Blind Work Expense (BWE) is a work incentive for individuals receiving SSI who have a primary diagnosis of blindness and who earn income.

To qualify for a BWE you must be under age 65, or age 65 or older and receive SSI payments due to blindness before reaching age 65.

When it decides your SSI eligibility and payment amount, the Social Security Administration (SSA) will not count any earned income that you use to help you work. These work-related expenses do not have to be related to your blindness, but they must be reasonable work-related expenses that you incur. The amount of these expenses must also be below the total countable income formula used by Social Security in determining your SSI payment each month.

How It Works

Some examples of Blind Work expenses may include:

- Dog guide expenses
- Transportation to and from work
- Dues or fees (such as licenses, union dues, etc.)
- Vehicle modifications
- Work-related training
- Federal, state, and local income taxes, and Social Security taxes
- Visual and sensory aids
- Translation of materials into Braille
- Medical equipment or supplies that help you work
- Attendant care services
- Meals consumed during work hours
- Therapy

When SSA calculates your new SSI payment, it will apply income exclusions, including a $20 General Income Exclusion and a $65 Earned Income Exclusion. After applying these exclusions, SSA will count half of your remaining earned income when calculating your SSI payment.

If your disability on record with SSA is blindness, it will also exclude any expenses that meet the criteria for Blind Work Expense in calculating your SSI payment. You must track and report these expenses to SSA when you report your earnings each month.

A Benefits Information Network Liaison can help you identify and calculate the Blind Work Expenses that are applicable to your situation.

The information contained in this fact sheet has been reviewed by the Social Security Administration, Office of Employment Support Programs, for accuracy. However, the viewpoints of this fact sheet do not necessarily reflect the viewpoints of the Social Security Administration.