



Fact Sheet

Occupational Information System Project

The Social Security Administration's (SSA) disability claims process requires us to evaluate several factors, including medical records and, in many cases, a person's ability to perform work. When we evaluate work, we first consider if the person can perform past work. If unable to perform past work, we look at the person's age, education, and work experience, to see if they can do other kinds of work.

The Department of Labor (DOL) developed our main source of occupational information - the Dictionary of Occupational Titles (DOT) - in 1938. However, the DOL stopped updating the DOT in 1991. To continue making accurate decisions, SSA considers the opinions of trained vocational specialists (VS) or vocational experts (VE) for disability claims that require an evaluation of ability to perform work. Initial claims and claims reviewed during a first level of appeal, both by the State Disability Determination Services (DDS), are reviewed by VSs. These specialists are trained and experienced in completing vocational assessments for past and other work within an applicant's functional capabilities. At the appeals level, longstanding policy interpretation allows for testimony from a VE during Administrative Law Judge (ALJ) hearings about the claimant's ability to perform past work and other work.

If there is a conflict between VS or VE evidence and the DOT, the adjudicator may rely on the VS or VE evidence if the explanation given by the VS or VE is reasonable and provides a basis for relying on that evidence rather than on the DOT information.

SSA is developing a new data source that reflects current occupations and their requirements. The intent of the Occupational Information System (OIS) is to provide information that reflects current occupations and their requirements.

What's the status of the OIS?

The OIS is a collection of occupational data from multiple sources that will be housed, accessed, and operationalized through an online platform called the Vocational Information Tool (VIT).

Revising the disability program rules, which impact millions of people, must be done using a measured and evidence-based approach. Because the policymaking process of finalizing the agency's new solution has been in the collection, evaluation, and development phase for several fiscal years, we wanted to provide an update on the status of that agency review.

The intent of the OIS is to provide updated occupational information. We will meet this goal in the following manner:

- The OIS will broadly describe the requirements of occupations in the national economy; and the ranges in which workers within occupations carry out critical tasks associated with their critical job functions.
- The Occupational Requirements Survey (ORS) data, provided by DOL's Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), will be the OIS' primary source of information on the requirements of work. SSA received its first complete set of BLS survey estimates in FY 2019.
- The OIS will also incorporate data from other government surveys, including the DOL Occupational Information Network (O*NET), military occupations from the Military Occupational Classification (MOC), data from BLS' Occupational Outlook Handbook, and other sources, into a web-based, publicly available, information technology platform known as VIT.

From FY 2012 – 2022, SSA has spent approximately \$239 million on pre-production testing, subsequent ORS data collection, and VIT development. We will provide an assessment of the cost/savings impact of ORS when we publish a proposed rule.

SSA contracted with Northrop Grumman and CGI to develop the VIT. VIT-specific development costs to date, representing FYs 2017 – 2020, were \$8.9 million. Starting in FY 2021, SSA paused VIT development to allow for the finalization of vocational policy development. There were no VIT costs in FYs 2021 and 2022. The work to date was designed to support the final policies that will be implemented under the OIS structure.

We continue to serve the disability community while collecting additional information and conducting ongoing analysis. Our existing regulatory framework ensures valid evidence-based decision-making within our disability programs. Moreover, DDS examiners and ALJs continue to consider the opinions of trained VSs and VEs to ensure decisions are made correctly.

The public and groups can find information regarding OIS online at [Social Security Online - Occupational Information System Project: FAQs \(ssa.gov\)](#).

Other:

SSA also has an interagency agreement with the National Institutes of Health Clinical Center's Rehabilitation Medicine Department to conduct research on data-driven methods to assist SSA in disability policy and process improvement initiatives. However, this interagency agreement does not include any work on the ORS project at BLS.