Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)
Welfare Transition (WT) Program Automation

The **Welfare Transition (WT)** program, operated by Florida's 24 Regional Workforce Boards (RWBs), requires individuals receiving TANF Temporary Cash Assistance (TCA) payments to participate in work activities and move toward economic self-sufficiency. The program serves three major groups:

- **Applicants** - individuals who must register for work in order to be eligible for TCA.
- **Mandatory Participants** – individuals who receive TCA are required to participate
- **Transitional Participants** – former TCA recipients who are working but need additional assistance

In light of recent TANF cuts, the Regional Workforce Boards (RWBs) offered suggestions on how the Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO) could assist in decreasing case management loads and still provide effective, quality services. One of the suggestions was to automate the WT work registration process. In addition, the DEO is automating the **Notification of Initial Engagement Requirements**.

Work Registration is required as a condition of eligibility for TCA as established in s. 414.095 (1), Florida Statute which reads *An applicant must meet eligibility requirements of this section before receiving services or temporary cash assistance under this chapter, except that an applicant will be required to register for work and engage in work activities in accordance with s. 445.024, as designated by the Regional Workforce Board and may receive childcare services and support services in conjunction with such requirements.*

Each RWB has the flexibility to define local work registration requirements and processes; however, the following two major elements are included in every region:

1. Orientation or Program Overview; and
2. Intake/Screening for:
    a. Domestic Violence
    b. Medical limitations
    c. Substance Abuse and Mental Health
    d. Up-front Diversion

RWBs have the option to require other activities in addition to the above as part of their local work registration process.

Current Work Registration Process

Customers apply for TCA through DCF's ACCESS system. Once an application is made, DCF interviews the applicant and screens each family for benefits as well as their work participation requirements. If during the interview DCF determines the applicant is required to register for work with the local RWB, they will provide the applicant with the career center's location and instruct them to contact the career center for work registration requirements. Once the applicant contacts the region for

work registration, they may encounter a number of different processes, depending on the area. The customer may complete orientation in a number of ways:

1. Orientation/Program Overview – Orientation may be provided in a number of ways.
    a. Group setting - applicants are given specific dates and times each week to attend established WT informational sessions. Customers are provided information about the program as well as local services.
    b. Online – applicants are given a link to access a presentation about the program and local services.
    c. One-on-one – applicants with extenuating circumstances and cannot attend a group orientation in areas that do not offer an online option may attend a 1:1 session and receive information about the program and local services.

Applicants are usually notified of their program Opportunities and Obligations (O & O) during the program overview portion of the process. They sign a paper copy of the form acknowledging that they have read and understand the O & O, which is retained in the case file.

2. Intake/Screening – An Intake/Screening form may be delivered in many ways locally. Some regions may require that applicants complete this form while they are attending an orientation session, may be asked to return to complete the screening after orientation or may complete an intake using a regionally developed online system.

Automated Work Registration

Customers will continue to apply for TCA through DCF's ACCESS system. Once an application is made, DCF interviews the applicant and screens each family for benefits as well as their work participation requirements. If during the interview DCF determines the applicant is required to register for work with the local RWB, they will provide the applicant with instructions on how to access the One Stop Service Tracking (OSST) system if they have access to a computer or provide them with information on the nearest one-stop career center.

The Automated Work Registration will allow an applicant to log into OSST and complete work registration requirements online. The following steps/functions have been automated:

The Notification of program Opportunities and Obligations (O & O) is currently provided to applicants via a paper form. The automated work registration system will allow the applicant to review an on-line version of form that describes the opportunities available to them and program expectations. The customer then will have to make the decision to either proceed with the work registration process or decline to complete the work registration process. If the customer declines to complete Work Registration, DEO will hold on to the record for 10 days and inform the applicant that they may come back during that time if they change their minds. If the applicant fails to work register during the designated time, a record indicating that the customer "***Declined***" will be automatically reported to DCF. Once this is received, DCF will move forward with a decision on the applicant's case. If the customer accepts the O & O, they will move forward to the Orientation or Program Overview which will provide details about program requirements.

1. The Orientation/Program Overview will provide the customer with more information about the WT program. Regional Workforce Boards can either use the generic general orientation prepared by DEO which will contain general program information and requirements, or upload their own

locally developed customized program overview. After completing the orientation, the customer will be required to complete an on-line screening.

2. The Intake/Screening or Needs Assessment replaces the local intake/screening and will include a screening of the needs and/or barriers that the applicant may need help resolving in order to participate in the program or find employment. The Needs Assessment will include a screening of:
    a. Domestic Violence;
    b. Medical limitations/Caring for a Disabled Family Member in the home;
    c. Substance Abuse and Mental Health; and
    d. Up-front Diversion.

Applicants who identify ***Domestic Violence and Substance Abuse and Mental Health*** issues will be provided information for services in their area via an interactive map that will be displayed after completing the Intake/Screening. The map will provide information about Domestic Violence and Counseling services in their area along with phone numbers and contact names, where available.

Applicants who identify that they have a ***Medical Limitation or are Caring for a Disabled Family Member*** will be given the opportunity to print out a form to have completed by their physician and provide to the local Career Center. If the applicant identifies a medical limitation, they will be instructed to hold onto the documentation until DCF has made a decision on their case. If approved for TCA, the applicant will need to provide the documentation to the Career Center case manager. If the applicant identifies that they are Caring for a Disabled Family in the home, they will be instructed to immediately provide this information to the Career Center and DCF to be excused/exempted from participation in the work program.

Applicants whose screening results appear to make them a candidate for ***Up-front Diversion*** consideration in lieu of on-going cash assistance will be immediately directed to the Career Center to meet with a case manager. The applicant will be informed of the information they need to take with them in order to better facilitate a decision. If the RWB recommends approval of the UFD, the system will report an approval code to DCF to inform that they should stop processing the case for on-going cash assistance and proceed with approving the recommended UFD amount based on documentation sent by the workforce board.

Reporting Work Registration Outcomes

Currently, work registration outcomes are reported in a number of ways:

1. RWB staff scans/faxes DCF Work Registration Form 2097 to DCF;
2. Applicant scans/faxes DCF Work Registration Form 2097 to DCF;
3. RWB staff sends mainframe mail message in the FLORIDA system to the DCF case manager;
4. RWB staff emails DCF case manager; or
5. RWB staff enters a case note into the FLORIDA system.

All Work Registration outcomes in the new automated system will be automatically reported to DCF via the system interface between OSST and FLORIDA. This will eliminate the need to scan, fax, and email the Work Registration form or rely on case notes in FLORIDA to report that the applicant completed the work registration requirement. A region that requires applicants to complete additional work registration activities (outside of the OSST system) must ensure that the applicant can complete all required steps within 10 days. The RWB will need to establish local procedures to track and document any additional

work registration activity. Upon completion of all required activities, case managers will need to enter the appropriate work registration code in the system to notify DCF that the applicant has satisfied the region's work registration requirements.

1. What if the process is not completed within 10 days?

The system allows an applicant a total of 10 days from the date the applicant is referred to the workforce system to complete the work registration process. If it is not completed within 10 days, the system will store the record as *incomplete* and restrict customer access. However, Career Center staff may give the applicant access by entering a code in the system. The applicant will then have another 10 days to complete the online process.

Automating Initial Engagement

Currently, applicants who are approved for TCA and required to participate in the WT program are referred back to their local Career Center for program engagement. How customers are engaged once they become mandatory varies by region. With the current process, the initial engagement could range from a few days to two or more weeks. However, 45 CFR 261.11 requires an initial assessment of a recipient's skills, work history and employability within 30 of the date an individual becomes eligible for assistance.

Applicants approved for TCA will be required log back into OSST and complete the required Initial Assessment. Participants will also be required to follow any supplemental instructions mandated by the region as a follow up to the initial assessment. The customer will be able to review the responses to their Intake/Screening assessment done during the work registration process and either confirm that the responses are still true or update as appropriate. They will also be required to enter skills and work history as part of the initial assessment. After they have completed the initial assessment and other locally determined steps, they will be required to meet with a career manager to confirm that all initial engagement activities have been completed in order to be removed from the automated process. Participants will have seven days to complete the Initial Engagement process. If they fail to complete the Initial Engagement process, OSST will initiate a pre-penalty. If the participant does not comply during the 10-day pre penalty period, OSST will automatically request a sanction on the case.

If the participant completes the initial engagement requirements, the case is taken out of the automated process and managed by a case manager thereafter.

2. Why is Initial Assessment included in the Initial Engagement requirement?

Including the Initial Assessment as part of the Initial Engagement process will in reviewing Quality Assurance reports for programmatic monitoring, completing the initial assessment within 30 days of the participant becoming eligible seems to be a consistent finding every year across several regions during each programmatic monitoring. It is DEO's goal to eliminate the instances of this finding and ensure that the Initial Assessment is being done timely as well as eliminate the time it takes a case manager to administer the assessment. The initial assessment record with responses will be stored in OSST.