



North Carolina Department of Health and Human Services Division of Social Services

325 North Salisbury Street • MSC 2408 • Raleigh, North Carolina 27699-2408
Courier # 56-20-25

Michael F. Easley, Governor
Carmen Hooker Odom, Secretary

Sherry S. Bradsher, Director
(919) 733-3055

July 19, 2006

DEAR COUNTY DIRECTORS OF SOCIAL SERVICES

ATTENTION: Work First Program Administrators, Managers, and Supervisors

SUBJECT: Work First Biennial County Planning

The Work First Block Grant planning cycle has come again. Your county agencies should have received a request to make a designation as to whether your agency will operate as Standard or Electing County. **The deadline to return the Standard or Electing County designation form is August 31, 2006.**

North Carolina General Statute 108A.27 and Work First Policy Section 003, *The Planning Process for Work First*, provide instructions on completing the planning process for Work First. The planning process is an important component of Work First and consists of several significant criteria. Those criteria include the selection of county status, the planning committee, the county plan model, public comment, and the primary contact designee. A successful county plan also includes involvement from multiple community partners. This is an opportunity for counties to take full advantage of the localized flexibility structured in the Work First Program. Preparations should begin now in the development of the Work First Block Grant Plans for SFY 2007-2009. The Department encourages counties to be inclusive of other interested parties in the planning process. Current and/or former Work First recipients, employers, child care providers, child welfare staff and others may prove to be valuable resources in the planning process. Engage community citizens in the process as well. The county Work First Block Grant Plans are due to the Division of Social Services **no later than close of business on October 31, 2006.**

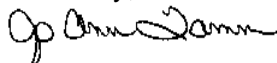
There are some notable changes that need to be highlighted. Those changes include:

- Eliminating the need to provide county plans on floppy discs;
- Adding that one (1) copy of the plan should be emailed to work.first@ncmail.net and 2 hard copies be mailed as in the past;
- The Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program was reauthorized until 2010 through the Deficit Reduction Act (DRA). Further changes will be forthcoming as a result of DRA, as a workgroup has been developed to respond to the requirements of DRA.

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Attached you will find a Work First Planning Outline, Submission Requirements, and timelines for submitting the county plans. Questions regarding this matter should be directed to your Work First Representative or Carla McNeill on the Work First/CPS Policy Team at (919)733-4622.

Sincerely,



Jo Ann Lamm, Chief
Family Support and Child Welfare Services Section

JAL:cem
Attachments

cc: Sherry Bradsher
Sarah Barham
Jane Smith
Family Support and Child Welfare Services Team Leaders
Children's Programs Representatives
Local Business Liaisons
Work First Representatives

FSCWS 45-06

COUNTY WORK FIRST PLAN OUTLINE FOR 2007-2008

2007-2008 Work First County Plans Submission Instructions

I. Format Requirements

Your county plan must be formatted according to the following guidelines:

- 12 point font.
- All white paper.
- All pages one-sided.
- Single spacing for sections containing narrative or bulleted text.
- One inch margins on all sides.
- Submit 2 hard copies and one electronic copy of the complete plan.
- No binders or document covers.
- Staple or clip your documents once, in the upper left corner.
- Page numbers on every page, at the top, including figures, attachments, etc.

II. Submission of plan

Submit one copy in electronic form as a Microsoft Word document by email to Work.First@ncmail.net.

Submit two hard copies **no later than close of business on October 31, 2006** of your complete county plan to:

Sara Anderson Mims, Program Administrator
Work First/CPS Policy and Adoption Indexing and Review Team
Family Support and Child Welfare Services Section
NC Division of Social Services
325 N. Salisbury St.
2408 Mail Service Center
Raleigh, NC 27699-2408

III. Web sites with information to assist with the county planning process

http://www.ncesc.com	N. C. Employment Security Commission
http://sdc.state.nc.us/	State Data Center
http://ssw.unc.edu/workfirst/	County data for Work First
http://www.ncleg.net/Statutes/Statutes.html	N.C. General Statutes
http://www.dhhs.state.nc.us/dss/workfirst	State TANF Plan
http://www.census.gov/	U.S. Census Bureau – homepage
http://www.census.gov/main/www/stat_fed.html	U.S. Census Bureau – statistics
http://www.census.gov/cgi-bin/gazetteer	U.S. Census Bureau – U.S. Gazetteer

COUNTY WORK FIRST PLAN OUTLINE FOR 2007-2008

County Work First Plans must adhere to the following outline and must have a:

- **Cover Sheet** with the name of the county, the date submitted, and the contact person's name, mailing address, telephone, fax, and email address, and
- **Table of Contents** with page numbers.

I. Conditions within the County

Briefly describe the current realities for low-income families in your county and key issues addressed by the plan. What are the most pressing problems? In addition to the narrative, provide relevant supporting documentation. Include current and projected economic trends such as new businesses, plant closings, and job availability. In this section, do not include much raw data, instead, include analysis and cite the sources.

II. Planning Process

A. Planning Committee

List the members of your local planning committee. Include names and affiliations. Membership of the committee must include, but is not limited to, representatives of:

1. the county board of social services,
2. the board of the area mental health authority,
3. the local public health board,
4. the local school system(s),
5. the business community,
6. the board of county commissioners and
7. community-based organizations that are representative of the population to be served.

In addition, it is highly recommended that you include representatives of:

8. the local Community Transportation System,
9. faith based organizations, and
10. recipients of Work First and other types of assistance and services
11. child welfare staff

B. Public Comment

Your plan must include documentation of your public comment process. Describe when and how public comments were received, the length of the comment period, and how the public was notified of the opportunity to comment.

C. Planning Process

Describe the collaboration that led to the plan's development and the proposed process for continued collaboration and coordination to carry out the plan throughout the year. Include a discussion of the committee appointed by the county board of commissioners to identify the needs of the population to be served. How did this committee contribute to the review and development of the county block grant plan to respond to the identified needs? How was other public comment obtained and processed? How will this committee contribute to the county's implementation of the plan?

III. Outcomes and Goals for the County

A. Statewide Work First Goals

The NC Division of Social Services, in consultation with the county department of social services and county board of commissioners, will establish acceptable levels of performance by counties in meeting the following six Work First goals. You will receive additional information regarding county specific goals under separate cover.

1. Employment. Self-sufficiency will be realized primarily through the employment of Work First clients.
2. Meeting Federal Participation Rates. Active participation in federal countable work activities will lead to full time employment.
3. Providing Employment Services. Active participation in intensive employment services for all families is necessary in order to meet the participation rate and to ensure families are served adequately before the end of five years. One measure of success in Work First is the percentage of families who are subject to the work requirement that counties are assisting with job preparation and job placement.
4. Benefit Diversion. The most successful outcome possible is for an applicant to avoid the need to become a recipient.
5. Staying Off Welfare. Efforts to reduce welfare rolls, help adults find jobs, and increase self-sufficiency are undermined when families return to welfare. Families leaving Work First because of a job are tracked to determine if they return to cash assistance.
6. Job Retention. Families who leave Work First for employment and continue to be employed 6 to 12 months after leaving the program show evidence of keeping their income and increased job stability, which impacts a family's well being. This measure will be based on the number of responsible adults that leave Work First Family Assistance for employment who are still employed at 6 and 12 month intervals following termination.

B. County Developed Outcome Goals

[**Electing** Counties: County boards of commissioners are responsible for establishing county outcome and performance goals (108A.27.3)] For **Electing** Counties, describe how you will document your progress toward these goals.

[**Standard** Counties: County departments of social services, in consultation with NC DHHS and the county board of commissioners are responsible for establishing county outcome and performance goals (108A-27.6)] Describe how your county will measure the outcomes for each goal.

IV. Plans to Achieve the Outcomes and Goals

A. Activities

Describe the activities that will be available to participants to enable your program to meet the goals listed above. What agencies or organizations in your community will provide these activities, and where will they take place? Include both public and private resources. How will these activities contribute to meeting the goals? If your county will operate a work supplementation program, describe the program.

B. Supportive Services

Describe the supportive services that will enable individuals to participate in the activities described above. What services will be provided? Who will carry them out? Where will they take place?

V. Administration

A. Authority

Will authority for administration of the Work First Program be delegated to an entity or agency other than the board of county commissioners [Electing counties] or the county department of social services [Standard counties]? If so, name and describe that entity or agency. (Notwithstanding any delegation of duty, the county board of commissioners shall remain accountable for its duties under the Work First Program.)

B. Organization

Describe your agency's organization for the purposes listed below. Describe any collaborative arrangements (such as co-location of staff) you have with other agencies, such as ESC, WIA, JobLink Centers, etc.

1. Intake
2. Emergency Assistance
3. Employability assessment
4. Employment Services
5. Other supportive services
6. Eligibility determination

Are you consolidating functions such as employment services and eligibility?

C. First Stop

Describe the arrangement between your agency and your local ESC regarding First Stop registration. Describe any services for which you are contracting or will contract with ESC to provide. Include the cost of these services.

Your plan must include a copy of your current memorandum of understanding with ESC concerning First Stop registration.

D. Child Care

Describe how your county will prioritize its subsidized child care services.

E. Transportation

Describe **in detail** how the transportation needs of Work First participants will be met through local coordination and collaboration. What arrangements do you have with your local transportation system? What private transportation resources have you developed? Will your agency continue to support the transportation needs of former Work First recipients who are working and no longer Work First eligible? Give an estimate of the amount of funds from your Work First Block Grant that will be allocated for transportation services.

F. Substance Abuse Services

Describe **in detail** your collaboration with the area authority for mental health, developmental disabilities, and substance abuse services to provide assessments and treatment. Do you have a local agreement? What are the conditions of that agreement? Include a description of the duties of your qualified professional in substance abuse.

G. Family Violence Option

Describe your arrangements for providing Family Violence Option waivers (See Work First Manual Section 104D) and your plans for coordinating with domestic violence service agencies in your area to provide services to victims of domestic violence.

H. Maintenance of Effort (MOE)

List the activities, staff, and services that will be funded using Maintenance of Effort (MOE) funds.

I. Child Welfare Services

Give an estimate of how much of your Work First Block Grant you will devote to Child Welfare Services.

VI. Emergency Assistance

Describe your Emergency Assistance policies and procedures. For requirements, see Work First Manual Section 003, VIII.

VII. Services to low income families (under 200% of poverty) .

Describe your policies and procedures for these services, as discussed in Work First Manual Section 003, IX. **As a reminder, providing 200% services is no longer optional.**

VIII. Services to Non-Custodial Parents.

Describe your policies and procedures for these services, as discussed in Work First Manual Section 003, X. If you choose not to provide these optional services, include a statement to that effect.

IX. Exemption from the Work Requirement

Describe your county policy regarding exempting single custodial parents of children under age one from the work requirement. See Work First Manual Section 003, XI. **If you do not specify a policy in your plan, there will be no exemption in your county.**

Optional Plan Elements

The following are optional sections that counties may want to include:

X. Innovative County Strategies

Describe activities or initiatives in your county that are innovative in meeting the goals of the Work First Program. These activities or initiatives may have already been described elsewhere in the plan; however, this is a place to showcase your innovations.

For example: Does your county have an innovative way to address domestic violence or literacy issues? What approach do you find successful in working with long-term recipient families? What is your strategy for serving adults with disabilities?

XI. Special Issues

Describe any special issues or conditions in your county that could affect operation of the Work First Program.

Required For Electing Counties

In addition to the items outlined above, Electing County plans must include the following:

XII. Eligibility Criteria

See Work First Manual Section 003, VII. for the limitations that federal and state law place on eligibility criteria.

Describe in detail the eligibility criteria that will be used in your county. Include all terms and conditions for receiving Work First Program assistance and services, including, at a minimum:

- age limits for children,
- definition of relationships,
- who can apply/be included in the payment,
- payment levels,
- benefit calculation,
- countable income,
- sanctions,
- resource requirements (limit and countable items),
- time limits and extensions,
- rewards, exemptions, and exceptions to requirements,
- Benefit Diversion requirements.

If you plan to follow the state's standard policy for any of these items, include a statement to that effect. (If you become an Electing County, you may accept or reject any standard policy changes that are made

during the period covered by the plan unless such changes are required to comply with federal or state law or regulation.)

If there is any change to eligibility that would exclude individuals currently eligible, please explain.

If your county proposes to change eligibility requirements or benefit levels, describe the reasons for these changes.

Attach a copy of a sample MRA to be used in your county.

XIII. Community Service Programs

Electing counties may choose to require parents or caretakers receiving assistance to participate in community service employment if, after receiving assistance for two months, they are not participating in federally countable activities for enough hours to count toward the participation rate. (The State has opted out of this provision for the Standard Work First Program.)

If you plan to require community service employment, provide a list of the community service programs that will be offered to Work First participants.

XIV. Appeals Process

Describe your appeals process. This must substantially comply with N.C.G.S. 108A-79. Second level appeal hearings must be held in the county rather than by the Department of Health and Human Services. The Board of County Commissioners is ultimately responsible for this process but may delegate it to another entity as provided for in this section of your plan.

XV. Review Prior To Expiration of Time Limits

State Law [GS 108A-27.4(e)(7)] requires Electing county plans to include “the process by which the county will review all Work First caseloads no later than three months prior to expiration of time limitations for receiving cash assistance to: a. Ensure that time limitations on assistance have been computed correctly; b. Ensure that the family is informed in writing about public assistance benefits, including child care, Medicaid, and food stamps, for which the family is eligible even while cash assistance is no longer available; c. Provide for an extension of cash assistance benefits if the family qualifies for an extension; and d. Review family status and assist the family in identifying resources and support the family needs to maintain employment and family stability.”

The Standard procedures for meeting this requirement are described in the Work First Manual, Section 105, III. and Section 105A, IV. Electing plans must include a description of the proposed Electing County procedures or a statement that the county will follow the standard procedures.

XVI. Funding Requirements

Estimate the amount of your county block grant that you will spend for Benefit Diversion, Work First Family Assistance, Work First Services, and your Maintenance of Effort contribution.

Will your county reduce its maintenance of effort to below 100% of 1996-97 budgeted amounts? If so, what is your maintenance of effort (cannot be lower than 90%), and how do you intend to use the savings from the maintenance of effort reduction?

REQUIRED FOR ALL COUNTIES

XVII. Certification

Your County Block Grant Plan must include certification, signed by the Chairman, that it was approved by the County Board of Commissioners.

Work First Block Grant

Planning Timeline

Activity/Task	Date
Counties notified of planning requirements.	July 2006
Counties notify State of desired electing or standard planning status.	August 30, 2006
Acknowledgement of planning status mailed to counties.	Upon receipt
Counties develop plans and receive public comments.	July-Oct. 2006
County comments sought for new State Plan changes.	Fall 2006
County plans for 2007-2008 due to State DSS.	October 31, 2006
County plans reviewed by State staff.	Oct.-Dec. 2006
Recommendation of electing counties submitted to General Assembly.	1/12/07
Draft State Plan scheduled to go out for public comment.	February 2007
Draft State Plan revised to incorporate public comments.	March 2007
State Plan submitted to General Assembly for approval.	April 2007