



Benefits Assistance Resource Center

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PLAN FOR ACHIEVING SELF-SUPPORT (PASS)



Introduction

A Plan for Achieving Self Support PASS is a Supplemental Security Income (SSI) work incentive that allows a person with a disability to set aside income and/or resources for a specified period of time to achieve a work goal. For example, a person may set aside income and/or resources for obtaining an education, job coaching or other support services, transportation, job-related items or equipment to start a business. Any person who receives SSI benefits or Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) and could qualify for SSI can have a PASS plan.

Basic Requirements for a PASS

A PASS must

- ♦ Be individualized, specifically designed for the person.
- ♦ Increase the person's self-sufficiency and reduce reliance on SSA benefits.
- ♦ Have a feasible and reasonable work goal that the person is capable of achieving.
- ♦ Include interval steps/milestones.
- ♦ Have a specific time frame for reaching the goal.
- ♦ Show the sources of income/resources to be set aside.
- ♦ Include an explanation of the expenditures to be covered by the set aside income and/or resources.
- ♦ Be in writing, SSA has established form SSA-545 to assist in completing a comprehensive plan.
- ♦ Show how the income/resources to be set aside will be kept clearly and easily identifiable from other funds.
- ♦ Be approved by SSA and periodically reviewed to assure compliance.

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Virginia Commonwealth
University
Rehabilitation Research
& Training Center
on Workplace Supports

Income and/or resources that are set aside in a PASS are not counted as income and resources in determining SSI eligibility. For example, a person whose income is considered too high for SSI eligibility requirements may develop a PASS to maintain or become eligible for SSI while pursuing their work goal. A distinct advantage of a PASS is that it allows a person to direct their own career plan and secure the necessary items/services to reach their work goal.

To qualify for a PASS, a person must:

- ♦ Be under age 65;
- ♦ Meet SSA's satisfaction of disability or blindness;
- ♦ Meet all SSI eligibility criteria with the exception of the income and resources test; and
- ♦ Have earnings, unearned income, deemed income, in-kind support or resources to set aside in the PASS.

Likely Candidate for a PASS

Resources in Excess of Allowable Limits: Individuals who do not have earned or unearned income and have not qualified for SSI in the past due to resources in excess of allowable limits. Establishing a PASS allows individuals to set aside resources to achieve work goals, thus they may qualify for SSI.

Unearned Income Only: Individuals with unearned income only can establish a PASS to exclude the income (all or a part of it) in order to.

Earned Income Only: Individuals who have earned income only can set aside earnings in a PASS and begin receiving SSI cash benefits.

Both Earned and Unearned Income: Individuals who have both earned and unearned income can set aside earnings, unearned income (such as SSDI and railroad retirement) or both to establish SSI eligibility.

Earned Income and Receiving SSI: Individuals who have earned income and are receiving SSI can set aside earnings in a PASS to increase the amount of their SSI checks.

Earned Income (in the future) and Receiving SSI: Individuals who have no income or resources other than SSI, but will be working in the near future can establish a PASS to set aside new earnings starting the first month of employment.

Developing a PASS

A PASS can be developed at any time. Individuals who establish a PASS who are not currently receiving SSI will have to complete the initial eligibility and application process for SSI. For those individuals already receiving SSI, meeting initial eligibility for SSI is not required. It is important to remember that for an individual to be eligible for SSI, they have to meet the income/resources test and also be earning under the Substantial Gainful Activity (SGA) amount. While income and/or resources that are set aside in a PASS are not counted in SSI eligibility determination, an individual's wages that are set aside

in a PASS cannot be deducted from gross wages for SGA determinations. However, a PASS expense can be simultaneously counted as an Impairment Related Work Expense (IRWE) to reduce wages below SGA (see [www.ssa.gov/press office](http://www.ssa.gov/pressoffice)). Only during SSI eligibility determination may the same expense be counted as an IRWE and included in a PASS simultaneously.

Establishing a Business Under a PASS

For individuals with a work goal of self employment, general small business start up costs will be approved for a minimum of at least 18 months, if necessary for business operation. A PASS with a self employment goal must include a detailed business plan, however, the lack of a business plan should not delay an individual's submission of a request for a PASS. The PASS could initially cover any costs associated with the development of a business plan. Assistance in developing a business plan can be obtained from vocational rehabilitation counselors, Small Business Administration personnel, Small Business Development advisors, and/or Chambers of Commerce.

PASS Expenditure

The PASS must show how the money set aside will be spent to achieve the individual's work goal. A listing must include planned expenditures on a monthly basis and how they are connected to the work goal. Expenses must be reasonable and cost estimates for items or services included in the PASS must show how the cost estimate was calculated. When possible, providers of services paid for through the PASS should be indicated. Some examples of possible PASS expenditures include:

- ◆ Equipment, supplies, operating capital and inventory required to start a business;
- ◆ Supported employment services including job development and job coaching;
- ◆ Costs associated with educational or vocational training, including tuition, books, fees, tutoring, counseling, etc.;
- ◆ Additional costs incurred for room and board away from principal residence required to attend educational, employment, trade or business activities;
- ◆ Dues and publications for academic or professional purposes;
- ◆ Attendant care;
- ◆ Child care;
- ◆ Equipment or tools either specific to the individual's condition or designed for general use; e.g. similar to what persons without disabilities would use for work;
- ◆ Uniforms, specialized clothing, safety equipment;

(continued)

- ♦ Least costly alternatives for transportation, including:
 - Public transportation and common carriers,
 - Hire of private or commercial carriers,
 - Assistance with purchase of a private vehicle;
- ♦ Operational access modifications to buildings or vehicles to accommodate disability;
- ♦ Licenses, certifications, and permits necessary for employment.

It is important to note that not all expenses may be allowed at the beginning of the PASS. In some cases, approval of certain goods and services may be contingent based on the successful completion of milestones that justify the expense.

PASS Case Study: Leigh

Leigh completed a BA degree from the University of Texas in 1979. Following undergraduate school, she held a variety of secretarial positions for approximately 14 years. Leigh always dreamed of attending graduate school and eventually work in the health care industry as a Dietician. Her dream was put on hold as she began to experience bouts of severe depression and was eventually diagnosed with bipolar disorder in 1993. After several hospitalizations, medication checks and therapy, Leigh went to state vocational rehabilitation (DVR) in late 2000 to get support to attend graduate school. With financial support from DVR and a loan through a local university, Leigh enrolled in a graduate program to become a registered dietician. Her DVR counselor was very supportive and pleased with her decision to begin this career path.

After attending full time for 2 semesters, Leigh was having a difficult time keeping up with the coursework level that DVR required to keep her in active case status. While her grades were above average, the stress she experienced in attending full time caused her MH symptoms to increase. For fear of becoming sicker, Leigh was looking at the possibility of dropping out of school. Leigh had heard about SSA's PASS program and approached the BPAO staff at the local MH center for assistance in developing a PASS. Utilizing a PASS plan, Leigh could direct her own educational program and set her own schedule to achieve her career goal.

During the initial planning meeting for the PASS in late 2002, Leigh and the BPAO staff person identified:

A feasible occupational goal: To become a Registered Dietician

Timeframes for achieving the goal: January 2004* - December 2007

* Leigh opted to request a 12 month retroactive start date for her PASS if approved as she had been enrolled in graduate school during this time and the retroactive payment would assist her with financial obligations already incurred towards meeting her goal. If the retroactive start date is approved, Leigh could be paid approximately \$6,108 in a lump sum payment that she would use towards her loan balance.

Income/Resources to be set aside:

Leigh receives SSDI in the amount of \$600.00/month. After taking the unearned income exclusion (20.00) Leigh could set aside as much as \$580.00/month x 36 months for a total of \$20,880.00 for her PASS.

Items/Services needed to achieve the goal and their cost:

Transportation to and from the University: Estimate of 260 miles/month at allowable mileage rate reimbursement for 24 months = \$2278.00

Remainder of Tuition (Loan balance and remaining tuition for semesters yet to be completed): \$10,895

Required Internship: \$5,000.00

Certification: \$150.00

Leigh's monthly income during her PASS:

\$600.00	SSDI benefit
- 20.00	Unearned Income Exclusion
\$580.00	Unearned income available for PASS expenses
- 580.00	PASS expenses
.00	Total countable income for SSI calculation
\$579.00	Leigh's SSI benefit (Leigh had no other income/resources and had a medically documented disability, thus was eligible for SSI prior to writing the PASS.

It is important to remember that Leigh is planning to use the lump sum retroactive payment if approved toward the loan balance of \$10,895. The reduced loan balance as well as transportation, internship and certification would then be paid in monthly increments over 24 months; January 2004 - December 2006.

Leigh's monthly living expenses: \$500.00

Rent: \$275.00 -- Utilities: \$55.00 -- Food: \$200.00 -- Phone: \$40.00

Frequently Asked Questions

Who can have a PASS?

Anyone that receives SSI or could be eligible for SSI can have a PASS plan. PASS plans are designed to help individuals set aside income/resources for a specified time period for a work goal. The intent of the PASS program is to assist persons in achieving self sufficiency and reducing their dependency on SSA benefits.

Who may help set up a PASS plan?

Anyone can help set up a PASS plan, including BPAO project personnel, other human service professionals/consultants and advocates, vocational rehabilitation counselors and SSA personnel. SSA PASS Specialists and Employment Support Representatives (ESR) will play a very major role in both the application process and the review process. Both PASS specialists and ESR personnel can be reached via 1-800 phone lines and are located around the country in regional and local SSA offices. Specific locations and contact information can be found through the SSA website at www.ssa.gov/work.

Can students under the age of 18 establish a PASS to assist with the transition process?

Students under age of 18 can establish a PASS if they have earned/unearned income or resources of their own, or have deemed income or resources from an ineligible parent to set aside.

Does an Individual need to be determined eligible for SSI prior to establishing a PASS?

The two processes typically occur simultaneously for persons interested in establishing a PASS that are currently not SSI eligible. These individuals will have to go through the SSA application process to determine eligibility prior to the PASS resulting in the SSI cash benefit being issued. Individual's already receiving SSI will not be required to meet initial SSI eligibility.

Can wages be excluded under a PASS in determining SSI Eligibility??

One of the eligibility criteria for SSI eligibility determination is that the individual is either currently not working or if working, earning under SGA. While income/resources that are set aside in a PASS are not counted in the SSI eligibility determination process, wages that are set aside in the PASS cannot be deducted from gross wages for SGA determination.

How are PASSes and IRWEs different?

The PASS work incentive allows an individual who is receiving SSI or could be found eligible for SSI to set aside income and/or resources for a specified period of time to purchase items and/or services necessary to achieve a work goal. The IRWE work incentive allows individuals to deduct certain impairment related items and/or services that are necessary to maintain employment from their gross earnings on an ongoing basis as needed.

Is it possible to use a PASS and IRWEs at the same time?

It is possible and allowable to have a PASS and also use

IRWEs at the same time for ongoing expenses not included in the PASS. For concurrent beneficiaries, it is also possible to use the exact same expense as a PASS for the purpose of SSI and simultaneously claim it as an IRWE for the purpose of the SSDI, assuming that the expense meets the requirements of the two work incentives. In addition, during the SSI eligibility process, an individual could use an IRWE that is also included as a PASS expense to reduce gross monthly countable income below SGA. Only, during SSI eligibility determination may the same expense be counted as an IRWE and included in the PASS simultaneously.

Would an individual be penalized if they did not reach their work goal at the end of the PASS?

An individual would not be penalized if they did not reach their

work goal at the end of their PASS if:

- ♦ They followed their PASS steps to reach their work goal as established/revised,
- ♦ Spent the set aside income and/or resources as outlined in the PASS,
- ♦ Kept records of the expenditures including receipts, and
- ♦ Actively sought employment at the end of the PASS.

PASS Planning Questionnaire Tool

Developed by: Sandy Hardy, Imagine Enterprises and Debby Murray, Creative Transitions

This form can be used by a Benefits Specialists and Beneficiaries to gather relevant information for use in planning a PASS.

Name: _____

Social Security No.: _____

Date of Birth: _____

Address: _____

City/State/Zip: _____

Phone No.: _____ Fax No.: _____

E-mail Address: _____

Do you receive benefits from Social Security? ___ Yes ___ No

If you answered "YES", do you receive:

SSI ___ Yes ___ No Monthly Benefit: _____

SSDI ___ Yes ___ No Monthly Benefit: _____

Other Income: ___ Yes ___ No

Source: _____

Monthly Amount: _____

Do you receive financial or personal assistance from anyone other than Social Security?

___ Yes ___ No Source: _____

Monthly Amount: _____

Are you working? ___ Yes ___ No Hourly Wage: _____

Monthly Salary: _____

What is your job title? _____

If "NO" when was the last time you worked? _____

Do you have personal expenses related to your disability
to be able to maintain your current job?
(transportation, medication, uniforms, etc.) ___ Yes ___ No

If "YES" what are your expenses and the cost per month?

<u>Personal Expense</u>	<u>Cost Per Month</u>
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

What is your work goal? _____

What help, services, items, or equipment
will you need to be able to achieve
your work goal? _____

What are your monthly living expenses?

Rent/Mortgage: _____

Utilities: _____

Telephone: _____

Food: _____

Clothing: _____

Loans: _____

Medication: _____

Attendant Care: _____

Child Support: _____

Other Expenses: _____

Total Monthly Expenses: _____

Please list your previous work experience:

<u>Job Title</u>	<u>Type of Business</u>	<u>Start Date</u>	<u>End Date</u>
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____

What is your highest educational grade completed?

Did you attend College/Trade School? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If "YES", where/when: _____

Did you receive a degree or certificate? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If "YES", please provide name of degree/certificate program: _____

Have you applied for assistance from your local vocational rehabilitation agency? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If "YES", do you have an active case? ☐ Yes ☐ No

Have you undergone a vocational evaluation? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If "YES", please provide date, location and person performing the vocational evaluation and their contact information:

Date: _____ Location: _____

Vocational Evaluator: _____

Contact Information: _____

What is the name of your local
SSA claims representative: _____

Location: _____

Phone No.: _____

Are you currently in an overpayment status with SSA? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If "YES", please provide overpayment
balance and monthly payback amount: _____

Have you ever established a PASS in the past? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If "YES", please provide dates of PASS and work goal for PASS: _____

Did you complete the PASS? ☐ Yes ☐ No

If "NO", please explain why you were not able to complete the PASS?

What are your disabling conditions?

Describe any limitations you have because of your disability:

Resources

Code of Federal Regulations for Social Security (CFR) References

Regulations No. 16

- ◆ 416.1181 -- What a plan to achieve self-support is.
- ◆ 416.1225 General -- An approved plan for self-support.
- ◆ 416.1226 -- What a plan to achieve self-support is.

Program Operations Manual System (POMS) References

SI 00870.000 PLANS FOR ACHIEVING SELF-SUPPORT FOR BLIND OR DISABLED PEOPLE

Section:	SI 00870.001	Plans for Achieving Self-Support -- Overview
	SI 00870.002	Terms Pertinent to PASS
	SI 00870.003	Applicability of PASS
	SI 00870.004	Helping Set Up a PASS
	SI 00870.005	Referrals to Other Agencies

PASS: The Plan and the Exclusions

SI 00870.006	Elements of a PASS
SI 00870.007	When to Start a PASS
SI 00870.008	Exclusions Under a PASS
SI 00870.010	Related Work Incentive Policies

Implementing and Maintaining a PASS

SI 00870.020	PASS Procedure & mdash; Field Offices
SI 00870.023	Completion of PASS Application Form SSA-545-BK
SI 00870.025	Documenting and Reviewing a PASS & mdash; PASS Expert
SI 00870.026	Business Plans
SI 00870.030	Modification of a PASS
SI 00870.040	Initial PASS Notices
SI 00870.045	Processing PASS Reconsiderations
SI 00870.050	PASS Amendments

Progress Review

SI 00870.055	Monitoring PASS Progress
SI 00870.060	Progress Review Notice

Closing Out a PASS

SI 00870.070	Suspension or Termination of a PASS
SI 00870.080	Resumption of a PASS
SI 00870.100	Exhibits

Websites and Documents

www.ssa.gov/work

SSA Office of Employment Support Programs -- The Work Site
and *Social Security: Working While Disabled...A Guide to Plans for
Achieving Self-Support (PASS)* -- (3/99); (05-11017)

www.passonline.org

This is a great website sponsored by Cornell University that provides specific information about PASS as well as an online tutorial to help Benefits Specialists learn how to develop a PASS.

www.passplan.org

This website, sponsored by the Rural Institute at the University of Montana offers numerous PASS examples and a searchable database of successful Plans for Achieving Self-Support.

PASS Form Online -- www.ssa.gov/online/form.html

Red Book on Employment Support

(A summary guide to employment support for people with disabilities under Social Security Programs.) The Red Book can be obtained by calling toll free at 1 800-772-1213, at local SSA offices and the Office of Employment Support Programs website.

<p>Virginia Commonwealth University's</p>  <p>Benefits Assistance Resource Center</p> <p>Give us a call or e-mail us....We are the answer to your Social Security Work Incentives questions!!!</p> <p>Virginia Commonwealth University Benefits Assistance Resource Center P.O. Box 842011 1314 W. Main St. Richmond, VA 23284-2011 (804) 828-1851 VOICE -- (804) 828-2494 TTY -- (804) 828-2193 FAX http://www.vcu-barc.org</p>	
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