidelines.

After the beneficiary is reinstated to in-use status, the second 12-month progress review period will begin. MAXIMUS will conduct a 12-month progress review at the end of this 12-month progress review period. After this, MAXIMUS will conduct 12-month progress reviews in the usual manner. When the beneficiary has completed these requirements, he/she will be reinstated to in-use status, provided that his/her Ticket is assigned to an EN or State VR Agency. After the beneficiary is reinstated, the next Timely Progress review period will begin. MAXIMUS will conduct a progress review at the end of this review period to determine if the beneficiary has met this requirement. After this, MAXIMUS will conduct 12-month progress reviews in the usual manner.

Decisions on whether the beneficiary has satisfied the requirements for re-entering in-use status

After the beneficiary submits a written request to MAXIMUS asking that he/she be reinstated to in-use status, MAXIMUS will decide whether he/she has satisfied the applicable requirements for re-entering in-use status. MAXIMUS will send a written notice to the beneficiary at his/her last known address. The notice will explain the reasons for the decision and inform the beneficiary of the right to ask the Social Security Administration to review the decision.

If MAXIMUS decides that the beneficiary has satisfied the requirements for re-entering in-use status (including the requirement that the beneficiary's Ticket be assigned to an EN/State VR Agency), the beneficiary will be reinstated to in-use status effective the date on which MAXIMUS sends notice of the decision to the beneficiary.

If MAXIMUS decides that the beneficiary has not satisfied the requirements for re-entering in-use status, MAXIMUS will send the beneficiary notice of the decision. If the beneficiary disagrees with the decision of MAXIMUS, he/she may request in writing that the Social Security Administration review the decision. The beneficiary must make this request before the 30th day after the date on which MAXIMUS sends the notice of its decision to the beneficiary. If the beneficiary does not request a Social Security Administration review before the 30th day, the decision that the beneficiary did not satisfy the requirements to re-enter in-use status will become effective and the beneficiary's status will be changed to not in-use. If the beneficiary does request a Social Security Administration review, MAXIMUS must send any information relevant to the appeal to the Social Security Administration for consideration. The Social Security Administration will send the beneficiary written notice of its decision. If the Social Security Administration decides that the beneficiary has satisfied the requirements for re-entering in-use status, the beneficiary will be reinstated to in-use status effective with the date on which the Social Security Administration sent the notice of the decision to the beneficiary.

Extension Period

If a beneficiary's Ticket was once assigned to an EN or State VR Agency and is no longer assigned, the beneficiary is eligible for an extension period of up to three months to reassign his/her Ticket. The extension period begins on the first day on which the Ticket is no longer assigned and ends three months after it begins or when the beneficiary assigns his/her Ticket to a new EN/State VR Agency, whichever is sooner.

A beneficiary is eligible for an extension period if his/her Ticket is in use and no longer assigned because:

- The beneficiary retrieved his/her Ticket because he/she was dissatisfied with the services being provided; or
- The beneficiary has relocated to an area not served by his/her previous EN or State VR Agency; or
- The beneficiary's EN went out of business or is no longer approved to participate as an EN in the Ticket to Work Program; or
- The beneficiary's EN is no longer willing or able to provide him/her with services, or if the beneficiary's State VR Agency stops providing services because the beneficiary has been determined to be ineligible for VR services, and the EN/State VR requests that MAXIMUS take the beneficiary's Ticket out of assignment with that EN/State VR.

Time spent in the extension period will not count toward the time limitations for the Timely Progress

guidelines. During the extension period, the Ticket will still be considered to be in use. This means that the beneficiary will not be subject to Continuing Disability Reviews during this period. If the beneficiary does not assign his/her Ticket by the end of the extension period, the Ticket will no longer be in-use and the beneficiary will once again be subject to Continuing Disability Reviews.

If the beneficiary's extension period begins during the initial 24-month period, and the beneficiary reassigns his/her Ticket to an EN or State VR Agency (other than the EN or State VR Agency to which the Ticket was previously assigned), the beneficiary will have a new initial 24-month period when he/she reassigns his/her Ticket. This initial 24-month period will begin with the first month beginning after the day on which the reassignment of his/her Ticket was effective.

If the beneficiary's extension period begins during any 12-month progress review period and the beneficiary reassigns his/her Ticket after the end of the extension period, the clock will stop on that 12-month review period and will not begin ticking again until the first month beginning after the day on which the reassignment of the beneficiary's Ticket is effective.

The beneficiary may reassign his/her Ticket after the end of the extension period under the conditions described in the previous section on Reassigning a Ticket, however the beneficiary's Ticket will be considered not in-use for any months outside of the three month extension period during which the beneficiary's Ticket is not assigned, and thus the beneficiary may be subject to Continuing Disability Reviews. If the beneficiary reassigns his/her Ticket after the end of the extension period, he/she will be reinstated to in-use status beginning on the day on which the reassignment of the Ticket is effective.

PART III: KEY POINTS

The key points of this unit include the following:

- Social Security Administration considers a beneficiary to be making Timely Progress toward self-supporting employment when a beneficiary shows an increasing ability to work at levels that will reduce or eliminate dependence on these benefits;
- A beneficiary may choose to place his/her Ticket in Inactive Status by submitting a written request to MAXIMUS; and
- If it is determined that a beneficiary is not making Timely Progress toward self-supporting employment, MAXIMUS will find that the beneficiary is no longer “using” his/her Ticket.