Electronic Signatures

AWARDS "Keys to Getting Started" Guide

With AWARDS you've taken the first step on the road to becoming a paperless agency by capturing client information in electronic form. The next step is to implement the AWARDS electronic signatures functionality, enabling key individuals to sign client records electronically for the purposes of approving their content and/or verifying their accuracy. By using electronic signatures ("e-signing"), you'll no longer need to go through the tedious process of having staff print records and manually collect the necessary signatures; instead, they'll be able to collect those signatures with a few clicks of the mouse and/or the use of handy signature capture technology.

An Overview of Available Electronic Signatures Capability in AWARDS

In an effort to help your agency become completely paperless, Foothold Technology has plans to roll out electronic signatures functionality to each and every place you find a signature line in AWARDS. While we're not quite there yet, we're well on the way. E-signing is currently available in the following key AWARDS locations, to a variety of roles:

E-Signing is Available in these locations – and more!	And Available to:		
	Staff	*Clients*	*Others*
Group Notes	x		
Progress Notes	x	x	
Service Plans	x	x	
Standalone FormBuilder Forms	x	x	x
Discharge Records	x	x	
Medication Admin Records	x		

Wait! What's a "standalone" form?

There are two types of FormBuilder forms – embedded and standalone. Embedded forms are incorporated into an existing AWARDS record; for example, a form included within a progress note. Unlike embedded forms, standalone forms are not linked to specific pieces of client or employee records. They can be accessed and completed on their own; for example, forms located from module flyout menus.

Of course, as with most AWARDS functionality, electronic signatures are highly configurable, so you can choose to use all of these e-sign locations, a combination of them, or none at all. Likewise, you can easily adjust which of the listed groups of signers can e-sign, and within what time frames. You can also choose from a variety of signing methods for each group of signers. Because of the great deal of flexibility and configurability you will find with electronic signatures, there are some important considerations to make before you dive into the e-sign world. Let's take a look!

What Should I Consider When Getting Started with Electronic Signatures in AWARDS?

The most important questions to answer as you begin working with Electronic Signatures are:

1. **Which documents do we want to be able to electronically sign?**
2. **Who should be able to sign each type of document?**
3. **How and where will we capture signatures?**
4. **What will our e-signing policies be?**

Here we'll help you weigh the options...

Which documents do we want to be able to electronically sign?

As we touched on earlier, e-signing can be configured for use with group notes, progress notes, service plans, discharge records, medication administration records, and/or standalone FormBuilder forms. Configuration for the first four locations is quickly and easily done on a program-by-program basis under System Setup > Business Rules. Use of e-signing in medication administration records is required and needs no additional configuration aside from making sure each staff member has an e-signature set up. The configuration process for the last of the available locations - forms - is different, requiring electronic signature lines to be built directly into relevant forms, which are then made available to the appropriate programs. Because of these configuration differences, part of getting started should include a review of where you want e-signatures so that you'll later know which setup processes are necessary. Additionally, the available signer types vary from one e-sign location to another, and the capture options for those signer types also vary. So it's important to know who you will need to capture signatures for as you delve deeper into the implementation considerations.

Who should be able to sign each type of document?

Another component of the e-sign configuration considerations is who should be allowed to sign each type of document. The various set up options allow you to have a different set of signers for most document types you choose to use e-signing for. Which individuals will be e-signing documents will have a direct bearing on the type of signature capture method(s) used. For example, while staff will always be required to upload a signature image and set a PIN that will then be used to apply the image to a document, clients and other individuals can forgo the upload requirements and have their signatures manually captured and saved with each individual document.

How and where will we capture signatures?

The signature capture methods available for e-signing in AWARDS are as follows:

Touchscreen Device – This signature collection option is turned on by default in AWARDS. Using this feature, signatures can be captured using a finger or stylus on touch-enabled devices such as tablets, laptops, touch-enabled monitors, or touchpads. Signers can even use a mouse on devices that are not directly touch-capable, and there are low-cost wireless mouse pens that be employed for just this purpose as well. In general the touchscreen option is one of the most user-friendly signature capture methods available. There is no setup required, and it provides great freedom of movement for workers.

Image Upload and PIN – This option is turned on by default in AWARDS, and is always available to staff and clients (it cannot be used by others) regardless of the availability of other signing methods. When using this capture method a signature image is uploaded and saved in AWARDS and is applied to documents using a PIN at the time of signing for added security. Uploaded images can be initials, full signatures, or both, and can be gathered using a variety of means, from low-tech to high-tech; specifically: a piece of paper can be signed, after which a scanner, digital camera, or even a scanning/photo application on a smart phone can be used to capture an image of the signature for uploading purposes. – OR – A touchscreen device can be used to capture the images directly into AWARDS, where they will be saved for future use.

Which of these capture methods you choose to implement for your agency can be based on a variety of factors, and may even be different for different programs. Specific things to think about as you make your selection include:

Cost - It's helpful to know up front how much you're willing to spend, if anything, to get electronic signatures up and running. While there's no additional cost requirement on the AWARDS side, you may choose to invest in helpful signature capture tools (for example, tablets) for use with AWARDS e-signing. If there's currently no money in the budget for those types of tools, you know you'll likely need to go with the upload and PIN option for which there is typically no extra associated cost (aside from the staff time required to assist clients in getting their signatures set up). Note though that a little homework here could go a long way. Many people are pleasantly surprised to find that there are some tablets on the market for around only $200. When keeping in mind that a tablet can be shared across a location, you might find that signing devices are more cost effective than you'd expected! Similarly, there are a lot of great touch-capable monitors on the market, so if you'll be replacing old monitors in the future, spending a little bit more to ensure that they're touch-enabled could be the way to go.

Signature Quality – If cost is a consideration, also keep in mind that the touch option does not have to be used with a tablet or other touch-screen device. When using that method there is always the option to submit the signature using a mouse at a computer workstation. It's a bit harder to record a clean and neat signature with a basic mouse though, so be sure to factor that in if signature quality is higher on your priority list. It may be that you'll want to make an investment in low-cost wireless mouse pends that can help to make signature captures a bit smoother. At the very least using a basic mouse can be a great backup for your programs if something should go wrong with a tablet, mouse pen, or other touch-capable device, or if there is limited availability for those items at certain times. Also relating to quality, if you will be scanning staff or client signatures for use with a PIN, we recommend using a "high" quality setting.

Signer Requirements – Can your clients be counted on to remember a PIN for e-signing purposes? If not, use of touchscreen devices are the way to go. Likewise if other individuals will be required to sign FormBuilder forms, as in that case the upload/PIN option is not available. Whichever route you choose, AWARDS gives you the option of setting up default signing options for your clients.

Workflow – If you'll be capturing client signatures, which of the methods you use may in part be based on *where* and how frequently they will be captured. For example, is there one central location for the agency where staff come in to sign documents? Or one per program? Or do staff travel to clients and collect signatures remotely? The answer to this question may determine how many capture devices are needed if you will be using touchscreen devices. Also, keep in mind that while staff signatures are only ever captured once (unless there is a change), clients who do not use the upload/PIN and all other individuals have to sign each individual document, meaning they may need access to their signing methods more frequently, affecting the number of devices in use.

What will our e-signing policies be?

At the time of configuration it's also a good idea to come up with some best practices for your agency as a whole when it comes to electronic signatures. Think about the circumstances when staff initials will be used versus full signatures, consider whether date and/or time should also be selected when e-signing, and so on.

What Should I Do Next?

Once you've decided how you'll configure electronic signatures in AWARDS, your next steps will be to:

1. Make any necessary purchases based on the signature capture technology you'll be using. We recommend that you start off by purchasing just *one* of the specific capture devices you've chosen so that you can test it out and make sure that it will work well for staff as part of their day-to-day processes. This will help your agency avoid making costly hardware mistakes.

   And don't forget! A quick chat with the hardware vendor you've chosen to purchase a device from - PRIOR to completing this step - may save you time and money by helping ensure that the solution you've chosen will work well for you.

2. Configure AWARDS to reflect your electronic signature setup decisions.

3. Set up a test program (if you don't already have one) and your electronic signature, enter some test clients, and try things out with your chosen signing method(s) to make sure everything is good to go.

4. Work with remaining staff (and clients if appropriate) to get their electronic signatures set up in AWARDS, and remind new staff to set up signatures as they come on board. It may be helpful to develop internal documentation to assist with this setup process.

5. Start e-signing!

To guide you through these steps we have extensive electronic signatures documentation available. Check out Online Help for more information!

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Need Help?

If, at any time while you're working in AWARDS, you need some assistance, don't forget to take advantage of all of our available online resources. They can be accessed by clicking **Help** from the navigation bar at the top of any AWARDS page, and then selecting **AWARDS Online Help**. There you'll find a comprehensive and searchable system containing detail on all aspects of AWARDS from top to bottom!

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