



POLK COUNTY GENERAL ASSISTANCE PROCEDURE MANUAL

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I. Legal Authorization

- A. The Code of Iowa, Chapter 252, imposes duties on counties of Iowa regarding General Relief. This chapter directs the Polk County Board of Supervisors to provide for the relief of “poor” persons in Polk County.
- B. Polk County shall provide assistance for the following:
 - 1. Poor-Defined by 252.1 of the Code of Iowa as persons who have no property, exempt or otherwise, and are unable, because of physical or mental disabilities, to earn a living by labor.
 - 2. Needy-Defined by 252.1 of the Code of Iowa as persons who have some means.
*Assistance provided for “needy” persons in Polk County is limited to assistance to persons who have “circumstances which are not attributable to them.” One-time exceptions may be made.

II. Administration

A. Personnel:

The General Assistance program shall be administered by the Director of the Community, Family and Youth Services Department (CFYS). The CFYS Director may designate qualified and trained CFYS staff to administer the program and carry out General Assistance duties. CFYS staff members are appointed by and responsible to the CFYS Director.

B. Duties of Personnel:

- 1. Accept applications for General Assistance on standard application forms provided by Polk County.
- 2. Investigate the factual statements on each application.
- 3. Determine eligibility of each applicant according to the guidelines set out in this manual.
- 4. Arrange for vendor authorization and payment for each eligible applicant.

III. Eligibility

To be eligible for assistance, an applicant must meet the following criteria:

- A. Must provide proof of identification—photo I. D.
- B. Must be a resident of Polk County.

- C. Must be 18 years or older.
- D. Must meet income guidelines as outlined in this manual.
- E. Must submit a fully completed application and provide all required documentation.
- F. Must, if able-bodied, be working or actively seeking employment and be registered with Iowa Workforce Development.
- G. Must, if not able to work due to mental or physical disability, provide written verification from a physician or licensed professional. The verification must state the primary health condition, whether the inability to work is temporary or permanent, and the approximate date (if applicable) that the applicant may return to employment. (Forms for this purpose shall be provided by General Assistance).
- H. General Assistance is available to persons receiving public assistance when there is a temporary emergency situation; however, assistance will not be provided on an ongoing basis.

IV. Employment/Employment Search

All able-bodied applicants who are unemployed shall be referred to the Workforce Development Center and shall cooperate with that agency in seeking employment and shall accept employment when available.

If unemployed and eligible for unemployment benefits, applicants must apply for such and cooperate with the requirements of that program.

Applicants who are unemployed for more than 30 days are not eligible for assistance unless approved for and awaiting receipt of Unemployment Benefits.

Applicants who are denied unemployment benefits are not eligible for assistance.

*Full time students are generally not eligible for assistance. Eligibility is determined based upon employment status and income – not academic status.

V. Computation of Income

Net income shall be the aggregate of all income, including child support, received by household members.

*Single persons living in a roommate situation must apply separately for rent assistance. The rent assistance guideline is divided equally between roommates. Each roommate's income is considered separately in determining eligibility.

In determining eligibility for utility assistance the applicant must be the individual in whose name the utilities are listed; however all household income is considered in determining eligibility.

VI. Resources

All real and personal property of the applicant, including net income, from any source shall be considered in making a determination for granting assistance with the following exceptions:

- A. Homestead
- B. Furniture and personal items
- C. Vehicles used for necessary transportation
- D. Burial lots and/or funeral trust funds
- E. Life insurance and retirement accounts (if not retired) unless already voluntarily liquidated.

Financial Assistance Specialists shall not encourage applicants to cash out these types of assets.

VII. Needs

After eligibility is established, assistance may be granted for the following:

- A. Rent/Mortgage
 - 1. Rent/mortgage payment shall be made only to owners of the property.
 - 2. Rent/mortgage shall only be paid for housing that is currently being occupied except for temporary absence due to health reasons.
 - 3. In most cases rent/mortgage payment may not be paid to any relative.
 - 4. Roommates must apply for assistance separately for their portion of the rent. For mortgage assistance, the mortgage holder is the applicant.
 - 5. Rent/mortgage may be paid for the current month only.
 - 6. Landlord/mortgage holder must agree to accept a County voucher and agree not to evict for a period of 30 days from the date specified on the voucher.

7. The amount of assistance will be determined by the most recent rent/utility guideline. (Flexibility will be allowed in cases where the entire request for assistance is no more than \$50 over the guideline.)
8. General Assistance is not available for deposits or back rent.
9. Affordability of housing is a consideration in determining eligibility.

B. Utilities

1. Utility assistance includes payments for gas, electricity, water and fuel oil for the purpose of heating and cooking.
2. Utility assistance is provided only in emergency situations when a disconnect notice has been received or payment arrangement will be broken and will result in disconnect.
3. Utility assistance may be provided only when the applicant demonstrates a “good faith” effort (3 or more client payments made from November-March) to contribute toward utilities during the moratorium. Payment is defined as the budget billing amount for the account. Payments made by agencies are not considered in determining “good faith” effort.
4. In determining eligibility for utility assistance the applicant must be the individual in whose name the utilities are listed.
5. General Assistance is not available for old bills, reconnect fees, utility deposits, repairs and miscellaneous equipment-related fees.
6. The amount of assistance allowable will be determined by the most recent rent/utility guideline.

C. Food/Personals

1. Food vouchers may not be used to supplement Food Stamps/Food Assistance. Excluded items include, but are not limited to: tobacco products, alcoholic beverages and pet food.
2. Non-food items may include: soap, paper products, household cleaning supplies and personal hygiene items.
3. The amount of assistance allowable will be determined by the most recent food/personals guideline.

D. Special Needs

1. Clothing: The reasonable value of clothing needed for employment or other special need if not available free from other sources, but not to exceed \$100 per person.
2. Transportation: The actual cost of public transportation, or where such is not available or feasible, the purchase of necessary gas and oil. Transportation does not include car repairs.
3. Furniture and appliances: The reasonable value of needed furniture and appliances if not available free from other sources, but not to exceed \$200 for a single person or family unit.
4. Medical: Reasonable value of needed services if the services are not available under Medicaid, the Medically Needy program, at Broadlawns Medical Center, University of Iowa Hospitals or in a private hospital under the provisions of the Hill-Burton Act.
5. Burial Expenses: Up to the maximum allowed by resolution of the Polk County Board of Supervisors for all expenses involved in a burial, if those expenses are not covered in full from other sources.

VIII. Form of Assistance

Assistance shall be purchased directly from the supplier for the poor or needy person, or it may be provided in kind. It may be for one or more of the items allowed.

IX. Duration

Poor person: Assistance shall continue until such time as the physical or mental disability no longer prevents the person from being employed or until the person's appeal under SSI or SSDI has been denied by the administrative law judge (ALJ), whichever event occurs first.

Needy person: Assistance may be provided during any twelve (12) month period for so long as the total amount provided does not exceed the "yearly assistance guideline" as determined by the Board of Supervisors.

Reasons to Approve Assistance

A. Circumstances which are attributable to the person which include:

1. Failure to safeguard liquid assets and/or resources when the person reports loss or theft but has not made a police report and/or there is no evidence.
2. Failure to prioritize expenses by directing income toward non-basic needs as a first priority or failing to reasonably plan and distribute expenditures in order to cover basic needs.

***Approval of assistance for circumstances which are attributable to the person is limited to one-time assistance.**

B. Circumstances which are not attributable to the person which include:

1. Involuntary termination from employment for other than cause.
2. Voluntary termination of employment for good cause.
3. Involuntary reduction in earnings.
4. Strike/lockout
5. Lost or stolen benefits which will be replaced.
6. Awaiting approval and/or receipt of FIP and/or unemployment benefits.
7. Delayed delivery of eligible benefits due to administrative error.
8. Unusual and/or inordinate amount of medical expense.
9. Unusual and/or inordinate amount of transportation expense when necessary for employment.
10. Unusual and/or inordinate amount of expense related to moving when:
 - I. The move is a result of domestic abuse.
 - II. The move is a result of sub-standard housing.
 - III. The move will decrease shelter costs.
 - IV. The move is required for reasons other than cause.
11. Release to the community after a period of incarceration of more than three months. (If incarceration was less than one year prior work history must be demonstrated.)

Reasons to Deny Assistance

- A. Other resources are available to meet the person's needs at the level of assistance applicable under the General Assistance guidelines.
- B. Failure of the person to provide requested information or otherwise cooperate.
- C. Failure of the person to demonstrate a good faith effort to secure or maintain employment. Examples of this may include the following:
 1. Multiple episodes of unemployment

2. More than 30 days of unemployment
 3. Fired for cause
 4. Voluntarily quit
- D. The person has received the maximum assistance available according to General Assistance guidelines.
 - E. The person's income exceeds General Assistance guidelines.
 - F. The person is eligible for assistance or has received maximum benefits from Veteran Affairs.
 - G. The person does not fit the definition of "poor" or "needy".
 - H. Failure to use income/resources for the purpose of providing for basic needs. (Non-essential items are prioritized and/or basic expenses will be unaffordable in current living situation).
 - I. Failure to safeguard income and/or resources. (no evidence and no police report).
 - J. Fraud-Presenting false or misleading information in order to obtain assistance.*

*Any person presenting false or misleading information for the purpose of obtaining assistance shall not be eligible to reapply for assistance for a period of ninety (90) days from the discovery of the false or misleading information.

CLIENT EXPECTATIONS/ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS

Eligibility

- Reside in Polk County
- Be over 18 or an emancipated minor
- Meet income and eligibility guidelines
- Agree to use whatever money you have to pay necessary expenses
- Agree to use community resources available to you
- Agree to apply first for any other programs for which you may be eligible (FIP, Food Stamps, Veteran's Assistance, etc.) and cooperate with these programs.

***War-time Veterans (Honorable Discharge) must apply at the Veteran Affairs Office, 2309 Euclid, 286-3670.**

Requirements

- General Assistance application

- Photo Identification
- Documentation of income and expenses for the past 30 days (in some cases, for the past 90 days)
- If unemployed, a form from the Workforce Center documenting eligibility status for unemployment benefits
- If unable to work due to medical incapacity, a Polk County “Medical Incapacity Report” completed by a physician

Additional Requirements

For Rent Assistance: A completed Polk County Landlord Statement (the form will be given to you at the General Assistance office with your maximum eligibility amount noted).

For Utility Assistance: A 12-month billing and payment history from the utility company as well as an “Options Letter” that indicates the minimum payment necessary to avoid disconnect.

Application Process

- Visit the General Assistance office and present photo identification.
- An Office Specialist will ask for some information. You will then be given instructions about the information you need to provide in order for us to determine your eligibility.
- When you have completed the steps required, you will be scheduled for an interview with a Financial Assistance Specialist.
- You will be given a “Notice of Decision” with approval or denial. The Notice of Decision may be taken to other community agencies to apply for benefits.

Right of Appeal

If you do not agree with the decision that is made, you have the right to appeal. You must file the appeal within ten days of the decision. To receive the necessary forms, you may ask any staff member while you are at the General Assistance office or call 286-2088 and ask that the forms be mailed to you.

Appeals

1. All appeals of the decision of a department employee to deny the person’s application for assistance will be sent to the Director of the Polk County Department of Community, Family and Youth Services.

The director's written decision regarding the appeal shall be mailed to the applicant within five (5) working days from the receipt of the appeal by the director. The director's decision should inform the applicant of the applicant's right to appeal the decision.

The appeal of the director's decision shall be to the County's Service Appeal Board. The Service Appeal Board's decision is final unless appealed to the district court. The applicant shall be informed (1) of the method by which an appeal may be taken, and (2) that he or she may represent him or herself, or may be represented by another person or by an attorney.

2. Any written appeal or communication to the director by or on behalf of an applicant requesting appeal of the director's determination, shall be taken by the director and put immediately upon the Service Appeals Board agenda for the next regular board meeting, provided that such appeal shall not be heard sooner than five (5) days after the appeal is taken.
3. An appeal of the director's decision must be made to the director within ten (10) days of the director's determination. The notice or communication must provide applicant's current address and telephone number and state the reasons for appeal. The applicant shall be informed immediately, by telephone and by ordinary mail, of the date and time of hearing before the board. Applicant and his or her attorney, upon written authorization, shall be granted access by the director to his or her assistance case file.

Appeal Hearing

1. The Service Appeal Board shall hear applicant's appeal at the time scheduled on the agenda unless continuance is requested by the applicant. Applicant shall be permitted to present whatever evidence he/she desires in support of the appeal including testifying and having other witnesses, if present. The technical rules of evidence shall not apply. The applicant's file shall be admitted into evidence. The board may question the applicant and the director shall present the board with the reasons for the determination.
2. The Service Appeal Board shall make a decision on the appeal within five (5) working days after the appeal. The board's decision shall be only on the basis of the evidence submitted before the board. The board shall mail to the applicant at his or her last known address, by ordinary mail, its decision in writing. The decision shall also state that an appeal may be taken of the board's determination, as provided below, and the method by which such appeal may be taken.

3. Appeal of the decision of the Service Appeal Board will be to the district court within the time, the manner and the procedures established under the Iowa Administrative Procedures Act, Chapter 17A, Code of Iowa, (Ord. No. 51, 8/11/89; Ord. No. 115, 2/4/93; Ord. No. 163, 7/11/97).