**Introductions and updates**

**Rob Pfaff (SSA)** welcomed everyone and shared updates:

* National Disability Forum – The Social Security Administration (SSA) recently held a National Disability Forum on the Ticket program in Washington DC with the intent to gather feedback to enhance future regulations. A panel of stakeholder participants provided comments. The panel included representatives from Employment Networks, State Vocational Rehabilitation agencies, Protection and Advocacy for Beneficiaries of Social Security (PABSS) and a public member who was a former Ticket program participant. The in-person and phone audiences also commented and posed questions. SSA will analyze comments and recommendations and add them to those gathered last year in the notice of proposed rulemaking. Next steps include briefing SSA executives, refining changes and publishing any changes in the Federal Register.
* Council of State Vocational Rehabilitation Administrators (CSAVR) and Partnership Plus – Social Security participated in the April CSAVR conference. SSA conducts training for newly hired staff of the Vocational Rehabilitation agencies on the processing of cost reimbursement. At CSAVR, SSA provided an update on the automation of the cost reimbursement process and also provided a session on Partnership Plus. When a State VR agency closes a beneficiary’s case, there is an agreement to transfer the services from the VR agency to an Employment Network for on-going employment supports. Partnership Plus requires relationships and cooperation between VR agencies and ENs. ENs and VR agencies are encouraged to consider and pursue Partnership Plus agreements. Partnership Plus benefits the VR and EN goals and benefits beneficiaries to provide on-going work supports. On future EN calls, Partnership Plus agreements will be further discussed.
* Request for Application (RFA) and Ticket Program Agreement (TPA) - A change is coming in the EN application and agreement process which is intended to increase program administration flexibility. The current Blanket Purchase Agreement will transition to a Ticket Program Agreement (TPA). The TPA will clarify policy and increase EN responsiveness and participation. To continue in the Program, all ENs will be asked to review and approve the new TPA within 60 days. ENs will not need to complete a new EN application or reapply for suitability. After the TPA is released a call will be set up to discuss. A Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) document will be posted on the website.
* Find Help Tool - Changes have been made recently to make a more user-friendly tool. A message sent May 11th summarized changes intended to help beneficiaries search for service providers based on their needs:
* Each service provider will be listed once in initial search results. The user will be able to select an option to see all other locations.
* Beneficiaries can indicate if they prefer to work with an organization providing in-person services or virtual services, or all providers.
* Users will have the option to choose whether they want to search for ENs, VRs, WIPAs, or PABSS organizations.
* Geographic searches will be by zip-code rather than state to eliminate the confusion for beneficiaries that live near one or more state borders.

**Training package and posters to SSA Field Offices**

**Carol Dempsey (SSA):** Ticket Program training and information will be distributed to Social Security field offices in the next few months. This includes Ticket Program training, overview video, poster for office reception areas, and a desk guide to include phone numbers, handouts, and process decision tree for claim service representatives.

**Guest Speakers on Administrative EN Model**

**Alexis Henry and Peter Travisano, Work Without Limits Administrative Employment Network, University of Massachusetts Medical School:** The full presentation is available in the Information Center [www.yourtickettowork.com](http://www.yourtickettowork.com).

**New Individual Work Plan (IWP)**

**Cara Caplan (SSA):** An e-mail was recently sent regarding the new Individual Work Plan (IWP) template. The use of this template is not required, but is encouraged as a guideline for the nine required IWP elements in the BPA. The IWP template can be found at <https://yourtickettowork.com/web/ttw/forms>.

**Work Incentives Planning and Assistance (WIPA**)

**Carol Cohen (SSA):** There are 83 WIPA projects nationwide that provide intensive benefits counseling): services to beneficiaries who are on a clear work path. ENs should become familiar with WIPA services and reach out to their local WIPA. Collaboration is encouraged between ENs and WIPAs to support the path to full employment for beneficiaries.

The Help Line staff is trained by the WIPA National Training Data Center (NTDC), who also trains the WIPA staff. The Help Line agents don’t provide intensive benefits counseling but do provide information, referral, and basic guidance in response to beneficiary questions.

The Protection and Advocacy for Beneficiaries of Social Security (PABSS) program provides beneficiaries with legal advocacy, advice, and information. There are 57 PABSS programs across the country. ENs are encouraged to reach out to the PABSS in their state.

**Beneficiary Help Line WIPA referral protocol changes**

**Margery McIver (SSA):** In March a change was made to the Helpline staff process for referring a beneficiary to a WIPA for intensive benefits counseling. To be referred, beneficiaries must be working or work must be imminent i.e. they have a job offer, they have interviewed within the past 30 days, or are interviewing in the next 2 weeks. Youth in transition continue to be served.

**New NTDC Benefits and Work Incentives web course**

**Terri Uttermohlen (SSA):** VCU recently began offering an introductory work incentives and benefits counseling web course that may be helpful to EN staff. The course is free and is a basic introduction to benefits counseling. It does not prepare you to be a benefits counselor, but to better understand what they do and how they help. The current course is already full and additional courses will be provided after July. Check the website at <https://vcu-ntdc.org/training/initial/introIndex.cfm>.

**Proof of Concept updates - Benefits Planning Query (BPQY), Marketing, and Wage Reporting:**

**Patrice Mclean (SSA):** Updates on the 3 proof of concept (POC) efforts include:

* BPQY– Participation now includes over 45 organizations including ENs, WIPAs and some VR offices. Processing time has increased from 1.4 to 9 days due to a new quality assurance process. All BPQYs are now reviewed before release. SSA hopes to reduce process time as the review becomes more efficient. The POC will not be expanded at this time but a list of interested ENs is maintained for future. Email ORDES.BPQY.POC@SSA.gov to be added to the list.
* Wage Reporting - ENs provide beneficiary wage verification which gets processed via E-works which is accessible by SSA field offices. The goal is to reduce beneficiary overpayments and increase timely adjudication decisions. To date, field offices have received work reports for 137 beneficiaries with EN provided wage information. The POC will be expanded to all ENs when possible. For more information contact ORDES.wagereporting.POC@ssa.gov
* Marketing - 28 participating ENs have made requests for marketing data such as zip code, beneficiary age, etc. and used the information to reach beneficiaries. All have received a first round of data and a second round is being processed. After analysis of effectiveness it is hoped the marketing POC will be expanded to all ENs. For information contact Marketing.support@SSA.gov.

**Outreach**

**Jayme Pendergraft (TPM):** The next WISE webinar will be held Wednesday, May 24th at 3:00 p.m. EST. The focus is on Ticket to Work for people with mental illness. A WISE webinar registration link will be sent. More information is available at <https://www.choosework.net/webinar/>. A new success story has been published highlighting Jesus, a beneficiary who started his career as a volunteer and subsequently found full-time work. <https://www.choosework.net/library/jesus-success-story>

ENs and beneficiaries are being sought as volunteer guest bloggers to share their expertise and experience. If interested, contact JaymeLPendergraft@maximus.com.

**Question: Who can certify disability for Schedule A hiring?**

Documentation can be requested from a licensed vocational rehabilitation specialist, licensed medical professional, or any Federal or state agency that issues or provides disability benefits (SSA). Proof of disability for Ticketholders is their status as an SSI or SSDI beneficiary. ENs may be able to certify disability if the person writing the letter has credentials to certify a candidate, such as a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor.

