

Program Evaluation

SSA continuously builds upon its body of program data, research and analyses, identifying strengths and weaknesses in our programs and processes. The Agency uses this knowledge to help it meet the major challenges it faces and improve the day-to-day administration of its programs. SSA evaluates the potential impact of proposals for change and the actual effects of change after implementation.

The Office of Management and Budget's (OMB's) assessments of the Disability Insurance (DI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) Aged programs using the Program Assessment Rating Tool (PART) continue from Fiscal Year (FY) 2002 into FYs 2003-2004. See page 91 for a discussion of the performance measures associated with these PART assessments.

The annual Agency coordinated evaluation plan cuts across SSA's strategic goals, objectives and business processes. It helps the Agency ensure that there are no duplications, overlaps or gaps in its evaluation program. Many of SSA's evaluations are completed on an annual basis, others are one-time efforts.

Following are brief summaries of the evaluations completed during FY 2003, organized by the strategic goals from SSA's new Agency Strategic Plan (ASP). Copies of the complete results can be obtained by writing to:

Social Security Administration
Office of Strategic Management
4215 West High Rise
6401 Security Boulevard
Baltimore, MD 21235

Strategic Goal: To deliver high quality, citizen-centered Service

Service Satisfaction Survey: The Service Satisfaction Surveys, conducted annually, survey core groups of people who do business with SSA to measure their satisfaction with various aspects of service, and with service overall, when they call SSA's 800 number or field offices, or conduct business in person in field and hearings offices. Results of the surveys for these different service delivery modes are combined to provide the performance indicator for overall satisfaction with SSA service. This is based on the percent of people rating overall service as "excellent," "very good," or "good". The annual performance targets are set by taking into account the actual satisfaction rates achieved in these surveys. The combined results for FY 2003 are not yet available.

Internet Services Satisfaction Surveys: The Internet Services Satisfaction Survey measures user satisfaction with SSA's website, addressing issues such as speed of finding information, ease of completing tasks online, and clarity of explanations as well as overall satisfaction. The FY 2003 survey found that 71 percent of users completing an online questionnaire gave an overall satisfaction rating of "excellent," "very good," or "good". Navigational problems that made it difficult for users to find needed information were identified as the leading cause of dissatisfaction with the website. Since the time of the survey, SSA has implemented a comprehensive site redesign to make popular services easier to access. The new site was launched in April 2003.

Internet Social Security Benefit Application Satisfaction Survey: This survey was conducted in FY 2003 to measure the satisfaction of individuals who filed for benefits using SSA's Internet Social Security Benefit Application. The survey addressed perceptions of the entire process, including issues arising after electronic submission of the form, as well as various topics related to utilizing the actual online application. The data collection for this survey was completed in FY 2003 and the Agency is currently analyzing the survey results and preparing a report.

Survey of Password Users: SSA offers several secure electronic services, such as the ability to check personal benefit information or change of address, to beneficiaries who have registered a password. This survey was conducted to obtain information about the frequency and nature of password services used to evaluate satisfaction with available services. The survey found that while just 35 percent of password holders had accessed protected services since the time they registered, but a far smaller percentage (10 percent) had used a traditional contact method to conduct the same type of business. Those who had used password services were highly satisfied with the clarity of instructions about using these services and with the services themselves.

Targeted Notice Surveys: In FY 2003, we conducted two targeted notice surveys to obtain public perceptions of SSA notices that had been identified by the General Accounting Office as particularly complex and difficult to understand. The first was a survey of Title II beneficiaries who received a benefit notice as a result of a work and earnings transaction. The survey found that despite the complexity of this type of notice, most respondents gave a favorable rating (87 percent excellent, very good or good). Respondent perceptions were generally supported by an assessment of the accuracy of their actual understanding of the notice content. However, survey results also supported the need for improvements SSA has already started to implement in the format and language of these notices. The second targeted notice survey focused on the Title XVI initial award notice. The results of this survey are not yet available.

Employer Survey: This survey measures satisfaction of business callers who contact SSA's Employer Reporting Services Center (ERSC), a special 800- number that provides assistance with business services related to wage reporting, such as Social Security number verification. Based on responses from over 2,000 employers who contacted SSA's Employer 800 Number in November, 2002, overall satisfaction was very high with 95 percent providing a rating of excellent, very good or good. Almost two-thirds of the callers considered themselves frequent ERSC callers and the primary reason for their calls was SSN verification, with 86 percent of responders conducting this type of business.

Benefit Planning, Assistance and Outreach (BPAO) Program Satisfaction Survey: This survey was conducted as part of the evaluation of the BPAO program, which was established under the Ticket-to-Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999. The BPAO program entails cooperative agreements, funded by SSA, with 116 entities nationwide to provide services to disabled beneficiaries so they may make informed decisions about work. The survey addressed experiences and perceptions of beneficiaries regarding the services they received from BPAO providers. A report of the findings will be released in FY 2004.

Strategic Goal: To ensure superior Stewardship of Social Security programs and resources

Annual Continuing Disability Review (CDR) Report to Congress:

SSA conducts very cost-effective CDRs to determine whether individuals receiving disability benefits have medically improved and no longer meet the statutory definition of disability, and therefore should have their benefits terminated. SSA completed a 7-year plan in FY 2002 to process its backlog of CDRs and was current in CDRs at the end of that year. The Agency is striving to keep current with processing this critical workload. SSA is required to file an annual report to Congress on the number of CDRs conducted and the results of those reviews. SSA's report covering FY 2002, issued fall 2003, reported that SSA conducted 1,569,749 CDRs. Based on those reviews, SSA made initial determinations that benefits should be ceased due to medical improvement and the ability to work in 126,620 cases. After all appeals, benefits to an estimated 78,600 individuals will be ceased. The estimated value of reduced program outlays from CDRs processed in FY 2002 is \$2.8 billion for FYs 2003 – 2007.

The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) Safeguard Procedures Report/Activity Report:

This report contains an outline of the security (both physical and systems) controls SSA uses to prevent IRS Federal Tax Information from being disclosed. These reports also contain an overview of the system process itself. SSA is responsible under the Taxpayer Browsing Act of 1974 and section 6103 of the IRS code, to inform IRS how we safeguard their data. Disclosure of the security for these systems would be inappropriate.

Federal Information Security Management Act (FISMA) Report to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB): FISMA requires federal agencies to conduct an annual self-assessment review of their information technology security program, to develop and implement remediation efforts for identified security weaknesses and vulnerabilities, and to report to the OMB on the Agency's compliance with FISMA. As in prior years, SSA employed the services of a public accounting firm, Deloitte & Touche (D&T), to perform an independent review of SSA's self-assessments of its 17 sensitive systems. D & T's evaluation indicated that SSA's self-assessment methodology was consistent with established FISMA requirements. SSA's Office of Inspector General also performed an independent review of SSA's compliance with FISMA and concluded that, with the exception of procedural areas needing improvement, SSA had complied with FISMA requirements. SSA submitted its annual FISMA report to OMB on September 22, 2003.

Retirement, Survivor, Disability Insurance (RSDI) Stewardship Review: The RSDI (or OASDI) payment accuracy (stewardship) review is based on a monthly sample of Social Security (Title II) cases randomly selected from the RSDI payment rolls, consisting of all beneficiaries in current payment status. The sampled cases (1,000 Retirement or Survivor Insurance cases and 500 Disability Insurance cases per year) are reviewed for non-medical factors of eligibility and, in each case, the beneficiary or representative payee is interviewed, collateral contacts are made, as needed, and all factors of eligibility are redeveloped as of the current sample month. The stewardship data are reported on a fiscal year basis (targeted for June 30 of the year following the year of review) and provide an overall accuracy measurement of payments to all beneficiaries currently on the RSDI payment rolls. Accuracy rates (percent of dollars paid that are free of overpayments and the percent free of underpayments) are reported for an overall RSDI accuracy rate as well as separate accuracy rates for RSI and DI cases. The Stewardship review findings provide the basis for reports to Congress and other monitoring authorities. In addition, the Social Security Annual Performance Plan includes the RSDI stewardship payment accuracy measure as one of the strategic objectives to which the Agency is committed. For FY 2002, RSDI overpayment accuracy was 99.87 percent and RSDI underpayment accuracy was 99.92 percent. RSI overpayment accuracy was 99.89 percent and underpayment accuracy was 99.95 percent. DI overpayment accuracy was 99.74 percent and underpayment accuracy was 99.73 percent.

SSI Stewardship Review: The SSI payment accuracy (stewardship) review is based on a monthly sample of SSI (Title XVI) cases randomly selected from the SSI payment rolls, consisting of all recipients in current payment status. The sampled cases (4,000 per year) are reviewed for non-medical factors of eligibility and, in each case, the recipient or representative payee is interviewed (usually during in-home visits), collateral contacts are made, as needed, and all factors of eligibility are redeveloped as of the sample month. The stewardship data are reported on a fiscal year basis (targeted for June 30 of the year following the year of review) and provide an overall accuracy measurement of the payments to all recipients currently on the SSI payment rolls. The Agency prepares two accuracy rates – percent of dollars paid that are free of overpayments and the percent free of underpayments – that are reported excluding preventable overpayments/underpayments and including preventable overpayments/underpayments. The stewardship review findings provide the basis for reports to Congress and other monitoring authorities. In addition, the Social Security Annual Performance Plan includes the SSI stewardship payment accuracy measure as one of the strategic objectives to which the Agency is committed. FY 2002 SSI overpayment accuracy, exclusive of unpreventable overpayments that the Agency is legally obligated to pay, was 93.4 percent. The FY 2002 underpayment accuracy rate, exclusive of unpreventable underpayments that are a consequence of program requirements, was 98.6 percent. For FY 2002, the overpayment accuracy rate, inclusive of preventable overpayments, was 93.0 percent. The underpayment accuracy rate, inclusive of unpreventable underpayments, was 98.6 percent (the same as the rate for unpreventable underpayments).

Enumeration Review: The Enumeration Review is conducted on an ongoing basis to determine the accuracy of Social Security Number (SSN) issuances. The accuracy rate is based on a review to verify that the applicant has not been issued an SSN that belongs to someone else, or that multiple SSNs assigned to the same applicant have been cross-referred. The data excludes SSNs assigned via the Enumeration-at-Birth process and major errors identified by the Office of Quality Assurance and Performance Assessment that do not result in SSN cards being issued erroneously. In FY 2002 and 2001, SSA issued 99.9 and 99.6 percent, respectively, of SSNs accurately. This rate is not significantly different from the accuracy rate of 99.7 percent observed for FY 2000 or from the Agency performance goal of 99.8 percent. SSA continues its effort to improve the quality of the enumeration process through continuing reminder items focused on deficiencies identified in quality reviews and enumeration studies.

Strategic Goal: To achieve Solvency and ensure Social Security programs meet the needs of current and future generations

Public Understanding Measurement System Survey:

In the last quarter of FY 2003, SSA conducted a new survey of public knowledge to help the Agency understand what the public knows about important Social Security issues. The results will be used to refine the Agency's measures and develop a national information campaign aimed at increasing the public's awareness of important Social Security issues.

Evaluation of Changing Benefit Structures: In FY 2003 SSA completed many analyses relevant to evaluation of changing benefit structures. The Agency improved its major model for analyzing changing benefit structures by including immigrants after the early 1990s, estimating earnings from jobs not covered by Social Security and total earnings from all jobs, and improving estimates of self-employment earnings. Additionally, SSA completed work related to restructuring traditional benefits by studying redistribution of the current Old-Age, Survivor, Disability Insurance (OASDI) program in a historical context, reviewing the range of Trust Fund outcomes arising from various stochastic models, and analyzing the macroeconomic implications of price-indexing benefits. Finally, SSA also completed estimates of the impact of SSI benefit restructuring related to multi-recipient households and eliminating counting of in-kind support and maintenance.

Strategic Goal: To strategically manage and align Staff to support SSA's mission

New Hire Study: The New Hires Study showed that SSA has a slightly better new hire attrition rate (15.7 percent) than the overall federal government (16.2 percent) during the first fiscal years of employment. This analysis focused on SSA's three critical direct service positions of Claims Representatives, Service Representatives, and Teleservice Representatives and why they chose to stay or leave. Survey results revealed that quality training and mentoring, perceived career growth and development, and clear job expectations may all contribute to an employee's decision to remain with or leave the Agency.

Retirement Wave Analysis: SSA conducts a tri-annual analysis of agency retirements and uses the data to project likely future retirements. These projections are used to identify where future losses might be, as well as to estimate their impact on service delivery. The results are also used to identify what tools might be needed to shape the workforce to ensure SSA preserves institutional knowledge, as well as to recruit and retain new employees with the necessary skills.

Competency Assessment Process (CAP) Evaluation:

In FY 2003, SSA piloted a competency-based, structured-interview for external Claims Representative applicants, known as the Competency Assessment Process. As part of this pilot, an extensive evaluation is planned that will attempt to determine if the CAP process results in better quality hires or improved new hire retention rates. Initial findings regarding managers' impressions of the process will be completed by January 2004, with more extensive findings available later in the year.