**Welcome**

Felix Stump, Deputy Project Director of the Operations Support Manager (OSM), welcomed participants, reviewed the agenda and provided general program updates.

**General Updates**

Felix began with a quick update on the Annual Performance Outcome Review (APOR), which was due on February 14, 2014. Nearly 200 ENs have not submitted the APOR still. Felix stressed the importance of completing the APOR and urged ENs to complete it as soon as possible. He mentioned that the information contained in the APOR is very crucial. The second update was on Ticket Assignment Processing. OSM is current with processing and ENs should not experience any delays with Ticket Assignment Requests. The last update provided information on the new Monthly Earnings Estimator tool which was created to help ENs decide when to submit payment requests. When paystub information is entered, the tool does the calculation and determines if the beneficiary's earnings would qualify for potential payment under the Ticket program. Since earnings is only one factor used to determine eligibility for payment, there is no guarantee that qualifying earnings will result in a payment. OSM sent a Gov Delivery message to alert ENs about this tool.

Finally, Felix mentioned the schedule for Ticket Training Tuesday events in March.

* March 4: Ticket Program Basics
* March 11: “Ask the Experts” featuring Sallie Rhodes, Karen Davidson, and Keitra Hill
* March 18: “Essential Tools for EN Success” featuring Karen Davidson

Felix then turned the call over to Sallie Rhodes, OSM Ticket Program Specialist, for some updates. Sallie mentioned that the new Monthly Earnings Estimator tool is available in the Information Center on the Ticket to Work website (www.*yourtickettowork.com) under “Resource Documents.”* She also noted that OSM has also posted a new resource on payment denials in the Information Center, also under Resource Documents. This document covers all payment denial codes/reasons, explains why each type of denial might occur, and provides tips on how to avoid each type of denial.

Sallie talked about an Executive Order signed in February by President Obama. It increases the minimum wage to $10.10 per hour for Federal contractor and subcontractor employees. This order takes effect on January 1, 2015.

Sallie provided an update on the new regulations governing Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act which take effect on March 24, 2014. These rules prohibit Federal contractors and subcontractors from discriminating in employment against individuals with disabilities and require affirmative action in recruiting, hiring, training, promoting and retaining qualified individuals with disabilities.

Sallie noted that a number of new resources had been added to Section 503 page on the Ticket to Work website (*yourtickettowork.com).* One is a national pre-award registry containing information a list of Federal contractors that the Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) has found to be in compliance with Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) regulations that OFCCP is mandated to enforce. There are also new resources related to Section 503 that are targeted to employers, including links they can use to assess their 503 readiness and to ensure their accessibility to individuals with disabilities. OSM has also posted job banks specializing in recruiting individuals with disabilities, links to three publications describing best practices in employment for people with disabilities, information on four programs for individuals with disabilities in post-secondary education and four sources of information on the labor market and unemployment rate. In closing, Sallie stated that OSM will be hosting a Community of Practice (CoP) on Section 503. This will involve calls on the first Wednesday of each month for the next six months. Each call will be EN led and open to all ENs and State VR agencies. These forums will be designed to function as learning forums for ENs and State VR agencies to discuss implementation of 503 strategies, how to deal with 503 barriers, and emerging problems or issues. The first CoP call, scheduled for April 2nd from 3:00 to 4:00 pm EDT, will focus on the voluntary self-identification process that is a part of the new 503 regulations.

**Section 503 Presentation**

Pam Walker, CEO at Alliance Professional Services LLC Employment Network shared practical insights and strategies for conducting outreach to take advantage of the new Section 503 rules. Pam’s presentation is available in the Information Center on the Ticket to Work website ([www.yourtickettowork.com](http://www.yourtickettowork.com)). Click on “Events Archive,” then on 503 Readiness Training and look for the March 6th presentation.

**Online Benefits Verification**

Felix provided a quick reminder about the new online process for obtaining Benefit Verification Letters. This process replaces the prior process of obtaining these letters from local Social Security offices. Felix encouraged ENs to talk to beneficiaries about establishing a personal account at ssa.gov. Felix then opened the call for participant questions.

**Questions and Answers**

***Q:*** *When will ENs know about future changes to this year's APOR?*

**A:** OSM is still reviewing the responses and will work collaboratively with Social Security to evaluate APOR responses to see if any changes will be needed for next year. At this point, there is no set timeframe for identifying these changes and communicating them to ENs.

***Q:*** *My question is related to the Employer Resource Recruitment Directory (ERRD). In my case here in New Mexico we have tried to register to get the on the ERRD about 7 or 8 times and our EN still does not show up. Does anybody have any updates on what might be going on there or what we can do to get on the directory?*

**A:** There is no update. Please submit your question through the OFCCP site.

***Q:*** *As an EN we have to first determine if we have to follow 503 rules ourselves based upon the requirements of how much we have received in income and we have to apply those rules to ourselves. But then, as an EN, we are also trying to place people into jobs with other Federal contractors. Is that correct?*

**A:** If you have any other Federal contract of $10,000 or more, you will be under the Section 503 rules. If your other Federal contract is for $50,000 or more and you have 50 or more employees, you must follow all of the affirmative action requirements. Please note that the EN RFQ contains affirmative action requirements that apply to all ENs.

***Q:*** *If someone self-identifies as having a disability, what's required to verify that? Let's say someone has MS, are they considered disabled even though they still work a 40-hour week. Is there some kind of requirement for the disability for self-identification?*

**A:** There is no verification required aside from self-identification.

***Q:*** *Does the Monthly Earning Estimator only work on the newer version of Excel?*

**A:** It is compatible with 2003-07 version of Microsoft Excel.

***Q:*** *Is 503 addressed in SSA’s red book?*

**A:** Section 503 is not addressed in SSA's Redbook. The Redbook covers Social Security's disability and work incentive programs.