

FloridaWorks Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)

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| SOP Number: | Subject: Up-Front Diversion |
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PURPOSE

The purpose of this document is to provide guidelines for the provision of Up Front Diversion to be utilized by families who are in jeopardy of losing their home, job, car and/or their ability to provide for their family. These services are made available to assist the TCA applicants in moving toward self-sufficiency. Florida Works permits the provision of Up Front Diversion to TCA applicants who do not require on-going monthly cash assistance – but the family may have an emergency or unexpected need that can be resolved through a one-time payment or short-term services.

BACKGROUND

Diversion Services have previously been provided through the Public Assistance Specialist working with the Department of Children and Families (DCF). Senate Bill 2050 shifted that responsibility to the Regional Workforce Board (RWB). It is the responsibility of the RWB designee (The Provider) to ensure that applicants know about and understand how Up-Front Diversion services can benefit them.

The Up-Front Diversion program is **available only to applicants** as an **alternative** to ongoing Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA), Florida Statute 445.017.

PROCESS

4 Step Process

Prior to awarding up front diversion, every effort must be made to remove barriers without providing cash. There is a four-step process that must be completed by the provider. If the barriers can be removed without providing cash that should always be the first choice.

Step 1 - Link applicants with job opportunities first

The goal of all welfare transition services is to help customers gain self-sufficiency. The first step is to attempt to connect the applicant with employment.

The case manager must determine why the applicant is having difficulty finding employment.

- Are they new to the area?
- Do they know where and how to look for employment?
- Do they have skills that will meet certain job requirements?

This information must be documented in the applicant's file/case notes.

The case manager must make every effort to determine if there is a way to help an applicant get his/her foot into the "door of employment."

The steps that must be taken to Link the applicant with job opportunities are:

- Verify the individual is a TCA applicant and not currently a recipient of TCA.
- Begin the Welfare Transition work registration process.
- Engage in a work activity and job search.

All supporting documentation for the steps taken must be maintained in the client's file. All information gathered that does not have supporting documentation must be documented in case notes.

Step 2 - Offer support services such as child care or transportation

Applicant support services are short-term benefits to assist the TCA applicant with completing the TCA application process and obtaining or retaining employment. Applicant support services may include transportation assistance and childcare. Applicant support services should not exceed 30 days due to the DCF's time standard to approve or deny a TCA application. Applicant childcare may be provided through the WT childcare referral process.

- The TCA applicant may be provided with applicant support services to assist with job search activities, obtaining employment, initiating the WT Work Registration process and/or retaining employment;
- The applicant may be provided with Up-Front diversion provision of services as an alternative to TCA.

The case manager must determine if the customer already has a job, but is having difficulty in maintaining it due to other factors, such as:

- Lack of childcare
- Unreliable transportation.

If it is determined that the customer already has a job, but is struggling to hold on to that job, other support services may be the answer – rather than up front diversion. Through support services, the client may be able to take the job; and the client does not have to accept ongoing assistance such as TCA.

The official start date for applicant support services is the date that the diversion process started, which is the date on the Up-Front Diversion Screening Form, AWI WTP-2073A.

All supporting documentation must be maintained in the file and documented in case notes.

Step 3—Screen applicants to help meet the emergency needs of the family

Emergencies can arise at any time and come in various forms such as, an accident, a medical emergency, a fire, or a natural disaster. Up-Front Diversion services can assist a family through an emergency. Assistance may be in the form of providing vouchers for car repairs or vouchers to cover public transportation. Sometimes families just need temporary services to handle an emergency situation.

After an emergency situation has been determined the provider must determine and document (in the file and OSST) what the emergency needs are.

Step 4—Offer a one-time payment of up to \$1,000 per family

If Steps 1 through 3 do not resolve the problem, a one-time payment might be the answer. The key is to meet the family's immediate needs and help them regain self-sufficiency.

INITIATING

Up Front Diversion may be initiated in three ways:

1. The individual may submit a Request for Assistance (RFA), CF-ES 2066, through the Department of Children and Families (DCF). The DCF Economic Self-Sufficiency Specialist (ESS) will explain Up-Front Diversion to the applicant. If the applicant is interested and the ESS determines the applicant is potentially eligible for TCA and the diversion, the applicant will be referred to the provider to complete the Up-Front Diversion process and initiate the Welfare Transition Work Registration Process. The ESS will forward a copy of the RFA to the provider, which must be maintained in the client's file.
2. The individual may submit an application for TCA. During the application and Welfare Transition Work Registration process, the provider may find the applicant to be a potential candidate for Up-Front Diversion. Because the applicant may not require on-going recurring TCA, the applicant can be reviewed as a potential candidate for the Up-Front Diversion.
3. An individual who has not applied for TCA may go to the local One-Stop Career Center and express interest regarding emergency assistance or an Up-Front Diversion payment.

In all three instances the applicant must submit a request for assistance (RFA) to the local Department of Children and Families (DCF) office. After the RFA is submitted, the applicant will be referred to the provider who will utilize the Up-Front Diversion Screening form, AWI WTP-2073A, to determine the eligibility of the TCA applicant. By reviewing this information, the provider can determine if the applicant would be more appropriately served with diversion services or an Up-Front Diversion payment. If the applicant appears to be a potential candidate, the provider will proceed with the Up-Front Diversion eligibility determination process, linking the applicant to employment opportunities and job services.

ELIGIBILITY & REQUIRED DOCUMENTATION

The provider must determine if the:

- applicant would be more appropriately served with support services or a one time payment of up to \$1,000 rather than cash assistance;
- applicant has a history of retaining employment;
- emergency or unexpected situation is resolved, would the applicant gain employment and/or retain employment.

Because the provider is responsible for the approval or denial of a family for receipt of Up-Front Diversion payment and provision of services they are responsible for determining/obtaining the following information:

1. Documentation that the individual is an applicant and is not currently receiving TCA;
2. Verify that the applicant has not exhausted his/her TCA time limit. If the applicant does not qualify for or receive TCA or is not "potentially eligible" for TCA due to exhausting his/her time limits, the applicant is not eligible to receive Up-Front Diversion.
3. Documentation of the applicant's identity and citizenship (driver's license, State ID card, work or school ID card, voter's registration card or birth certificate). If the applicant is "qualified non-citizenship status", verification is required as indicated on AWI WTP 0005;
 - a. Eligibility Form for TANF Funded Services (AWI WTP 0005)
 - b. Review the FLORIDA System for Citizenship data
4. Documentation that the household meets the definition of family;
 - a. Eligibility form for TANF Funded Services, AWI WTP Form 0005
 - b. Florida System to verify data

5. Verify the applicant has a child(ren) under age 19 residing in the home or is a pregnant woman and meets TCA eligibility criteria (for pregnancy criteria, see F.S. 414.095 (6));
6. Documentation of the household composition, including names and social security numbers of each family member (self-attestation is allowable). A social security number (SSN) is required for the TCA applicant, or the applicant must apply for a SSN with the Social Security Administration. A SSN is required for each family member applicable to the case;
 - a. Eligibility Form for TANF Funded Services (AWI WTP 0005)
 - b. FLORIDA System to verify data (if FLORIDA screens are used to document household composition or other eligibility factors, the screens must be printed and placed in the hard file)
 - c. Update OSST with this information if needed.
7. Documentation that the applicant has **an emergency/unexpected situation**, that if resolved by Up-front Diversion, would eliminate the need for on-going assistance;
 - Catching up on utility bills to avoid an interruption in services;
 - Car repairs;
 - Emergency payment for counseling;
 - Replacement of lost income due to medical leave without pay;
 - Emergency childcare payment (not parent fees) for temporary childcare while securing permanent childcare; and/or
 - A need for tools, clothing, shoes or equipment necessary for employment.
8. Determining what the family needs to resolve the emergency situation (support services or a one time payment). Resolving the emergency would prevent the family from requiring ongoing TCA. Tools to determine and resolve the emergency may include:
 - The family plan to resolve the emergency situation; and
 - A budget for meeting future expenses or reducing the likelihood of other emergency situations.
9. Determining the services that should be provided to the applicant through the WT Work Registration process and the Up-Front Diversion process;
10. Providing the applicant with referrals for community support services as deemed appropriate;
11. Documentation that the applicant has **secured an on-going means for meeting monthly recurring expenses** if Up-front Diversion assistance is provided:
 - Document the household income and resources. Income is defined as income on the date of application. Self-attestations are acceptable forms of verification: and the information provided on FLORIDA is acceptable.
12. Notifying the ESS of the provider's decision; and
13. Notifying the applicant through the Agreement for Up-Front Diversion Payment/Service (AWI WTP-2075), of
 - TCC;
 - The restriction on applying for cash assistance for three months after the receipt of the Up-Front Diversion payment unless an acceptable emergency is demonstrated to the provider; and
 - Repayment of Up-Front Diversion payment. If the participant is approved of an emergency re-application by the RWB after the receipt of the Up-Front Diversion payment prior to the three-month restriction the family must repay the diversion amount.
14. Determining if the family applying for Up-Front Diversion is currently sanctioned. Sanctioned families, including families receiving TCA through a protective payee, are not eligible for Up-Front Diversion.

Families with a current level two or three sanction must serve out the minimum sanction period and then comply to have the sanction lifted before requesting Up-Front Diversion.

APPROVAL

Once eligibility and an emergency need has been verified, and the applicant has proven the ability to meet on-going economic needs, a one-time payment of up to \$1000 per family and/or a provision of supportive services utilizing local TANF funds for up to four months may be offered. The AWI WTP-2075 must be completed with the participant and the provider. The AWI WTP-2075 must be forwarded to DCF and a copy retained in the case file. Recognizing that Up-Front Diversion is designed to help families cope with emergencies, Up-Front Diversion **payments should be authorized by DCF within five working days after receiving the authorization from the provider.**

The Agreement for Up-Front Diversion Payment/Service must be signed by the participant indicating that he/she understands:

- the amount he/she is potentially eligible for;
- that the family is declining to receive TCA for three months once the Up-Front Diversion payment is received;
- he/she may apply for Medicaid or food stamps anytime in the future;
- the Up-Front Diversion payment up to \$1,000 is a once in a lifetime benefit;
- he/she may be eligible to receive TCC if he/she is employed within 90 days of the start of the diversion process and the family's income does not exceed 200 percent of the [Federal Poverty Level](#); and
- that if the application for diversion is denied or the applicant chooses not to receive the Up-Front Diversion payment, the TCA application will be processed by DCF.

DENIAL

If the applicant does not meet eligibility criteria or the provider determines that an Up-Front Diversion payment or provision of services is not appropriate, the Up-Front Diversion will be denied. The AWI WTP-2075 must be completed and marked DENIED in section C. The provider must sign the AWI WTP-2075. The AWI WTP-2075 and the Request for Assistance must be forwarded to DCF and a copy retained in the case file. **If the applicant is not approved for Up-Front Diversion, the ESS will complete the TCA application at that time. The applicant should complete the WT Work Registration Process through the provider.**

TRANSITIONAL CHILD CARE

Applicants who receive Up-Front Diversion may be eligible for Transitional Child Care (TCC) if they are employed 90 days after the Up-Front Diversion start date.

- The Up-Front Diversion applicant should be given a 30-day referral for applicant childcare. The start date of the referral is documented on the Up-Front Diversion Screening Form, AWI WTP-2073A.
- If the applicant has not obtained employment when the 30-day childcare expires, (s)he is responsible for his or her own childcare needs for the remainder of the 90-day time period.
- The applicant must secure employment prior to receiving TCC from the provider or the DCF ESS. The employment must be secured within 90 days of the date the Up-Front Diversion process was started.
- If employment is not secured within the 90-day timeframe, he/she is not eligible for TCC.

If the applicant secures employment within the 90-day time period and loses employment, he/she is still eligible to receive the 30-day job search TCC available to other transitional participants.

REAPPLYING FOR EMERGENCY ASSISTANCE/TEMPORARY CASH ASSISTANCE

Once an Up-Front Diversion payment is received, the family cannot re-apply for TCA for three months after receipt of payment unless they meet a qualified emergency. Requests for assistance from DCF before the three-month restriction period ends, requires a demonstrated emergency need presented to the provider to be approved for TCA.

1. The individual must be referred to the provider to complete the Diversion Services Emergency Criteria form, AWI WTP-0001.
2. If the provider determines the family has demonstrated a qualified emergency within the three-month period, which includes the month the cash payment was received, the family is allowed to reapply for TCA. The diversion payment must be prorated over an 8-month period and deducted from any temporary assistance for which the family is eligible.
3. The completed AWI WTP-0001 must be forwarded to DCF. The AWI WTP-0001 notifies DCF staff if the individual is eligible to reapply for TCA.

Qualified Emergencies May Include:

- Hospitalization or illness resulting in a significant loss of income or employment;
- Loss of housing
- Natural disaster responsible for destruction of the family's major property; or
- Other situations of similar nature affecting employment.

DATA ENTRY REQUIRED IN OSST

Up-Front Diversion assistance information is compiled from OSST on a regular basis and compared to the information recorded in the FLORIDA system. Data regarding WT applicants served is also compiled and reported from the OSST system on a regular basis.

- For applicants who are former WT participants, the case information should be updated and the WT Work Registration process should be initiated.
- Work activities assigned during the WT Work Registration process should be recorded in OSST.
- Supportive services received during the WT Work Registration process should be recorded in OSST.
- The provider must record the Up-Front Diversion process in the OSST system. The Up-Front Diversion payment must be recorded under Service Plan on the Skill Development screen as Up-Front Diversion service. An Actual Start Date must be entered to indicate the date of the request for Up-Front Diversion services.
- The *Up-Front Diversion* service must be closed appropriately in OSST by entering an **Actual End Date** when the service is approved or denied. If the applicant receives the service or benefit, the "Reason for Outcome" must be completed.
- At the entry of the service outcome, the financial outcome must be entered. The two options available under the *Financial Outcome* section are, "was the applicant provided with RWB funded Up-Front Diversion as a service," and "was the applicant provided with Up Front Diversion payment of up to \$1000 through the Department of Children and Families on the electronic benefit card (EBT)?" A selection of *yes* or *no* must be selected for each question for the data to be saved.
- If an outcome is entered on an OSST case in "mandatory" status, a warning will appear. Diversions are not applicable to mandatory cases. The individual must be a TCA applicant.
- A *Case Note* must be entered at each phase of the diversion process. A *Case Note* must be entered regarding the reason for qualification (emergency or unexpected need), the supervised job search, the completion of the agreement and Up-Front Diversion forms, as well as Up-Front Diversion payment amount and/or services rendered.

OTHER INFORMATION

- Up-Front Diversion payment and/or services will not count against the client's time limit for receiving TCA.
- Individuals receiving cash payments for Up-Front Diversion are considered as applicants and have no effect on the Welfare Transition Entered Employment Rate.
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- The applicant may withdraw their request to receive an Up-Front Diversion payment anytime before the money is released.
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- Counts as a lump sum asset in the month of receipt for Food Stamps and Medicaid.
- Does not count as income

FORMS

The Up-Front Diversion forms are available on the AWI [Welfare Transition](#) Website.

Diversion Services Emergency Criteria form
Diversion Services Eligibility Screening Tool
Up-Front Diversion Agreement for Payment/Service
Up-Front Diversion Screening Form

AWI WTP-0001
AWI WTP-2073B
AWI-WTP 2075
AWI WTP-2073A