

# Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018

## Fiscal Year 2026 Evaluation Plan



Securing today  
and tomorrow





# CONTENTS

Contents .....	2
Introduction .....	3
Evaluations and Evidence-Building Activities .....	4
Project 1 —The Use of Electronic Payroll Data to Improve Program Administration: The Payroll Information Exchange (PIE) Project .....	4
Project 2 — Assessment of Time Spent Screening SSI Applicants for SNAP Eligibility .....	6
Project 3 — Reduction of Improper Payments for SSI by Expanding the Use of Access to Financial Institutions (AFI) .....	7

## Selected Abbreviations

<b>FNS</b>	Food and Nutrition Service
<b>FY</b>	Fiscal Year
<b>OASDI</b>	Old-Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance
<b>OASI</b>	Old-Age and Survivors Insurance
<b>OMB</b>	Office of Management and Budget
<b>PIE</b>	Payroll Information Exchange
<b>SNAP</b>	Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program
<b>SSA</b>	Social Security Administration
<b>SSAB</b>	Social Security Advisory Board
<b>SSDI</b>	Social Security Disability Insurance
<b>SSI</b>	Supplemental Security Income



# INTRODUCTION

The Fiscal Year (FY) 2026 Evaluation Plan describes the Social Security Administration's (SSA) most significant evaluation and evidence-building activities planned for FY 2026. We define significant activities as those that are required by law, address the President's priorities, or support the goals in our Strategic Plan. We identified three activities for this Evaluation Plan.

The FY 2026 Evaluation Plan identifies the most significant activities at SSA and includes the additional information required by the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 ("Evidence Act"),<sup>1</sup> which was signed into law on January 14, 2019.

When we develop our evaluation and evidence-building activities, we consult with internal and external stakeholders. For example, our Associate Commissioner for the Office of Research, Evaluation, and Statistics sends out an annual memo to the Deputy Commissioners from all our major offices to obtain information on their research and evaluation needs. Our Associate Commissioner for the Office of Research, Demonstration, and Employment Support holds regular meetings with representatives from our major offices to provide updates and obtain information on our demonstration projects. We also work closely with the agency's Chief Data Officer to ensure that the data for our evaluation and evidence-building activities are available and suitable for each activity. The external stakeholders that provide us with information on our research and evaluation activities include the Social Security Advisory Board (SSAB), Congress, academics and practitioners who serve on the Technical Evaluation Panels we use to develop our research and demonstration projects, and the public (e.g., via listening sessions and public comment).

For each significant activity, we provide the information required in the Evidence Act.<sup>2</sup> More specifically, we include: a title; a description of the key questions to be addressed by the evaluation activity or evidence-building activity; the information needed for the evaluation or study; the methods to be used; the anticipated challenges; and the dissemination strategy.

---

<sup>1</sup> Pub. L. No. 115-435, 132 Stat. 5529 (2019), available at [Text - H.R.4174 - 115th Congress \(2017-2018\): Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 | Congress.gov | Library of Congress](#).

<sup>2</sup> See Office of Mgmt. and Budget, Exec. Office of the President, [OMB Memorandum M-19-23](#), *Phase 1 Implementation of the Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018: Learning Agendas, Personnel, and Planning Guidance*.



# EVALUATIONS AND EVIDENCE-BUILDING ACTIVITIES

## Project 1 —The Use of Electronic Payroll Data to Improve Program Administration: The Payroll Information Exchange (PIE) Project

### EVIDENCE-BUILDING QUESTION

*To what extent does receiving timely wage information through a data exchange improve payment accuracy and reduce improper payments?*

**Context for the Evidence-Building Question:** Section 824 of [the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015 \(BBA\)](#) authorizes the Commissioner of Social Security to participate in information exchanges with payroll data providers who will provide the agency with wage and employment information. We use wage and employment information to administer the OASDI disability and SSI programs under titles II and XVI of the Social Security Act (the Act). We call this the Payroll Information Exchange (PIE). We implemented PIE in phases beginning April 2025.

Despite the many wage self-reporting options currently available (e.g., phone, app, online), we are working to receive wage data timelier and with less customer burden. PIE allows us to obtain the wage information we need to make accurate benefit determinations more efficiently because it will help us process a large volume of wage information queries simultaneously. It allows us to automate obtaining and recording the wage and employment data we receive from a payroll data provider through the information exchange to the appropriate OASDI disability and SSI systems records. We use this information to efficiently administer OASDI disability and SSI benefits, including adjusting payment amounts and making entitlement or eligibility determinations for the OASDI disability and SSI programs based on the information we receive from a payroll data provider.

We expect that receiving monthly wage and employment information for our claimants, beneficiaries, recipients, and deemors<sup>1</sup> automatically through an information exchange with a payroll data provider who provides sufficiently accurate, up-to-date, and complete information will improve payment accuracy. It will also reduce improper payments that occur when we do not receive wage or employment reports timely or at all.

Our evaluation will provide us with information on the effectiveness and efficiency of PIE for administering the OASDI disability and SSI programs. We will use the results to identify potential improvements to PIE. We plan to address the following evidence-building topics and questions.

- **PIE Accuracy:** Stakeholders expressed concerns about the accuracy of the data. We conducted an analysis on the accuracy of the data, which is described in our [notice of proposed rulemaking](#) on the use of electronic payroll data to improve program administration. We will continue to assess the accuracy of the data.
- **Effect on Improper Payments:** What is the effect of PIE on SSI and OASDI disability improper payments?
- **Return on Investment:** What are the costs of implementing PIE? What are the savings to implementing PIE? What is the return on investment for PIE?

---

<sup>1</sup> Deemors are individuals whose income and resources are considered for meeting an SSI claimant's (or recipient's) basic needs of food and shelter.



The PIE assessment plan was developed in the second quarter of FY 2025 and PIE was implemented in April of FY 2025. We anticipate producing interim findings in the fourth quarter of FY 2025 and in early FY 2026, and a final report during FY 2026.

**Information Needed for the Study:** We need information from the following sources:

- **SSA program data files:** We will use data we collect to administer our programs to assess: PIE coverage, PIE accuracy, the percentage of beneficiaries, recipients, and deemors refusing/agreeing to provide authorization and their characteristics, the impact on improper payments, and the return on investment.

**Methods:** Administrative data will be used to report on PIE coverage, PIE accuracy, the percentage of beneficiaries, recipients, and deemors refusing/agreeing to provide authorization and their characteristics.

The assessment methodology to determine the effect on improper payments will take advantage of the random assignment of cases to the monthly release cohorts from April 2025 through September 2025, which gives each case the same probability of being placed in any given cohort. The benefits of building our analyses upon random assignment include elimination of selection bias; increased internal validity (that is, controlling for confounding variables); facilitation of statistical analysis; and generalizability to the broader population.

We plan to compare the experience of those whose SSNs have been submitted to PIE with the experience of those whose SSNs have not yet been submitted to PIE. There will be different assessments for Title II, Title XVI, and concurrent Title II and Title XVI, plus different assessments for beneficiaries/recipients and deemors.

Select statistics for those cohorts with and without PIE submission will include the percentage of cases for which there is a wage report and the average amount of wages reported. These data will be used to determine whether there is a difference between cohort groups, such as whether there is a greater percentage of wage reporting and average amount of wages being reported.

The Office of the Chief Actuary will perform ROI analyses.

**Anticipated Challenges:** As is the case with implementing any new process, there may be some unanticipated challenges during the first few months of implementation. Therefore, as we assess the PIE process, we will need to distinguish between short-run challenges attributable to implementation and longer-run challenges attributable to the design of the PIE business process.

**Dissemination and Use:** The study assessment will provide key information to the Agency about the impact of this project and the findings will directly inform decisions relating to the continued expansion and operation of PIE.



## Project 2 — Assessment of Time Spent Screening SSI Applicants for SNAP Eligibility

### EVIDENCE-BUILDING QUESTION

*How much time do SSA employees spend screening SSI applicants for Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) eligibility?*

**Context for the Evidence-Building Question:** SSA employees screen SSI applicants to determine whether they are eligible for SNAP. The Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) within the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) reimburses SSA for the work. SSA periodically completes an assessment of the amount of time employees spend conducting this workload for FNS, and the estimates from the assessment are used to determine the amount of the reimbursement. The assessment is referred to as the SNAP screening time study.

The goals of this project are to:

1. Conduct a deep dive to improve the study design and metrics based on current assessment,
2. Develop and test a prototype for the study design including protocols and instruments that can be used by SSA to continue estimation of SNAP screening time,
3. Complete FY25 screening time study with new study design and provide recommendations for future rounds of the survey including lessons learned.

This project will include a review of 2016 and 2023 surveys, related reports, the internal SSA assessment report with recommendations, and field office instructions for conducting the study.

The outcomes of this project will include:

1. An instrument that can be used in future time studies,
2. A sampling plan for selecting a representative sample of field offices,
3. A data management and weights constructions guide,
4. An analytical plan,
5. Analytical report with SNAP screening time estimates,
6. A final report with prototype methodology and instruments towards conducting future rounds of the study and recommendations.

**Information Needed for the Study:** We will use a survey instrument to collect data from a representative sample of Social Security field offices across the country.

**Methods:** This project is an observational study that will generate point estimates with confidence intervals and precision metrics for both screening time and SSI applicants' and recipients' projections towards the final cost estimates.

**Anticipated Challenges:** We do not anticipate significant challenges completing this assessment.

**Dissemination and Use:** SSA will use the results of the study to identify a rigorous estimate of the amount that FNS will reimburse SSA for the work that SSA performs on behalf of FNS. The final report will be disseminated to FNS.



## Project 3 — Reduction of Improper Payments for SSI by Expanding the Use of Access to Financial Institutions (AFI)

### EVIDENCE-BUILDING QUESTION

*To what extent do the following result in a reduction in improper payments for SSI:*

- a) The interim use of AFI requests between their current use only during the initial claim, that is the first decision made on an application, and subsequent non-medical redeterminations of eligibility?*
- b) The removal of the liquid resource-level tolerance, that is dropping the tolerance from the current \$400 to \$0?*

**Context for the Evidence-Building Question:** Access to Financial Institutions (AFI) is an automated process that verifies alleged bank account balances with financial institutions and searches for undisclosed accounts at geographically relevant locations based on the individual's address. Several studies, including [a recent SSA/OIG audit report](#), have shown that money above the resource limit held by SSI recipients is a leading cause of payment errors. SSA uses the AFI to address this concern. The AFI process has been shown to be an effective means of reducing payment errors associated with excess resources. This same report maintains that "SSA needs to implement new, or expand existing, corrective actions to address improper payments" and that "SSA should continue exploring the liquid resource tolerance reduction from \$400 to \$0 as well as reducing the barriers to using AFI between initial claims and redeterminations."

- a) Currently, SSA uses AFI when it processes initial SSI applications and periodic eligibility redeterminations, which review a recipient's non-medical eligibility factors (income, resources, and living arrangements) to determine whether the recipient is still eligible for, and receiving, the correct SSI payment. [OIG reviewed a sample of 150 cases](#). Based on their review, OIG suggested that "AFI could result in additional savings if SSA used it more often."
- b) [OIG reviewed a stratified random sample of 140 recipients](#) who had an initial claim, pre-effectuation review contact, or a redetermination in Fiscal Year 2022 and alleged having financial account balances totaling less than \$400. Based on their review, OIG recommended that SSA lower its \$400 resource-level tolerance for AFI application use to \$0 to help ensure more accurate SSI resource determinations when processing initial claims, pre-effectuation review contacts, and redeterminations.

**Information Needed for the Study:** SSA Stewardship review data.

**Methods:** Stewardship data will be used for both parts of this study because Stewardship reviews both a) occur between the initial claim and subsequent non-medical redetermination and b) are performed on all cases, that is without a tolerance level. As such, both parts of the question can be addressed.

**Anticipated Challenges:** We do not anticipate significant challenges completing this assessment.

**Dissemination and Use:** This study will provide key information to the Agency about the impacts of these potential policy changes on improper payments, and will guide the Agency in determining whether such policy changes should be adopted. We will publish a final report and share with Congress, OMB, and SSA leadership.





Securing today  
and tomorrow



**SSA.gov**



**Social Security Administration**

Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 Documentation

Produced and published at U.S. taxpayer expense