

# FloridaWorks Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)

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<b>SOP Number:</b>	<b>Subject: Individual Responsibility Plan (IRP) and/or Alternative Requirement Plan (ARP) Policy</b>
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## **PURPOSE**

The purpose of this document is to define state policies for local use and to provide clear and exact guidance for the development of the Individual Responsibility Plan (IRP) and/or the Alternative Requirement Plan (ARP).

## **BACKGROUND**

The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 changed the welfare system in America. At the time PRWORA was passed there were many individuals and families who had become welfare independent. However, in some cases three and four generations within families had always depended on federal or state assistance to survive. These families were caught in a system filled with disincentives to work. Today, the Welfare Transition Program has moved from a system of disincentives to one of incentives – encouraging families to move from welfare to self-sufficiency.

Unfortunately many of the long-term recipients of assistance possessed few if any work readiness skills. Additionally, there was a lack of understanding of how to develop short and long-term goals as well as a lack of organization and planning skills needed to become independent and self-sufficient. In an effort to assist Welfare Transition jobseekers the legislature established a requirement that serves two functions.

The Individual Responsibility Plan (IRP):

1. Establishes a jobseeker's short and long-term goals for employment and education.
2. Serves as a road map for self-sufficiency.

## **INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY PLAN (IRP)**

An Individual Responsibility Plan (IRP) is a plan developed with the jobseeker, based on an assessment of the jobseeker's skills, prior work experience and employability. The IRP is required for all WTP jobseekers and shall be initiated and developed within 30 working days of the date a "To Do" is received informing the service provider of a new jobseeker or a jobseeker whose case is being reopened or transferred in. The IRP specifies the activities and services agreed upon by both the service provider and the jobseeker, which will lead towards the jobseeker's self-sufficiency.

### **Purpose of the IRP**

The Individual Responsibility Plan (IRP) should serve as the roadmap for the Welfare Transition jobseeker as he/she moves to self-sufficiency. This can only happen if the IRP is developed in cooperation with the jobseeker. It is not the job of the career counselor to decide what type of job a jobseeker may want for the future. It is the career counselor's job to help the jobseeker make some basic decisions about what he/she would like to do and then how to help him/her reach that goal.

The goal of the IRP is matching the jobseeker with appropriate services that will lead to employment. The IRP process should include assessment of the jobseeker's knowledge, skills and attitudes. If the assessment process is done correctly, the IRP can be a useful tool that ultimately results in the jobseeker finding employment that is related to his/her interests as well as aptitude and attitude. Done incorrectly, the assessment

process can result in frustration and ultimately the jobseeker's moving from job to job, never finding what he or she wants to do, much less what he or she would be most successful doing.

The IRP is as important to the career counselor as it is to the jobseeker. The IRP provides a roadmap for support services for which the career counselor may need to make referrals. The IRP allows the career counselor to track the jobseeker's progress in gaining self-sufficiency.

There are several steps in the IRP development process, including:

- Initial Screening
- Assessment
- Writing of the IRP
- Revising of the IRP
- Tracking jobseeker progress

### Initial Screening

The initial screening part of the IRP process is very important. During the initial screening, the career counselor first focuses on developing a positive working relationship with the jobseeker, this is done by establishing effective communication via positive interaction. Effective communication is the key to getting the information needed to proceed.

During the initial screening, the career counselor will need to identify the jobseeker's:

- Practical needs and barriers, such as services that will be needed before the jobseeker begins the actual process of gaining work readiness skills, including:
  - ❖ Transportation
  - ❖ Child care
  - ❖ Counseling or substance abuse treatment
- Marketable skills, including any past volunteer or job experience or education and training that would help in the job placement process.
- Level of education, including whether or not the jobseeker has completed high school, college or if the jobseeker has low level literacy skills.
- Career goals, are they realistic given the information you have already gathered about the jobseeker, including marketable skills and level of education.  
Someone who expresses an interest in becoming a pharmacist, but has not completed high school and has no work experience, may not have very realistic ideas of future employment.
- Work history, including whether the jobseeker has been floating from job to job, been fired repeatedly for poor performance or has not even applied for a job in years.

Each of these items can have a great impact on the development of the IRP and setting of realistic short and long-term education and career goals.

### Assessment

Another very important part of the IRP process is the assessment. During the assessment, the service provider may have the jobseeker complete a number of different tests. These may include, but are not limited to:

- Basic skills assessment in reading, mathematics and writing
- Career interest inventories
- Career aptitude testing

### Basic Skills Assessment

The most common basic skill assessment instrument used in Florida is the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE). The TABE can provide information about the reading, and mathematics levels of the jobseeker. This information is very useful when designing an education or skill enhancement program for the

jobseeker. Many of the hard-to-serve jobseekers do not have high school diplomas and even some of the ones who do, still possess limited literacy skills. The lack of literacy skills greatly impacts the jobseeker's ability to find and maintain employment. The results of the TABE will let the service provider know if the jobseeker should be referred to adult basic education programs so he/she can increase basic and functional literacy skills that can eventually lead to earning a high school diploma through the GED testing program.

#### Career Interest Inventories

Many jobseekers do not have a clear idea as to what type of job they want for the future. They view employment as something they have to do, not something that they can actually enjoy. Career Interest Inventories can provide the jobseeker with information about the type of job or career that would be most appropriate given the interests of the jobseeker.

#### Career Aptitude Testing

Although this type of assessment is not as common as the basic skills and career interest, career aptitude testing provides more in-depth information about the type of employment best suited for a jobseeker. Aptitude testing doesn't measure interest it measures actual ability.

The IRP process is designed to take into consideration much of the information gathered during the Initial Screening and the Assessment. At this point, the career counselor will analyze the data and assist the jobseeker in making decisions about his/her future and the types of goals to establish. During the IRP process the following will be identified:

- Education and employment goals
- Additional resources the jobseeker will need to meet those goals
- Barriers that may hinder the jobseeker's ability to reach the goals

Establishing short and long-term goals may be totally foreign to the jobseekers. They have little or no experience in this area, and as is often the case, they function from one crisis to another. This part of the IRP process can be a true learning experience for the jobseeker. The career counselor will basically assume the role of a teacher or guide as they work through this part of the process.

### **Writing the IRP**

#### Initiation/Updates

The IRP is initiated at the first meeting between career counselor and jobseeker. This meeting provides the new "team" a chance to get to know each other and begin the process of establishing a close and trusting working relationship. The IRP is to be initiated within 30 days of the receipt of the new case, reopen or transfer-in referral from the Department of Children and Families.

#### Should be:

- Initiated within 30 days of receiving the New Case, Reopen or Transfer Alert.
- Based on initial screening / assessment findings.
- Developed by the jobseeker with the assistance of the career counselor.
- Developed using the ***IRP Wizard in OSST***.

*Note: The IRP Completion Date and the IRP Update Date must be entered in the IRP Wizard.*

#### Should be updated if:

- A change affects the existing IRP (such as homelessness, domestic violence, etc.).
- New activities, training or services are approved, or
- Nearing completion of an activity or training to ensure continuous participation.

#### Development

An Individual Responsibility Plan must be flexible and responsive. The IRP must be flexible so that it can meet the individual needs of the jobseeker. Every jobseeker is different; each brings his/her own unique needs, desires, strengths and weaknesses to the table. An IRP should not be one-size fits all. An IRP must also be responsive. It is the career counselor's responsibility to review and document both in OSST and in the

jobseeker's case file, the progress of the jobseeker as he/she implements the IRP. If there are parts that must be changed, the IRP must be responsive to those changes.

The IRP should be developed as a team effort – the career counselor and the jobseeker working together. Although the plan is developed as a team, this is the jobseeker's plan for the future. The career counselor's role is to serve as the guide through the process.

The IRP must include information about specific barriers that the jobseeker may face and what can be done to overcome those barriers. For example, a jobseeker who does not have a car may need to identify bus routes to get to and from work or school. Someone who needs a high school diploma to obtain the job he/she wants may first need to enroll in an adult education program.

A very big and equally important part of the career counselor's job is making sure that as many barriers as possible are removed. This is where knowledge of resources and services available to individuals in the Welfare Transition program is extremely valuable.

Additionally, the IRP should:

- Describe the career counselor's responsibilities, such as providing a childcare referral or transportation voucher.
- Describe the consequences for failure to follow their plan:
  - ❖ Loss of support services
  - ❖ Sanction

### **Individual Responsibility Plan Components**

- Demographic Information  
Provide basic information on the form such as jobseeker's name, address, telephone number, county, identification number, career counselor's name, etc.
- Dates of Service and Expected Achievement Dates  
Document important dates such as beginning and projected ending dates for Temporary Cash Assistance as well as beginning and projected ending dates for the plan and the beginning and expected achievement dates of goals.
- Long Term Employment Goal  
Develop a long-term goal for employment. What is the jobseeker's career goal for the future? An example may be: To become employed as a chef at a local restaurant.
- Short Term Employment Goal  
Develop short-term goals and objectives to help the jobseeker reach the long-term goals. Example: To obtain a job at a local restaurant as an assistant in the kitchen.
- Long Term Educational Goal  
Does the jobseeker have an educational goal? An example may be: To complete a food service course of study at the community college.
- Short Term Educational Goal  
Is the jobseeker ready for community college, or does his/her basic skills need improvement? An example of a short-term education goal may be: To complete a basic skills class in order to prepare for the GED Tests
- Long Term Personal Goals  
Does the jobseeker have personal needs that must be dealt with such as leaving an abusive situation or attending a drug or alcohol treatment program? These goals will assist you in outlining the step-by-step process for your jobseeker to become self-sufficient.
- Barriers to Self-sufficiency  
Does the jobseeker have barriers that would get in the way of achieving their goals? Such as childcare, transportation, education, language barrier, etc.
- Support Services  
Based on the identified barriers, describe the support services that will be provided to assist the jobseeker in obtaining and retaining private sector employment.
- Steps to Self-sufficiency

Once the goals have been determined, how is the jobseeker going to achieve these goals? Outline the basic steps that will be needed in order to achieve the long-term goals and ultimately self-sufficiency. For example:

- 1) Provide voucher for Basic Computer Keyboarding class scheduled to begin 5/10/06 at Horizons.
- 2) Register for Basic Computer Keyboarding class by 4/26/06.
- 3) Attend class on a regular basis.
- 4) Provide documentation of attendance within five calendar days after the end of each month to career counselor.
- 5) Call career counselor at (xxx)-xxx-xxxx immediately if unable to attend class to report your reason.

- Assigned work activity  
Including expected completion date(s) and the number of hours assigned to the activity.
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- Timeline  
Placing dates that objectives must be completed is important for follow-up. The jobseeker needs to have timelines in order to complete his/her goals. Timelines also assist in monitoring compliance.
- Follow-Up  
The IRP shall provide space for documentation of follow-up activities. The career counselor must ensure compliance with the plan. Monthly follow-up via personal or phone contacts is necessary to assist the jobseeker in achieving his/her goals.
- Signatures and Dates  
As with all forms, the Individual Responsibility Plan must include original signatures and dates upon the initiation, revision and completion of the plan. The signatures required are those of the jobseeker as well as the career counselor.

The IRP is not just another form to be completed and filed away. The IRP is the roadmap for individuals and their families to gain self-sufficiency. Individuals who fail without good cause to comply with their IRP may be subject to sanctions. Development of an IRP is a very serious part of the career counselor's job.

#### Documentation Requirements

The IRP must be entered in OSST via the **IRP Wizard** and the document must be printed out, signed and dated by both the career counselor and the jobseeker. The jobseeker must be given a copy of the IRP with the original document being retained in the jobseeker's file.

The career counselor must review and update the jobseeker's case **at least once a month** to verify that the jobseeker is complying with work plan requirements. The IRP must be updated to reflect all progress made.

As changes occur with the jobseeker's circumstances or activities, information must be updated in OSST as well as in the jobseeker's file to reflect the changes. All *Case Notes* and *System Notes* must be updated to reflect informational entries and case actions taken. Additionally, all required follow-ups must be entered into OSST as they occur.

Any documentation that supports the jobseeker's progress through the IRP must be updated in OSST and retained in the client file.

#### Revising of the IRP

The IRP is a fluid document that is reviewed and modified as needed during each meeting between the career counselor and jobseeker.

The IRP is to be updated and signed within 30 days of the most recent reopen or transfer-in referral, as well as, when the following circumstances exist; a change that affects the existing IRP (such as homelessness or domestic violence), when new activities, training or services are approved, or the nearing of the completion of an activity or training to ensure continuous participation.

Tracking Jobseeker Progress

Federal law requires the reporting of an individual's participation on a monthly basis in order to track the State's performance in meeting federal participation rates. This information is entered into the OSST system under the Skill Development tab. Welfare Transition entries into the system are based on participation documentation such as time sheets or school attendance forms, pay stubs, etc.

The IRP must allow for changes and updates as the jobseeker's circumstances dictate. In addition to the monthly or more frequent follow-up, the IRP shall be jointly reviewed and revised, if necessary, **no less than every 6 months**. IRPs and currently amended IRPs shall be printed and signed with the **original** retained in the jobseeker's hard copy file.

Follow-up and ongoing support shall be provided to the jobseeker. Both the career counselor and the jobseeker are responsible for the achievement of the goals of the IRP therefore regular contact shall be maintained to enable joint monitoring of the progress made in achieving goals outlined in the plan. Jobseekers shall be contacted **no less than monthly** and more often if the steps outlined in the plan require it.

**Participation and Failure to Comply with the Individual Responsibility Plan**

All TCA recipients who are not exempt must participate in work activities as outline on their work requirement plan – this includes jobseekers who have been deferred. All jobseekers may be subject to the sanctioning process for failure to comply with the IRP.

**ALTERNATIVE REQUIREMENT PLAN (ARP)**

The Alternative Requirement Plan (ARP) provides a vehicle for addressing the barriers to self-sufficiency while an individual is deferred from the work requirements, thus preserving Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA) payments within the Welfare Transition framework.

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Factors to consider when determining the appropriateness of alternative activities:

- The ongoing safety of the participant and the children (domestic violence related).
- The goal of self-sufficiency.
- Specific activities required enabling the individual to fully participate in work activities.
- Is it reasonable based on documentation received (medical verification, collateral contacts, etc).

## **ARP Requirements**

Participating in alternative requirements does not preclude involvement in traditional work activities if the jobseeker is able to do so without harm to him/herself or other members of the family. Such activities may be job skills training, community service, alternative job placement and vocational education.

The steps in the ARP should indicate the barriers to partial or full participation and the alternative activities that a jobseeker will do. The ARP should also be updated and revised as necessary when circumstances change. An ARP must also be developed for jobseekers in the case of domestic violence where participating in regular work activities would jeopardize the safety of the jobseeker and his/her children.

The IRP shall be updated to reflect ARP status on the same day documentation is received supporting the need for the deferral. The case notes in OSST shall include all details of the deferral including the length of time of the deferral. A new ARP shall be developed and will include the steps needed to move away from the deferral and back to regular status. When the ARP is completed it must be signed and dated by both the jobseeker and the career counselor. The original document must be maintained in the jobseeker's file.

## **Writing the ARP**

### Initiation/Updates

An ARP must be developed or updated when an individual is deferred from regular participation due to medical or other good cause reasons. The ARP is initiated upon verification of the deferral. In cases where jobseekers are unable to perform regular work activities (*deferred*), an Alternative Requirement Plan (ARP) is developed.

#### Should be:

- Initiated upon verification of deferral.
- Based on individual limitations.
- Developed by the jobseeker with the assistance of the career counselor.
- Developed using the ***IRP Wizard*** in OSST.

#### Should be updated if:

- A change affects the existing ARP
- New activities, training or services are approved, or
- Nearing completion of an activity or training to ensure continuous participation.

### Development

An Alternative Requirement Plan (ARP) is created using the same procedures and physical document as the IRP – therefore the IRP Wizard is used (see “Development” above).

Additionally, the ARP should:

- Describe the career counselor's responsibilities.
- Base work requirements on the jobseeker's limitations and ability to comply.
- Describe treatment plans/progress.
- Reflect assessments (medical, vocational, etc.).
- Describe the consequences for failure to follow their plan:
  - ❖ Loss of support services
  - ❖ Sanction

## **Types of Deferrals and required Documentation**

### Domestic Violence

- Work requirements would make it probable that the individual would not be able to escape domestic violence
- Must comply with an Alternative Requirement Plan (ARP) that prepares the individual for self sufficiency while providing for the safety of the individual and dependents

### Past Effects of Domestic Violence

- Unable to comply with work requirements due mental or physical impairment related to past incidents of domestic violence
- The individual must comply with an alternative requirement plan designed to prepare the individual for self-sufficiency while providing for the safety of the individual and dependents
  - ❖ The plan must include counseling or a course of treatment necessary for the individual to resume participation.
  - ❖ The need for treatment must be verified by a licensed physician, psychologist or other professional identified in 414.065

### Medical Incapacity

- A participant cannot comply because of a medical incapacity or limitation.
- The participant must comply with work activities designed with regards to limitations/
- The career counselor may require evaluation (work or vocational assessment).
- A licensed physician under Chapter 458 or 459 of the Florida Statutes documents the limitation. This does not include chiropractors or nurse practitioners. Furthermore, if a participant is excused from work activities based on medical incapacity, the documentation must include:
  - ❖ The nature of the medical incapacity
  - ❖ The duration of the incapacity
  - ❖ The number of hours per week the individual can participate in activities
  - ❖ The percentage of the individual's disability
  - ❖ Other limitations on participation in work activities
  - ❖ The course of treatment necessary to resume participation

### Outpatient SAMH Treatment

- The individual may be excused up to five hours per week to participate in treatment.
- The individual may not exceed 100 hours per year.
- The treatment must be verified by a mental health or substance abuse professional.
- The attendance must be documented and provided to the career counselor.

### Noncompliance for SSI/SSDI Applicants

- An individual who verifies (s)he has applied for SSI/SSDI
- The decision is pending and the application or appeal remains current
- The required documentation is a copy of the application or a letter verifying that the application is in the appeal process
- The individual must verify medical limitations
- The individual must comply with activities designed with regards to documented limitations

### Other Good Cause Exceptions

- Circumstances out of the individual's control such as natural & personal disasters
- The natural & personal disasters must be documented via official letter (from a State agency) or newspaper article

## **What Does a Plan Look Like?**

Currently, there is not a state adopted form for Alternative Requirement Plans (ARP). The same form and process used for developing the Individual Responsibility Plan (IRP) will be used for the Alternative Requirement Plan. The ARP information must also be updated in OSST to track the plan. The career counselor will be responsible for the development, follow-up and documentation of Alternative Requirement Plans.

### **What kind of information should be included on an Alternative Requirement Plan?**

The primary goal for jobseekers who are on an Alternative Requirement Plan is self-sufficiency. The main focus will be long and short-term goals for the jobseeker. The ARP should also include the following basic information:

### **Alternative Requirement Plan Components**

- **Deferral**  
Provide specific information about the deferral such as reason for the deferral, date of the deferral, etc.
- **Demographic Information**  
Provide basic information on the form such as jobseeker's name, address, telephone number, county, identification number, career counselor's name, etc.
- **Dates of Service and Expected Achievement Dates**  
Document important dates such as beginning and projected ending dates for Temporary Cash Assistance as well as beginning and projected ending dates for the plan and the beginning and expected achievement dates of goals. Most importantly, the ARP must include beginning and anticipated ending dates for the deferral.
- **Long Term Employment Goal**  
Develop a long-term goal for employment. What is the jobseeker's career goal for the future? An example may be: To become employed as a legal secretary in a local law office.
- **Long Term Education Goal**  
Does the jobseeker have an educational goal? An example may be: To obtain my high school diploma and attend the local technical school to complete the one-year legal secretarial course.
- **Long Term Personal Goal**  
Does the jobseeker have personal needs that must be dealt with such as leaving an abusive situation or attending a drug or alcohol treatment program? These goals will assist you in outlining the step-by-step process for your jobseeker to become self-sufficient.
- **Barriers to Self-sufficiency**  
Does the jobseeker have barriers that would get in the way of achieving their goals? Such as childcare, transportation, education, language barrier, etc.
- **Support Services**  
Based on the identified barriers, describe the support services that will be provided to assist the jobseeker in obtaining and retaining private sector employment.
- **Steps to Self Sufficiency**  
Once the goals have been determined, how is the jobseeker going to achieve these goals? Outline the basic steps that will be needed in order to achieve the long-term goals and ultimately self-sufficiency. For example:
  1. Provide voucher for Basic Computer Keyboarding class scheduled to begin 5/10/06 at Horizons.
  2. Register for Basic Computer Keyboarding class by 4/26/06.
  3. Attend class on a regular basis.
  4. Provide documentation of attendance within five calendar days after the end of each month to career counselor.
  5. Call career counselor at (xxx)-xxx-xxxx immediately if unable to attend class to report your reason.
- **Timeline**  
Placing dates that objectives must be completed is important for follow-up. Your jobseeker needs to have timelines in order to complete his/her goals. Timelines also assist you in monitoring compliance.
- **Follow-Up**  
The form shall provide space for documentation of follow-up activities. The career counselor must ensure compliance with the plan. Monthly follow-up via personal or phone contacts is necessary to assist the jobseeker in achieving his/her goals.

- Signatures and Dates

As with all forms, the Individual Responsibility Plan must include signatures and dates upon the initiation, revision and completion of the plan. The signatures required are those of the jobseeker as well as the career counselor.

Acceptable activities that may be incorporated into the ARP include but are not limited to:

- Obtaining emergency shelter or shelter in a safe house
- Participating in peer support groups
- Applying for an injunction for protection and other legal assistance
- Participating in case management at a victim services agency
- Assembling adequate documentation regarding domestic violence
- Attempting permanent or temporary relocation
- Participating in the prosecution of the perpetrator
- Participating in life skills training
- Participating in pastoral counseling
- Participating in substance abuse treatment
- Participating in various levels of safety planning
- Accessing services for children
- Participating in stress management activities
- Receiving medical treatment related to domestic violence
- Participating in mental health counseling
- Working with a domestic violence advocate

#### Documentation Requirements

The ARP must be entered in OSST via the IRP Wizard and the document must be printed out, signed and dated by both the career counselor and the jobseeker. The jobseeker must be given a copy of the ARP with the original document being retained in the jobseeker's file.

The career counselor must review and update the jobseeker's case **at least once a month** to verify that the jobseeker is complying with work plan requirements. The ARP must be updated to reflect medical assessment, vocational assessment, treatment plan progress, and participation based on medical ability to comply.

As changes occur with the jobseeker's circumstances or activities, information must be updated in OSST as well as in the jobseeker's file to reflect the changes. All *Case Notes* and *System Notes* must be updated to reflect informational entries and case actions taken. Additionally, all required follow-ups must be entered into OSST as they occur.

Any documentation that supports the jobseeker's progress through the ARP must be updated in OSST and retained in the client file.

#### Tracking Jobseeker Progress

Federal law requires the reporting of an individual's participation on a monthly basis in order to track the State's performance in meeting federal participation rates. This information is entered into the OSST system under the Skill Development tab. Welfare Transition entries into the system are based on participation documentation such as time sheets or school attendance forms, pay stubs, etc.

Follow-up and ongoing support shall be provided to the jobseeker. Both the career counselor and the jobseeker are responsible for the achievement of the goals of the ARP therefore regular contact shall be maintained to enable joint monitoring of the progress made in achieving goals outlined in the plan. Jobseekers shall be contacted **no less than monthly** and more often if the steps outlined in the plan require it.

The ARP must allow for changes and updates as the jobseeker's circumstances dictate. In addition to the monthly or more frequent follow-up, the ARP shall be jointly reviewed and revised, if necessary, **no less than every 6 months**. ARPs and currently amended ARPs shall be printed and signed with the original retained in the jobseeker's hard copy file.

### **Participation and Failure to Comply with the Alternate Requirement Plan**

All TCA recipients who are not exempt must participate in work activities as outline on their work requirement plan – this includes jobseekers who have been deferred. All jobseekers may be subject to the sanctioning process for failure to comply with the ARP.