

## SOAR Integration in Continuums of Care (CoCs)

### IMPROVING SYSTEM PERFORMANCE

The U.S. Housing and Urban Development (HUD) CoC programs are pivotal in addressing homelessness and housing instability across communities and states. The HUD CoC program requires a community-wide commitment to ending homelessness and outlines the specific purpose of “**promot[ing] access to and effect utilization of mainstream programs by homeless individuals and families**; and optimiz[ing] self-sufficiency among individuals and families experiencing homelessness.” Including Supplemental Security Income/Social Security Disability Insurance (SSI/SSDI) Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR) in local CoC planning and projects is a viable strategy for connecting individuals to long-term stable income and improving CoC system performance. CoCs nationwide have included SOAR in their local homeless response systems.

### Importance of SOAR to CoCs

Supporting households in obtaining or increasing income is essential to ensure long-term housing stability. HUD established [system performance measures](#) to assist CoCs in assessing their efforts to address homelessness. Measure #4 focuses explicitly on Employment and Income Growth, measured by increasing the percentage of adults who increased their income while enrolled in CoC-funded projects. SOAR staff can play a critical role in assisting individuals who are unable to work due to severe disabling conditions to apply for SSI/SSDI by completing comprehensive applications. Studies have shown that applications submitted using the SOAR model have significantly higher approval rates on average. Cumulatively, over 105,000 SOAR-assisted SSI/SSDI applications have been submitted with a 65% average initial approval rate ([SOAR National Outcomes](#)).

### Initiating Conversations: SOAR/CoC Collaborations

Begin by familiarizing yourself with your local CoC and community’s SOAR initiative. The [HUD website](#) provides information on CoC collaborative applicants and lead agency contacts. The SOAR website has a [State Directory](#) with State Team Lead and Local Lead contact information and other state program information.

### Local SOAR Leadership

CoCs can identify appropriate staff to serve as [SOAR Local Leads](#) for their respective catchment areas. While duties may vary, the primary role of a SOAR Local Lead is to collaborate with community partners and local Social Security Administration (SSA) and Disability Determination Services (DDS) offices to plan, implement, and support local SOAR initiatives. Some communities have specifically funded positions for SOAR Local Leads or coordinators, but this isn’t required. Local Leads can be any person whose work is best suited to being a champion for SOAR.

## Strategy in Practice

### The Ending Community Homelessness Coalition (ECHO) (Austin, Texas)

ECHO funds a staff position to serve as the SOAR Local Lead to increase SOAR capacity and support SOAR case workers across the county. ECHO staff provide one-on-one training, monthly technical assistance, and SOAR monitoring and compliance. They also facilitate virtual training with subject matter experts from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) SOAR Technical Assistance (TA) Center and SSA. ECHO staff have created a standardized SOAR workflow and are working with the CoC Systems Improvement Committee to develop, adopt, and implement SOAR Written Standards. Additionally, ECHO staff facilitate biannual *Understanding SOAR 101* training to promote SOAR training for community-based service providers.

### Close to Home CoC (San Antonio, Texas)

Close to Home supports a SOAR Coordinator position to oversee and coordinate community programs and services that address housing instability in Bexar County. This position aligns the work of community partners to ensure effective coordination of Coordinated Entry, SOAR, Street Outreach Initiatives, Housing Navigation, and policy and procedure development.

### North Carolina Coalition to End Homelessness (NCCEH) (Raleigh, North Carolina)

NCCEH serves as the state lead for SOAR in North Carolina. The coalition offers a SOAR Community Certification process to help communities develop an infrastructure that supports SOAR programs. In addition, they offer training and ongoing support for SOAR providers and help communities educate key community partners about incorporating SOAR into their plans to end homelessness.

### New York City (NYC) Coalition on the Continuum of Care (New York, New York)

A SOAR workgroup is embedded into the Income Access Committee of the NYC Coalition on the Continuum of Care (CCoC). This committee supports member organizations and individuals by providing education on and access to best practices in connecting individuals to housing and income opportunities and focusing on capacity building and culture change. The committee maintains the city-wide SOAR action plan, hosts a yearly SOAR Online Course Cohort training, and serves as a resource for SOAR-trained caseworkers throughout NYC.

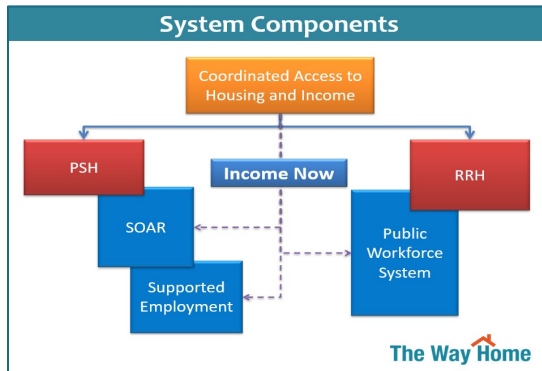
## Coordinated Entry

HUD requires all CoCs to establish and operate a coordinated or centralized assessment system to increase the efficiency of their local crisis response systems. A critical aspect of coordinated entry systems is assessing an individual's or family's need for housing and supportive services and providing quick connections to providers. Many communities are [incorporating basic SSI/SSDI eligibility questions into their coordinated entry assessments](#) so that individuals who may qualify for Social Security disability benefits receive immediate referrals to local SOAR providers and/or employment services, as appropriate. Housing-related needs are assessed concurrently, and individuals experiencing homelessness are rapidly placed into housing and referred to supportive services as needed and desired.

## Strategy in Practice

### The Way Home Houston (Houston, Texas)

The Way Home Houston launched the *Income Now* initiative to coordinate access to housing and income. One single assessment (housing and income) directly connects individuals with one of three income interventions: SOAR/disability income, supported employment, or public workforce for mainstream competitive employment. Essential to this initiative was the creation of a SOAR workflow in the Homeless Management Information System (HMIS). Participants who meet certain criteria are immediately referred for a SOAR income plan so they can pursue income even while living outside or in a shelter, while housing is being identified.



### Virginia Community Service Boards

In Virginia, an SSI/SSDI applicant can be evaluated to receive SOAR assistance through the Community Service Boards (CSBs). There are 40 CSBs throughout the state, and many have SOAR-trained staff. At intake, the CSB can evaluate individuals for various services and supports, including SOAR.

## Steering Committees

Some CoCs have developed SOAR-specific or benefits-related subcommittees or workgroups to help develop successful SOAR implementation or identify solutions to barriers the CoC may be experiencing.

## Strategy in Practice

### The Way Home Houston (Houston, Texas)

The Way Home Houston (CoC) launched the SOAR Expansion Workgroup to support its new *Income Now* initiative. The workgroup is intended only for the CoC's official partners and their staff and focuses on planning and implementation.

### Workgroups

Workgroups are a fundamental part to developing successful solutions to barriers our CoC may face. For information on workgroups focused around income and employment see the information below.

Please direct any questions regarding our programs or workgroups to the Coalition's Income team at [cchincome@homelesshouston.org](mailto:cchincome@homelesshouston.org)

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|      |                |            |                     |
|------|----------------|------------|---------------------|
| CCHP | SOAR Expansion | Income Now | Employment Partners |
|------|----------------|------------|---------------------|

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#### SOAR Expansion Workgroup

Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) Outreach, Access and Recovery (SOAR) Expansion provides increased access to the disability benefit programs administered by the Social Security Administration for eligible adults who are experiencing or at risk of homelessness and have a disability that prevents them from working.

**Eligibility:** All individuals enrolled in a Housing Program who have a diagnosed medical or physical disability that prevents them from working and is expected to result in death or last over 12 months.

**Services:** Assist individuals apply for Social Security Administration disability benefits (SSI/SSDI).

**Outcomes:** Navigate 225 individuals to physical or mental health services to prepare for and enroll in SOAR Case Management.

**Dedicated SOAR workers meet monthly to establish best practices, analyze data, and identify gaps.**

Click the link for more information on [The Way Home CoC SOAR Initiative](#).

## The Ozarks Alliance to End Homelessness (OAEH) CoC (Springfield, Missouri)

The CoC embarked on a Strategic Action Planning process that leveraged community input, homeless service system partners, and data reviews to develop tangible, action-oriented projects to help achieve the goals and objectives outlined in the OAEH’s Strategic Plan. Financial stability was a central theme in this process. The CoC assigned a SOAR project to their Systems & Services Committee. Within this project, the CoC is using multiple coordinated efforts to increase the number of and support for SOAR-trained case management staff.

## Denver and the State of Colorado

Both the state of Colorado and the city of Denver host quarterly SOAR Steering Committee Meetings; regular attendees at both meetings include SOAR-trained caseworkers, the SOAR State Team Lead, the SAMHSA SOAR TA Center Liaison, representatives from SSA and DDS, representatives from state agencies and funders, Veteran services, Department of Corrections, and agencies that support SOAR-trained staff. Both meetings serve to provide updates, discuss barriers, celebrate successes, and identify areas for targeted technical assistance.

## Project Applications

CoCs often develop or identify “priorities” when releasing funding opportunities. These priorities reflect essential strategies and components of projects targeted to people experiencing homelessness. CoCs are encouraged to prioritize SOAR access in the rank and review process for new and renewal project applications. Most commonly, any project application must include information about how program participants will be guaranteed access to SOAR services. Many CoCs prioritize SOAR training, access to mainstream benefits, or an increase in SOAR-assisted SSI/SSDI claims and approvals in their NOFOs. Other CoCs tie SOAR to the performance of CoC-funded projects and incorporate SOAR into annual program monitoring.

## Strategy in Practice

### Texas Balance of State CoC Competition Priorities (Austin, Texas)

The Texas BoS CoC has named SOAR as a competition priority for projects applying for CoC funding. The priority states, “Employ staff whose primary function is to assist individuals with their SSI/SSDI applications through the SOAR process.”

1. Describe a community-wide commitment to the project. Applicants will be asked to identify partners in the development of the application, partners in the administration of the project, and partners in the oversight and evaluation of the project. These partners should include stakeholder groups such as the Local Homeless Coalition (LHC), the Coordinated Entry Planning Entity, persons with lived experience of homelessness, governmental agencies (county government or regional Councils of Governments (COGs) and other cross-sector partners such as Public Housing Authorities (PHA), Community Housing Development Organization (CHDO), or Community Development Corporation (CDC). Healthcare partners may include Local Mental/Behavioral Health Authorities (LMHA/LBHA), Healthcare/Hospital Districts, Public Health Departments, or Federally Qualified Healthcare Centers (FQHC), or Healthcare for the Homeless (HCH) Recipients. As part of a community-wide commitment to the goal of reducing unsheltered homelessness, application partners must not participate in activities that criminalize homelessness.
2. Leverage additional housing resources in the operation of the project, or leverage additional healthcare resources in the operation of the project.
3. Utilize a landlord recruitment/ engagement strategy.
4. Employ staff whose primary function is to assist individuals with their SSI/SSDI applications through the SSI/SSDI Outreach, Access, and Recovery (SOAR) process.
5. Describe how the proposed project will implement Housing First principles and practices.
6. Target people who are unsheltered, or with histories of unsheltered homelessness, OR people with severe service needs.
7. Describe how persons with lived experience of homelessness (PWLE) meaningfully contribute to the project design and development of the project and how PWLE will participate in the implementation of projects funded under this NOFO.
8. Describe how the project will identify and serve “underserved” communities, or those communities that have not previously been served by the homeless system at the same rate that they experience homelessness in the community (that is, they are experiencing homelessness in the community, but they are not being served by the homeless services system). Applicants will be expected to follow Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services (CLAS) in their work under this NOFO.



## El Paso CoC New Project Scorecard (El Paso, Texas)

The El Paso CoC New Project Scorecard includes specific questions and awards points related to mainstream benefits acquisition, SOAR training completion, and utilization of SOAR technical assistance.

| Eligible Supportive Services     | Provided (applicant, formal partner, informal partner) | Frequency (daily, weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, semi-annually, annually, as needed) |
|----------------------------------|--|---|
| Assessment of service needs      |  |   |
| Assistance with moving costs     |  |   |
| Case Management                  |  |   |
| Childcare                        |  |   |
| Education Services               |  |   |
| Employment Assistance            |  |   |
| Food                             |  |   |
| Housing/Counseling Services      |  |   |
| Legal Services                   |  |   |
| Life Skills                      |  |   |
| Mental Health Services           |  |   |
| Outpatient Health Services       |  |   |
| Outreach Services                |  |   |
| Substance Use Treatment Services |  |   |
| Transportation                   |  |   |
| Utility Deposits                 |  |   |

**Identify whether your project will include the following: (10 Points)**

Transportation assistance to clients to attend mainstream benefit appointments, employment training, or jobs

Annual follow-ups with program participants to ensure mainstream benefits are received and renewed

Access to SSI/SSDI technical assistance provided by this project or a partner agency staff person providing technical assistance completed SOAR training in the past 24 months

Staff person providing technical assistance completed SOAR training in the past 24 months  
 Yes    No    N/A

**Describe how you will work with landlords and community stakeholders to identify appropriate housing units. Describe what strategies you will utilize to persuade landlords to rent to clients who may have poor rental history and/or a criminal background. Describe how you will engage clients in decision-making around their housing preferences. (15 Points)**

## West Virginia Balance of State CoC Monitoring Score Criteria

The West Virginia BoS CoC uses SOAR in its CoC Monitoring Score Criteria. One of the questions in the Program Specific Requirements for Transitional Housing and Rapid Re-Housing programs asks, “Is there evidence in the client file that indicates the case manager is working with the client to increase their income, including utilization of the SOAR process.” Maximum points are awarded if a “minimum of 2 program participants are connected with disability benefits annually utilizing the SOAR process.”

## Youth Homelessness Demonstration Program (YHDP)

[YHDP](#) is a HUD initiative that began in 2016 to support communities in ending youth homelessness. SOAR is a key part of a systemic response to ending youth homelessness. It represents an innovative model for increasing income and housing stability for youth who have disabling conditions, particularly for those exiting foster care.

### Strategy in Practice

#### The Way Home Houston (Houston, Texas)

In 2021, The Way Home Houston received \$10 million from HUD to develop and implement a coordinated community approach to youth homelessness. The CoC worked with community partners to develop a [Coordinated Community Plan](#) to identify goals and priorities. One such goal was increasing educational engagement and income for youth experiencing homelessness, for which “Increasing SOAR trained Case managers to connect youth with disabilities to SSI/SSDI” was included as an action step (Page 26).

## The Rhode Island Coalition to End Homelessness (Providence, Rhode Island)

The state of Rhode Island was awarded a \$3.5 million YHDP grant in 2021 to address youth homelessness throughout the state. The CoC collaborated with community partners and youth with lived expertise to develop a [Coordinated Community Plan](#). In the plan, the CoC identified youth and young adults (YYA) with marginalized identities/expression as a priority population and outlined specific needs related to their identities/lived experiences. For YYA with Disabilities, access to SOAR services was included as a strategy for promoting their Health and Wellbeing (Page 28). The CoC utilized this funding for a SOAR Youth Navigator position.

## Other HUD Funding

In addition to CoC Program funds, HUD also awards communities Emergency Solutions Grants (ESG) funding. This funding can be used for outreach, shelters, services, rapid re-housing, and homelessness prevention. ESG recipients and Continuums of Care (CoCs) can use some of this funding to support SOAR-dedicated case workers.

HUD also awards additional funding to communities through Special Notice of Funding Opportunities (SNOFOs). These specialized funding opportunities are excellent opportunities for SOAR implementation in new or expanding programs.

## Strategy in Practice

### All Chicago (Chicago, Illinois)

All Chicago, the Continuum of Care lead agency, worked with the city of Chicago to tap into ESG-CV funding to add a SOAR coordinator to their staff. The plan also included contracting 4 case workers for their Rapid Rehousing case management teams across the continuum. All Chicago uses their Coordinated Entry system to identify individuals with disabilities and no income and connect them to a SOAR case worker. This effort was described in HUD's [Maximizing Income for Rapid Rehousing Participants During COVID-19](#) resource. All Chicago has also utilized [SNOFO](#) funds received in 2023 to focus on unsheltered homelessness. Some of those funds are being used for SOAR work.

### Appalachian Regional Coalition on Homelessness (ARCH) (Johnson City, Tennessee)

The Appalachian Regional Coalition on Homelessness (ARCH) operates HUD's CoC Program in Northeast Tennessee. ARCH uses ESG funds for a SOAR-dedicated position.

### New York State (NYS) Balance of State (BoS) CoC

The NYS BoS CoC, led by the New York Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (OTDA), supports eight predominantly rural communities in New York. The BoS CoC has assisted the communities in allocating funding to SOAR-dedicated positions and provides ongoing support and technical assistance. It is also utilizing the HUD SNOFO funds set aside for rural communities.