The Role of the CWIC in Supporting Employment Networks under the Ticket to Work Program

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The Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency Program is an employment program for Social Security beneficiaries who desire to obtain employment or return to work. Recent regulatory changes to the Ticket Program are primarily aimed at expanding the number of Employment Networks (ENs) available to provide services and supports to Social Security disability beneficiaries, which will allow beneficiaries greater choice among service providers and improved access to employment supports.

The WIPA projects have an important role to play in supporting the efforts of ENs. CWICs need to work in close partnership with ENs to overcome potential barriers to employment related to the Social Security disability benefits or other federal, state, or local benefits.

CWICs have an obligation under the Ticket Program to support ENs in the following ways:

1. CWICs should be knowledgeable about the ENs serving the WIPA project catchment area and help ENs understand and use WIPA services.

CWICs also must move beyond simply providing beneficiaries with basic information about ENs. Under the WIPA program, CWICs are encouraged to help beneficiaries choose an appropriate service provider for Ticket assignment and make referrals to ENs. To fulfill this role, CWICs must be able to suggest available ENs based on individual employment goals and service preferences. When possible, CWICs should develop in-depth knowledge of how these providers operate, the services they provide, and eligibility procedures and criteria.

Finally, CWICs can provide specific information to ENs about WIPA services. This includes:

- The overall mission and goals of the WIPA program;
- Eligibility requirements for WIPA services;
- Characteristics of a high-priority WIPA referral;
- Services provided by WIPA projects;
- How the WIPA program delivers services to eligible high priority beneficiaries; and
- How to make a referral for WIPA services.

CWICs are responsible for helping ENs understand how WIPA services fit into the larger picture of the Ticket Program and how these services can help ENs be more effective in helping
beneficiaries obtain and maintain paid employment. CWICs can provide a great deal of education to new ENs to help staff members understand how they can use WIPA services to promote employment and decrease dependency on Social Security disability benefits.

2. CWICs should assist ENs to understand and use Benefits Summary & Analysis (BS&A) reports and Work Incentive Plans (WIPs) when working with beneficiaries to plan and deliver employment services and supports.

CWICs have an obligation to provide high-quality individualized work incentives planning, counseling and assistance to beneficiaries with Tickets assigned to local ENs. As a matter of fact, beneficiaries with Tickets in assignment and in use constitute a very high priority for WIPA services. As a part of this, CWICs need to help ENs understand how paid employment or self-employment affects a beneficiary’s Social Security disability benefits, Medicaid/Medicare, and all other applicable federal, state, and local benefit programs. This includes helping ENs to understand when and how Social Security applies specific work incentives to the Social Security disability benefit programs to help beneficiaries achieve employment goals.

With the beneficiary’s permission, CWICs can use the Benefits Summary and Analysis to help an EN gain an understanding of how work incentives apply to a specific beneficiary’s situation. Of course, before CWICs can share any documents or reports with EN staff members, CWICs must obtain a signed release of information from the beneficiary. CWICs may not share information with anyone without the express written approval of the individual or his or her legal guardian.

CWICs are not required to provide training, technical assistance, or other information on EN payment mechanisms under the Ticket Program. You should refer ENs with questions about how Social Security pays for services under the Ticket Program to Maximus, the TPM. CWICs are also not required to provide intensive training or technical assistance to ENs on Social Security benefits and work incentives, except as part of working collaboratively to serve specific beneficiaries who have tickets assigned and in use.

3. CWICs should be knowledgeable about the Ticket Program provisions and how the Ticket Program functions as an important work incentive for beneficiaries.

CWICs can also support the efforts of ENs by providing complete and accurate information to beneficiaries on topics such as placing Tickets in assignment, re-assigning Tickets, moving a Ticket in or out of inactive status, or understanding the medical CDR protections. In addition, CWICs can help beneficiaries understand the employment or educational requirements for the various timely progress certification periods.

WIPA projects have a critically important role to play in helping beneficiaries realize their employment goals. However, the WIPA program cannot provide all of the services necessary to achieve these ends. Only by working in tandem with ENs that provide the actual vocational rehabilitation, career preparation, and employment services will CWICs achieve the most positive employment outcomes for the beneficiaries they serve.

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