

104C - FIRST STOP EMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE

Change #07-2004
July 1, 2004

I. WHAT IS FIRST STOP?

In SL 1997-443, the North Carolina General Assembly enacted the First Stop Employment Assistance Program. It is administered by the Employment Security Commission (ESC) and is established to assist applicants and participants of Work First Family Assistance to become employed.

All Work First adult applicants (except those applying for Benefit Diversion), recipients, re-applicants and individuals requesting inclusion (unless exempt), are required to register with the First Stop Employment Assistance Program at ESC before their application or inclusion request can be approved or their assistance continued. This requirement applies to all counties, regardless of their status as Electing or Standard.

There are also some optional components of the First Stop Program. As part of First Stop, counties may contract with the Employment Security Commission for a continuum of services including job search, job preparedness, and community service. Whether your county chooses to contract for these services is a local decision and must be reflected in a contract between your agencies. This policy does not address the optional services.

Counties have options regarding how the First Stop requirement is implemented locally. **The option your county chooses must be used for all applicants, re-applicants, and recipients in the county.**

NOTE: The term applicant as used in this policy refers to a Work First applicant or re-applicant, an individual applying to be added to a pending application, and an individual requesting inclusion to an on-going case.

II. WHAT ARE THE RULES FOR FIRST STOP REGISTRATION?

A. **For applications:** Unless exempt, all adults included in the Work First Family Assistance application or request for inclusion must be referred to ESC or to the ESC representative for First Stop work registration. In a two-parent family, both parents must complete the First Stop work registration unless they are exempt. (See IV. for exemptions.)

The application/inclusion for Work First Family Assistance can be taken, but not be approved, until everyone required to register with First Stop has done so.

If a standard filing unit individual asking to be included in the on-going case fails to meet the registration requirement, the on-going case must be terminated.

- B. **For active Work First recipients at review:** Unless exempt, at review all adults included in the Work First Family Assistance case must be referred to ESC or to the ESC representative for First Stop work registration unless they are active First Stop registrants in your county. See III., I. below. In a two-parent family, both parents must complete the First Stop work registration unless they are exempt. (See V. for exemptions.)

If at review the non-exempt adult(s) refuses or fails to register with First Stop, the on-going case must be terminated.

- C. ESC will register all non-exempt adults. The registration could result in an immediate job referral.
- D. Any services provided by ESC outside the required registration are not part of the First Stop work registration process and, therefore, are subject to a service contract between your agency and ESC.
- E. The intent of First Stop is to have a face-to-face evaluation by ESC staff to assess job readiness accurately and make appropriate referrals.
- F. **If the Work First Family Assistance application is denied or the case is terminated because individuals in the assistance unit do not complete the First Stop work registration, the family must be evaluated for Medicaid.**

If your county chooses to have non-exempt adults register with ESC before a Work First Family Assistance application is taken, you must take a Medicaid application for the family on the day the applicant inquires about Family Assistance, unless all individuals on the Work First inquiry are active in a Medicaid case or a Medicaid application is inappropriate.

III. DESCRIPTION OF COUNTY OPTIONS FOR APPLICATIONS

Counties have two options regarding the timing of First Stop registration. You may either **(A)** take the application when the applicant appears at your agency, **or (B)** require that the individual register for First Stop before you take the Work First application. If you choose to require First Stop registration before taking the application for Work First **you must take a Medicaid application** on the day the family comes into the agency unless all the individuals requesting assistance are

active in a Medicaid case or a Medicaid inquiry is appropriate. Continue your current application practice for Food Stamp applications. All applications and re-applications in your county must be processed using the same method.

Based on community awareness of the registration requirement, some adults go to ESC before they come to DSS to apply for Work First. In this instance, ESC will register the individual(s). You can verify the registration by viewing the ESC registration screens (See VIII. for verifications.). Applicants registered for First Stop in this manner have met the requirement. Exempt families can *choose* to register for First Stop prior to or after applying for Work First Family Assistance.

A. Option A: Taking an Application at DSS, Then Referring to ESC

1. Continue the current application/inclusion process. Take the Work First Family Assistance application/re-application/inclusion on the date the applicant comes to social services to make an application.
2. Evaluate each adult to determine if he/she is required to complete the First Stop work registration process. (See IV. for exemptions.)
3. Advise the applicant that each non-exempt adult must register with ESC for First Stop before the application/inclusion can be approved.
4. Refer the applicant to a First Stop ESC representative to complete the First Stop work registration process according to the registration procedures established in your county.
5. The applicant or individual asking to be included must complete the First Stop work registration process within a minimum of 10 calendar days after the date of application/inclusion request for Work First Family Assistance. Counties cannot choose a period shorter than 10 calendar days but may give the family longer to register. Be sure to document the deadline date by which registration must be completed.
6. Advise applicants that it is their responsibility to notify their caseworker (prior to the deadline given to register for First Stop) if they are unable to complete the work registration process.
7. If the applicant advises the caseworker that he/she is unable to complete the First Stop work registration process by the deadline, evaluate whether the reason is acceptable. The director or his/her designee must establish acceptable reasons for an allowable delay. There is no acceptable reason for failing to register, only for a delay in registering. (See VI. for emergency registration procedures and VII. regarding changes in exemption status.)

- a. If the reason is acceptable, set a new deadline and advise the applicant of the new deadline for registration.
- b. If the reason is not acceptable, advise the applicant that if the First Stop work registration is not completed by the original deadline:
 - The application/non-standard unit inclusion will be denied, or
 - The on-going case for the standard unit inclusion will be sent a timely notice proposing termination.

8. **If the applicant registers by the deadline**, process the application/ inclusion if all other eligibility criteria have been met. Continue to follow Work First Manual Section 202 to determine the effective date of the inclusion.

If the Work First application is denied due to another eligibility requirement, the family **must** be evaluated for any appropriate Medicaid programs.

9. **If the applicant/inclusion does not register** (and does not notify the caseworker) by the deadline:
 - a. Process the denial.
 - (1) Deny the application; or
 - (2) Deny the non-standard unit add-on application and continue to process the original application; or
 - (3) Deny the standard filing unit add-on application and complete an open-shut for the original application; or
 - (4) Deny the inclusion and send a timely notice to terminate the on-going case.
 - b. Evaluate family members on the Work First application for any appropriate Medicaid program using the same application date.
10. If the applicant tells you that he/she registered for work at ESC before coming to the agency, inquire into the Employment Security Client System (ESCS) to verify the applicant s statement. (See VIII. for verification procedures.)

- a. If your inquiry verifies that the individual is an **active First Stop** registrant in your county, the individual has met the requirement. No further action is necessary.
- b. If your inquiry verifies that the individual is an **active** work registrant in your county, but not a *First Stop* registrant, you must determine the date of registration.
 1. If the individual registered in your county within the last 10 workdays, he/she has met the requirement. However, you must notify ESC that the individual is now a Work First applicant so that ESC will add the First Stop indicator. Notify ESC by completing and forwarding [Attachment 2](#). (Also see X., A. for notifying ESC.)
 2. If the individual registered more than 10 workdays prior to coming to social services, he/she has not met the requirement. Follow the procedures above.
- c. If your inquiry verifies that the individual has not registered for First Stop, he/she must register. Follow the procedures above.

B. Option B: Refer to ESC, Then Take Application

1. If all adults in the family applying for Work First Family Assistance or inclusion to an on-going case have not completed First Stop work registration, consider the visit an inquiry for Work First Family Assistance.

Always take a Medicaid application on the date the family visits the agency, unless all of the individuals inquiring about Work First Family Assistance are active in a Medicaid case or a Medicaid inquiry is appropriate.
2. Advise the family that each non-exempt adult must register for First Stop, then take an application or inclusion request for Work First Family Assistance.
3. Advise the individual inquiring about inclusion to an on-going case that he/she must both register for First Stop **and** return to the agency to request inclusion within 10 calendar days. This means that you must establish a manual tracking mechanism to track the 10 days. Failure to complete First Stop work registration and return to the agency to request inclusion means the on-going case will be issued a timely notice proposing termination.

4. Refer the applicant to ESC or First Stop work registration representative to register for First Stop following the registration procedures set up in your county.
5. Once all non-exempt adults in the case have registered for First Stop and the applicant returns to your agency, take a Work First Family Assistance application/inclusion. Process the application/inclusion when all other eligibility factors have been established.
 - a. The effective date of the payment for an application is the date the application for Work First was taken.
 - b. The effective date of the payment for an inclusion is the date the inclusion is taken regardless of the date the Work First family reported the individual had moved into the home.
6. If the individual requesting standard filing unit inclusion does not register for First Stop and return to the agency to request inclusion within the 10 calendar days specified, send a timely notice proposing termination for the on-going case and evaluate for Medicaid. If the request was for a standard filing unit add-on to an existing application, process the existing application as open-close.

Terminate the on-going case of the standard unit inclusion at the end of the timely notice period unless the individual advises the caseworker, and it is verified, that he has completed the First Stop work registration process prior to the end of the timely notice period.

IV. FIRST STOP REGISTRATION FOR ACTIVE RECIPIENTS AT REVIEW

For reviews: Unless non-exempt adults are active First Stop registrants in your county, they must register for First Stop before continued eligibility is established. If a non-exempt adult refuses or fails to register for First Stop, terminate the on-going case.

- A. Evaluate each adult to determine if he/she is required to complete the First Stop work registration process. (See V. for exemptions.)
- B. Advise the payee that each non-exempt adult must register with ESC for First Stop before on-going eligibility can be established.
- C. Refer the non-exempt adult to a First Stop ESC representative to complete the First Stop work registration process according to the registration procedures established in your county.

- D. Give the non-exempt adult a minimum of 10 calendar days to complete the First Stop registration process. Counties cannot choose a period shorter than 10 calendar days but may give the family longer to register. Be sure to document the deadline date by which registration must be completed.

- E. Advise non-exempt adults that it is their responsibility to notify their caseworker (prior to the deadline given to register for First Stop) if they are unable to complete the work registration process.

- F. If the non-exempt adult advises the caseworker that he/she is unable to complete the First Stop work registration process by the deadline, evaluate whether the reason is acceptable. The director or his/her designee must establish acceptable reasons for an allowable delay. There is no acceptable reason for failing to register, only for a delay in registering. (See VI. for emergency registration procedures and VI. regarding changes in exemption status.)
 - 1. If the reason is acceptable, set a new deadline and advise the non-exempt adult of the new deadline for registration.
 - 2. If the reason is not acceptable, advise the non-exempt adult that if the First Stop work registration is not completed by the original deadline, the on-going case will be terminated.

- G. **If the non-exempt adult registers by the deadline**, evaluate all other eligibility factors to determine on-going eligibility. If the Work First case is terminated due to another eligibility requirement, the family **must** be evaluated for any appropriate Medicaid programs.

- H. **If the non-exempt adult does not register** (and does not notify the caseworker) by the deadline, terminate the on-going case.

Evaluate Work First family members for any appropriate Medicaid program.

- I. If the non-exempt adult tells you that he/she previously registered for work at ESC, inquire into the Employment Security Client System (ESCS) to verify the adult's statement. (See VII. for verification procedures.)
 - 1. If your inquiry verifies that the individual is an **active First Stop** registrant in your county, the individual has met the requirement. No further action is necessary.

2. If your inquiry verifies that the individual is an **active** work registrant in your county, but not a *First Stop* registrant, you must determine the date of registration.
 - If the individual registered in your county within the last 10 workdays, he/she has met the requirement. However, you must notify ESC that the individual is a Work First recipient so that ESC will add the First Stop indicator. Notify ESC by completing and forwarding [Attachment 2](#). (Also see X., A. for notifying ESC.)
 - If the individual registered more than 10 workdays from the date you are conducting your inquiry, he/she has not met the requirement. Follow the procedures above.
3. If your inquiry verifies that the individual has not registered for First Stop, he/she must register. Follow the procedures above.

V. WHO IS EXEMPT FROM FIRST STOP WORK REGISTRATION?

- A. All children (except emancipated minors) in a Work First Family Assistance application or on-going case are exempt from the First Stop work registration process.
- B. Adults who are approved for, or already receiving, Supplemental Security Income, VA benefits based on 100% disability, or Social Security based on disability or age (65 or older) are exempt from the First Stop work registration process.
- C. The single custodial parent of a child under 12 months eligible for and claiming the S exemption. This parent is required to register no later than the next review following termination of exempt status.
- D. The payee only in a Work First Family Assistance case.

VI. ARE THERE PROVISIONS FOR HOMEBOUND OR HOSPITALIZED INDIVIDUALS?

There may be instances in which an applicant is required to register for First Stop but cannot complete the First Stop work registration because he/she is hospitalized or homebound. Generally, these situations should be temporary. To meet the registration requirement, complete [Attachment 3](#) based on information provided by the applicant. Forward the completed form to ESC where it will be entered into the ESCS system.

Allowing for mail time and keying time at ESC, assume the registration is complete 5 workdays from the date the completed form was sent to ESC.

VII. WHAT HAPPENS WHEN AN APPLICANT'S EXEMPTION STATUS CHANGES?

- A. When a change occurs during the application process that makes an adult(s) in the Work First application no longer exempt from the registration requirement:
1. Notify the adult(s) of the First Stop work registration requirement.
 2. Allow the applicant at least 10 calendar days to register for First Stop.
 3. Advise applicants that if they are unable to register for First Stop, it is their responsibility to notify their caseworker prior to the deadline given to complete the First Stop work registration process.
 4. If the applicant advises the caseworker that he/she will be unable to register for First Stop by the deadline, evaluate whether the reason is acceptable. The director or his/her designee must establish acceptable reasons for an allowable delay. There is no acceptable reason for failing to register, only for a delay in registering.
 - a. If the reason is acceptable, set a new deadline and advise the applicant of the new deadline for registration.
 - b. If the reason is not acceptable, advise the applicant that the Work First application will be denied if the First Stop work registration is not completed by the deadline.
 5. **If the applicant registers by the deadline**, process the application if all other eligibility criteria have been met. If the application is denied due to other eligibility requirements, the family must be evaluated for any appropriate Medicaid program effective with the original application date.
 6. **If the applicant does not register by the deadline**, deny the application. Evaluate the family's eligibility for any appropriate Medicaid program using the same application date.
- B. When a change occurs during the application process that makes the adult(s) exempt from the registration requirement and the adult(s) has not registered with ESC, notify the applicant that he no longer has to register.

VIII. HOW DO I VERIFY FIRST STOP REGISTRATION?

In an effort to facilitate the sharing of registration information between the two agencies, DSS has been given read only access to a number of screens in the Employment Security Client System (ESCS). (See Appendix A05 for access instructions and A07 for a description of the screens.)

To determine if an individual is registered at ESC, sign on to the ESCS system and request the Client Characteristics screen (CC). The Reg/Date field reflects the date of registration. An A in the FD field will indicate if the individual registered as a First Stop applicant.

IX. CAN I FOLLOW-UP ON THE PROGRESS THAT AN APPLICANT OR CLIENT IS MAKING WITH ESC?

Additional screens are available when the FD field on the Client Characteristics screen reflects a value. These screens are the First Stop Data screen (FD) and the First Stop Notes screen (RF). These screens show both registration (new applications and renewals) and the registrant's progress in First Stop optional components: Job Search, Job Preparedness, and Community Service. In addition, the screens supply ESC's assessment of job readiness, whether referrals were made, cooperation, and supportive service needs (e.g., child care, transportation, other). The First Stop Notes screen supplies a format for the ESC Interviewer to explain needed services in more detail or elaborate on indications of failure to cooperate.

X. DOES ESC PROVIDE ANY ADDITIONAL TOOLS TO MONITOR A CLIENT/APPLICANT'S PROGRESS?

Each county DSS office will receive a weekly report generated by ESC listing clients that have the failure to cooperate field activated. This report will list the Participant's Name, Social Security Number, Address, and the Failure to Cooperate code that was input. (See A07 for a list of Failure to Cooperate codes.) If DSS workers have entered their number on the First Stop Data screen (See X., B.), a separate report will be issued for that worker number. If failure to cooperate occurs on a First Stop case that does not have a worker number on the First Stop Data screen, the report will be printed in alphabetic order by the last name. Once the code for Failure to Cooperate has been included on the weekly report, the system will remove the code until the next occurrence.

XI. AM I REQUIRED TO SUPPLY ESC WITH INFORMATION ABOUT THE APPLICANT?

Yes, there are several situations which necessitate sharing information with ESC about a case. Both ESC and DSS staff will have data entry capabilities on the First Stop Data (FD) and First Stop Notes (RF) screens. Other partner agencies that contract with DSS to operate additional components may be given access as well. (See A07 for instructions on updating the screens.)

- A. The caseworker should alert ESC that the registrant should be considered a First Stop registrant if they discover through the verification process that the individual has registered at ESC but did not indicate that they would apply for Work First. When notified, ESC will key an A in the Client Characteristics (CC) screen. This will, in turn, create First Stop screens for the client.
- B. Once an applicant's registration has been verified, the DSS caseworker should enter his/her Worker Number on the FD screen.
- C. Throughout the application process, the caseworker is responsible for updating the Participant Status code to reflect any change in the applicant's status. The update consists of accessing the FD screen and placing an X in the field beside First Stop Participant Mandatory, First Stop Participant Optional, or Not Eligible for Work First to indicate the status of the application. First Stop Participant - Mandatory will be the category of most applicants. Applicants who are exempt from First Stop requirements, but choose to participate in First Stop activities will be categorized as First Stop Participant Optional. Not Eligible for Work First will be used to identify applicants who apply for Work First but are found to be ineligible.

When DSS staff inputs the X beside the correct category, the category name will be displayed on the Client Data (CD) screen.

- D. As the caseworker continues working with the First Stop participant and the Personal Responsibility Contract is completed and signed, DSS should place an X in the field beside DSS Mutual Responsibility Plan Written on the FD screen.
- E. The First Stop Notes (RF) screen can be utilized to make notes to explain any entries of Other or any information that could help another agency provide better service to the participant.
- F. Both agencies have data entry capabilities for the following fields: Job Preparedness, Supportive Services, Training, Job Search, Community Service, and Failure to Cooperate.

XII. DOES ANYONE ELSE HAVE ACCESS TO THE ESC SCREENS?

For those counties contracting with other agencies for certain components, consideration may be given to granting access to the ESCS system. The RF screen may be used for sharing information and recording progress on components.

XIII. WHAT HAPPENS IF AN APPLICANT MOVES FROM ONE COUNTY TO ANOTHER COUNTY AFTER REGISTERING FOR FIRST STOP?

If applicants move from one county in North Carolina to another and wish to apply for Work First in the new county of residence, they must register for First Stop in the new county. The interviewer in the second local office will key the Participant Status in the Client Characteristics screen and a second First Stop Data screen will be set up and numbered 2 of 2. The original First Stop screen will not be changed; the system has up to nine screens for each applicant.

Denial Code

- B7** You failed to comply with the requirements of First Stop by registering with the Employment Security Commission. State rules supporting this action are found in the Work First Policy Manual. We are continuing to determine your Medicaid eligibility.

Transfer Code (Timely)

- 1B** You failed to register with the Employment Security Commission for First Stop. State rules supporting this action are found in the Work First Policy Manual. You will continue to receive Medicaid.

Withdrawal Code

- W6** You asked that your application be withdrawn. You did not wish to comply with the First Stop requirements which require you to register with the Employment Security Commission. State rules supporting this action are found in Work First policy.

TO: ESC - First Stop Employment Assistance Program

FROM: _____

_____ County Department of Social Services

RE: Addition of First Stop Indicator

The following individual is registered for work with ESC. He/She has subsequently applied for assistance through the Work First Program. Please change the First Stop Indicator to reflect this change in status.

Please don t hesitate to call me at _____ if you have any questions.

Individual's Name: _____

Address: _____

Social Security Number: _____

Date of Work First Application: _____

Comments: (Indicate whether supportive services have been arranged and identify the specific services. Also indicate if supportive services are needed but are not yet arranged.)

Attachment 3

1. LAST NAME	FIRST NAME	INITIAL	2. SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER			Do Not Write in This Space JF-I JF-IV				
3. ADDRESS				4. TELEPHONE				JF-II JF-V		
5. CITY		COUNTY		STATE		ZIP				
6. Check whether under 22 and looking for summer work only 1 <input type="checkbox"/> Yes 2 <input type="checkbox"/> No				7. SEX 1 <input type="checkbox"/> Male 2 <input type="checkbox"/> Female			14. Enter Companies Preferred _____ _____			
8. BIRTHDATE Mo. Day Yr. 		9. Circle Highest Year of Education Completed Grade School High School Post High School 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19				15. Circle Areas of Work Interest: Assembly, clerical, machine operating, law enforcement, managerial, technical, sales, professional, service work, farming, other (write in): _____ _____				
10. Education and Special Training										
11. Pay on Last Job \$ _____ Lowest Pay Acceptable \$ _____			12. Circle Transportation Bus Car None		13. Circle Shifts 1st 2nd 3rd					
Special Information										
SDA	CNTY	ETHN	H/D	VET	RSV	DIS	WEL	FS	Reference (DOT, Renewals, Other Tests)	
MIGR	DATE 		DSWR	CLAI	JTPA	LO	STDSK			
16. EMPLOYMENT RECORD Describe your longest and most important jobs, starting with the most recent of these.										
Name of Company					Name job and describe what you did. Include tools, equipment used.					
Address										
Length of Job		Date ended		Pay						
Reason for leaving job										
Name of Company					Name job and describe what you did. Include tools, equipment used.					
Address										
Length of Job		Date ended		Pay						
Reason for leaving job										
Name of Company					Name job and describe what you did. Include tools, equipment used.					
Address										
Length of Job		Date ended		Pay						
Reason for leaving job										
17. Dates of Active Military Service: Entered Separated <input type="checkbox"/> Discharge other than dishonorable										
18. Citizen of the United States? <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No					19. I certify the information submitted by me on this form is true and correct to the best of my knowledge. Signature: _____					