EN ESSENTIALS TRANSCRIPT

Ask Program Integrity: Creating Quality Individual Work Plans

May 21, 2025

Derek Shields: Welcome to today's EN Essentials, *Ask Program Integrity: Creating Quality Individual Work Plans.* My name is Derek Shields and I'll be serving as the moderator for today's session. I appreciate you joining us to take time to cover this important topic with our colleagues from the Program Integrity Department. Today's session covers how to work with Ticketholders to create successful IWPs that identify clear and measurable goals, describe the individualized services and supports the Ticketholder needs to achieve those goals, and, of course, meet all the Ticket Program requirements. I'll be interviewing two members of the Program Integrity Department staff to discuss and provide tips about IWP development and documentation. We'll be focusing on the most common issues that they see and some of the best practices that they encounter as well. We'll also be sharing multiple IWP and services and supports-related resources, and we'll be describing them and providing links to those in the chat to help reinforce some of the same points that the Program Integrity specialists share. And we hope to assist all ENs in gaining some of these best practices today. And, of course, we'll have plenty of time for you to ask the Program Integrity specialists your own questions too. So, with that in mind, we have 60 minutes, and we have a lot to cover. Let's go to the next slide, please.

I'm going to review our agenda, then I'll cover our logistics, introduce our panelists, and then we'll begin that Q&A panel. First, we have the — well, there's our agenda session right there. I didn't say IWP-related resources, but those will cover our agenda items. Let's go to the logistics slide next, please.

All right. For logistics, first, it's important to recall that TPM is recording and capturing the transcript from today's meeting, and we'll make it available on the Your Ticket to Work website under our EN Essentials Learning Events section that's in the main Training and Events area of the page. We do encourage you to ask questions today through the MS Teams chat. We'll be collecting those for our panelists towards the end. You can also, of course, participate in the Q&A panel by using the Teams raise hand feature too. We'll provide details on that when we get to the panel.

Next, closed captioning is available, and we have a couple options for participants who are joining using the MS Teams application or by using the closed caption link provided in both the GovDelivery email announcement for today's call and also posted by Ana into the chat with the link. To use the closed captions in MS Teams, as a reminder, please, go to the three ellipses at the top of the MS Teams window, click on *more*, scroll down that menu list to *Language and Speech*, and then select *Turn On Live Captions*. If you prefer to use the link provided in the GovDelivery or in chat, paste that link into the browser of your choice. It'll open a separate window, and you can view the full closed captions. And last, per the Ticket Program Agreement, Part 3, Section 11, Subsection I, EN staff are not permitted to record this meeting nor capture the transcript. So, those are our logistics. And at this point, if we could proceed to the next slide, I would now like to introduce our panelists.

I'll be serving as the moderator. I'm Derek. I'm the Senior EN Development and Training Manager for the Ticket Program Manager, and I'm joined by two colleagues from the Ticket Program Manager Program Integrity Department. Today, we'll have with us shortly Zoe Kwitek. Zoe is an EN Integrity Specialist, and she'll be joined by another specialist on the team, Synethia Ellerbee. I'll be pleased to have both of them with me to ask some questions, and then they'll be back for the audience Q&A as well. Before Zoe and Synethia come on, I'd like to just go to the next slide and provide our overview.

These are really our objectives for the hour that we have together today. During the session, we'll interview the Program Integrity staff to discuss and provide tips about the development of the IWPs and the documentation and related materials. And we'll be focusing on those most common areas for improvement. Next, we're going to share multiple IWP and services and supports-related training resources, and we'll show you where to find them. And, of course, we have ample time available for Q&A to ensure that you're getting the information that you need to be successful in the work that you do. So, those are our objectives today.

And if we could go to the next slide, I'd now like to welcome Zoe Kwitek and ask her to turn her camera on and join me for a few questions to get us started. Zoe, how are you doing today?

Zoe Kwitek: I'm good. How are you, Derek?

Derek Shields: Great. It's a pleasure to have you with us. And, as I mentioned in the setup, we want to hear from you about some of these best practices. And when we talk about the most common things that you see as a team that you're addressing, why don't we start out by — could you identify for us the three most common themes or trends we could call around IWPs that your team identifies that we can dig into a little deeper today?

Zoe Kwitek: Absolutely. That's a great question. Across the board, the top three areas where ENs often need the most support are with documentation, short- and long-term goals, and then meeting that two-way communication guideline with documentation and case notes. When it comes to documentation for reviews, one of the most common issues we see is just making sure that all of the requested and required pieces are being submitted. Unfortunately, missing documentation can have a big effect on an overall score. So, it's always a good idea to double-check everything before you're submitting documents. Short- and long-term goals are also an area where we see many ENs appreciate some guidance around. And as a reminder, short- and long-term goals should always be individualized based on the Ticketholder's specific situation. They should show a clear progression and ultimately reflect the goal of financial independence.

The two-way communication guideline and documenting in case notes is another common area we see a lot of questions about, and we'll go into more specifics later. But two-way communication means that you and the Ticketholder are having a back-and-forth conversation. And that happens when a contact attempt is made, and a response is given. And when you're documenting your contact with your Ticketholders in your case notes, we strongly emphasize the word documentation. If it's not documented and submitted, we cannot verify that that contact actually occurred or if a service or support was provided.

Derek Shields: Zoe, thanks for that. Let me just recap that. I hear complete documentation, goals, and two-way communications. These are the three most common areas. Probably not surprising to a lot of people that have been doing this work for a little while and certainly not surprising to your team because you see these as trends. What we're going to do now is dig into each one of these a little further, and let's start with goals. This is something that since I've been involved with the program, I continuously hear about. And for that, I know you have some slides to help review along with your answers, and they’re back up on the screen. So, when it comes to writing short- and long-term goals that will meet the required and expected levels, what recommendations or tips can you provide for everyone?

Zoe Kwitek: Yeah, thanks for that question, Derek. When it comes to developing short and long-term goals, one of the best tools that we recommend using the SMART goal framework. And we recommend this so often because using this framework really can help you and the Ticketholder create goals that are clear, meaningful, and it really does make it easier to track progress over time.

Let's break this framework down a little bit. The S in SMART stands for specific, and this means that the goal should clearly say what the Ticketholder wants to do using action-based language that's easily understood by both you and the Ticketholder. The M stands for measurable, and measurable goals include metrics, data, and specific numbers that again make it easier for you and the Ticketholder to measure success. Examples of this might include the number of hours the Ticketholder will work. The A stands for achievable, and this means that the goal makes sense based on the Ticketholder's current starting point. That means looking at their background, their past experience, their education, training, certification, and taking this into consideration when you're creating the goal. The R stands for realistic, and realistic goals take a look at if a goal is a good fit for the Ticketholder, and will it help them move towards Trial Work Level and eventually SGA? And finally, the T stands for timely, and that means setting a clear timeframe that helps measure progress, and it also sets a guideline for when a goal will be reached.

So, when we break this framework down, we can see how it does help create a clear plan with actionable steps. And remember that the more detailed the goals are, the easier it then becomes for you as the EN to identify the services and supports that the Ticketholder may need to accomplish those goals. It also helps you and the Ticketholder be on the same page. If we can think of the IWP as a shared game plan or a road map that you both can refer to. Okay.

Now that we've gone over the framework, it might be helpful for us to apply it to a real-world scenario and develop some example goals. And with that, I'd like to introduce you to Aliyah, our example Ticketholder today. This is Aliyah. She is ready to return to the workforce in the human resources field as she now has a seizure alert dog and a new medication that has helped stabilize her condition. Before receiving SSDI, she worked as an administrative assistant. She plans to start part-time in a remote administrative assistant position while pursuing college, and she would like to eventually obtain certification and work full-time in HR.

So now that we've got some background on Aliyah and her specific situation, let's take a look at the short-term goal we developed for her. Aliyah's short-term goal is to enroll at Granite Rock University in the human resources bachelor's program within the next month. During her first two years, she's planning on studying 15 to 20 hours per week. She is also looking to pursue part-time work at 15 hours per week as an administrative assistant to earn $1,200 or more monthly.

Okay. As we look at this goal, we can see that it follows the SMART goal framework, and let's break it down a little bit more. So first, it is specific. We know exactly what Aliyah's planning to do. She's going to be enrolling in school in the HR program, and she also wants to work as an administrative assistant as she's in school. It's measurable. We can see how many hours she plans to work, as well as how many hours she plans to put towards studying. It's achievable. We know that she has past experience as an administrative assistant, so it makes sense for this to be her goal. It's realistic. She would like to earn $1,200 or more each month, which is doable since she's planning to work part-time. And it's timely. We see a timeframe for when she's going to register for school and how long it's going to take for her to obtain that part-time role. So after we break this down, hopefully, the SMART goal framework is making a bit more sense and we can see how this framework really helps create a clear and structured plan that's easy for both the EN and Aliyah to see how progress will be made. Okay. So now that we have our short-term goal, let's look at her long-term goal in the next slide.

All right. Aliyah's long-term goal is to complete her degree in HR within the next six years. During her third year at the university, she would like to increase her hours in her role as an administrative assistant to 20 to 25 hours per week and earn $1,800 or more per month. She would also like to dedicate 15 to 20 hours per week to studying. After she graduates, she plans to move into a full-time role at 40 hours per week in the human resources field with a goal of making $4,000 or more monthly. And during her first year of working full-time in this HR role, she would also like to dedicate 10 hours per week to pursuing an HR certificate that can ultimately help her obtain that mid-level or above role in the HR field to earn $5,000 or more each month. All right.

So just as we did with the short-term goal, let's break this down using the SMART goal framework. We also added highlights on the screen to help visually show each element as we go through the goal. So first, the goal is specific. We can see that she wants to keep working as an administrative assistant as she finishes her degree, and then pursue a position in HR. Next, the goal is measurable. She's going to be working 20 to 25 hours per week while finishing her degree. She's dedicating 15 to 20 hours per week to studying, and eventually, she's going to be moving to 40 hours per week with 10 hours dedicated towards obtaining that certificate. The goal is achievable. We know that it makes sense for her to be increasing her hours at her part-time job after she's worked there for some time. It makes sense for her then to pursue a new job in HR after she graduates, as that's what her degree will be in. And it makes sense for her to eventually move into a higher role as she's getting a certificate to support this. The goal is realistic. We can clearly see that her wage goals are possible based on her new degree, her previous work experience, and her future certification. And last, but not least, the goal is timely. We can see a timeframe for each of her individual goals, including finishing her degree in six years, increasing hours after three years, pursuing a new job after graduating, and obtaining that certificate one year after she's working in her new HR role. So, after we break this down, we can see that it's a great long-term goal. It's following that SMART goal framework with details that are personalized to Aliyah's specific situation. It's showing progression from that short-term goal, and it does show the ultimate goal of working towards financial independence, which is the goal of the program.

Derek Shields: Zoe, thanks so much for going through the details of short- and long-term goals. One of the things that you said really resonates with me. We have a game plan here, a shared game plan, or a blueprint, or road map as you said, that Aliyah could use and see her destination and also the EN can use to see the destination that they're going to support through specific services and supports. I'm sure there's more than just me wishing that some of these game plans had been established earlier in my life, because it gives you those stepping-stones to get from where you are to where you want to be. And I also acknowledge how you delivered that. It's helpful to have the cues. Sometimes we talk about the SMART goal setting, but we lose track of exactly what that means. And so, each of those elements, I think, really helps everybody. I appreciate that. Let's come back now.

We're going to switch over from Zoe here from goals to IWP documentation. And in doing that, can you share a little bit of the advice that you've gained through being a specialist in the Program Integrity Department that ENs might value and understanding? What is appropriate IWP documentation?

Zoe Kwitek: Absolutely. One of the biggest reasons reviews are found non-compliant is due to missing or incomplete documentation. And that does often start with the IWP. So it's important to remember that an IWP is not valid until it is signed by both the EN representative and the Ticketholder. And those signatures need to be either wet or they can be electronic with a digital ID showing that date and timestamp. And then and only then should that Ticket be assigned, once both of those signatures and dates have been obtained. Another big piece of advice is that after you receive your services and supports review request, please make sure that you're reviewing all the requested information and then you are submitting the required documentation for each Ticketholder. And that includes the IWP from the original assignment date, any amended versions of the IWP, and the case notes from the last year. Your case notes should be showing your contact with the Ticketholder, including what services were provided, when they were provided, and if there was any sort of response. Also, everything that you submit should be directly related to the Ticketholder and to the Ticket to Work Program. And anyone mentioned in the documentation also needs to be suitable. This does include the EN representative signing the IWP and any other staff members that are listed in the IWP or the case notes.

Also, we do get asked if annual reviews occur at the same time every year, and the answer is yes, they do. And that is determined by your EN's award date. For instance, if you have an award date of April 1, 2010, your review will occur every year in April. To sum it up, my biggest piece of advice is just knowing that strong documentation is one of your best tools for success. Make sure those IWPs are properly signed, including those amendments, your case notes reflect clear communication, and all your submissions are complete and accurate.

Derek Shields: Zoe, thanks for reviewing the second trend that we have, which is appropriate documentation and reinforcing the ideas of signed IWPs, who's eligible to be inside of that by role, and including the amendments but also those case notes. Appreciate that we see a couple of hands being raised. You can keep them up. We'll be with you during the Q&A panel. You can also place your questions into chat. And just a call out, Ana has put a couple resources into chat, including the last one, what to include, services, and supports review request. It's a transcript that goes into those details reinforcing what Zoe has just shared. So, Zoe, thanks a lot for being with us.

Now we're going to switch from Zoe over to her colleague Synethia. Synethia Ellerbee, another specialist with the Program Integrity team is with us, and we welcome Synethia. We'll have Zoe back in just a little bit for that Q&A. Synethia, as we mentioned earlier, another expectation for the EN’s meeting. One of the more common trends we see is meeting the communication guidelines outlined in the Ticket Program Agreement. What tips can you share with everyone that's with us today around those communication guidelines?

Synethia Ellerbee: Thank you Derek, and good afternoon, everyone. As Derek said, we'll go into some two-way communication guidelines and some tips to make sure that you are meeting those expectations. We'll start with what two-way communication is. Two-way communication is a Ticketholder's response to the EN's contact or even the EN's response to a Ticketholder's contact. There are instances where a Ticketholder may reach out to you before you initiate your monthly or quarterly contact, and that's totally fine. And you just want to make sure that you respond to them and document that conversation, and that will meet the two-way communication requirement as well.

There are several ways that you can make that two-way communication. We have in-person meetings, phone conversations, personalized emails, text messages, voicemails, any app-based communications like Zoom or Skype, and then personalized letters. You want to keep in mind also that the Ticketholder doesn't have to respond to you in the same method that you initiated the contact, and the contact doesn't have to be responded to the same day. You may reach out to a Ticketholder leaving a voicemail message and they may respond a few days later in email, and that's totally fine. You have made that two-way communication and you just want to document what was in that voicemail and their response to it.

Another thing that we want to emphasize is that mass emails like e-blast or robocalls with pre-recorded messages to all of your Ticketholders collectively are not considered contacts. Contacts should be individualized.

Also, if you are asking your Ticketholders for pay stubs and the Ticketholders are submitting pay stubs, that's not a proper contact for Program Integrity unless it has communications discussing services and supports that were offered in your IWP. You want to make sure that if the communication is about pay stubs, you also want to make sure that you are providing services and supports to the Ticketholder as well.

A lot of times we see questions with the EN just asking the Ticketholder, “How's work going?” And their response is “okay fine.” And then they may ask, “Is there anything I can support you with?” And the answer may be no. A lot of times the Ticketholders may have forgotten about services and supports that they are eligible for, so a tip to get Ticketholders more engaged in the two-way communication could be asking questions like, “What's been keeping you busy? Or any interesting challenges or things happening for you?” Or you could also say things like, “You've now been in your role for three months. It's a great time to talk about the ongoing support services.” And you could list a few that you listed in your IWP and just ask them which one they would like to begin with. So open-ended questions can be asked in either the initial job search phase or the ongoing support phase. And it helps lessen the defensiveness of Ticketholders. It builds trust and rapport. And it can also reveal things that you may have or not have thought to ask that Ticketholder. This will make the Ticketholder feel more valued and seen and it could lead to them being more open to respond and share.

We've talked about the two-way communication. So, we'll go into the requirements. For Ticketholders in the initial job acquisition phase, the ENs must contact Ticketholders at least monthly. And in the contacts, you should be offering services, such as job search services. That could help them apply for jobs. It could be sending job leads, helping them create a resume, helping them with interview skills or any other job search services that your EN provides. One of the things that we see that makes the EN non-compliant in the initial job search phase is that they don't maintain monthly contact after the Ticketholder gains employment. If that Ticketholder is still in the Phase One Milestone payment period, that contact should remain monthly. And that contact will remain monthly until that Ticketholder reaches the Phase Two Milestone payment period, and then quarterly contact can begin.

In the ongoing support phase, Ticketholders should be contacted at least quarterly, and that contact should be offering services such as updating a resume or training to improve their skills. And it may be job coaching or conflict resolution services, those kinds of ongoing support phases that will help that Ticketholder maintain and advance in their career. ENs also must make three attempts to contact the Ticketholder. If they're in that initial job search phase, that Phase One Milestone payment period, then you want to make sure that you're contacting that Ticketholder three times in one month. And if that Ticketholder is unsuccessful in returning your contacts, then that Ticket should be unassigned within 60 days.

And the ongoing support phase, you should contact that Ticketholder three times in a quarter. So, with that contact, there's no particular sequence to it. The most common sequence that we see is, for instance, if you contact a Ticketholder in June, then you would contact them again in July, and then again in August. But if you wanted to contact them twice in June and one time in July, that would be fine as well. If those contacts are unsuccessful, then you would unassign those Tickets in 180 days. And the unassignment is based on the initial date of contact. So, if you contacted your Ticketholder on 5/2, 5/15, and 5/20 and you haven't received a response, your initial date of contact would be 5/2, and that's when you would begin counting your days.

ENs must also save the evidence of contact attempts and communications with the Ticketholder to provide to TPM or SSA if needed. A lot of times we'll get full emails or full text message threads with information. And it's okay to summarize your contact, because sometimes it may be personal information in those emails or text messages that we don't necessarily need, or it's not directly related to the Ticketholder meeting their goal. If you summarize your case notes, then you just want to make sure that you are including the date that you contacted the Ticketholder, the method of contact, and the summary of the conversation. And you still want to hold on to the original evidence in case we do need it in the future. The discussions that you have with your Ticketholders during the two-way communication should support you in creating your case notes, which we'll discuss in our next slide.

So, with our case notes, they're requested during your annual or six-month reviews, and we request the prior 12 months of case notes. When documenting your case notes, again you want to make sure that you include the date of contact, the method of contact, and the services and supports that were agreed upon, and your IWP or any other highlights from that conversation that will help the Ticketholder meet their goals.

The IWPs are living documents, and that means that the goals or needs of the Ticketholder may change at any time. And you want to make sure that your IWP stays current. With that, if you have a conversation and you realize that your Ticketholder needs new services or their goals change, then you would want to create an IWP amendment for that particular Ticketholder. On our next slide, we're going to look at an example case note for Aliyah.

In this example, we see that the employment specialist, Jett, reached out to Aliyah on May 12 to ask her a time to talk about her job progress. Aliyah responded and said that 5/13 would be a good day for them to meet. So, on 5/13, Jack called Aliyah, and he discussed her increase in pay and her increase in hours. Jett provided benefits counseling to Aliyah as he advised her that her increases would put her over SGA and that it may cause an overpayment with SSA. He also provided resources and contact information for her to reach out so that she would be able to avoid having that overpayment. Aliyah stated that she understood and that she would reach out to SSA to have her benefits stopped so that she wouldn't have that overpayment. So that response from Aliyah met that two-way communication piece. So again, documentation is important, as Zoe has mentioned as well, the more you document, the smoother the IWP process is and the more the Ticketholder will understand where they're going. Derek, I hope this has been able to answer some questions and gain clarity on documenting the IWPs and two-way communication.

Derek Shields: Synethia, thanks so much for going through the response there and providing a little bit more detail, perhaps, than folks are used to hearing. Two-way communication, meaning what are the requirements? But then showing how that can be applied. And, we appreciate the case note example, where it shows Jett as the EN employment specialist supporting Aliyah. And importantly, acknowledging the plan worked we got there, but again, giving her some good reminders to avoid an overpayment situation and her responsibilities. With that, Synethia, thanks so much. I'll be back with you, and we'll bring Zoe back in just a little bit. But for now, what I'd like to do is, as we've gone through this, there are a lot of resources that are out there.

If we could go into the next section, I'm going to cover some of the IWP-related resources. And some of these come up at different times and if you have an IWP resource center, this is going to be it. We're going to cover three topical groups, and I'll give some examples of where to find this content. And importantly, Ana will be posting links as well.

Let's go into that first topical area. Some of the documents that we've provided as resource guides or worksheets. We'll start with the EN Guide for Working with Ticketholders. This EN guide was published a little while back. It was a partnership between our development and training team and our Program Integrity colleagues. It allows for coverage of four topical groups: Conducting a Thorough Intake discussion with the Ticketholder that allows you to capture the entry point and start to frame those goals; Creating and Updating a Detailed IWP, like we've been talking about today, with the goals and appropriate content; Assigning and Unassigning Tickets. And then that last area, Preparing for IWP and Services and Supports Reviews, getting into some of those key elements Synethia was talking about — what documentation and case notes we should have for those reviews. So that EN guide, if you haven't looked at it for a while, we encourage you to visit that. It is posted on the Your Ticket to Work website.

Let's go next to the worksheet that supports that, the Intake Guidance and Worksheet. After the publication of the EN Guide for Working with Ticketholders came out, we did another session, an EN Essentials session that showcased intake guidance, and we published this accompanying worksheet. It's a companion to the EN guide that includes in-depth intake information and a fillable form to assist ENs in really conducting and documenting an intake discussion that meets those IWP requirements. Of course, it's not a mandatory form, it's there to assist and support or for you to take the elements you like and put it into your own form if you prefer. All right. Let's go to the next slide now.

And we look at our next topical group. We have the guide and the worksheet, but now we have our new learning modules, the Service Provider Foundations Learning Modules were published online on April 1, and they're available on yourTickettowork.ssa.gov to everyone. And they allow all EN staff to access the same training that's required of the specific EN key points of contact that we do through the Learning Management System. Today, we want to call out three specific modules. If we could go to the next slide.

These learner-centered experiential modules start off with topics in this area around the Ticketholder intake process. And so, we can get into the EN responsibilities, Ticketholder needs, the Discussion Summary requirements for the IWP, along with best practices, of course. With this module, we also start to see these case scenarios.

If we go to the next module, Module 6 is Preparing the Individual Work Plan. This is an overview, where we learn about the IWP requirements and best practices, specific tips on writing Ticketholder goals and related services and supports, and all those protocols that we just heard about for signatures and dates and how to maintain the IWP through amendments.

And we're introduced to Aliyah. Aliyah is a case scenario. Everything that we just heard about from our two Program Integrity colleagues is embedded right there in Module 6.

And to wrap it up, Module 7 on the next slide, we have the Services and Supports Review, understanding what they are, reviewing the detailed requirements, the notice of review, and how to respond to the request for documentation and that outcome summary report, along with non-compliant review responses. And again, we have case scenarios to reinforce the learning objectives of Module 7 and all the modules. If you haven't visited these online, we encourage you to do so. We're getting good feedback about the quality of the content with the supporting case scenarios, and we encourage you to share them with your teams. All right. Let's go to the next slide.

Another resource area that we have is our recorded past Essentials learning events. And when preparing for this event, our team — together with SSA, looked backwards at some of the content that we had provided in the past and we wanted to point out all of them together. Our previous Essentials events started in July, Optimizing Ticketholder Intake, and that's actually when we published the EN Guide for Working with Ticketholders. Then in August, we had part one of a two-part series, Preparing Successful Individual Work Plans. And then in September, we had Putting the Ticketholder's IWP into Action. And last, in October of 2023, we put out Managing your EN Services and Supports Review. And with that one, that's when we published that accompanying worksheet. These are all available to you. Of course, these Essentials events are historical, and we don't always reflect the exact SSA policies that may have been implemented since the events. We do remind you to access the ENRFA on the SSA Work Site for all of the current requirements.

And on the next slide, we have our final topical group, IWP development. We have four tools here, and Ana's provided some of these. We have Form 1370 for the IWP itself. We have Guidance for Completing IWPs, with an example. We also have information — excuse me, Informing Beneficiaries of the Goals of the Ticket Program, a recently updated document. And we have the IWP Submission Cover Sheet. So having those links and being familiar with these documents that are all on the website are important to have in your toolkit. All right. So now with that, let's go to the next slide please.

And we will now turn to our audience Q&A. If we could bring up the next slide. And while I provide these reminders about how to participate in the audience Q&A, I'd encourage our two panelists, Zoe and Synethia, to turn their cameras on. So again, please feel free to ask a question in the MS Teams chat or for some of you, continue asking those questions. If joining via telephone and you wish to ask a question, we encourage you to do so with a two-step process. Press star-five to raise your hand and we will unmute your phone and then ask you to press star-six so you can speak. If joining via MS Teams and you wish to ask a question, you could use the raise your hand feature and our team will call on you. We do encourage you to limit your question to one per participant. If we do run out of questions, you can ask a second. If you prefer, you can also send an email, and our team is watching our enoperations@ssa.gov inbox. So again, send a question there and we can get back to you through that option. Okay. We'll leave that up. And at this point, we will now turn to open the questions to our panelists.

And for that, I want to start by asking LaKesha on our team if she has any questions for Zoe or Synethia. LaKesha.

LaKesha Hunt: Okay. Good afternoon. The first question we have is, how detailed should services and supports descriptions be on the IWP? And that question is for Zoe.

Zoe Kwitek: Hi, LaKesha. That's a great question. When you select a service or support on the IWP, you just want to make sure that you're going beyond just checking the box. So, you want to describe how those services are actually going to look like in practice. For instance, if you select job placement assistance as a service or support, you might write something like, “We will assist Aliyah with job leads, complete job applications, and provide job referrals.” So, both you as the EN and Aliyah understand what's going to occur for that service and support.

Derek Shields: Thanks, Zoe and LaKesha, for that one. LaKesha, another question coming from chat?

LaKesha Hunt: Yes, another question based off of Zoe's response. What if we don't have a certified benefits counselor on staff, yet that was one of the services offered on the IWP?

Zoe Kwitek: That's okay. If your EN does not have a certified benefits counselor on staff but that Ticketholder still needs the service or is asking for the service, you'll just be referring that Ticketholder to the Ticket to Work helpline so that they can be referred to the appropriate local WIPA. And you just want to make sure that if you select that as a service on the IWP that you are documenting that they will be referred to WIPA under the services support.

Derek Shields: Thank you, Zoe. And now let's switch from LaKesha over to Krista. Krista, I think we have two raised hands. If you could call on the first, we can get their question for our panelists.

Krista Narlock: All right. Thanks, Derek. I have Laurie. Just give me a moment here to get her mic enabled. All right. Laurie, go ahead and activate your mic and ask your question.

Derek Shields: So, Laurie, if you're on Teams, that would be activating your mic by hitting the microphone icon at the top menu. In the meantime, let's move to question number two coming in, Krista.

Krista Narlock: All right. Question number two, I have Dr. J.

Derek Shields: Dr. J, go ahead.

Dr. J: Good afternoon, Derek, Zoe, Synethia. Thank you all. I'm recently taking over as an EN from a previous position, a previous person in that role, and I have about six Ticketholders. None of them are at SGA at this point. And I know that their yearly review is going to be coming up. What is your recommendation for getting them back to SGA if they had really no intention to be in there in the first place per the prior EN?

Derek Shields: Dr. J, thanks for the question. I'll take that over. Zoe, I see you've come off your mic. Any recommendations, considering the situation that he's just outlined?

Zoe Kwitek: The first recommendation would be to meet individually with each of the Ticketholders, see if an amendment can be made, and if any adjustments need to be made to their short- and long-term goals or the services and supports that you're providing for them. But also remembering that the goal of the program is to reach financial independence. So, if the Ticketholder does not have a goal of reaching SGA, that would be something to consider and have a conversation with them if they are a candidate for the program still.

Dr. J: Thank you.

Derek Shields: Yeah, that's a great question, and thanks, Zoe, for framing that. We need to look at that. Potentially, the short-term objective or goal would be a path to explore and figure out how we're going to change that. But the long-term goal needs to identify SGA. And if you've received these, I think that a one-on-one meeting would be important to have to reframe the expectations for both sides. I appreciate that. Let's circle back. Laurie has identified in chat that she can't unmute. Perhaps, LaKesha, you could — I saw it pop up, but I wasn't able to read what she posted. Was she able to post her question in the chat, LaKesha?

LaKesha Hunt: Hello, Derek. Yes, it says my question regarding IWPs. When or have digital signatures — I think it's saying when or have digital signatures been allowed? And Laurie, digital signatures, I know they've been allowed for some time. I'll have to go back to look at the original GovDelivery emails that went out. It's probably been — Zoe and Synethia, if you guys remember off the top of your head, but it's been several years now. But we do recommend the use of Adobe Pro and/or DocuSign that has that digital signature available. So that's going to have that time and date stamp. It's not just going to be a signature that can be done with just the general Adobe Acrobat. Hopefully that answers your question. But we can send you the GovDelivery message where it allows digital signatures as soon as I can locate it. Thank you. So back over to you, Derek.

Derek Shields: Thanks, LaKesha. Yeah. It's been in place for a little while now. We don't have the specific date because it's been a couple of years. But the recommendation there is to use one of those applications that has a date timestamp along with that digital signature. With that, just check in with Krista. Krista, I don't have everyone lined up in front of me. Are there any other raised hands?

Krista Narlock: No, we have no more raised hands at the moment.

Derek Shields: Okay. If you're on MS Teams and you have a question, please feel free to take a moment and use the raise hand. If you prefer you can use the two-step process, star six in order to begin the — I'm sorry —star five in order to identify through telephone, and then we'll ask you to hit star six. In the meantime, let's go back to LaKesha. LaKesha, any other questions coming in from chat. I know that we've had questions and they've been answered along the way by Tiffany and some team members. Any others that you'd like to call out?

LaKesha Hunt: Yes, there is a question. This would be for Synethia, tagging on to her discussion related to two-way communication and documenting that communication in your case notes. What if the Ticketholder is not responding to the EN? Related to two-way communication.

Synethia Ellerbee: Okay. If your Ticketholder is not responding, there are several things that you can do before you get to Ticket unassignment. You can send them a letter or email and just advise them that a part of the Ticket to Work Program is that they maintain that two-way communication. And you can ask them to respond by a certain date if they would like to remain active in the program. Also, in that letter, you can ask them what's a good day or a good time and a good method to contact them, and they may respond to that as well. You have to be creative and flexible. A lot of Ticketholders have things that they have going on during the day. If they're working, then it's unlikely that they'll accept a call during the day or can respond to a call during the day. It may be just scheduling a message to go out in the evening. Or if that particular Ticketholder, in that initial conversation says that they're an early morning person, it may be scheduling a message to them early, in the morning, in non-traditional hours. If that Ticketholder doesn't respond to any of the contacts, then that's when you would move to un-assignment.

Derek Shields: LaKesha, thanks for the question. And Synethia, thanks for going through that. I know sometimes it's hard to force somebody to respond and so we have this happen, and those are good practices to document and the step towards unassignment. I saw someone ask this question earlier and it is a question we get frequently. Since this presentation has a lot of resources in it and includes the long-term example with Aliyah and SMART goals being applied, there's a question of whether we will receive the presentation. And Ana posted in there, in case you’re not able to see this, the presentation won't be shared through email, but we will post it within a couple weeks on the Your Ticket to Work EN Essentials website. You can get the posted slide deck along with the recording. So, it does become available.

All right. LaKesha, there's been a couple other questions inside the chat. Do you have anyone to call out for Zoe or Synethia?

LaKesha Hunt: Hello, Derek. It looks like we've answered most of them and there's just one question that kind of goes along with the response Synethia just stated about if the Ticketholder is not responding. But the question was related to the 60 and the 180 days where we count to see if there's no response, no two-way communication. When we're doing the reviews, do we include the holidays? And that response, I am not 100% sure. I'm looking at Zoe and Synethia, but I know that we do give some allowance. We do not look at exactly 60 days. We will look at plus or minus, I would say maybe five or six days to ensure that you are reaching out to the Ticketholder and giving the Ticketholder ample time to respond back. Although we may not say in the documentation holidays are excluded, we do account for that when we're looking through the reviews. I just wanted to kind of just say that out loud instead of responding in the chat. Derek.

Derek Shields: Thanks, LaKesha. And while you were responding to that, we see that a question was asked — to restate where the materials will be provided on the website. And Ana has put a link in chat to the EN Essentials learning events section. That's where all the materials for the previous events will be. But the one at the top will now be this one after we get to post-production. You can get the slide deck there along with the recording. We encourage you to access that and if appropriate, we'll send out a GovDelivery letting you know that that has been updated.

Krista, I saw for a moment a hand went up. Is there anyone we can call on for a question?

Krista Narlock: All right. I am showing Cindy. And Cindy, your mic is enabled. Go ahead and unmute yourself by either clicking on the mic up at top of the Teams screen and ask your question.

Derek Shields: We know, Cindy, you want to ask a question. If you're not able to activate your mic, we have you ready to go. If you're not able to, if possible, then an alternative would be to post it in chat. If you're unable to do that, we also could encourage you to send it to us at enoperations@ssa.gov and we could follow up with you at another point. All right. It looks like Cindy's not able to do that currently. Cindy, go ahead and try to reach us through chat or email and we'll be happy to address your question then.

Cindy says, I asked it in the chat. Where do you put the discussion in the IWP of the meeting held with the beneficiary? I do think I saw this. So, for the Discussion Summary, there was a comment maybe about the structure of the IWP and somebody had a question of like, well, why does it go in that section? Shouldn't there be a Discussion Summary section? It's my understanding that the form would need to be reviewed by external partners to the Social Security Administration to make that change. And that's why it is not currently available to us as a separate section. And the guidance is to post it in that subsection number, I'm forgetting off the top of my head. Zoe or Synethia, you want to just clarify a little bit more about where the Discussion Summary should go?

Synethia Ellerbee: Okay. So, if you're using the SSA 1370 Form, then the Discussion Summary would go under terms and conditions under number 15, if there's no other terms and conditions. And that's page six of that form. If you are using your own form, you could create an area to include your Discussion Summary, or it could be a separate Word, or a PDF document. But you just want to make sure that it includes the Ticketholder's name, Social Security number, your period, and the date, location, and duration of the discussion.

Derek Shields: Thanks so much, Synethia. I don't remember all those details, but they are important as the requirements for inclusion. So that's the explanation of where it goes, the explanation of why it goes there. And there's a comment from Karen that says it would be nice if it had an online option. And we'll obviously take that feedback back to Social Security too.

We have about three minutes left if we have other questions. It looks like we have a hand raised. Krista, go ahead.

Krista Narlock: All right. Susan, give me a moment here. Let me see if your mic's ready. All right. Susan, your mic is enabled. Go ahead and unmute yourself and ask your question.

Derek Shields: Susan, thanks for your interest in asking a question. It seems like we have a trend today, where getting the mic unmuted on the other end is not a simple activity. So we apologize for that. If you're able to put your question into chat, Susan, please do so and we can get your question answered prior to wrapping up today. Let me just circle back, in the meantime, with LaKesha. LaKesha, any other questions that you've seen or items that you would like to bring up for Zoe or Synethia before we close the panel today?

Susan: Oh, hi. I'm sorry. Can you hear me?

Derek Shields: Yes. Is that Susan?

Susan: I'm sorry. I was having trouble unmuting. I submitted an IWP to the TPM for review just yesterday actually. And I'm just wondering, from there, what happens? Will I get a notification that it's okay and that they've assigned the Ticket or, if it's not okay? If they have suggested changes, do they — how is it returned to me and what's the procedure?

Derek Shields: Thank you, Susan. It looks like Zoe and Synethia both came off of mute for that one. Zoe, do you want to start?

Zoe Kwitek: Sure. Hi, Susan. When you submit an IWP for review, we have a couple of days turnaround time. If that IWP is compliant we will reach out to you and let you know that the Ticket was assigned. If there are any areas that need improvement, or are non-compliant, you will receive a phone call, and your Analyst will discuss what needs to be adjusted and give you some feedback. And then you would resubmit that IWP. If this is for TAR or new EN, we would go through the process again. But either way, you will hear from your Analyst.

Susan: Oh, okay. Great. I was just curious because this is the first time I've submitted something. I just wanted to make sure I was — knew what to expect. But thank you so much. I appreciate it.

Zoe Kwitek: No problem.

Derek Shields: Thanks for your question, Susan, and we appreciate you being with us, and Zoe for your response there. We are looking at about 90 seconds to wrap up here. We have Angela asking, “How long after signing an IWP do you have to assign the Ticket?” If we could get a response for about — a 15-second response from Synethia or Zoe.

Zoe Kwitek: There's more information in the RFA, the specific amount of time. But you really want to be assigning that Ticket as soon as possible. And a big part of that is that it can affect your payments if you wait too long as well. But please refer to the RFA for the specific amount of time that you're supposed to wait until you want to assign that Ticket.

Derek Shields: Thanks, Zoe. I know I asked you to do something very quickly there. And we got a couple of comments. Thank you. Very informative.

With that in mind, I'd like to thank our panelists. We are at time. If you have a question, we encourage you to send it to enoperations@ssa.gov . On behalf of the Ticket Program Manager team and our clients at Social Security, we'd like to thank Zoe and Synethia for joining us, and the entire Program Integrity team for the work that you do. And with that, I now turn to our final slide.

We have a couple of upcoming events we'd like you to be aware of. On May 28, next Wednesday, we have our WISE webinar, “Presenting Your Best Self to Employers.” Please share that as appropriate with your beneficiaries and Ticketholders. We would like to give you a little advance notice. June 4 to 18, we'll be conducting the next employment verification. You'll be receiving an email with information about that employment verification cycle. On June 17, we'll have our quarterly All EN Call. We encourage you and your staff to join us. And at the end of June on the 25, we'll have our WISE webinar. Please check our calendar of events on the Your Ticket to Work website for all of these activities.

And again, we appreciate you being with us today. The Ticket Program Manager and Social Security appreciates your feedback and ideas for other EN Essentials events. Please email us at enoperations@ssa.gov with such input. It's very helpful. It's why we had this session today. And with that, on behalf of the Ticket Program Manager team, thank you for all you do to support Ticketholders and their journey to financial independence. This ends today's EN Essentials.