CT SOAR
Program Manual
(for Dedicated, certified SOAR specialists)

SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR) is funded by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) and is a national program designed to increase access to the disability income benefit programs administered by the Social Security Administration (SSA) for eligible adults and children who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness and have a serious mental illness, medical impairment, and/or a co-occurring substance use disorder SOARWorks provides resources and technical assistance to each state that has SOAR specialists: SOAR Works! (samhsa.gov)

CT SOAR Certification

DMHAS funded SOAR specialists are required to become certified. There is a separate certification process document that needs to be reviewed and signed. Again this is for dedicated SOAR specialists that spend 100% of their time on SSI/SSDI applications and not community case management.

Here is a summary of the certification process:
Individuals become SOAR certified by completing the SOAR Online Course. Prior to beginning the online course, individuals need to contact the State Team Lead and/or your area Local Lead(s): Connecticut Contacts | SOAR Works! (samhsa.gov) to discuss their training needs and expectations of the SOAR process. Upon notice that a Certificate of Completion for online training has been issued from the National SOAR TA Center, the participant will be contacted by the State Team Lead and/or your area Local Lead(s) with information about the upcoming SOAR Online Course Review Session. All individuals who complete the online curriculum must participate in the follow-up SOAR Online Review Session which includes information on State and local-specific SOAR processes. The below requirements must be completed prior to submitting SOAR claims to SSA/DDS.

Certified SOAR Specialists must agree to the following requirements:
____   Request permission from your agency leadership to participate in the SOAR Online Course

____   Complete the following SOAR Critical Components:

- Serve as the applicant's appointed representative for the purpose of applying for SSI/SSDI. Representation includes "standing in" for the applicant, responding to questions, receiving copies of all mail sent to the applicant, and communicating back and forth with SSA and DDS.
- Complete applications for both SSI and SSDI.
- Collect medical records from providers who have treated the applicant over the last two years.
- Complete the SSA psychosocial assessment, functional impairment assessment, and substance use worksheet.
- Write a comprehensive medical summary report that includes psychosocial, treatment, and functional information that is co-signed, if at all possible, by a physician or psychologist who has seen the individual.
- Conduct ongoing outreach and engagement with the individual to stay connected throughout the process and to work with the individual to obtain other needed services and treatment such as housing, physical and mental health care, other support services, food, and clothing.

____   Register for the SOAR Online Application Tracking (OAT) system and track applications and outcomes in a timely manner.

____   No fees will be collected from SOAR applicants for completion of the application.

____   Actively collaborate with other local SOAR Specialists by attending SOAR meetings (where applicable).

____   Quarterly completion of at least one of the continuing learning opportunities listed below:

- Participation in a SAMHSA SOAR TA Center webinar
- Participation in SAMHSA SOAR TA Center SOARing Over Lunch Calls

- Participation in a SOAR Online Course Review Session
- Submit a Medical Summary Report to your area Local Lead for review

_____ Adhere to all expectations of your Local SOAR process (communicate with your SOAR Local Lead(s) for additional information on this process)

_____ Submission of a minimum of five completed SOAR applications (initial or reconsideration) to SSA every 12 months (If you are a fully funded SOAR Specialist through DMHAS or SAMHSA, you must adhere to your contracted outcome measures)

SOAR Training

A new Dedicated SOAR Specialist will need to successfully complete the SOAR Online Course Adult curriculum prior to assisting with adult SSI/SSDI applications. We estimate that this course takes approximately 35 hours to complete, though may take additional time if revisions to the course packet are required.

- Each course packet is individually reviewed by an expert at the SAMHSA SOAR TA Center, which may take up to 10 business days. With this in mind, we recommend completing the SOAR Online Course during the first week or two of employment to allow time for the new SOAR specialist to receive feedback, a certificate of completion, and begin meeting with potential applicants within the first month of employment.

Caseloads

The number of individuals a SOAR specialist serves at any given time is likely to be lower than the caseload of others in the agency who are providing case management services. The SOAR model's intensive engagement process necessitates a lower caseload in order 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.

- We estimate that a newly trained, full-time dedicated SOAR specialist can complete approximately 10-20 SOAR-assisted applications in the first year, which takes into account the time to complete the SOAR Online Course and become familiar with the SSI/SSDI application process and to work within the community to educate providers on what an appropriate SOAR referral looks like Full-time, experienced, dedicated SOAR specialists can be expected to complete approximately 20-40 SOAR-assisted applications per year.

- SOAR-assisted SSI/SSDI applications have a large part of the work in the beginning stages of the application process. In order to not overwhelm SOAR specialist with new applications, caseloads need to be assigned on a rolling basis. We recommend that a newly trained, dedicated SOAR specialist start 1-2 applications per month and a more experienced SOAR caseworker start 2-3 applications per month.

Expectations for Time Management

Dedicated SOAR Specialists may spend a great deal of time outside the office conducting outreach and/or meeting with referred clients that are unsheltered, attending mental health and medical appointments with applicants, and visiting the Social Security Administration field office. They will also spend a great deal of time in communication with medical providers to gather records supporting the client's diagnosis and family, friends, past employers to gather a history of effects of the diagnosis on daily functioning.

Flexibility

It is important for supervisors to understand that each SOAR-assisted SSI/SSDI application is unique, and the time each application will take to complete may vary based on the complexity of the case.

- Generally, SOAR-assisted SSI/SSDI applications take approximately 20-40 hours over the course of 60 days.
- Ongoing communication between the SOAR specialist and supervisor will be essential to tracking workloads and time in and out of the office for appointments.

SOAR specialist will need support talking through challenging cases, proofreading Medical Summary Reports (MSRs), and requesting records and signatures from acceptable medical sources.

- A SOAR specialist can navigate these challenges by scheduling weekly or bi-weekly case consultations and supervision.
- Encourage the SOAR specialist to complete all SOAR critical components, and frequently communicate with their SOAR Local Leads and State Leads and SAMHSA SOAR TA Center Liaison and attend community case conferencing or other SOAR technical assistance offered.
- Completing the SOAR Online Course: Adult Curriculum will help supervisors better understand the SOAR model and its application.
- Some medical records requests may require fees. While SOAR specialists are successful at deferring fees for most records, agencies should have a small amount of funding set aside to pay medical record fees if necessary.
- SOAR specialists should not work in a vacuum. They need to have regular contact with peers to share information on SSA processes, difficult cases, and handling unique situations. All staffing with outside colleagues should be done without compromising the applicant's privacy rights.

Monitoring for Quality

SOAR specialists and program managers will need to register 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. 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

Managers should complete component 1 in the SOAR online training which is essentially a SOAR 101. This will give managers information and insight on the process their staff will use to complete SSI/SSDI applications without having to complete the full training.

SOAR Outcomes Report
Each state must work with the SOAR T.A. Center to complete the statewide outcomes report. That data is pulled from OAT and reviewed for accuracy. This report is usually due in August. Managers should review OAT data throughout the year but especially focus on the reported decisions for the outcomes report in June and July.

Referral process – Identifying SOAR applicants

Educate the housing and homeless providers and behavioral health providers in your community and coordinated access network by sharing the document, "Identifying SOAR applicants". You can also educate your community by referring them to the SOARWorks website CT page:
Connecticut | SOAR Works! (samhsa.gov)

- Ensure that you are taking appropriate referrals by using the DMHAS suggested referral form or something similar adopted by your agency

Important reminder that this manual is for dedicated SOAR specialists meaning 100% of their work is on SSI/SSDI applications