

How You Can Become an Employment Network

By Andrzej Walz-Chojnacki

The Social Security Administration's recent revision of the Ticket to Work program, with its introduction of milestone payments, has breathed new life into a floundering initiative. As always, the opportunity to tap another revenue stream to expand the pursuit of integrated employment is cause for excitement for service providers.

But before any business, service-providing department or agency, or any other entity can begin reaping the benefits of this program, it must first become an Employment Network (EN). This process is not insignificant, but with adequate preparation it can be manageable. As with other projects, it is important to identify the experts who will be able to assist you at each stage. And, hopefully you can learn from some of my mistakes!

Start With a Checklist

I recommend that anyone interested in becoming an EN begin with a checklist to be sure that you submit all of the necessary documentation at the outset — it will help avoid confusion later. A very helpful document of this type is available from CESSI. This is the organization responsible for facilitating the process of completing an application — also known as a Request for Proposal (RFP). This document includes a checklist of all of the necessary data, credentials and registrations, and helpful instructions for obtaining any missing items.

CESSI staff is also available to help with any questions that you might have about any of the steps described below. Briefly, the information that needs to be gathered is as follows:

➤ *Employer Identification Number (EIN) or Taxpayer Identification Number (TIN)* — If your organization has an accountant(s), he or she should be able to help you identify this number.

➤ *A number and profile with Dun & Bradstreet®* — This information can be obtained online at www.dnb.com. This organization is a widely recognized registration of businesses.

➤ *Registration with the Central Contract Registry (CCR)* — The CCR is the primary registrant database for the federal government. Registration can be done online, but the process is involved, so at least an hour should be allowed to complete it. More importantly, this time should be scheduled with someone that has extensive knowledge of the company's structure and finances, as there are wide-ranging questions regarding these matters.

➤ *Automated Clearing House (ACH) Payment enrollment form* — This will need to be signed by a representative at the bank where your payments will be deposited directly.

➤ *Proof of Insurance* — This can be obtained from your insurance broker or agent.

➤ *Proof of Qualification* — There are four ways an organization can prove that it is qualified to provide the services needed by ticket holders:

- 1) A copy of the license or certification of the organization from a state or other government body;
- 2) Evidence of certification from rehabilitation or employment services accrediting body;
- 3) A narrative describing the plan for services; and
- 4) *Security Clearance* — A brief form (Optional Form 306) will ask some basic questions pertaining to criminal background.

In addition to these steps, another common method to establish the qualifications of an organization to become an EN — is to obtain a copy of a contract with a state or county agency that demonstrates previous provision of similar services.

Another Option

If you decide that this process is too involved, your

agency may be able to find an EN where you live in which an “EN of Record” relationship could be established. In this situation, the EN of Record, which will have already completed the registration, will be able to work with you to assign Tickets and receive payment without the trouble of becoming an EN yourself. You and the EN of Record will most likely share the milestone payments.

Next Steps

Once you have submitted all of the necessary documents, it will take several weeks for the Social Security Administration (SSA) to review your RFP. In the meantime, it would probably be wise to consider what your intake process will look like. Once you become an EN, you will begin receiving calls from beneficiaries that are interested in the program. These calls will come in waves as Tickets are sent from SSA.

When taking calls from Ticket holders, I always give a short introduction of the program and ask if the beneficiary has any questions. Eventually, I ask if the beneficiary has the goal of working at such a level that their cash benefits will cease, as helping people work toward self-sufficiency is the goal of the Ticket to Work program. It is also helpful to mention that there are provisions in which a Ticket holder can keep his or her medical benefits.

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Following this discussion, I request that the beneficiary complete an application that provides me with basic information about the individual’s work history and goals for future employment, as well as motivating factors. I request this partly to assess the beneficiary’s level of dedication to the employment search.

After you get the application back — but before you meet to create the Individualized Work Plan (IWP) — call to confirm the ticket is “open” or “assignable,” in other words, it is not assigned to another EN. This can be achieved through a phone call to MAXIMUS, a private company contracted by the SSA to administer oversight and support necessary to sustain ongoing Ticket operations.

In the event that the Ticket holder has already assigned their ticket to another EN, it can be unassigned by faxing a simple signed statement.

After this point, the Ticket holder will need to meet with you to complete an IWP, which will outline the services to be provided as well as the responsibilities of the beneficiary. Once this is completed, submit the IWP to the SSA. When it is approved, the beneficiary’s Ticket will be assigned to you. You are now ready to begin working with the Ticket holder! ■

Editor’s note: The Ticket to Work program was also covered in the September 2009 *APSE Connections*.



Brief Q & A About ENs

Q: *What is an Employment Network?*

A: An Employment Network (EN) is an entity that contracts with the Social Security Administration (SSA) to either provide or coordinate the delivery of necessary services to Social Security disability beneficiaries who assign their tickets to the EN. The EN may be a single individual, a public and/or private partnership, or a consortium of organizations collaborating to combine resources to serve Ticket holders.

Q: *Does it cost anything to become an EN?*

A: No, the application process is free and consultation and assistance is provided in understanding or completing the Request for Proposal (RFP).

Q: *How many ENs will be approved?*

A: There is no limit. The SSA is contracting with as many qualified entities as possible from both the public and private sector.

Q: *Do ENs receive upfront funding?*

A: No, Ticket to Work is a performance-based program. ENs receive payments when the Ticket-holder achieves certain employment-related milestones and/or outcomes. ENs that need upfront capital can use the Employment Capitalization Resource Directory, www.yourtickettowork.com/en_cap_resource. The directory, which provides information on potential funding sources, is provided at no cost. ■

Source: SSA. Additional questions and answers are available at www.ssa.gov/pubs/10065.html.

For more information, visit www.apse.org