

# Guide to Payments Under the Ticket to Work Program

## Ticket to Work Program

The Ticket to Work (Ticket) Program is an outcome-based employment program administered by the Social Security Administration. The program is for participating employment service providers to assist Social Security disability beneficiaries (Individuals receiving Social Security Disability Insurance and/or Supplemental Security Income benefits based on disability) become financially independent through sustained work at or above Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA) level. The ultimate goal of the program is to reduce, and whenever possible eliminate, beneficiaries' dependence on Social Security benefits.

Organizations selected and approved by Social Security to participate in the Ticket Program are called Employment Networks (EN). These organizations are required to provide employment services, vocational rehabilitation services and other supports that help beneficiaries, known as Ticketholders, obtain and retain employment. Beneficiaries' participation in the program is voluntary and free and they can choose when and where to assign their Tickets. The EN must choose between two systems to receive payments — Milestone /Outcome and Outcome-Only payment systems.

Since the Ticket Program is outcome-based, Social Security rewards approved ENs financially for successfully assisting Social Security Disability Beneficiaries to enter, maintain and advance in employment. When an EN is eligible for a payment, the Ticket Program Manager (TPM – Cognosante) or Social Security staff processes the payment, and the Department of the Treasury deposits the funds via direct deposit into the EN's bank account. These funds represent unrestricted revenue for the EN because Social Security does not place requirements or restrictions on how ENs use revenue generated under the Ticket Program. Social Security expects an EN to provide employment support services that afford Ticketholders the opportunity to prepare for, obtain and retain career ladder jobs that enable beneficiaries to become self-sufficient, leave and remain off federal benefits.

An EN cannot limit its business model to assisting Ticketholders for part-time employment only and Social Security terminates the contracts of ENs that use this practice. Social Security requires ENs to provide services to Ticketholders to help them reach their employment goals before issuing any payments.

## Payments Systems

TPM pays an EN when a Ticketholder attains certain Milestones and Outcomes in moving toward self-supporting employment. There are two options to receive payments — the Milestone/Outcome and Outcome-Only Payment Systems.

### Milestone /Outcome Payment System

This payment system offers two sets of Milestone payments (Phase 1 and Phase 2), as well as subsequent Outcome payments.

**Phase 1 Milestones** – Social Security establishes the same rate for all four Phase 1 Milestones (P1Ms) regardless of the Ticketholder's disability program.

The work and earnings requirement for P1Ms is Trial Work Level (TWL) are cumulative as long as the earnings occur within the designated timeframe. This means the first month of TWL earnings needed to qualify for P1M1 counts toward the 3 months of TWL earnings needed to qualify for P1M2; the 3 months of TWL earnings needed to qualify for P1M2 count toward the 6 months of TWL earnings needed to qualify for P1M3; and so on.

There is one exception to the earnings requirement for P1M1. An EN can submit a payment request for P1M1 if the beneficiary's earnings are equal to or greater than 50% of TWL (earned during the last period of the claim month requested) and equal to or greater than full TWL and the beneficiary is expected to achieve TWL earnings within the next 2 months. However, an EN should wait and submit a payment request once the beneficiary earns a full month of TWL earnings to prevent overpayment if the beneficiary does not achieve earnings at or above TWL within the 2-month period.

The chart below outlines the P1Ms payments based on a Ticketholder's gross earnings.

### Phase 1 Milestone Payments 2024 Rates

| Payment Type        | Ticketholder Gross Earnings                            | EN Payment (SSDI) | EN Payment (SSI) |
|---------------------|--|-------------------|------------------|
| Phase 1 Milestone 1 | ≥ \$1,110/mo. for 1 calendar month*                    | \$1,788           | \$1,788          |
| Phase 1 Milestone 2 | ≥ \$1,110/mo. for 3 months w/in 6 months (cumulative)  | \$1,788           | \$1,788          |
| Phase 1 Milestone 3 | ≥ \$1,110/mo. for 6 months w/in 12 months (cumulative) | \$1,788           | \$1,788          |
| Phase 1 Milestone 4 | ≥ \$1,110/mo. for 9 months w/in 18 months              | \$1,788           | \$1,788          |

| Payment Type                               | Ticketholder Gross Earnings | EN Payment (SSDI) | EN Payment (SSI) |
|--|-----------------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Total Potential Phase 1 Milestone Payments |                             | \$7,152           | \$7,152          |

To qualify for Phase 1 Milestone payment, the following criteria must be met:

1. Beneficiary's benefits must be in current pay status in which the beneficiary is receiving a federal benefit payment.
2. The beneficiary is working, and earnings are at or above the TWL earnings; 2024 TWL earnings is \$1,110 a month.
3. The work must be associated with a job. This does not include paid vocational training with no record of continued TWL employment. Social Security recognizes that it can take time for a disability beneficiary to be able to work full-time and will compensate an EN when the services it provides help a Ticketholder reach TWL earnings. However, the Ticketholder must have earnings above SGA as an eventual goal and the Individual Work Plan (contract of services an EN agrees to provide a beneficiary) must include services and supports to assist the beneficiary to reach that earnings goal.
4. Some exclusions that apply to the Phase 1 Milestone payments can result in an EN being excluded from receiving these payments:
  - **Prior State Vocational Rehabilitation Services Rule:** (This rule applies to all successful closures since January 2002.)
    - No P1Ms will be available to the EN if the State Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) agency previously served the beneficiary and received a Cost Reimbursement payment.
    - No P1Ms will be available if the VR successfully closed the most recent case within 18 months prior to Ticket assignment date.
  - **18-Month Look-Back Rule:** If a beneficiary had TWL earnings during some or all of the 18 months prior to the first Ticket assignment to the EN and after the date of disability onset, some or all of the P1/MS may not be available to the EN.
    - If the beneficiary worked the month immediately prior to the Ticket assignment date (TAD), then P1M1 will be unavailable.
    - If the beneficiary worked 3 months out of 6 months prior the TAD, then P1M2 will be unavailable.
    - If the beneficiary worked 6 months out of 12 months prior the TAD, then P1M3 will be unavailable.
    - If the beneficiary worked 9 months out of 18 months prior the TAD, then P1M4 will be unavailable.

**Phase 2 Milestones** – This set of Milestones is available to the EN based on the same criteria as P1Ms, except the earnings requirement. The beneficiary's earnings must be at or above SGA or SGA Blind (SGA-Blind) for blind or visually impaired beneficiaries. For 2024, SGA levels are \$1,550/month for non-blind Ticketholders and \$2,590 per month for Ticketholders who are blind or visually impaired.

The number of P2/MS the EN can receive vary depending on the Ticketholder's disability benefits:

- SSDI beneficiaries: ENs can qualify for up to 11 Phase 2 Milestone payments.
- SSI beneficiaries: ENs can qualify for up to 18 Phase 2 Milestone payments.

The chart below outlines Phase 2 Milestone payments based on beneficiary's benefits (SSDI/SSI).

#### Phase 2 Milestone Payments 2024 Rates

| Payment Type                                 | Ticketholder Gross Earnings                             | EN Payment (SSDI)           | EN Payment (SSI)            |
|--|---|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Phase 2 Milestones                           | Gross $\geq$ SGA (\$1,550/non-blind; \$2,590 for blind) | \$536/mo. (up to 11 months) | \$300/mo. (up to 18 months) |
| Total Phase 2 Payments                       |   | \$5,896                     | \$5,400                     |
| Total Potential Ticket Payments Phases 1 & 2 | Phase 1 & 2   | \$13,048                    | \$12,552                    |

**Outcomes** – If the Ticketholder continues to work and have monthly earnings at or above SGA or SGA-Blind and is no longer receiving Federal benefits (benefits cease due to work and earnings), the number of Outcome payments ENs are entitled to receive varies depending on Ticketholder's disability benefits:

- SSDI beneficiaries: ENs can qualify for up to 36 Outcome payments.
- SSI beneficiaries: ENs can qualify for up to 60 Outcome payments.

The chart below outlines Outcome payments based on beneficiary's benefits (SSDI/SSI).

### Outcome Payments under Milestone/Outcome Payment System

If a Ticketholder moves into the Outcome payment phase before an EN receives all available Milestone payments (Phase 1/Phase 2), Social Security processes a reconciliation payment after TPM processes the 12<sup>th</sup> Outcome payment. This one-time, lump-sum payment equals any unpaid available Milestone payments that would have been available to the EN with the Ticket assignment. Unavailable Phase 1 Milestone payments due to Look-Back earnings and VR successful closures are not included in this lump-sum reconciliation payment. See chart below.

The chart below shows possible payments under the Milestone Outcome Payment Method

#### Total Possible Payments

| Payment Type                    | EN Payment (SSDI) | EN Payment (SSI) |
|---------------------------------|-------------------|------------------|
| Phase 1 Milestone               | \$7,152           | \$7,152          |
| Phase 2 Milestone               | \$5,896           | \$5,400          |
| Outcome                         | \$19,296          | \$18,000         |
| Total Potential Ticket Payments | \$32,344          | \$30,552         |

### Outcome-Only Payment System

Under this payment option, ENs can submit a request for payment when a Ticketholder's earnings are at or above SGA or SGA-Blind and he or she no longer receives Federal benefits (benefits cease due to work and earnings). The number of Outcome payments ENs are entitled to receive varies based on the Ticketholder's disability benefits:

- SSDI beneficiaries: ENs can qualify for up to 36 Outcome payments.
- SSI beneficiaries: ENs can qualify for up to 60 Outcome payments.

The payment rate is higher under the Outcome-Only Payment System than the Outcome payment rate under the Milestone/Outcome Payment System.

#### Outcome-Only Payment System 2024 Rates

| Outcome Number | SSDI Rate (Title II) | SSI Rate (Title XVI) |
|----------------|----------------------|----------------------|
| 1-36           | \$998/month          |                      |
| 1-60           |                      | \$560/month          |
| Total          | \$35,928             | \$33,600             |

