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**WORK FIRST**

**Cash Assistance Application Process and Procedures**

**Change #2-2017**

**June 1, 2017**

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

**Change # 2-2017**

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If the applicant household is ineligible for or has declined Benefit Diversion, proceed with determining eligibility for Work First cash assistance. The case worker must ask if any individuals in the household wish to apply for Medicaid. Document the response(s) and refer for services, if appropriate. Refer the individual(s) to Medicaid at the time of the cash assistance interview. Individuals must complete and sign an application for Medicaid the same day of their request.

**I. APPLICATION PROCEDURES**

**A. The Application PDF**

The initial application interview consists of responses by the applicant to the NC FAST Intelligent Evidence Gathering(IEG) script. The IEG is 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. When the IEG is submitted, the system creates an Application PDF. The resulting document, which includes a signature page, is considered the application for cash assistance.

**B. The Application Interview**

The date of application for Work First cash assistance is the date the applicant requests assistance. If an application interview cannot be completed in its entirety, for whatever reason, the caseworker should generate an Application PDF with limited information. At minimum, the caseworker must complete the first page of the IEG and submit in NC FAST. The resulting document will protect the application date.

The agency must not suggest the applicant make an appointment when the applicant contacts the agency. If the interview does not occur on the same day and a system generated application is created after that date, the date of request must be honored as the application date when entering in NC FAST. 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 or 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 agreeable appointment for the interview. When possible, the appointment should be scheduled for the next workday.

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b. The agency must:

1. Have the individual sign the abbreviated Application PDF. At minimum, the application form must contain the applicant's name and address;
2. Explain the date of application is protected when the application is signed;
3. Explain an eligibility decision cannot be made until a face to face interview is completed and
4. Document the reason for the appointment.

**C. Use of the DSS-8228**

In instances where the caseworker submits an abbreviated IEG or utilizes the one page application, the [DSS-8228, Work First Cash Assistance Application and Review Documentation Workbook](#), is used to support the NC FAST eligibility determination process.

1. At Application

- a. The caseworker must provide the applicant with a return appointment. Use the [DSS 8146A, Notice of Information Needed to Determine Your Eligibility for Work First Cash Assistance](#), to document the appointment date and inform the applicant of the information needed for the scheduled interview.
- b. The caseworker must use the DSS-8228 at the return appointment. Its use will allow the case owner to capture and record all eligibility requirements.

2. Adding an Application to an Existing Income Support Case

If the applicant currently exists in NC FAST system and is not applying as a separate household, this is considered a reapplication. The caseworker must complete a DSS-8228 with the applicant.

- a. Once the DSS-8228 is completed and signed, submit the one-page application. Review the information with the applicant and obtain their signature on the one-page application.
- b. Provide the applicant with the DSS 8146A for any pending information.
- c. The worker will use the information on the signed DSS-8228 to manage the Evidence Dashboard.

3. Adding a Person to an Application

- a. The caseworker 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.

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- b. The caseworker must ensure that all eligibility factors are met and documented within the case record.
- c. Provide the household with the DSS-8146A for any pending information.

**D. 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.

**E. Eligibility Requirements**

The applicant and the caseworker 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

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

There are certain rules that apply as to 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 Work First cash assistance.

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Do not request citizenship, immigration status, and/or social security number for individuals who are not applying for assistance.

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. [\(See Section WF 112, Kinship/Living with Requirement\)](#).
2. Certain other relatives of a child (~~ren~~) may apply for assistance on the child's behalf but cannot be included in the payment for the family. [\(See WF Section 112, Kinship/Living with Requirement\)](#).
3. Non-relatives may apply for assistance on behalf of a child 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.
4. 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/Living with Requirements must be verified at application and review.

**G. 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.)
  - b. All parents (birth and adoptive) and stepparents of a child who is 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 apply, choose to be included, and meet the requirements.

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- a. A parent (birth, adoptive or stepparent) may choose to apply 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.
  - 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 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. Incarcerated or institutionalized individuals.
  - d. Individuals who do not meet the Citizenship/Qualified Immigrant rule. (See WF Section 111, Citizenship/Immigrant Rules)
  - e. 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).
  - f. Parents who fail to cooperate with child support services.
  - g. Individuals disqualified due to confirmed positive substance use test. (See [WF Section 104B](#), Substance Use/Mental Health Initiative)
  - h. SSI recipient (parent or child).

#### **H. 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. Everyone in the assistance unit.
2. 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](#))
3. A child the parent/caretaker fails to apply for the child's social security number.
4. 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.

**I. RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

**Explain to each applicant that they have the following rights.**

1. Apply for and receive assistance, if eligible. If the application is denied, they may reapply at any time.
2. 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.
3. Have an interpreter or translator services at no cost to the applicant/recipient when communicating with the agency.
4. Get help in completing an application and/or help getting the information needed to determine eligibility.
5. Apply for assistance for new or additional household members at any time.
6. Withdraw from applying for or receiving benefits at any time.
7. Receive written notice of any information needed to determine your eligibility and the outcome of the application or any changes in the benefits.
8. Receive the monthly benefit until notice of termination or until it is withheld by appropriate action.
9. 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.
10. Not have a permanent address as long as the applicant/recipient plans to stay in North Carolina.
11. Ask questions regarding program rules and requirements.
12. Register to vote in North Carolina. If you want to register to vote or to update your registration, the agency will provide assistance.
13. 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.
14. Request a screening at any time to identify potential disabilities or other barriers that may impact program participation.
15. Ask for a hearing from the county department of social services and the state Division of Social Services if:
  - a. Your application was denied, and you think the decision was wrong.
  - b. You believe your assistance is wrong based on the county's use of State or local regulations.
  - c. The county does not take action on your Work First Cash Assistance application within 45 calendar days.
  - d. Your assistance is changed or stopped, and you think the decision was wrong based on State or local regulations.

**Explain to each applicant that they have the following responsibilities:**

1. Help your case manager develop a Mutual Responsibility Agreement-Plan of Action. It is also your responsibility to carry out the agreed upon actions.
2. Provide the local agency information requested by the date due so that your eligibility can be determined as soon as possible.

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3. Apply for other benefits that you are entitled to, such as Social Security, Unemployment Insurance or Veterans Benefits.
4. Let your Work First worker know of any changes in your situation within 10 days.
5. If you expect a child to be away from your home longer than 90 consecutive days, you must report the child's absence within 5 days of knowing 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.
6. Let your Work First worker know immediately if you get more Work First cash assistance than you are supposed to.
7. 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.
8. 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.

**J. VERIFICATION REQUIREMENTS and PROCEDURES**

At application, the caseworker 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 at review or change in situation may be different from those at application. For verification requirements at review or change in situation, see the manual sections that apply to each eligibility factor.

There is no specific time frame by which the caseworker must request verifications from an applicant or third party. However, do not deny a Work First application for failure to provide information without allowing the applicant or third party at least twelve 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, Work First may be denied as early as the day after the deadline (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 caseworker may accept applicant statement at application but must obtain third-party verification at review. (See Section 109, Age Rule for Children.)

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- b. School attendance for minor parents.
- c. Kinship (Exception: Third party verification is required for legal custody or legal guardianship.)
- d. Living with a specified relative or legal guardian or custodian
- e. Resources
- f. Social Security number when the applicant knows the number. (Non applicants are not required to provide a social security number, immigration or citizenship status.)

**2. Third Party Verifications**

The following Work First Cash Assistance elements always 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)
- d. Incapacity of a parent or step parent
- e. Rebuttal for value of resources.
- f. Enumeration when the social security number is unknown or the applicant/ family unit member, who is applying for benefits, does not have a social security number
- 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. Residence

Special attention should be given to re-applications in which third party verifications were not obtained at previous application.

**3. 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 Medicaid, Work First, Food and Nutrition Services, and other program's records.



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1. Document in the case file the date agency records were checked for information and whether the needed information was found.
2. If no records exist or are not legally accessible to the Work First worker, document the case record. Request the applicant provide the information and assist the applicant with obtaining the information, if needed.

**4. 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 caseworker does not need to give the 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 the additional request for information as soon as possible. Allow applicant or third party at least twelve calendar days to return the needed information.

Review the DSS-8146A with the applicant. Explain to the applicant, when requesting assistance with obtaining the needed information, return the second page of the form, or contact the caseworker 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 to obtain. Explain 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 provide other required verifications by the original deadline date. Inform the family of the assistance the agency will provide to them. Advise the family the application will be denied if neither the family nor the agency can 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 for a reasonable accommodation.

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

**K. Child Support Cooperation Status at Application**

At application, the caseworker 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 caseworker must instruct the applicant to contact Child Support Services to establish cooperation. Use the DSS-8146A to document the deadline set for compliance, give at least twelve calendar days but do not exceed the 45-day application processing timeframe.

Verify cooperation status in ACTS before disposition of the application. The worker 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 worker must deny the application.

**L. 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 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 caseworker 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 at least twelve calendar days but do not exceed the 45-day application processing timeframe. At the deadline, the caseworker 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 worker verifies there is an existing child support sanction without an end date. OVS/ACTS inquiry also displays a non-cooperation status for the case for a child in the application. The worker explains to

the applicant how to contact Child Support Services, the requirement to cooperate and gives a deadline for cooperation. At the deadline, the worker 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.

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**M.    Job Quit Penalty**

The Job Quit Penalty must be explained and documented for all work eligible adults at application. The caseworker 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.

**N.    NATIONAL VOTER REGISTRATION ACT (NVRA)**

The purpose of the NVRA is to make more opportunities available for people to vote. The NVRA requires 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 caseworker or another designated agency staff must help. Staff are required to provide the same level of assistance in completion of voter registration forms as offered in the completion of other 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.

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Applicant and recipient questions concerning voter registration must be directed to the local board of elections office.

Each applicant or recipient 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).

**O. SIGNING THE CASH ASSISTANCE APPLICATION**

Inform the applicant that signing the Application PDF constitutes a statement on their part that all information provided in applying for Work First is accurate and true to the best of their knowledge.

The applicant's signature on the Application PDF and the DSS-8228 (if utilized) 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 they:

- have answered the questions truthfully; and
- understands that willfully providing incorrect information could result in fraud charges; and
- 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 with the day after the date the application pdf is signed. 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.

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1. Approvals

Processing time ends the date the case is authorized and the product delivery case is activated in NC FAST. A system generated DSS-8108 is produced and mailed to the applicant. If the case worker generates an approval notice, override the system generated notice and enter the date the worker mails or gives the notice to the applicant.

2. Denials

The processing time ends the date the case is denied in NC FAST. NC FAST will generate a DSS-8109 to be sent the next workday, unless overridden by the case worker. If the worker generates a notice, override the system generated notice and enter the date the worker 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 caseworker authorizes the case, overrides the system generated notice and mails a worker generated notice, the application processing time is calculated as 45 days and meets the time standard.

3. Withdrawals

The processing time for withdrawals ends the date the DSS-8109, is mailed or given to the applicant. The caseworker must override the system generated DSS-8109 and create a worker generated notice.

**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 ten calendar days. If the applicant does not apply for the required family member by the tenth calendar day, deny the original pending application. Do not hold the existing application pending for completion of the application for the additional person(s).

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- b. If appropriate, develop new Mutual Responsibility Agreement (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 ten 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 prorated 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 worker in the original county must continue to process the application. Once the case is approved, it will transfer to the participants' new county of residence effective the following month.

The caseworker 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 worker should set a deadline of no less than ten calendar days for the applicant to complete the actions or provide the verifications. The originating county is responsible for keying work participation hours and issuing the cash assistance payment for the month the move occurred prior to transferring the case.

Upon receipt of the case in the new county of residence, the worker must review the case to ensure the household's continued eligibility for cash assistance. Compliance with the Outcome Plan and appropriateness of

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scheduled activities must also be reviewed by the worker, with all work eligible household members. The worker 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 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 Notice of Approval DSS-8108 to inform the family of the months for which they are ineligible and the reason.

**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>. The spouse is employed full time, and their wages makes the family ineligible for April. Evaluate Ms. Smith'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 should be eligible for March 5<sup>th</sup>-31<sup>st</sup>, and would be ineligible April 1<sup>st</sup>, onward.

Any time during the application process the family makes a request to withdraw the application, explore with the family possible eligibility as an open/shut or Benefit Diversion case, if appropriate. If the family wishes 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 only for the specified period.

**C. APPLICATION APPROVAL and BENEFIT ISSUANCE**

If all required actions have been completed and NC FAST determines the case eligible; the case worker 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.

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

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 he/she 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 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.



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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. WITHDRAWALS**

When an applicant decides after signing the application the he/she is not interested in Work First cash assistance, the worker must complete the DSS-8109. 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 DSS-8109. Remind the applicant they can reapply for cash assistance at any time. When an applicant wishes 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. DOCUMENTATING THE CASE RECORD**

The case worker must ensure the case record contains documentation of all eligibility factors, including the applicant's statements, agency requests for information, and third-party verifications.

The applicant's signature on the Application PDF and the DSS-8228, if utilized, serves 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:

- a. have answered the questions truthfully; and
- b. understands that willfully providing incorrect information could result in fraud charges; and
- c. 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. Agencies may opt to scan paper documentation into NC FAST or maintain a paper file. Whichever option is used, the agency must have the capacity to provide print copies, including electronic documents, upon request.

It's strongly suggested that the placement of case documentation and case notes be consistent within the program area. Consistency of placement permits both staff and

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external reviewers (state monitors and auditors) to clearly follow case activity. This minimizes duplication of effort and potential monitoring/audit findings.

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

- a. Include only information based on fact.
- b. Do not record staff's assumptions about the applicant/recipient and their situation.
- c. The issue must be documented as it was stated by the applicant/recipient.
- d. 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 worker must review the information with the applicant to ensure there have not been any changes to the previously documented information. The worker must re-verify information that changed from the previous application. If the information has not changed, the worker must document in the case notes.