



Report on Successful Outcomes After Release (SOAR) Program

January 2021 Report



Winston-Salem

Background

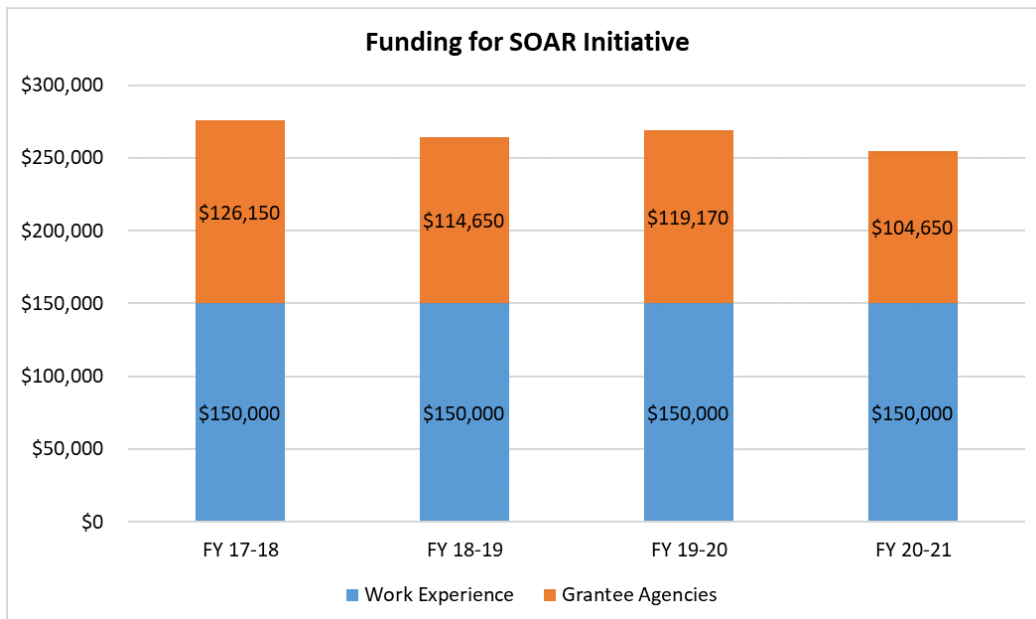
The Mayor and City Council approved funding for the Successful Outcomes After Release (SOAR) Program during FY 2014-2015. The six-month program provides life skills training and a work placement and mentor program to former offenders re-entering the workforce while supplementing the city's existing workforce in areas of critical need. Participants work a maximum of 32-hours per week and earn the city's minimum wage.

Program requirements include having City of Winston-Salem residency, at least one prior conviction, six months of work experience since a previous conviction, or completion of a job-training/re-entry program, the ability to pass a city-sponsored drug test & background check, and registration with selective services. The program actively recruits participants through community partners, recommendations, and marketing channels. The program graduates two classes per year.

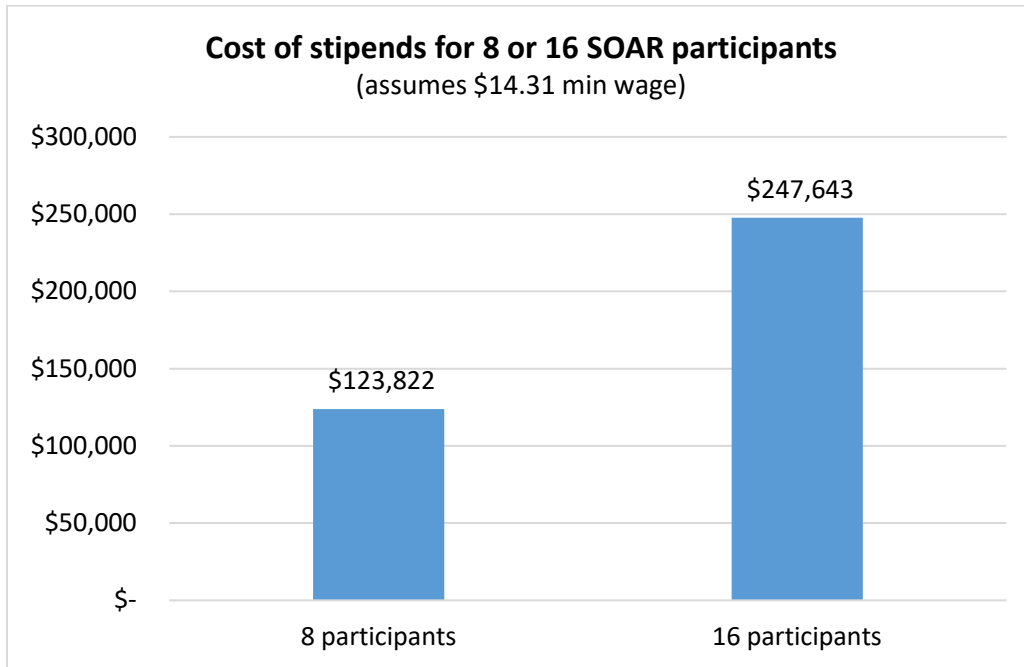
In FY 2020-2021, SOAR oversight shifted from the Office of Business Inclusion & Advancement to the Operations Department.

Funding

The SOAR program utilizes General fund revenues, along with grantee agency funding. In FY 2015, the Mayor and City Council approved the allocation of \$50,000 of the funding previously designated for grants to fund a work experience program designed to provide employment opportunities for participants who met the program's guidelines. In the FY 15-16 budget, the Mayor and City Council increased funding for the SOAR initiative from \$100,000 to \$202,500, with \$150,000 allocated for the work experience program that extended training from 16 weeks to six months for participants. The bar chart below represents funding sources for the work experience and grantee agencies since FY 17-18, with a stable \$150,000 from the General Fund through FY 20-21.



Below is a graph analysis provided by the Budget and Evaluation Department to potentially expand the class size from 8 to 16 participants at the \$14.31 minimum wage. The program would need an additional \$123,821 funding allocation for expansion and does not include an increase in staff administration, supplies or training cost.



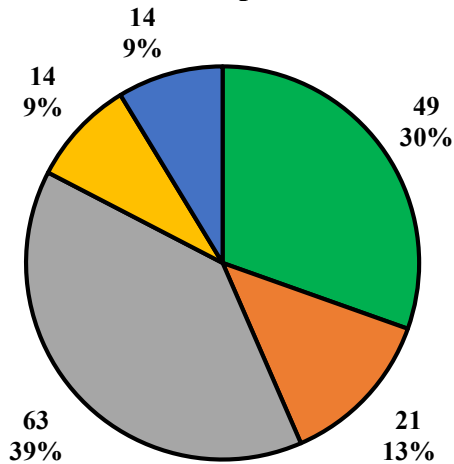
*This is only the cost of participant stipends and does not include the cost of staff time for administration of the program, supplies, training, etc.

Outcomes

The inaugural class of participants began in April 2015, and to date, the program includes 63 SOAR participants. Of the 63 participants, 49 completed the program. SOAR staff confirmed that 21 participants secured part-time or full-time employment while 4 participants continued employment, with the city, through Winston Personnel Group.

Departments hiring SOAR participants include Community Development, Recreation & Parks, City/County Planning, Fleet Services, WSDOT, City/County Utilities, Sanitation, Property & Facilities Management, Field Operations and CityLink. Private employers hired 12 former SOAR participants, and one member pursued post-secondary education. The following chart provides a breakdown of the status of these participants.

SOAR Participant Status



■ Completed Program
■ Enrolled

■ Hired By City
■ Hired by an Outside Company

SOAR Work Experience & Mentor Program

The SOAR work experience program allows participants to work in labor or clerical positions within city departments and is based on their prior work experience or expressed interest. For six months, participants complete 32-hours per week with 28-hours dedicated to the assigned department and 4-hours reserved for professional and personal development.

Participants engage with mentors throughout the term of the program. SOAR mentors are city employees or outside agency representatives that provide increased retention, guidance and advice, and networking opportunities.

Professional & personal development is an essential component to the SOAR program's success. Courses are led by city staff and community partners, including Forsyth Technical Community College, Center for Smart Financial Choices, Deeper Dive Consulting, NextGen, Goodwill Industries, and NCWorks.

Program Initiatives

Blue Bag Program

The Office of Sustainability and Keep Winston-Salem Beautiful identified litter index rates throughout the community. SOAR participants used blue bags to retrieve litter debris at 20 of the high-litter areas by monitoring sites and providing daily litter removal. The program also identified additional hotspot areas as the program evolved. The Blue Bag program lasted for 26 weeks, and the team averaged a collection of 57 bags of litter per week for a total of 1,480 blue bags.

The SOAR program provided constant communications to the Sanitation Department to facilitate the recovery of the blue bags to the landfill. The Blue Bag program successfully provided a visible impact and allowed the participants the opportunity to give back to the community. Below are links to media coverage of the Blue Bag Program.

Fox 8 News: <https://myfox8.com/news/blue-bag-program-helps-keep-winston-salem-beautiful-while-giving-people-a-second-chance/>.

WSTV Digital Media: <https://youtu.be/kIG57SSkLvA>



Additional Clerical Positions

Another initiative for the SOAR staff is to expand clerical roles across city departments. The chart below represents the 2020 SOAR class and assigned department placement.

2020 Fall SOAR Class	Work Experience Program	Position
Participants 1-4	Operations -Blue Bag Program	4 labor positions
Participants 5-6	Fleet Services	1 clerical; 1 labor position
Participants 7-8	Recreation & Parks (Recreation Maintenance)	1 clerical; 1 labor position

Spring Class 2020

Interviews for the spring SOAR class begin in February, and the program will resume February 22, 2021 with a projected graduation of August 2021.