Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Health and Human Services
Department of Transitional Assistance

CHARLES D. BAKER
Governor

KARYN POLITO
Lieutenant Governor

MARYLOU SUDDERS
Secretary

AMY KERSHAW
Commissioner

Online Guide Transmittal 2021-94
November 26, 2021

To: **Department of Transitional Assistance Staff**

From: **Sarah Stuart, Associate Commissioner for Change Management**

Re: **TAFDC – Temporary Procedures due to COVID-19 for Initial Engagement Period and Work Program Rules**

Overview

In response to the COVID-19 public health crisis, the Department temporarily suspended TAFDC work program requirements to support access to and stabilization of benefits, during the State of Emergency.

The Department is reinstating work program requirements for TAFDC families who do not have an exemption reason. DTA staff are required to explore possible work program exemptions, meets compliance reasons, ensure case accuracy and promote Pathways to Work opportunities. All families are encouraged to connect to a Full Engagement Worker (FEW) to complete a set of Initial Engagement Activities and enroll in a Pathways to Work program. Self Sufficiency Specialists (SSS) will remain the lead staff for engagement activities for young parents applying and on their caseload.

Purpose

The purpose of this Online Guide Transmittal is to advise staff about:

- reinstatement of TAFDC Work Program requirements
- MassHire JobQuest registration as an application requirement for work required clients
- procedures in reviewing and updating TAFDC Work Program related BEACON pages
- expectations for encouraging participation in Pathways to Work and the Initial Engagement Period activities
- expectations for FEWs and SSSs in connecting to families for an Initial Engagement Period
- procedures for completing and tracking the Initial Engagement Period activities
- participation and engagement tracking through co-case management and client touchpoints

Processes Remaining on Hold

The following work program related changes remain in place, pending further program and system changes:

- The Pre-Benefit Job Search (PBJS) Screening and all associated pages will be disabled, and pages will be View-Only
- The Pathways to Self-Sufficiency (PSS) Assessment appointment batch and automated closing remains suspended.
    - The PSS Appointment type is not to be utilized
- The PSS Services Assessment questions in the Strengths and Challenges pages is not to be completed with clients
- Staff must continue to utilize the PSS Workflow to generate referrals and the client's Employment Development Plan (EDP)
- TAFDC Orientation Appointment for in-office sessions are not to be utilized
- BEACON generated work program sanctions

Work Program Requirements for TAFDC Clients

Starting on December 1, 2021, all new TAFDC applications initiated that have a household member subject to work rules must have the appropriate Work Program Required reason status selected on the Work Requirements - TAFDC page. The COVID-19 Exemption Compliance reason will not be available for selection. For clients reapplying for TAFDC who were previously coded with a Compliance reason of COVID-19 Exemption, case managers will need to remove this Compliance reason if it is shown.

For all TAFDC reevaluations initiated after this date, the COVID-19 Exemption work program Compliance reason will no longer be available. Staff must explore the client's ability to engage, other possible work program exemptions or Compliance reason and update the Work Program fields appropriately. If a client states they are able to engage, the Compliance reason must be set to Participation.

No TAFDC application or reevaluation is to be authorized after December 1, 2021 with the Compliance reason of COVID-19 Exemption. Supervisors must ensure the Work Requirement – TAFDC page is accurate prior to case authorization.

Staff must keep in mind that many families may be continuing to face challenges in returning to education, training, or employment relative to the pandemic and must apply an applicable exemption or Compliance reason if needed.

During all TAFDC applications and reevaluations, the case manager must:

- promote DTA's Pathways to Work opportunities
- determine if the client is already engaged in an activity
- review the work rules and state clock for nonexempt clients
    - the extension process and time limits must be discussed with clients who have 22 months or more on their clock but COVID-19 extension procedures remain in place
- confirm with the client that they have opted-in to receiving emails related to Pathways to Work and engagement activities and ensure a valid email address is recorded on the Email page
- refer all clients subject to work rules or Pathways to Work eligible clients interested in engaging in Pathways to Work activities to a FEW

Clients may meet the TAFDC work rules by participating in a Pathways to Work activity or working. All clients enrolled in the Initial Engagement Period will be considered meeting the work rules during that Employment Development Plan (EDP), which ends at Day 60 or upon enrollment in an approved Pathways to Work activity.

Disability and Caring for Disabled Exemption Processes

The Disability Determination process to determine a TAFDC work program exemption remains suspended. At this time, clients who state that they cannot engage in Pathways to Work activities or employment due to disability are to be given the Compliance reason of Temporary Health Problem for a 90 day period based on their verbal self-declaration.

Procedures for verifying an exemption from the work program requirement and time limit due to being essential to care for a child, spouse, or child's other parent with a disability, are returning to pre-COVID procedures. Clients must have the Verification of Caring for the Disabled (TAFDC-4) completed by the person's medical provider or provide other allowable verification.

Heightened Level of Security

Case managers must continue to engage clients with Heightened Level of Security (HLS) with support from the Ombuds and Domestic Violence Units. At this time, TAFDC clients with HLS who are work program required must be given the Compliance reason of Domestic Violence Waiver for 6 months.

Staff must discuss Pathways to Work opportunities with these clients and determine whether they want to be referred to the FEW. While clients assigned to a SSS will have their engagement activities completed by their case manager, the SSS will ensure that they collaborate with the FEW to meet the client's needs. If speaking with a client not in-person, the case manager must advise the client that an in-person appointment will be sent to connect with the FEW from their local office. If the FEW receives a referral for a client with HLS, they must schedule an in-person appointment at which they will discuss Initial Engagement activities and Pathways to Work programs. Both FEWs and SSSs may schedule time with clients who have HLS to meet in-person at provider sites, if that works best for the client. If a client with HLS comes into the office with a Pathways to Work or FEW related needs, they should be registered to speak with the FEW. The FEW will complete as much as possible with the client while they are in the office.

TAFDC Pathways to Work Eligibility

TAFDC Pathways to Work eligible clients include those who are work program required or who are exempt but volunteer to engage in activities.

Clients who receive Supplemental Security Income (SSI), have an undetermined noncitizen status, and non-liable relative caregivers not receiving benefits for themselves may be connected to a FEW but are not eligible for DTA-funded TAFDC Pathways to Work activities. Staff must engage with these families on programs, resources, and supports that meets their unique needs.

Case Manager Responsibilities

Case managers play a vital role in promoting and encouraging participation in Pathways to Work activities. Discussions are to focus on the benefits of connecting to education, training and employment programs and supports needed to be successful. Case managers must confirm the client's email address, ensuring that the best email to reach the client is entered on the Email page and record in the narrative the client's verbal self-declaration to receive Pathways to Work and engagement related emails. For any client who is being referred to the FEW, the case manager must advise the client to expect FEW outreach following case approval. Case managers will continue to collaborate with the FEW on an ongoing basis to support continued engagement and goal progress as they work with the families on their caseload.

Registration with MassHire JobQuest

At application, all clients age 18 and older must be encouraged to register with MassHire JobQuest and informed of the services offered through the MassHire system. MassHire JobQuest is a free online service that allows clients to search jobs and register for Career Center workshops and access employment related resources. Staff will direct clients to the MassHire JobQuest home page, where they can complete a New User Registration or log-in as an existing user.

Clients who are work program required must register or confirm they are already registered with JobQuest as part of their TAFDC application. This is verified by verbal self-declaration from the client. If a client states they are not able to register at the time of application, good cause must be applied. A client's confirmation of registration or good cause for not being able to register at application must be recorded in the narrative.

The FEW will follow up during the Initial Engagement Period to make sure the client is registered, able to log in and is aware of the services available through MassHire.

Case Manager Pathways to Work Engagement Narratives

At both application and reevaluation, a separate narrative specific to Pathways to Work Engagement must be entered for all Pathways to Work eligible clients who are referred to the FEW indicating:

- if they have registered for MassHire Job Quest based on the client's self report
- if they have consented to receive Pathways to Work and engagement-related emails
- additional information that would be helpful for the FEW in receiving a referral (e.g., education/employment history and goals, supports needed, best time to call

SSS Responsibilities

Clients assigned to a SSS will have their case management and engagement activities, including the Initial Engagement Period activities, participation and co-case management with Providers completed primarily by the SSS with support from the FEW as needed.

FEW Responsibilities

Working with case managers and providers, FEWs will continue to be the lead in connecting and supporting clients in education, training, and employment through DTA Pathways to Work. During the Initial Engagement Period, FEWs will establish a strong foundation with referred clients by having meaningful conversations and setting engagement expectations. FEWs will utilize the DTA programs and resources available and connect each family to options that work for them.

Referral to FEW

All eligible clients who are interested in engaging in Pathways to Work or subject to work rules must be referred to the FEW. SSSs will not refer clients in their caseload to the FEW but must work collaboratively if support is needed. Clients must be referred to the FEW after case approval or authorization of a TAFDC reevaluation by an email from the supervisor authorizing the case. Case managers may also email FEWs directly to refer a client when not completing an application or reevaluation. SSSs will collaborate with the FEW to support clients in their caseload when needed.

The FEW will complete a set of Initial Engagement activities and facilitate enrollment in a Pathways to Work activity.

FEW Welcome Call

FEWs will complete a Welcome Call to any client who is referred to them within 5 days to introduce themselves and their role and discuss the Initial Engagement Period activities and Pathways to Work opportunities.

At least three cold call attempts must be made to connect with any referred client and all attempts must be documented in the case narrative.

If contact is made, during the Welcome Call, a plan to complete the Initial Engagement Period activities and the client’s readiness to engage in any education or employment activities is to be discussed. If contact is not made for a client subject to work rules, a telephonic Case Maintenance appointment is to be scheduled 5 days from the last cold call attempt.

Initial Engagement Period & Activities with the FEW/SSS

The Initial Engagement Period activities provide each family with time to explore their options, set goals and connect with the right resources.

The FEW will review any case upon receiving the referral to see if the family is to be enrolled in an Initial Engagement Period. This includes:

- Newly approved TAFDC cases, even if they have been on before if they are not currently connected to a Pathways to Work program;
- Clients referred at Reevaluation who are not currently connected to a Pathways to Work program or working; and
- Clients referred as they are interested in engaging in Pathways to Work or who are newly subject to work rules.

The Initial Engagement Period includes the following:

- Registration and support with MassHire JobQuest, if not completed at application;
- TAFDC Pathways to Work Orientation;
- Stepping Stones to Success tool and conversation;
- Pathways to Work program referral and enrollment and
- Child care referral and other supports.

These activities must be completed in a way that makes sense for each family. FEWs and SSSs will determine at what pace a client may want to work through these activities and/or in what order during the 60-day Initial Engagement Period. For example, a client may complete all activities during the Welcome Call and receive a Pathways to Work referral to enroll with a provider. Another client may have multiple touchpoints with the FEW to hear what is available, discuss Stepping Stones, explore their options, and get connected to a program.

Initial Engagement Period Employment Development Plan (EDP) with the FEW/SSS

For any client who is work program required, an Initial Engagement Period EDP must be completed in BEACON for 60 days once the initial Welcome Call is completed or attempted, even if the client did not answer the phone.

For a client volunteering to engage, an Initial Engagement Period EDP is to be completed for 60 days only if client contact is made, and the client states they would like to engage in Pathways to Work activities.

To enroll a client in this component, the FEW/SSS must:

1. go to the PSS Services workflow in BEACON
2. under ESP Referral Disposition > choose
   Activity: Employment Ready, Resource > Initial Engagement Period and accept the referral
3. go to the ESP Activity Disposition and enter an activity date 60 days from the current date and for 6 hours per day Monday thru Friday
4. approve the activity
5. approve the PSS EDP

FEWs and SSSs will monitor families in their Initial Engagement Period through provided data tools and work through the activities in a way that meets each family's needs.

When a client becomes enrolled in a Pathways to Work activity or becomes employed during the Initial Engagement Period, the EDP must be changed to reflect the new activity in the PSS Services Workflow.

TAFDC Pathways to Work Orientation with FEWs & SSSs

The TAFDC Pathways to Work Orientation will continue to be provided in multiple formats to best support each family's needs. With updated materials, staff must ensure that families are aware of the Pathways to Work opportunities and supports available to them, how to access them and who their local contacts are.

The Orientation can be completed at any point, after the Welcome Call, as one of the Initial Engagement Period activities and must be offered to the client in the different formats based on what their needs are. The TAFDC Pathways to Work Orientation materials and local Pathways flyer are to be shared with clients through email, when possible. Clients may also be directed the Pathways to Work website, have the Orientation content reviewed over the phone or mailed from a local office, if needed.

FEWs and SSSs will determine with the family how they want to complete their Orientation including:

- Individual via telephone or virtual platform
- Group via virtual platform

All work program required clients must be scheduled for an Orientation, even if contact isn't made for the Welcome Call. This is to be scheduled as a telephonic Case Maintenance appointment to complete an individual Orientation when approving their Initial Engagement Period EDP as client contact was not made. If the client does not complete the scheduled Orientation, FEWs/SSSs must be sent a second telephonic appointment 5 days after the missed appointment.

All clients are to receive the same introduction to TAFDC Pathways to Work regardless of how they complete their Orientation, with the group sessions allowing for attendees to learn directly from multiple providers. If an individualized Orientation call does not result in a program referral, or a client wants to explore programs after an individualized Orientation, they are to be referred to the TAO's next group session to learn about the opportunities directly from available programs. For clients who are already enrolled or know what activity they want to enroll in, the ESP activity referral is to be completed at this time.

Each office will facilitate a biweekly virtual TAFDC Pathways to Work Orientation that will share the overview of Pathways to Work opportunities and supports, and ensure participants are connected directly to the local education, training, and employment providers. Each office will determine a set day and time and schedule a recurring virtual meeting. Clients are to be invited to the Virtual Orientation using a TAFDC Pathways to Work Orientation email with the link to access the meeting.

The client's completion of the TAFDC Pathways to Work Orientation, either one-on-one or group, must be recorded by the FEW or SSS in the narrative with any program connections or follow-up action needed. The Orientation completion date must also be recorded on the Work Requirements -TAFDC page.

Stepping Stones to Success

As an Initial Engagement Period activity, a new tool, Stepping Stones to Success has been developed. Stepping Stones to Success is a research-based framework developed by Mathematica Policy Research that helps individuals identify their own motivations and goals. This tool encourages staff to engage in meaningful conversations to support client-driven goal planning.

FEWs and SSSs will use Stepping Stones to Success with families that are referred to them on an ongoing basis, based on the client's goals. This tool is intended to give each client an opportunity to share with their FEW or SSS where they are in different areas of life as it relates to their economic and family well-being. DTA must determine what referrals and resources a client may benefit from and support the client in developing a plan to reach their goals.

Stepping Stones is to be shared with clients through email for use as a visual tool when possible. Staff may also walk through the Stepping Stones content with an individual during a virtual meeting or phone call. The Stepping Stones tool does not need to be filled out or returned to DTA. FEWs and SSSs will revisit the Stepping Stones tool with the client when reviewing goals or at other touchpoints.

Pathways to Work Referrals and Enrollment

FEWs and SSSs are to discuss client's goals and explore what Pathways to Work activity would best fit the individual and family's needs and support their economic mobility path.

When a client has selected a Pathways to Work provider, the FEW or SSS must issue a referral for the program through BEACON. The client's verbal confirmation allows DTA to share the client's information with the provider. Staff must write a detailed narrative and provide the client with the program contact and phone number. **A signed ESP-16 is not required or to be requested.**

The FEW and/or SSS must send a Secure email to the Provider with the client's name, telephone number and any other information that may be helpful (best time to call, client goals, employment/education history, etc.) and copy their supervisor.

The Provider will confirm enrollment via email or phone with the FEW or SSS who will complete the Employment Development Plan (EDP). Once the EDP is completed, a service authorization for DTA contracted providers will be generated. The service authorization is to be attached to an email to the Provider. If a client is participating in an activity that is not DTA contracted, they may confirm enrollment through a letter or email from the program, course schedule, or other verification of their enrollment. FEW and/or SSS follow-up must be completed with the Provider and client to confirm the client's enrollment in the program within 15 days of the referral date. If a referred client is not enrolled in the activity the FEW must follow-up to determine if another activity is a better fit or if additional support is needed.

Participation & Engagement Tracking

DTA will no longer require ESP Participation and Attendance Record (ESP-7/ESP7-B) forms to track monthly participation in DTA Pathways to Work activities, with the exception of young parents under age 20 with a school requirement. FEWs and SSSs will collaborate with DTA Pathways to Work Providers and complete monthly client touchpoints to confirm monthly engagement in activities.

Initial Engagement Period Tracking
During the Initial Engagement Period, all clients enrolled in that activity must have participation hours entered for those 60 days while the FEW or SSS work intentionally with that family through the activities. For all clients enrolled in the Initial Engagement Period activity, the FEW or SSS must enter 6 hours of participation per day, Monday thru Friday in the ESP Participation Workflow. Once the participation hours are entered, click the Calculate button and Save.

Pathways to Work – Contracted and Funded Providers
DTA's contracted and funded providers will complete a template provided by DTA to confirm clients who are enrolled in their program and indicate those who are engaged. This spreadsheet will serve as verification of the month's participation and will be used by FEWs and SSSs to enter ESP participation hours in the client's Electronic Case File (ECF).

- This verification will be returned to local office management, FEWs and SSSs by the 10th of each month through Secure email.

FEWs and SSSs must reconcile each funded provider's monthly list with the current TAFDC Caseload dashboard and/or BEACON data to ensure accurate EDP information. The monthly participation reports are to be utilized to ensure that clients who are reported as not actively participating in their activity are contacted for reengagement and potential challenges are addressed by DTA. Reengagement efforts must be completed by cold calls, collaboration with providers and/or scheduled telephonic Case Maintenance appointment. All reengagement efforts must be documented in the narrative.

Pathways to Work – Non-funded Providers
For clients enrolled in a Pathways to Work activity that is not DTA-funded, monthly participation is to be confirmed by DTA through a client or program touchpoint. The TAFDC Caseload Dashboard is to be utilized to view all families active in an activity and to facilitate contact.

FEWs and SSSs are to make monthly contact with all clients who are engaged in non-funded activities. Monthly engagement is preferred through phone/email contact with the client. A client's monthly engagement may also be confirmed through phone/email with the program staff, a letter received from the program or course schedule, transcript, or certificate.

When setting up a client's EDP for their Pathways to Work activity, DTA and the client should set an expectation that there will be a monthly touchpoint which is required for those subject to work rules. When making monthly contact, the FEW or SSS are to send an appointment for next month's touchpoint.

If the FEW or SSS has been unable to make contact with a client participating with a non-funded provider and needs be reengaged, efforts must be completed by cold calls or scheduled telephonic Case Maintenance appointment. All reengagement efforts must be documented in the narrative.

Young Parents under 20 with School Requirement

Parents under the age of 20 who must meet the education requirement are required to attend school full-time. For these clients, their attendance will continue to be verified on an ESP Participation and Attendance Record (ESP-7) form monthly.

SSSs are responsible for collecting this information monthly, by emailing the forms to the Provider or supporting the client to have the program/school complete the form or submit other documentation of attendance by the 10th of each month.

Work Program Reengagement

FEWs and SSSs must ensure that TAFDC clients who must meet the work rules are aware of Pathways to Work opportunities and supports as part of their career planning and economic stability goals.

By continuing to use the data tools provided and BEACON, FEWs and SSSs are required to review TAFDC client cases subject to work rules and determine if:

- all Initial Engagement Period activities were completed or attempted,
- Orientation completion has been documented;
    - if not completed, two Orientation appointments are to have been scheduled
- the client has been referred to or enrolled in a Pathways to Work activity
- the client has been actively engaged in an activity and participation hours have been entered
- a monthly contact has been completed or attempted for those not with a funded/contracted provider
- they are working
- there is any additional information known that may have made engagement difficult (e.g. domestic violence, housing instability, ADA accommodations needed

If a client has not enrolled in a program they were referred to or disengaged from a program, the FEW and/or SSS must work with the client to determine if support is needed in enrolling, reengaging in their current activity or if there are any additional challenges.to engaging. If a challenge is identified, the FEW or SSS are to work with the client to determine any supports needed and next steps.

Obsolete Online Guide Transmittals

Online Guide Transmittal 2020-59: TAFDC - Virtual Engagement Strategies for Employment and Training Activities.

Questions

If you have any policy or procedural questions, after conferring with the appropriate TAO personnel, please have your Systems Information Specialists or TAO management email them to DTA.Procedural Issues.

Systems issues should be directed to the Systems Support Help Desk.