

**104 – WORK FIRST CASH ASSISTANCE APPLICATION PROCESS AND PROCEDURES**

The agency shall require an application, signed under a penalty of perjury, by the applicant or the applicant’s spouse, if the applicant is incompetent or incapacitated. If the applicant household is not a good candidate for or has declined Benefit Diversion, proceed with determining eligibility for Work First Cash Assistance. The case manager must ask if any individuals in the household would like to apply for any additional benefits such as Medicaid or Food and Nutrition Services. Document the response(s) and refer for services, if appropriate.

**I. APPLICATION REQUIREMENTS**

**A. The Application**

Everyone who wishes to apply must be given the opportunity to do so on the same day they visit or contact the agency. Each applicant must be screened promptly to ensure timeliness. The applicant must sign an application on the day they appear at the local county agency. Applicants have the option to do a telephone interview and provide a telephonic signature. An application for Work First Cash Assistance may be submitted to the local Social/Human Services agency either face-to-face, by telephone, mail, ePASS, fax, or drop-off

The Work First Cash Assistance Application and Recertification Workbook (DSS-8228) and the NC FAST Intelligent Evidence Gathering (IEG) are designed to capture the required program eligibility factors, populate the Evidence Dashboard, and store the application date. The application date must be system generated to ensure case processing timelines are met and for the correct issuance of benefits. The date of application is the date the DSS-8228 and/or IEG is signed by the applicant, or their spouse, and is received in the agency. An application is not complete until an interview is conducted.

**B. Acceptance of an Application**

The applicant, or their spouse, must apply for Work First in the county in which the household resides and the applicant must be a resident of North Carolina. Applicants are not required to complete applications in the office nor have face-to-face interviews. This includes applications for short-term services such as Benefit Diversion, Emergency Assistance and Work First Services for low-income families at or below 200% of poverty. If an application is received, by any method, and the applicant cannot be reached by phone, send a DSS-8146 including a date and time for an interview. Applicants who contact the agency by phone wanting to apply should be interviewed at that time and complete the application with a telephonic signature. If verification is needed send a DSS-8146 requesting necessary verifications. The date of application is determined as the earlier of the two items below:

1. The date the interview occurs if this is the same date the application is signed; or
2. The date the signed application is received in the WF office prior to the date of the interview application. If received during non-business hours the date received will be the next business day, i.e., applications received via the ePass portal.

#### Registration of the Application in NC FAST

When the DSS-8228 is received by either mail, fax or drop off, the local agency must register the application within three (3) workdays from the time the signed application was received. An application is registered by keying and submitting the Intelligent Evidence Gathering (IEG) in NC FAST. The NC FAST IEG is designed to capture the required program eligibility factors, populate the Evidence Dashboard, and store the application date. Applications must contain at a minimum the applicant's name, address, and signature.

#### **C. The Application Interview:**

The initial application interview consists of responses by the applicant for the DSS-8228 or the NC FAST IEG script. If an application interview cannot be completed in its entirety, for whatever reason, the case manager must generate an Application PDF with limited information. At minimum, the case manager must complete the first page of the IEG and submit it in NC FAST. The resulting document will protect the application date. **Should the application be received via ePASS the case manager must complete, a minimum, of the first three pages of the DSS – 8228 to determine if basic eligibility requirements are met.**

**NOTE: If an ePass application results in a withdrawal, the first three pages of the DSS-8228 must be completed and uploaded to NC FAST. If the application results in an approval or denial, the entire DSS-8228 must be completed and uploaded into NC FAST, as this constitutes a full eligibility determination.**

#### Application Procedure for Telephone Interviews:

When an applicant contacts the local Social/Human Services agency, the case manager must conduct a telephone interview with the applicant to complete the DSS-8228 and/or NC FAST IEG. Case managers must document the telephonic signature in the income support case details. All applicants have the option to provide a telephonic signature by phone. All Work First forms may be signed via telephonic signature. An applicant must speak directly with a case manager to complete a telephonic application. The case manager will summarize the information to which the household attests and allows a verbal signature. The documentation must be included in a case note in NC FAST to demonstrate that the applicant has signed the application. Document "Telephone Signature" in the Income Support Application

Case Details Notes. The documentation in NC FAST must include the applicant's name, date, time, telephone interview and the applicant's response to indicate agreement to this verbal attestation of signature over the phone. A voicemail message requesting assistance is not an application for cash assistance. Applicants must meet all eligibility requirements for ongoing Work First cash assistance or short-term benefits and services.

Application Procedure for Face-to-Face interviews:

A face-to-face interview can be in-person or any virtual platform which includes video capability and allows the case manager to have a face-to-face conversation with the client. (This can include but is not limited to Zoom, Microsoft Teams, FaceTime, etc.) The case manager's documentation should clearly outline the platform being used.

Exceptions to the applicant's right to a same day interview are:

1. The individual arrives at the local agency within an hour of the close of business and there is insufficient time for staff to conduct the interview.
2. The individual voluntarily leaves the agency before the interview, without informing the reception staff.
3. The individual voluntarily makes a request for an appointment for another day.
  - a. When an interview appointment is requested or required, discuss with the applicant, and schedule a mutually agreed upon appointment for the interview. When possible, the appointment should be scheduled for the next workday.
  - b. The agency must:
    - 1 Have the individual sign the DSS - 8228 or abbreviated Application PDF generated in NC FAST. At minimum, the application form must contain the applicant's name, address, and signature.
    - 2 Explain the date of application is protected when the application is signed.
    - 3 Explain an eligibility decision cannot be made until an interview is completed; and
    - 4 Document the reason for the appointment.

**D. Use the DSS-8228 to:**

Add an Application to an Existing Income Support Case

If the applicant currently exists in NC FAST and is not applying as a separate household, this is considered a reapplication. The case manager must complete a DSS-8228 with the applicant **Each section of the** DSS-8228 must be completed for all Cash Assistance applications. The DSS-8228 **must** be used to prevent County responsible overpayments and reduce eligibility errors.

1. Once the DSS-8228 and/or the IEG is completed and signed, submit the one-page application. Review the information with the applicant and obtain their signature.
2. Provide the applicant with the DSS-8146A for any pending information.

3. The case manager will use the information on the signed DSS-8228 and/or the IEG to manage the Evidence Dashboard.

**Add a Person to an Application**

1. The case manager may use the DSS-8228 to assist with managing the Evidence Dashboard for person(s) being added to an existing application, but it is not mandatory.
2. The case manager must ensure that all eligibility factors are met, documented **and uploaded** to the case record.
3. Provide the household with the DSS-8146A for any pending information.

**E. Administrative Actions**

The following administrative actions do not require a new Application PDF:

1. Denying an application taken in error. This includes actions to correct an incorrect date of application or incorrect application type.
2. Reopening a case due to a state or local appeal decision.
3. Reopening a case terminated in error.
4. A reapplication when the original decision to deny was due to an incorrect eligibility decision.

**F. Eligibility Requirements**

The applicant and the case manager must discuss personal responsibility requirements. The applicable household members must sign the Mutual Responsibility Agreement-Core Requirements. (See Work First Section 103, Personal Responsibility). The additional eligibility requirements to be assessed are:

1. Individual Criminal Violations
2. Substance Use Screening/Testing, if applicable
3. Family Violence Option
4. State and Federal Time Limits
5. Family Cap
6. Minor Parent Rules
7. Residency
8. Age Rule for the Children (age 17 or younger at application)
9. Social Security Enumeration
10. Citizenship / Qualified Immigrant Status
11. Identity
12. Kinship and Living With
13. Income
14. Resources

**G. Who May Apply for Work First Cash Assistance**

There are certain rules that apply regarding who in the family must apply and who may choose to apply, as well as whose income and resources must be counted. The basic rules must be applied when evaluating whether the family is eligible to receive

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Work First cash assistance. Do not request citizenship or immigration status for individuals who are not applying for assistance.

**Note: Work First Cash Assistance does not permit the use of an Authorized Representative; therefore, authorized representative forms are not applicable.**

1. Biological or adoptive parents and stepparents may apply for assistance for children and must be included in the payment for the family, unless they are ineligible, or disqualified from the program. (See Section WF 112, Kinship/Living with Requirement). Certain other relatives may apply for assistance on the child/children's behalf but cannot be included in the payment for the family. (See WF Section 112, Kinship/Living with Requirement). Non-relatives may apply for assistance on behalf of a child/children if they have legal custody or legal guardianship of the child. These adults cannot be included in the payment for the family. (See Section WF 112, Kinship/Living with Requirement). Legal custody or legal guardianship can only be established by a court document signed by a Judge or other Officer of the Court. A notarized statement is not sufficient.
2. Work First cash assistance is not provided to pregnant women unless they have other eligible children in the home and meet all other eligibility requirements.

Note: Kinship must be verified at application and when someone is added to the income support case. Living with requirements must be verified at application and recertification.

#### **H. The Assistance Unit**

The assistance unit includes all individuals that live in the home who will receive the benefit. This may include individuals who are temporarily absent from the home. All required members of the applicant household are included on the application. NC FAST rules determine which family members are included or not included in the assistance unit based on the entered evidence. This is shown on the Household tab of the Cash Assistance Decision.

1. The following individuals are required to be included in the Work First unit if they live in the home.
  - a. Children: All minor siblings, half siblings, and stepsiblings. (This includes a child who is subject to the family cap.)  
Note: Siblings can be separated for non-parent caregiver applications. If kinship cannot be established for one child to the case head, the case head can receive assistance for the children for which kinship can be verified. Non-parent Caregivers have the option to include half siblings living in the same household when unearned income is received for one of the half-siblings and is not intended for both siblings – see Work First Policy Section 114 for income guidelines.

Example: A grandmother is caring for her two grandchildren who are half-siblings. The children share the same father but have different mothers. One of the children receives SSA survivor benefits from their mother which is intended only for this child and not the half-sibling. The grandmother has the choice to include, or exclude, this child from the Work First case. If the grandmother includes the child, the unearned income will be counted as outlined in WF Section 114.

This exception **ONLY** applies to non-parent care givers. All parents (birth and adoptive) and stepparents of a child who are required to be included.

1. A minor parent is considered a child and cannot be case head/payee for a cash assistance case. (See WF Section 107, Minor Parent Rules)
  2. If both the adoptive parent and birth parent live in the home with the child, only the adoptive parent can be included.
  3. When two parents have a mutual child (ren) the entire family is considered one assistance unit. Parents with a mutual child living in the same household cannot receive in separate cases.
2. The following individuals may be included if they choose to apply and meet the requirements.
- a. A parent (birth, adoptive or stepparent) may be included when the child receives Supplemental Security Income (SSI) or adoption assistance. This could result in an assistance unit with only the adult and no children.  
NOTE: Adults ineligible due to citizenship are not eligible to receive WF Cash Assistance in an adult only case.
  - b. Children other than siblings, stepsiblings and half-siblings may be included when they meet the Kinship Requirement (See WF Section 112, Kinship/Living with Requirement). However, if a child has countable income discuss with the applicant the impact that the child's income will have on the cash assistance payment.
3. The following individuals will be excluded from the assistance unit by NC FAST:
- a. An adult relative caretaker (other than a parent or stepparent)
  - b. Children receiving foster care or IV-E funded adoption assistance payments.
  - c. Extended Foster Care recipients aged 18-21
  - d. Incarcerated or institutionalized individuals.
  - e. Individuals who do not meet the Citizenship/Qualified Immigrant rule. (See WF Section 111, Citizenship/Immigrant Rules)

- f. Any child who does not meet the Kinship/ Living with Requirement, with respect to an adult in the household. (See WF Section 112, Kinship/Living with Requirement).
  - g. Parents who fail to cooperate with child support services.
  - h. Individuals disqualified due to confirmed positive substance use test. (See WF Section 104B, Substance Use/Mental Health Initiative)
  - i. SSI recipient (parent or child).
4. When both a parent and a legal custodian or guardian live in the home with a child, only the individual providing the child's day-to day care may apply for and receive Work First Cash Assistance for the child. The child's parent must be included in the assistance unit, and child support enforcement must be pursued. The parent's income is counted in the eligibility determination. In addition, the parent must sign an MRA-B/Outcome Plan and is expected to meet work participation requirements, unless they qualify for an exemption under the definition of a Work Eligible Individual (see Work First Policy Section 103).

Situation 1: A grandmother has legal custody of her grandchild and provides the child's day-to-day care. The child's mother resides in the same household. The grandmother may apply for Work First Cash Assistance as a non-parent caretaker. The mother must be included in the assistance unit as the parent. The grandmother must complete a child support referral for the absent father. The grandmother will be designated as the case head and the nominee for the payment.

Situation 2: A grandmother has legal custody of her grandchild, however, the child's mother lives in the home and provides the day-to-day care of the child. The mother of the child may apply for Work First Cash Assistance, and the case would follow normal Work First Benefit policy. See Work First Policy Section 119.

### **I. The Budget Unit**

The Budget Unit includes everyone in the assistance unit plus any other individuals that live in the home who are financially responsible for any assistance unit members. The following are included in the budget unit, and their income is included in the payment calculation:

- 1. A parent or stepparent who does not meet the citizenship/qualified immigrant rule. The parent or stepparent is not required to provide or apply for a Social Security Number. (See Section WF 111, Citizenship/Immigrant Rules)
- 2. A child when the parent/caretaker fails to apply for the child's social security number.
- 3. Disqualified parent(s).

Non-assistance unit members, who are included in the budget unit, are still required to provide information to determine eligibility, such as income, resources, etc. Non-applicant budget unit members are not required to provide a social security number, immigration status or citizenship status.

**J. Rights and Responsibilities**

1. Explain the Recipient's Rights and Responsibilities (NC FAST-20009). The case manager and the applicant must sign the NC FAST-20009.
2. Explain to each applicant that they have the following rights.
  - a. Apply for and receive assistance, if eligible. If the application is denied, they may reapply at any time.
  - b. Have all information provided to the agency kept in confidence and remain private unless required by law. Be advised that information provided to this agency may be stored in a computer database.
  - c. Have an interpreter or translator service at no cost to the applicant when communicating with the agency.
  - d. Get help in completing an application and/or help getting the information needed to determine eligibility.
  - e. Apply for assistance for new or additional household members at any time.
  - f. Withdraw from applying for or receiving benefits at any time.
  - g. Receive written notice of any information needed to determine your eligibility and the outcome of the application or any changes in the benefits.
  - h. Receive the monthly benefit until notice of termination or until it is withheld by appropriate action.
  - i. Be protected by law against discrimination based on race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age, disability, or political affiliation. The agency follows the standards set by Title VI of the Civil Rights Act.
  - j. Not having a permanent address as long as the applicant plans to stay in North Carolina.
  - k. Ask questions regarding program rules and requirements.
  - l. Register to vote in North Carolina. If you want to register to vote or to update your registration, the agency will provide assistance.
  - m. Use the benefits as you want, as long as it is in the best interest of your family. If the benefits are used incorrectly, someone may be appointed to get and use your benefits on your behalf.
  - n. Request a screening at any time to identify potential disabilities or other barriers that may impact program participation.
  - o. Ask for a hearing from the county department of social services and the state Division of Social Services if:
    1. Your application was denied, and you think the decision was wrong.
    2. You believe your assistance is wrong based on the county's use of State or local regulations.

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3. The county does not take action on your Work First Cash Assistance application within 45 calendar days.
4. Your assistance is changed or stopped, and you think the decision was wrong based on State or local regulations.
3. Explain to each applicant that they have the following responsibilities:
  - a. Assisting the case manager with developing a Mutual Responsibility Agreement-Outcome Plan and that is their responsibility to carry out the agreed upon actions.
  - b. Provide the local agency with information requested by the date due so that eligibility can be determined as soon as possible.
  - c. Apply for other benefits that you are entitled to, such as Social Security, Unemployment Insurance or Veterans Benefits.
  - d. Notify your Work First case manager of any changes in your situation within 10 calendar days.
  - e. If you expect a child to be away from your home for longer than 90 consecutive days, you must report the child's absence within 5 days of this change. If you do not, your cash assistance will be reduced or terminated. This child is no longer eligible for cash assistance unless there is good cause for the absence.
  - f. Notify your Work First case manager immediately if you get more Work First cash assistance than you are supposed to.
  - g. Tell the truth. It is against the law to make false statements or to willfully withhold information. If you do not tell the truth, you can be taken to court and charged with fraud. Everything you tell the local social services agency will be checked by them and, perhaps, by a State or Federal reviewer.
  - h. You cannot use or access the cash benefits on your EBT card in any casino or gambling establishment, liquor store or any establishment that provides adult oriented entertainment.

**K. Verification Requirements and Procedures**

At application, the case manager must verify each condition of eligibility following the policy in this section. For many elements of eligibility, the applicant's statement is acceptable verification, unless questionable. Verification requirements for recertification or change in situation may be different from those at application. For verification requirements at recertification or change in situation, see the manual sections that apply to each eligibility factor.

Do not deny a Work First application for failure to provide information without allowing the applicant or third party at least 12 calendar days to provide the requested information. If the household has not requested extra time to take needed actions or acquire required verifications by the deadline set, the WF application may be denied as early as the day after the deadline set (no sooner than the 13<sup>th</sup> day). As a reasonable accommodation, individuals with disabilities are entitled to additional time

and/or assistance with obtaining needed information. All families should be informed of the rights of individuals with disabilities to receive such assistance.

1. Verifications Using Applicant Statement

The following information may be verified at application by the applicant's statement. If the information is questionable, require third party verification.

Document case record as to why the applicant's statement is unacceptable.

- a. Age: The case manager may accept applicant statement at application but must obtain third-party verification at recertification. (See Section 109, Age Rule for Children.)
- b. School attendance for minor parents.
- c. Resources

2. Third-Party Verifications

The following Work First Cash Assistance elements require third party verification.

- a. Identity
- b. Qualified immigrant status
- c. U.S. Citizenship (for individuals who have declared themselves to be U.S. citizens) Incapacity of a parent or stepparent
- d. Rebuttal for value of resources
- e. Social Security number when the applicant knows the number (non-applicants are not required to provide immigration or citizenship status). **Applicants who have a Social Security Number (SSN) must provide the number at the time of application. The Case Manager must use the Online Verification System (OVS) to access SOLQIS to verify that a "V" (validated) indicator appears next to each family members SSN.**
- f. **Enumeration When the Social Security Number (SSN) Is Unknown or Unavailable – refer to Work First Section 110 – Social Security Number Requirement.**
- g. Felony status of individuals convicted of Class H or I controlled substance felony in North Carolina (in order to include them in the need standard).
- h. Completion of substance use screening and testing, if applicable
- i. Filing for Unemployment Insurance Benefits (UIB), if monetarily eligible and not exempt
- j. Income (earned and unearned)
- k. Verification of questionable statements. See instructions in the appropriate manual section.
- l. Verification of legal custody or guardianship of a non-relative /adult caretaker
- m. Kinship
- n. Residence
- o. **Living With**

- p. Verification of Receipt of Assistance in another State – refer to Work First Policy Section 105.

If not provided at application or recertification, third party verification must be provided at reapplication.

- 3. Verification that a child is living within the home of a specified relative shall be made during each determination of eligibility by:
  - a. a home visit when there is evidence of the child living in the home;
  - b. use of school records;
  - c. statement of a social worker employed by the county department of social services when, following a home visit, the social worker is able to substantiate that the child is living in the home;
  - d. statement from a non-relative having personal knowledge of the child's living with the specified relative (collateral contact);
  - e. two of the following:
    - 1. medical records, including health department records;
    - 2. Social Security Administration or other benefit records;
    - 3. rental records;
    - 4. church, mosque, temple or synagogue records

**Note:** Living With must be verified at both application and recertification. Direct contact with the collateral source is preferred; however, the Verification of Household Composition form (DSS-6961) may be used to document collateral contacts. All verifications must be recorded on the DSS-8228 and in case notes at both application and recertification.

#### 4. Agency Responsible Verifications

The agency is responsible for obtaining any necessary verification that cannot be verified by the applicant's statement when:

- a. There is a fee to the applicant for obtaining the information.
- b. It's available and legally accessible within the agency, including on-line information and information in an other program's records.
  - i. Document in the case file the date agency records were checked for information and whether the needed information was found.
  - ii. If no records exist or are not legally accessible to the Work First case manager, document the case record. Request the applicant provide the information and assist the applicant with obtaining the information, if needed.

#### 5. Procedure for Requesting Information Needed to Determine Eligibility

Always use the DSS-8146A, Notice of Information Needed to Determine Your Eligibility for Work First Cash Assistance, to request information from the applicant.

If no information is required from the applicant, the case manager does not need to give them a DSS-8146A.

Make the initial request for any pending information/verification at the intake/application interview. When information is required beyond the initial interview, make an additional request for information as soon as possible. Allow the applicant or third party 12 calendar days to return the needed information.

Review the DSS-8146A with the applicant. Explain to the applicant that when they are requesting assistance with obtaining needed information, they will need to return the second page of the form or contact the case manager in person or by telephone. If the family requests assistance with obtaining any verification listed on the DSS-8146A, determine the specific information the applicant needs help obtaining and inform the family of the assistance the agency will provide to them. Explain to the applicant that the family will be responsible for all other information.

Agency assistance with specific verifications does not relieve the family of its responsibility to take required actions or to provide other required verifications by the original deadline date. Advise the family the application will be denied if the agency does not establish eligibility by the 45<sup>th</sup> day from the date of application.

Inform the applicant that if they have a disability, they are entitled to assistance in obtaining verifications as a reasonable accommodation. The applicant does not need to receive or be eligible for SSI or other disability benefits to be entitled to a reasonable accommodation.

The case manager must document the case indicating the specific information for which the family is requesting agency assistance and how the agency will provide that assistance.

#### **L. Child Support Cooperation Status at Application**

At application, the case manager must research ACTS cases via the Online Verification System (OVS) to evaluate cooperation with child support services. If the ACTS case has a cooperation status of "N," the case manager must instruct the applicant to contact Child Support Services to establish cooperation. Use the DSS8146A to document the deadline set for compliance, which is 12 calendar days, but do not exceed the 45-day application processing timeframe.

Verify cooperation status in ACTS before disposition of the application. The case manager may approve the application if the ACTS case has a cooperation status of "Y" and all other eligibility requirements are met. If the cooperation status is "N," the case manager must deny the application.

**M. Applications with an Open Sanction**

When there is an existing sanction without an end date, the information is displayed on the Income Support and the Product Delivery screen in NC FAST.

For reapplications without an end date, evaluate whether the person is still out of compliance with the requirement that caused the sanction. End date the sanction evidence if the family’s situation has changed so that the requirement that caused the sanction is no longer applicable.

If the requirement is still applicable, the case manager must discuss the actions the applicant must complete to end the sanction. Use the DSS-8146A to document the deadline set for compliance. Allow the applicant 12 calendar days but do not exceed the 45-day application processing timeframe. At the deadline, the case manager will evaluate whether the individual is still out of compliance with the requirement that caused the sanction. End date the sanction evidence if compliance occurs during the application-processing period. Deny the application if the applicant fails to comply without good cause by the deadline set.

**Example 1**

A child only case was sanctioned for failing to ensure a 17-year-old child attended school. The family comes in to reapply. The 17-year-old is now 18 years of age and is not attending school. The 18-year-old cannot be included in the family unit. All other children are attending school as required. End date the existing sanction and approve the application without a sanction.

**Example 2**

At reapplication, the case manager verifies there is an existing child support sanction without an end date. OVS/ACTS inquiry also displays a noncooperation status for the case for a child in the application. The case manager explains to the applicant how to contact Child Support Services, the requirement to cooperate and gives a deadline for cooperation. At the deadline, the case manager reviews the status in ACTS/OVS and verifies that the applicant is in cooperation. The sanction is end dated, all other eligibility requirements were met, and the application is approved.

**N. Job Quit Penalty**

The Job Quit Penalty must be explained and documented for all work eligible adults at application. The case manager must notify the applicant that if they quit or lose a job without good cause during the application-processing period, after application approval or during the ongoing certification period, the family will be ineligible for Work First cash assistance for a period of three months. The ineligibility period is defined as the month of quit and the next two consecutive months. The household may reapply at any time but is ineligible for assistance during the job quit penalty period.

1. A job quit penalty is applied when an individual:
  - a. Voluntarily quits without good cause (including during the Job Bonus period);

- b. Simply leaves the job unannounced or does not return to work without good cause; or
  - c. Received a warning from the employer about objectional behavior and is subsequently terminated due to the continuance of the behavior.
2. A job quit penalty is not applied when:
- a. Terminating a self-employment enterprise; or
  - b. There is good cause, as defined by the social/human services agency.

There is no cure for the job quit penalty. Once the penalty period begins, it continues for the full three months, even if the individual obtains subsequent employment.

### **O. National Voter Registration Act (NVRA)**

The purpose of the NVRA is to provide more opportunities for people to register to vote. The NVRA requires that individuals, who are U.S. citizens and at least 16 years of age, be offered the opportunity to register to vote or update a voter registration record at application, recertification or when reporting a change to their address.

These individuals must be given a voter registration application form during their visit or mailed a form if the contact was by telephone or email. If the individual asks for assistance in completing the voter registration form, the case manager or another designated agency staff must assist the individual. Staff are required to provide the same level of assistance in the completion of voter registration forms as offered in the completion of agency/program forms. The agency must coordinate with their local board of elections office to ensure the agency maintains sufficient North Carolina voter registration materials to comply with the NVRA.

Agency staff do not determine eligibility of any individual's right to register to vote. The county board of elections office makes that determination. Inform the individual the Board of Elections processes voters registration applications.

Applicant questions concerning voter registration must be directed to the local board of elections office. Each applicant must be informed that registering to vote **or** declining to register to vote will not affect their eligibility for services or benefits. No information relating to a declination to register vote may be used for purposes other than voter registration.

All completed voter registration applications must be submitted to the NC State Board of Elections no later than five business days after accepting the voter registration application. There must be interagency coordination to ensure the appropriate information is submitted to the NC State Board of Elections. This information includes the number of voter registration forms submitted and the number of remote transactions, the method of communication (telephone, email, or U.S. mail) and the transit method (U.S. mail or email).

**P. Signing the Cash Assistance Application**

Inform the applicant that signing the DSS-8228 and/or the Application PDF constitutes a statement on their part that all information provided in applying for Work First Cash Assistance is accurate and true to the best of their knowledge. The applicant's signature via in-person or telephonic on either the DSS- 8228 or the IEG PDF serves as verification for information for which applicant statement is acceptable. When the applicant signs the required forms, ensure the applicant understands their signature indicates that they:

1. have answered the questions truthfully; and
2. understand that willfully providing incorrect information could result in fraud charges; and
3. authorize investigation of eligibility for assistance by the county social/human services agency.

**II. APPLICATION PROCESSING**

Once eligibility factors have been verified, approve, or deny the application. The applicant must receive a notice explaining the case decision and the right to a hearing if the applicant disagrees with the decision. If more information is needed from the applicant, request information using the DSS-8146A (Notice of Information Needed to Determine Your Eligibility for Work First Cash Assistance).

**A. Processing Time Standards**

The time standard for completing and processing an application is 45 calendar days. The 45-day time standard begins the day the IEG is processed. If the 45th calendar day falls on a non-business day process the application on the next business day following the 45<sup>th</sup> calendar day. Applications reopened due to a local or state appeal reversal may extend beyond the normal 45-day time standard.

1. **Registration of the Application in NC FAST**  
Work First Applications must be registered (keyed) into NC FAST within (3) business days from the time the signed application was received. An application is registered by keying and submitting the Intelligent Evidence Gathering (IEG) in NC FAST. Applications must contain at a minimum the applicant's name, address, and signature.
2. **Approvals**  
Processing time ends the date the case is authorized, and the product delivery case is activated in NC FAST. NC FAST will generate and issue a DSS-6244 approval notice based on the action taken on the case. The case manager may send a DSS-8108, Notice of Benefits manually if necessary.

3. Denials

The processing time ends the date the case is denied in NC FAST. NC FAST will generate a DSS-6244 to be sent the next workday, unless overridden by the case manager. If the case manager generates a notice, override the system generated notice and enter the date the case manager mails or gives the notice to the applicant.

**Example:** The case is denied on Friday, the 45th day; the notice is automatically issued on the next workday, Monday, the 48th day. This application was completed in 48 days and, for the purposes of computing the time standards, is overdue. However, if the case manager authorizes the case, overrides the system generated notice and mails a case manager generated notice, the application processing time is calculated as 45 days and meets the time standard.

4. Withdrawals

The processing time for withdrawals ends the date the **system generated DSS-6244 or manual Your Application for Benefits is Being Denied or Withdrawn (DSS-8109)**, is mailed or given to the applicant. **NC FAST will generate and issue a DSS-6244 withdrawal notice based on the action taken on the case. If the case manager generates a notice, override the system generated notice and enter the date the case manager mails or gives the notice to the applicant. The notice must be uploaded to the Income Support Application. Note: A manual DSS-8109 should only be used if the system generated DSS-6244 produced is incorrect.**

5. Screenings and Assessments

**The following screenings and assessments must be entered into NC FAST at application and recertification. Please refer to Work First Sections 117 and 201 and the Job Aid “Completing Cash Assistance/Work First Assessments” for additional information.**

- a. **Substance Abuse (Audit/DAST-10) – Refer to Work First Policy Section 104B**
- b. **Family Violence Option - Refer to Work First Policy Section 104D**
- c. **Learning Needs Screening Tool (LNST)**

**The following screening must be entered into NC FAST within 6 weeks of application for Work First Benefit applicants.**

- d. **The Work First Family Strengths and Needs Assessment**

**B. Special Circumstances During Application Period**

1. Adding a Person to an Existing Application

To add an additional person(s) to a pending Work First cash assistance application, obtain all required information concerning the additional person(s). If the person is not a required family member, the applicant should be informed they are not required to apply for the additional person.

- a. If a required family member moves into the household, send a DSS-8146A to inform the applicant they must apply for that person within 12 calendar days. If the applicant does not apply for the required family member by the 12th calendar day, deny the original pending application. Do not hold the existing application pending for completion of the application for the additional person(s).
- b. If appropriate, develop a new Mutual Responsibility Agreement (s) and Outcome Plan(s). If the new person is an adult, they must also sign the MRA(s). The case payee must sign the Add On application to include the additional person(s).
- c. Use the DSS-8146A to request any additional actions or verifications required and set a deadline of no less than 12 calendar days for the applicant to complete the actions or provide the verifications. If the additional person(s) meets the eligibility requirements, and the first application has been approved, issue an adjusted payment, if appropriate. The payment should be raised based on the number of eligible days, including the date of application. If the first application was approved as an open/shut and the additional person(s) meets the eligibility requirements, do an open/shut approval for the additional person(s). Eligibility for the additional person(s) ends on the same day the first application was terminated. Authorize an additional payment, if appropriate.

If the first application was denied, deny the application for the additional person(s).

**Note:** Additional persons are never added to applications for Benefit Diversion or to ongoing Benefit Diversion cases. To add an additional person to an ongoing case, refer to instructions in Section 202, Changes in Situation.

## 2. Case Transfer During the Application Processing Period

Work First Cash Assistance cases transfer if the applicant moves to another county. The case will not terminate, and the applicant is not required to reapply in the new county of residence.

If the applicant moves to another county before the application is processed, the case manager in the original county must complete processing the application. Once the case is approved, it will transfer to the applicant's new county of residence effective the following month. **Please refer to the job aid "Completing a County Transfer" for more information.**

The case manager in the originating county must use the DSS-8146A to request verification of the address change, household composition, or any additional actions or verifications needed to meet the eligibility requirements. The case manager should set a deadline of 12 calendar days for the applicant to complete the actions or provide the verifications. **If the requested information is not received by the originating county, the case manager must deny the application.**

**Prior to transferring the case in NC FAST, the originating county must enter all work participation hours, issue the initial cash assistance payment, and contact the receiving county. In addition, all initial eligibility documents must be uploaded to NC FAST before the transfer is completed.**

Upon receipt of the case in the new county of residence, the case manager must review the case to ensure the household's continued eligibility for cash assistance. Compliance with the Outcome Plan and appropriateness of scheduled activities must also be reviewed by the case manager, with all work eligible household members. The case manager must revise or create an Outcome Plan that is appropriate for the new county of residence.

### 3. Open/Shut Eligibility Determination

If at any time during the application process it is determined that a family is ineligible for Work First Cash Assistance, determine if the family was eligible for any portion of time covered by the application. If the family is eligible for a portion of the time, contact the family to discuss Benefit Diversion as an alternative to an open/shut disposition. If Benefit Diversion is not appropriate, approve assistance for only the time the family was eligible. If the family is ineligible for one or two months beginning with the date of application but is eligible by the 45th day, approve the application effective with the first month of eligibility. Use the **system generated DSS-6244** to inform the family of the months for which they are ineligible and the reason. **The case manager may send a DSS-8108, Notice of Benefits manually if necessary. If a manual notice is sent, the notice must be uploaded to NC FAST.**

**Example:** Ms. Smith applied for cash assistance on March 5<sup>th</sup>. On April 3<sup>rd</sup>, she calls to report that her spouse returned to the home on April 1<sup>st</sup> and is employed full time. If the spouse's wages make the family ineligible for April, evaluate the family's eligibility for March. If eligibility is established and she does not want to pursue Benefit Diversion, edit the evidence to complete an open/shut for March. The original applicant household would be eligible for March 5<sup>th</sup>-31<sup>st</sup> and would be ineligible effective April 1<sup>st</sup>.

If at any time during the application process the family requests to withdraw the application, explore with the family possible eligibility as an open/shut or Benefit Diversion case, if appropriate. If the family chooses to be evaluated for eligibility for any period beginning with the date of application, do not process as a withdrawal. If the family is eligible, approve as an open/shut or Benefit Diversion case for the specified period only.

**C. Application Approval and Benefit Issuance**

If all required actions have been completed and NC FAST determines the case eligible, the case manager activates the Product Delivery Case and benefits are issued. If all eligibility requirements are met, the payment begins from the date of application. The payment prorates from the date of application; the number of eligible days includes the day of application.

If the family is ineligible for one or two months beginning with the date of application but is eligible by the 45<sup>th</sup> day, approve the application effective the first month all eligibility requirements are met. NC FAST does not prorate any payment except for the month of application.

For Child Only cases, the system will issue the Work First Cash Assistance beginning with the payment effective date.

For Work First Benefits (WFB), the cash assistance payment will be placed on hold. After the case manager determines compliance with the Mutual Responsibility Agreement and the Outcome Plan, the case manager will release the payment.

There are two methods of issuance for the cash assistance payment. The methods are Direct Deposit and Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT). Applicants must be given information about the issuance methods so they can make an informed decision. Give each applicant household the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) flyer and the EBT brochure, which provides information regarding electronic issuance. Assist the applicant, if needed, and establish the case nominee/payee and the correct delivery pattern in NC FAST prior to activating the Product Delivery Case.

**D. Denying an Application**

If all required actions are not complete, verifications not received or all eligibility factors are not met, deny the application no later than the 45<sup>th</sup> day.

If the family does not provide necessary information or perform required actions by the deadline set and does not request additional time or assistance, the case manager may deny the application. The application can be denied as early as the day after the deadline given on the DSS-8146A but no sooner than the 13<sup>th</sup> day. Deny assistance at any time during the application process when:

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1. The applicant refuses or fails to apply for unemployment benefits, when monetarily eligible, or refuses or fails to apply for other benefits, such as Social Security or Veterans' benefits, for which they may be eligible.
2. The agency is unable to locate the applicant and efforts to contact the applicant have failed. Use this reason only when it is impossible to contact the applicant by letter or telephone or mail has been returned by the post office.
  - a. Verify the applicant's address, phone number, and other contact information. Check the address on the reception log or other possible sources, such as the telephone directory, internet, or postal official.
  - b. Document in the case file the details of the attempts to locate the applicant.

Do not deny an application because the applicant does not have a permanent address or is homeless.

3. The applicant refuses or fails to apply for a required family unit member.
4. The applicant refuses or a required adult family member fails to sign a Mutual Responsibility Agreement (either Core Requirements or Plan of Action) or Outcome Plan, if required.
5. Ineligibility has been verified, including situations in which the applicant's statement results in ineligibility.

For income and resources, if a range is given and the midpoint results in ineligibility but the low point does not, make at least one request of the applicant to provide information that is more precise. Document the request and the case action.

#### E. Inquiries

The case manager must complete the NC FAST **DHB-5095** and document the case record as an inquiry if:

1. An applicant contacts the local agency to obtain information about Work First Cash Assistance and then decides not to complete an application,
2. The case manager must have the individual sign the **DHB-5095**. If an individual refuses or is unable to sign the **DHB-5095**, the case manager must document the individual's refusal or inability to sign and mail the individual a copy of the **DHB-5095**. Inquiries received via telephone require a telephonic signature.

#### F. Withdrawals

When an applicant decides after signing the application that they are not interested in Work First Cash Assistance, the case manager must **withdraw the application in NC FAST. A system generated DSS-6244 will be automatically produced. The case manager may send a DSS-8109 manually if necessary and the notice must be uploaded to NC FAST.** Give the applicant the notice and retain a copy for the case record. If the withdrawal request is made by mail or telephone message, attempt to contact the applicant by telephone. Ensure the applicant is provided with correct

information so they may make an informed decision regarding withdrawing or proceeding with the application.

If unable to speak directly with the applicant, send the **system generated DSS-6244 or the manual DSS-8109 if needed**. Remind the applicant they can reapply for cash assistance at any time. When an applicant chooses to withdraw an application, encourage the individual to consider Medicaid, Food and Nutrition Services, and other services that may benefit the family and document the case record.

### **III. DOCUMENTING THE CASE RECORD**

**Agencies must upload case documentation to the Income Support case associated with approved applications. If the application is denied or withdrawn, documentation must be uploaded to the application case. Case managers should upload all required documentation prior to disposing of the application; however, system functionality allows documentation to be uploaded after application disposal, if necessary.** The case manager must ensure the **NC FAST case management system for the State** contains **case notes**, documentation of all eligibility factors, including the applicant's statements, agency requests for information, and third-party verifications.

The applicant's signature and/or telephonic signature serve as verification for information for which applicant statement is acceptable. When the applicant signs the required program forms, ensure the applicant understands their signature indicates they:

1. have answered the questions truthfully; and
2. understands that willfully providing incorrect information could result in fraud charges; and
3. authorize investigation of eligibility for assistance by the county social/human services agency/department.

Verification and documentation of eligibility requirements can be in both electronic and paper format. If the information is in paper format; initial, date stamp or write in ink the date all information is received, including information received at intake **and upload the documentation into NC FAST**. The agency must have the capacity to provide print copies, including electronic documents, upon request.

The placement of case documentation and case notes **into the NC FAST case management system must** be consistent within the program area. Consistency of placement permits both staff and external reviewers (state monitors and auditors) to clearly follow case activity. This minimizes duplication of effort and potential monitoring/audit findings. **All ongoing case documentation must be uploaded and maintained in the NC FAST case management system.**

When documenting a case, particularly sensitive issues (substance use, mental health, domestic violence, and medical needs, etc.), remember others will read the case notes. If

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the information does not relate to eligibility or work participation, do not document in the case record. If related, consider the following guidelines:

1. Include only information based on fact.
2. Do not record staff's assumptions about the applicant and their situation.
3. The issue must be documented as it was stated by the applicant.
4. Observations may be noted, but staff must be thorough and specify exactly what was observed without expressing any assumptions.

If an application is denied or withdrawn and the applicant reapplies within 45 days from the original application date, it is not necessary to document all eligibility factors again. Documentation from the original application may be used to document eligibility at reapplication. The case manager must review the information with the applicant to ensure there have not been any changes to the previously documented information. The case manager must re-verify information that changed from the previous application. If the information has not changed, the case manager must document it in the case notes.