

Social Security Administration

Conference Information Report

Fiscal Year 2015

Overview

Our conference events are mission critical and support our goal of better serving the public by improving our business practices, adopting new technology, or training our employees on the complex policies and procedures of the Social Security Act. We have a strong review and approval process in place for all of our sponsored conferences and for employee attendance at non-agency sponsored events. Our strong internal conference planning policies ensure we reduce costs for our agency activities. We continue to use cost-cutting initiatives, including hosting events as close as possible to employee duty stations to minimize travel, maximizing our use of free Federal space, and adhering to policies restricting meals and light refreshments. In addition, we require agency components to research alternatives to hosting events, such as video conferencing and interactive video teletraining. We oversee, monitor, and review our spending for all agency-sponsored conferences and employee attendance at non-agency sponsored events to ensure we use Federal funds efficiently and comply with all applicable laws and regulations.

Most of our conference expenses for fiscal year (FY) 2015 were for training (technical, programmatic, and non-programmatic) and associated travel costs. Besides training and associated travel costs, our conference expenses included costs for speakers and presenters, facilities, equipment, supplies, and other miscellaneous conference costs.

Conferences where expenses associated with the conference exceeded \$500,000

For FY 2015, we did not sponsor any conference where the expenses exceeded \$500,000. Thus, we did not require a waiver from the Acting Commissioner for conference spending in excess of the \$500,000 limit for a single event.

Conferences where expenses associated with the conference exceeded \$100,000

The Fiscal Year 2015 Conference Information Table (Table), beginning on page 3, lists all of our agency-sponsored conferences, in date order, where the expenses exceeded \$100,000. For FY 2015, the Table includes 21 agency-sponsored conferences totaling \$3,910,682. In addition, we also include our single, non-agency sponsored conference in the amount of \$317,900.

Our Office of the Inspector General (OIG) has its own conference review and approval process, and OIG confirmed it did not hold any events over \$100,000 for FY 2015.

For each conference, we include the following information in the Table:

- Name of the conference;
- Total conference expenses incurred by the agency;
- Location;
- Date(s);
- Total number of attendees whose travel expenses or other conference expenses were paid by the agency; and
- Brief explanation of how the conference advanced the mission of our agency.

Social Security Administration

Fiscal Year 2015 Conference Information Table

SSA-Sponsored Conferences

Conference	Total Expenses	Location	Date	Number of Attendees	Mission Related Narrative
New Administrative Law Judge Training – Phase 2	\$233,234	Social Security Administration (SSA) facility, Falls Church, Virginia	October 14, 2014 to November 7, 2014	49	We provided technical and programmatic training to the agency’s newly-hired administrative law judges. This training taught the basic functions and responsibilities of the position and introduced the new administrative law judges to national policy. The training also introduced the uniform writing process used by our agency to ensure administrative law judges write decisions using a consistent format and that the evidence in the case file supports the decision. We trained 23 judges with 18 agency trainers, 6 agency presenters, and 2 medical presenters. This mission-critical training provided our new judges with the tools to process cases efficiently, which will help reduce our backlog of disability cases in a timely manner.
New Decision Writer Training	\$119,566	SSA facility, Falls Church, Virginia	October 20, 2014 to October 31, 2014	32	We provided Decision Writer Training for newly hired employees assigned to support our nationwide hearings offices. This training was necessary to introduce employees to national policy and the uniform writing process we use in our hearing offices. We trained 28 employees with 4 agency trainers. This mission-critical training ensured that written decisions are consistent with the Social Security Act and comply with the Commissioner’s adjudication policies as reflected in Social Security regulations and rulings.

Conference	Total Expenses	Location	Date	Number of Attendees	Mission Related Narrative
Fiscal Year 2015 Technical Entry-Level Service Representative Training – San Francisco	\$110,663	Multiple SSA locations throughout the San Francisco Region	November 13, 2014 to February 19, 2015	212	We provided interactive video teletraining in the San Francisco Region to support our field office operations and process our agency’s core mission work. We provided entry-level training for service representatives to support the expected increases in key workloads over the next few years. We trained 175 employees with 37 agency instructors/mentors. This mission-critical training ensured our entry-level trainees gained the skills necessary to handle our increasing workloads, contribute to field office operations, and provide pertinent services to the public.
New Administrative Law Judge Training – Phase 2	\$419,194	SSA facility, Falls Church, Virginia	February 17, 2015 to March 13, 2015	89	We provided technical and programmatic training for a second group of newly-hired administrative law judges. Similar to the session held earlier in the year, this session taught the basic functions and responsibilities of the position and introduced the new administrative law judges to national policy. The training also introduced the uniform writing process used by our agency to ensure administrative law judges write decisions using a consistent format and that the evidence in the case file supports the decision. We trained 46 judges with 34 agency trainers, 7 agency presenters, and 2 medical presenters. This mission-critical training provided our new judges with the tools to process cases efficiently, which will help reduce our backlog of disability cases in a timely manner.

Conference	Total Expenses	Location	Date	Number of Attendees	Mission Related Narrative
New Administrative Law Judge Training – Phase 2	\$428,164	SSA facility, Falls Church, Virginia	April 13, 2015 to May 8, 2015	84	We provided technical and programmatic training for a third group of newly-hired administrative law judges. Similar to the sessions held earlier in the year, this session taught the basic functions and responsibilities of the position and introduced the new administrative law judges to national policy. The training also introduced the uniform writing process used by our agency to ensure administrative law judges write decisions using a consistent format and that the evidence in the case file supports the decision. We trained 39 judges with 35 agency trainers, 8 agency presenters, and 2 medical presenters. This mission-critical training provided our new judges with the tools to process cases efficiently, which will help reduce our backlog of disability cases in a timely manner.
Essentials of Suitability Training – Regional Offices	\$123,773	SSA facility, Kansas City, Missouri	April 20, 2015 to April 30, 2015	21	We provided technical training to our background investigation adjudicators who are responsible for determining the fitness of the agency's workforce. This training encompassed the fundamentals of adjudicating background investigations. We trained 21 employees using Office of Personnel Management instructors. This mission-critical training ensured we are compliant with Federal national training standards set forth by the Office of Personnel Management and the Office of Management and Budget.

Conference	Total Expenses	Location	Date	Number of Attendees	Mission Related Narrative
Essentials of Suitability Training – Regional Offices	\$139,154	SSA facility, Dallas, Texas	May 11, 2015 to May 21, 2015	28	We provided technical training to a second group of our background investigation adjudicators who are responsible for determining the fitness of the agency's workforce. This training encompassed the fundamentals of adjudicating background investigations. We trained 28 employees using Office of Personnel Management instructors. This mission-critical training ensured we are compliant with Federal national training standards set forth by the Office of Personnel Management and the Office of Management and Budget.
Fiscal Year 2015 Technical Entry-Level Claims Representative Training – San Francisco	\$118,436	Multiple SSA locations throughout the San Francisco Region	May 18, 2015 to September 25, 2015	85	We provided interactive video teletraining in the San Francisco Region to support our field office operations and process our agency's core mission work. We provided entry-level training for claims representatives to support the expected increases in key workloads over the next few years. We trained 65 employees with 20 agency instructors. This mission-critical training ensured our entry-level trainees gained the skills necessary to handle our increasing workloads, contribute to field office operations, and provide pertinent services to the public.

Conference	Total Expenses	Location	Date	Number of Attendees	Mission Related Narrative
Administrative Investigations for Harassment Allegations Cadre Training	\$117,519	SSA facility, Baltimore, Maryland	June 1, 2015 to June 5, 2015	78	We provided training to those employees appointed as Harassment Prevention Officers to investigate harassment allegations. This training ensured that Harassment Prevention Officers understand the procedures governing investigations and are equipped to address allegations appropriately and timely. We trained 71 employees using 5 agency trainers, 2 support staff, and Equal Employment Opportunity Training Institute instructors. This mission-critical training is vital to maintaining thorough investigative continuity to ensure our agency offers a safe work environment that is free from discrimination, including harassment.
Essentials of Suitability Training – Regional Offices	\$161,745	SSA facility, Dallas, Texas	June 1, 2015 to June 11, 2015	33	We provided technical training to a third group of our background investigation adjudicators who are responsible for determining the fitness of the agency's workforce. This training encompassed the fundamentals of adjudicating background investigations. We trained 33 employees using Office of Personnel Management instructors. This mission-critical training ensured we are compliant with Federal national training standards set forth by the Office of Personnel Management and the Office of Management and Budget.
Fiscal Year 2015 Claims Representative Technical Training Class	\$231,318	SSA facility, Baltimore, Maryland	June 1, 2015 to July 27, 2015	20	We provided face-to-face entry-level technical training for locally employed overseas claims representatives. We trained 16 students, all employees of the Department of State, with 1 dedicated agency instructor, 1 additional agency speaker, and 2 support staff. This mission-critical training provided overseas staff with the skills necessary to serve American citizens and beneficiaries living in foreign countries.

Conference	Total Expenses	Location	Date	Number of Attendees	Mission Related Narrative
New Administrative Law Judge Training – Phase 2	\$194,637	SSA facility, Falls Church, Virginia	June 8, 2015 to July 3, 2015	42	We provided technical and programmatic training for a fourth group of newly-hired administrative law judges. Similar to the sessions held earlier in the year, this session taught the basic functions and responsibilities of the position and introduced the new administrative law judges to national policy. The training also introduced the uniform writing process used by our agency to ensure administrative law judges write decisions using a consistent format and that the evidence in the case file supports the decision. We trained 20 judges with 17 agency trainers, 3 agency presenters, and 2 medical presenters. This mission-critical training provided our new judges with the tools to process cases efficiently, which will help reduce our backlog of disability cases in a timely manner.
Administrative Investigations for Harassment Allegations Cadre Training	\$132,802	SSA facility, Baltimore, Maryland	June 22, 2015 to June 26, 2015	77	We provided training to a second group of employees appointed as Harassment Prevention Officers to investigate harassment allegations. This training ensured that Harassment Prevention Officers understand the procedures governing investigations and are equipped to address allegations appropriately and timely. We trained 66 employees using 11 agency trainers, and Equal Employment Opportunity Training Institute instructors. This mission-critical training is vital to maintaining thorough investigative continuity to ensure our agency offers a safe work environment that is free from discrimination, including harassment.

Conference	Total Expenses	Location	Date	Number of Attendees	Mission Related Narrative
New Decision Writer Training	\$100,964	SSA facility, St. Louis, Missouri	July 6, 2015 to July 17, 2015 (make-up session August 24, 2015 to September 4, 2015)	44	We provided a second session of Decision Writer Training for newly hired employees assigned to support our nationwide hearings offices. This training was necessary to introduce employees to national policy and the uniform writing process we use in our hearing offices. We trained 34 employees with 10 agency trainers. This mission-critical training ensured that written decisions are consistent with the Social Security Act and comply with the Commissioner's adjudication policies as reflected in Social Security regulations and rulings. This training included a make-up session for students absent during the original class period.
Fiscal Year 2015 Judicial Training	\$237,584	Marriott Inner Harbor at Camden Yards, Baltimore, Maryland	July 7, 2015 to July 9, 2015	252	We provided technical training to the agency's administrative law judges and administrative appeals judges. Periodic judicial training is necessary to ensure the agency's judges have the requisite knowledge and skills to adjudicate complex cases accurately and efficiently while using the latest technology. We trained 162 judges using 41 agency trainers and speakers, and 49 support staff. This mission-critical training helped ensure that our judges have the requisite knowledge to conduct hearings, issue legally defensible decisions, and correctly apply agency policy, applicable statutes, and case law.

Conference	Total Expenses	Location	Date	Number of Attendees	Mission Related Narrative
New Administrative Law Judge Training – Phase 2	\$365,555	SSA facility, Falls Church, Virginia	July 20, 2015 to August 14, 2015	85	We provided technical and programmatic training for a fifth group of newly-hired administrative law judges. Similar to the sessions held earlier in the year, this session taught the basic functions and responsibilities of the position and introduced the new administrative law judges to national policy. The training also introduced the uniform writing process used by our agency to ensure administrative law judges write decisions using a consistent format and that the evidence in the case file supports the decision. We trained 45 judges with 34 agency trainers, 4 agency presenters, and 2 medical presenters. This mission-critical training provided our new judges with the tools to process cases efficiently, which will help reduce our backlog of disability cases in a timely manner.
2015 Center for Disability, Disability Program Administrators, and Disability Determination Services Administrator Meeting	\$129,690	SSA facility, Baltimore, Maryland	July 28, 2015 to July 30, 2015	184	We held a meeting for State disability determination services (DDS) administrators and agency administrators, branch unit chiefs, directors, and regional executives to discuss systems, programmatic, and operation issues specific to the disability program. This meeting helped disseminate information and build the consensus necessary for achieving our mission and goals for the disability program. We had 116 participants with 50 agency presenters and 18 support staff. This mission-critical meeting enabled participants to address important projects and workload issues, as well as allowed participants to share concerns and best practices. Total expenses include amounts paid by the State DDSs and our agency.

Conference	Total Expenses	Location	Date	Number of Attendees	Mission Related Narrative
National Public Affairs Training Conference	\$139,702	SSA facility, Baltimore, Maryland	August 17, 2015 to August 20, 2015	209	We provided our communications professionals with training on communication priorities and major marketing campaigns. This conference provided valuable training on our programs and policies, outreach strategies, promoting online services, and educating the public about our agency. We trained 175 employees using 29 agency trainers, 5 support staff, and an outside speaker. This mission-critical training ensured that our communications are unified, comprehensive, and effective in conveying critical information to the public.
Fiscal Year 2015 Judicial Training	\$180,403	Marriott Inner Harbor at Camden Yards, Baltimore, Maryland	August 18, 2015 to August 20, 2015	198	We provided technical training to a second group of administrative law judges and administrative appeals judges. Periodic judicial training is necessary to ensure the agency's judges have the requisite knowledge and skills to adjudicate complex cases accurately and efficiently while using the latest technology. We trained 128 judges using 24 agency trainers and speakers and 46 support staff. This mission-critical training helped ensure that our judges have the requisite knowledge to conduct hearings, issue legally defensible decisions, and correctly apply agency policy, applicable statutes, and case law.

Conference	Total Expenses	Location	Date	Number of Attendees	Mission Related Narrative
New Administrative Law Judge Training – Phase 2	\$123,826	SSA facility, Falls Church, Virginia	August 31, 2015 to September 25, 2015	25	We provided technical and programmatic training for a sixth group of newly-hired administrative law judges. Similar to the sessions held earlier in the year, this session taught the basic functions and responsibilities of the position and introduced the new administrative law judges to national policy. The training also introduced the uniform writing process used by our agency to ensure administrative law judges write decisions using a consistent format and that the evidence in the case file supports the decision. We trained 12 judges with 12 agency trainers, and 1 medical presenter. This mission-critical training provided our new judges with the tools to process cases efficiently, which will help reduce our backlog of disability cases in a timely manner.
Crisis Advisory Team Training, Phase 2	\$102,753	SSA facility, Baltimore, Maryland	September 2, 2015 to September 3, 2015	134	We provided workplace and domestic violence Crisis Advisory Team training to employees from key disciplines, including security, legal, employee assistance, and labor relations. This training covered specific application of our policy, standard operating procedures, interview practices, case studies, and customized internal electronic and case management system. We trained 125 employees with 6 agency trainers and 3 support staff. This mission-critical training provided Crisis Advisory Team personnel with the skills to handle concerns and respond to incidents of violence in a consistent and uniform manner.

Non-Agency Sponsored Conference

Conference	Total Expenses	Location	Date	Number of Attendees	Mission Related Narrative
Partnership for Public Service's Excellence in Government Fellows Program	\$317,900 ⁱ	May 2015 session in Williamsburg, VA, the remaining six sessions held in Washington D.C.	May 5, 2015 to March 3, 2016 (Fellows meet every 6 weeks, and spend approximately 20 days in session)	25	This non-SSA sponsored conference is a one-year program to strengthen the skills of top performing GS-13 through GS-15 employees, which provides a proven combination of coursework, best practices benchmarking, executive coaching, and government-wide networking. The 25 agency participants remain in their full-time jobs during completion of this program. This training is mission critical to ensure our agency has a comprehensive leadership succession management plan in place.

ⁱ Event runs through March of 2016, and we will not know final costs until the course end date.