

The Role of CWICs in Supporting Employment Networks under the Ticket Program 2011

The Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency Program is an employment program for SSA beneficiaries who desire to obtain employment or return to work. Recent regulatory changes to the Ticket Program are primarily aimed at expanding the number of Employment Networks (ENs) available to provide services and supports to SSA disability beneficiaries, which will allow beneficiaries greater choice among service providers and improved access to employment supports.

The WIPA projects have an important role to play in supporting the efforts of ENs. CWICs need to work in close partnership with ENs to overcome potential barriers to employment related to the SSA disability benefits or other federal, state or local benefits. CWICs have an obligation under the new Ticket Program to support ENs in the following ways:

1. CWICs should work collaboratively with ENs to conduct joint outreach to SSA disability beneficiaries in their catchment area.

For the new Ticket Program to be successful, SSA disability beneficiaries need to be aware of and understand the unique opportunities available through the program. To be most effective, outreach activities need to include the local SSA Field Office, local Employment Networks, and the WIPA project. Each of these key players provides a critical piece of the service array that will lead to self-supporting employment for beneficiaries.

CWICs can collaborate with community partners in outreach efforts by participating in periodic Work Incentive Seminar Events (WISE), but also by making certain that information about local ENs is disseminated every time outreach activities are performed. CWICs must understand that it is not enough to inform beneficiaries about WIPA services alone, or to simply talk about how paid work affects disability benefits – the entire service array under the ticket to work program needs to be described.

2. CWICs should be knowledgeable about the ENs serving the WIPA project catchment area and help ENs understand and utilize WIPA services.

Being knowledgeable about ENs goes far beyond just maintaining a list of these agencies to hand out to beneficiaries - although that certainly is a start! In addition, CWICs need to know which ENs are currently accepting tickets, what services the various ENs provide, what the participant eligibility requirements are, and be aware of any restrictions on services or eligibility. Keeping abreast of local ENs requires that CWICs make regular contact with ENs and ask for updates. This is an ongoing effort!

CWICs also must move beyond simply providing beneficiaries with basic information about ENs. Under the WIPA program, CWICs are required to help beneficiaries choose an appropriate service provider for ticket assignment and make direct referrals to ENs. In order to fulfill this role, CWICs must be able to match beneficiaries with available ENs based on individual employment goals and service preferences. A general familiarity with the local ENs will not be sufficient to perform this role. CWICs will need to have in-depth knowledge of how these providers operate, the services they provide, and eligibility procedures and criteria.

Finally, it is imperative that CWICs provide specific information to ENs about WIPA services. This includes:

- The overall mission and goals of the WIPA program;
- Eligibility requirements for WIPA services;
- Characteristics of a high priority WIPA referral;
- Services provided by WIPA projects;
- How services are delivered to eligible beneficiaries; and
- How to make a referral for WIPA services.

CWICs are responsible for helping ENs understand how WIPA services fit into the larger picture of the Ticket Program and how these services can help ENs be more effective in helping beneficiaries obtain and maintain paid employment. A great deal of education must be provided to new ENs to help staff members understand how WIPA services can be utilized to promote employment and decrease dependency on SSA disability benefits.

3. CWICs should assist ENs to understand and use Benefits Summary & Analysis reports and Work Incentive Plans when working with beneficiaries to plan and deliver employment services and supports.

CWICs have an obligation to provide high quality individualized work incentives planning, counseling and assistance to beneficiaries with Tickets assigned to local ENs. As a matter of fact, beneficiaries with tickets in assignment and in use constitute a very high priority for WIPA services! As a part of this, CWICs need to help ENs understand how paid employment or self-employment affects a beneficiary's SSA disability benefits, Medicaid/Medicare, and all other applicable federal, state and local benefit programs. This includes helping ENs to understand when and how specific work incentives are applied to the SSA disability benefit programs to help beneficiaries achieve employment goals. The best way to accomplish this task is by sharing the information CWICs gather about an individual's benefits as well as the reports they develop summarizing advice about work incentives and next steps. This information would include:

- **Benefits Planning Queries (BPOY)** – These are reports generated by SSA that verify benefits received and work incentives used. These reports also indicate what SSA has on file for reported wages or earnings from self-employment.

- **Benefits Summary & Analysis Reports (BS&A)** – These are reports developed by CWICs that summarize the various public benefits an individual receives and describes how an individual’s employment goal would affect the various benefits. These reports also offer specific advice about the use of various work incentives as well as advice about how to resolve barriers to employment associated with disability benefits.
- **Work Incentive Plans (WIP)** – These documents contain measurable action steps related to disability benefits to be accomplished by the beneficiary, the CWIC, and/or other responsible parties. Each action step has a designated individual identified as being responsible for completing the step and indicates dates by which the steps should be accomplished. The WIP holds everyone accountable for accomplishing the benefits-related tasks necessary for achieving the beneficiary’s employment goal.

The CWIC can use these documents to help ENs gain an understanding of how specific work incentives apply to the beneficiaries they are working with. It is important that CWICs review these documents with EN staff so that questions can be answered and key work incentive provisions applicable to a specific beneficiary clarified. Of course, before any documents or reports can be shared with EN staff members, CWICs must obtain a signed release of information from the beneficiary. No information is to be shared with anyone without the express written approval of the individual or their legal guardian!

CWICs are not required to provide training, technical assistance or other information on EN payment mechanisms under the Ticket Program. ENs with questions about how services are paid for under the Ticket Program should be referred to Maximus. CWICs are also not required to provide intensive training or technical assistance to ENs on SSA benefits and work incentives, except as part of working collaboratively to serve specific beneficiaries who have assigned tickets assigned and in use.

4. CWICs should be knowledgeable about the Ticket Program provisions and how the Ticket Program functions as an important work incentive for beneficiaries.

CWICs can also support the efforts of ENs by providing complete and accurate information to beneficiaries on topics such as placing tickets in assignment, re-assigning tickets, moving a ticket in or out of inactive status, or understanding the medical CDR protections. In addition, CWICs can help beneficiaries understand the employment and/or educational requirements for the various progress certification periods related to having the ticket be “in use”. CWICs should work collaboratively with ENs to support beneficiaries in their efforts to meet the various requirements necessary to keep the Ticket in use.

Another important function CWICs perform is working collaboratively with ENs to resolve problems beneficiaries experience while using a ticket, such as a medical CDR which was initiated after a ticket was assigned and in use, or an incorrect determination during a progress certification review. CWICs are uniquely positioned to assist with these activities

due to their relationships with local SSA Field Offices and their knowledge of how the ticket functions as a work incentive for disability beneficiaries. CWICs need to make certain that ENs are aware of the support they can provide in solving ticket-related problems a beneficiary may experience.

WIPA projects have a critically important role to play in helping beneficiaries realize their employment goals. However, they do not provide all of the services necessary to achieve these ends. Only by working in tandem with ENs that provide the actual vocational rehabilitation, career preparation and employment services will CWICs achieve the most positive employment outcomes for the beneficiaries they serve.

Conclusion

WIPA projects have a critically important role to play in helping beneficiaries realize their employment goals. However, they do not provide all of the services necessary to achieve these ends. Only by working in tandem with ENs that provide the actual vocational rehabilitation, career preparation and employment services will CWICs achieve the most positive employment outcomes for the beneficiaries they serve. For more information about local ENs and how WIPA projects and ENs can work collaboratively, go to the following websites:

www.yourtickettowork.com

<http://www.socialsecurity.gov/work/index.html>