

STATE OF SOUTH DAKOTA CLASS SPECIFICATION

Class Title: Economic Assistance Benefits Specialist

Class Code: 51580
Pay Grade: GH

A. Purpose:

Assesses and analyzes client life circumstances and financial capabilities to provide assistance and services to low income individuals and their families; verifies collateral information and determines eligibility for multiple social service programs; responds to public inquiries regarding programs and benefits; and interprets rules, regulations, and policies to ensure appropriate benefits and services are provided in an effective and expedient manner to promote self-sufficiency.

B. Distinguishing Feature:

The Economic Assistance Benefits Specialist assesses individuals and families to identify needs and problems, providing eligibility services for multiple programs and services, and counseling and referring clients to other resources to help them work towards self-sufficiency.

The Caseworker determines the eligibility of clients and what the allotment will be for financial assistance to be used for child care services.

The Quality Control Specialist randomly reviews these determinations for accuracy.

The Lead Economic Assistance Benefits Specialist oversees the daily operation of a remote office, provides work direction for at least three staff, and carries the most difficult/sensitive caseload.

The Economic Assistance Supervisor supervises a work unit in a large county or multi-county area and is responsible for the delivery of services within a service area. This position has authority to hire and fire, conduct performance appraisals, establish responsibilities for each position, assign overall work, and set priorities for the work unit.

C. Functions:

(These are examples only; any one position may not include all of the listed examples nor do the listed examples include all functions which may be found in positions of this class.)

1. Assesses and analyzes current life circumstances and financial capabilities to provide assistance to low income individuals and their families.
 - a. Interviews applicants, assesses and identifies specific family needs, and determines if applicant may be eligible for multiple state and federal programs or referral to other programs.
 - b. Provides information to individuals regarding benefits and services provided by the department including Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), Food Stamps, numerous medical programs, Low Income Energy Assistant Program (LIEAP), and childcare services.
 - c. Counsels and assists individuals in developing realistic and achievable goals and removing barriers to self-sufficiency.
 - d. Determines, based on actions observed and information obtained during the interview, the need for referral to child protection or adult services in cases of possible child or adult abuse and neglect.
2. Determines eligibility and authorizes state and federal program expenditures for TANF, Food Stamps, and all medical programs.

- a. Completes or assists with the completion of various program forms and applications and outside agency forms as well.
 - b. Gathers relevant information from numerous data systems and collateral contacts to collect and verify relevant asset information.
 - c. Reviews documentation for accuracy, completeness, and relevance.
 - d. Evaluates household circumstances, including household income, assets, household composition, and medical information to make a final eligibility determination.
 - e. Informs clients of their rights and responsibilities for each program for which they are eligible.
 - f. Determines the need for and applies penalties based on household circumstances.
 - g. Notifies households of eligibility decisions within timeframes established for each program.
 - h. Maintains case files and computer database systems for assigned cases.
 - i. Monitors ongoing cases to ensure appropriate eligibility status for current benefits and re-evaluates eligibility for various benefits if circumstances change.
 - j. Determines the need for and assigns a protective payee for TANF client based on documented misuse of TANF funds.
 - k. Gathers documentation when a recipient has appealed a negative action and prepares and presents testimony at fair hearings to defend actions.
3. Identifies community resources, provides information, makes referrals, and/or obtains services available from outside agencies to ensure all of the clients needs are met.
 - a. Makes critical assessments to identify barriers to self-sufficiency and makes referrals to other community resources to assist removing those barriers.
 - b. Provides short-term crisis intervention through counseling, the use of community resources, or other service providers and agencies.
 - c. Assists and advises clients in interpreting and understanding correspondence, forms, and information received from other agencies and resources.
 4. Responds to public inquiries and speaks to organizations or individuals to explain various benefits and services provided by the department and procedures for obtaining the services and benefits.
 5. Examines and analyzes case record information to ensure compliance with program rules.
 - a. Examines case records, report, and computer systems for inaccuracies or fraudulent actions of clients.
 - b. Completes corrective actions based on reviews completed by quality assurance or supervisory findings.
 - c. Determines the cause of an error and computes the accurate amount of benefits.
 - d. Contacts the client and makes collateral contacts to reconcile discrepancies.
 - e. Completes overpayment referrals by determining whether the benefits were paid incorrectly due to inadvertent household error, suspected program violation, or agency error.
 - f. Gathers and reviews documentation regarding suspected fraud, makes a determination that fraud occurred, recommends appropriate action, and represents the department at administrative hearings to substantiate claims of suspected program violations and/or fraud.
 6. Performs other work as assigned.

D. Reporting Relationships:

Typically no subordinates report to this position.

E. Challenges and Problems:

Challenges include working with clients with a wide and disparate range of education and social skills, who may come from diverse cultures, or may be dysfunctional, mentally impaired, or chemically dependent; obtaining emergency assistance for clients with limited or no resources in order to provide basic necessities in a crisis situation; and counseling clients that are distressed, irate, and/or angry.

Typical problems facing the incumbent include determining appropriate eligibility for various benefits under multiple programs with differing eligibility requirements, rules, regulations, guidelines, and policies; staying knowledgeable of continually changing rules, regulations, policies, and procedures; and multiple and ongoing changes in household composition, employment status, assets, etc. that require re-evaluation of benefit eligibility.

F. Decision-making Authority:

Decisions include approving, rejecting, or closing a case based on state and federal regulations; policies to apply; if an over/underpayment has occurred; increase or decrease benefit levels based on client reporting; information needed from the client to process an application or a re-determination; if client's income, resources, or non-financial circumstances make them ineligible for assistance; encouraging a client to make application for additional programs/services; counsel and intervention; and referrals to other agencies.

Decisions referred include interpretation of unclear policies, procedures, or penalties; clients who are unhappy and request a conference regarding their case; claims regarding underpayment of benefits; referral for prosecution of fraud; and information regarding a legal opinion or value.

G. Contact with Others:

Daily contact with clients, Employment Specialists to coordinate case management of TANF clients, Employment Representatives to support employment efforts in Food Stamps, other social service agencies to make referrals and consult on common clients, collateral contacts to verify client information, Social Security Administration to determine current social security benefits, and other department staff to provide information or refer clients for additional services.

H. Working Conditions:

The incumbent usually works in a typical office environment; however, the incumbent may travel to clients' homes to verify information or visit with them regarding their cases. The incumbent may also work with irate, indifferent, and hostile clients, which may present a danger of physical harm.

I. Knowledge, Skills, and Abilities:

Knowledge of:

- public assistance programs, objectives, and underlying causes of economic deprivation;
- principles and techniques of conducting interviews and acquiring information from clients in need of social services;
- community resources useful in providing service to clients;

- concepts related to clients' rights, confidentiality, and professional ethics;
- various social, cultural, economic, psychological, and emotional factors influencing the behavior and attitudes of families and individuals.

Ability to:

- communicate with individuals and groups to provide information and give assistance;
- understand, comprehend, and apply policies and procedures in eligibility determination process;
- maintain accurate case records and documentation;
- keep up to date on program policy memorandums and manuals for all eligibility programs;
- accurately apply rules, regulations, and policies for multiple programs;
- produce documents with clearly organized thoughts and using proper sentence structure, punctuation, and grammar;
- provide customer service and establish effective working relationships with clients, their families, and other social service personnel, public officials, and private citizens;
- develop community relationships by providing consultation, coordinating services, and providing informal and formal referrals;
- build and establish rapport with individuals from different diverse backgrounds;
- effectively manage a large caseload and administer a variety of programs and services;
- work with a computerized data system;
- show initiative, make decisions, and work with minimal supervision.