

Social Security Administration



SERVICE · STEWARDSHIP · SOLVENCY · STAFF

STRATEGIC PLAN

FY 2006 – FY 2011

www.socialsecurity.gov

A MESSAGE FROM THE COMMISSIONER

I am pleased to present the Social Security Administration's Strategic Plan for fiscal years 2006 to 2011. The plan reflects my priorities—Service, Stewardship, Solvency and Staff—which are goals that are essential to fulfilling the mission of the Agency. It also provides a guide for meeting the goals of the President's Management Agenda and the Government Performance and Results Act.



We have made great strides in achieving these goals, but there is more to be done. With a program as large as Social Security, it is vital that our strategic plan adequately balances our resources and commitment to results. We must recognize that limited resources will necessitate difficult choices. For years, SSA has excelled at relating resources to results. Although we are faced with substantial resource constraints, I am confident that this plan includes the strategies that need to be employed to deliver the results the American people expect and deserve.

This plan serves as the cornerstone of Social Security's efforts to strengthen our overall management, accountability, and stewardship of Agency resources. Outcome-oriented objectives which reinforce each strategic goal have been developed and reflect my highest priorities. Key strategies, external factors and long term outcomes in support of these objectives have also been identified. This framework provides the Agency with a blueprint to follow and allows us to focus on immediate priorities while working toward our long term goals and objectives.

Social Security's effectiveness will be determined by how well we meet the needs and expectations of the American people. Its success will also be measured by how we manage resources to provide services and benefits in a way that is responsive to the American public. To operate efficiently in a changing environment, we must focus on identifying our priorities and shifting resources accordingly.

I am proud of the exceptional dedication of Social Security and the State Disability Determination Services employees. Our employees share a deep commitment to finding better ways to be even more responsive to those who depend on our service and sound fiscal stewardship. I believe that by working together we will continue to improve our performance and ensure that Social Security meets the needs for current and future generations.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jo Anne B. Barnhart". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jo Anne B. Barnhart
Commissioner

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A MESSAGE FROM THE COMMISSIONER.....	I
THE MISSION OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION.....	1
THE VALUES OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION.....	1
THE PROGRAMS AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION	2
AGENCY ORGANIZATION.....	3
STRATEGIC GOALS AND OBJECTIVES.....	4
SERVICE	7
STEWARDSHIP	19
SOLVENCY.....	31
STAFF	35
APPENDIX A: STRATEGIC PLANNING FRAMEWORK.....	41
APPENDIX B: PROGRAM EVALUATION PLAN.....	44
APPENDIX C: CONSULTATIONS.....	47

MISSION AND VALUES



The Mission of the Social Security Administration

The mission of the Social Security Administration is "To advance the economic security of the Nation's people through compassionate and vigilant leadership in shaping and managing America's Social Security programs." There are challenges to accomplishing this mission.

The major challenge the Social Security Administration faces is the increase in the number of beneficiaries as the baby boomers age. As the Agency meets this and its other challenges, it is committed to continue to:

- Give the American people the excellent service they expect and deserve;
- Ensure the highest level of program integrity through sound fiscal stewardship;
- Ensure the program's financial solvency for future generations; and
- Maintain high quality staff committed to organizational excellence.

The Social Security Administration's emphasis on Service, Stewardship, Solvency, and Staff is reflected in the Agency's goals and objectives.

The Values of the Social Security Administration

The Nation's citizens expect the Social Security Administration's employees to be *Respectful*, *Responsive* and *Reliable*. These values describe employee actions in service to the public and each other.

Respectful - Social Security employees believe in treating people with equal regard, dignity, courtesy and compassion. They respect diversity among themselves and those they serve. They remember that each employee is responsible for fostering the positive environment that makes the Social Security Administration an employer of choice.

Responsive - Social Security employees know that listening carefully and acting on what they hear is the cornerstone to good service. In a rapidly changing world, they embrace change. They believe in keeping the public informed, investing in continuous learning, and breaking barriers that interfere with providing citizen-centered service.

Reliable - Social Security employees are proud stewards of the public trust. Citizens can count on them to meet their commitments, to act with integrity, to maintain the confidentiality of the data entrusted to them, to work efficiently and effectively and to ensure quality in all their endeavors.

PROGRAMS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The Programs and Responsibilities of the Social Security Administration

The Social Security Administration promotes the Nation's economic security by administering America's major income support programs for the elderly, disabled, and their dependents through:

- Old-Age and Survivors Insurance;
- Disability Insurance; and
- Supplemental Security Income.

The programs administered by the Agency touch the lives of over 95 percent of the American public and improve the economic well being of the nation. The first contact with the Social Security Administration may be when filing for a Social Security Number and establishing records of earnings. At critical junctures in their lives, whether it is exiting the workforce due to retirement, the onset of an unexpected disability, the untimely loss of a spouse or parent, or the inability to meet basic needs as a senior citizen, the American public files claims for benefits, reports subsequent post-entitlement changes or seeks information. These five core business processes - Social Security Number issuance, earnings, claims, post-entitlement and informing the public - cross program lines and facilitate planning and managing the delivery of services to our citizens.

The Social Security Administration also provides service delivery support to the Medicare, Medicaid, Railroad Retirement and Food Stamp programs. In addition, by exercising due caution in verifying the identity of individuals through such means as the coordinated verification of documents through the appropriate sharing of data, the Agency supports homeland security activities. In support of the *Medicare Prescription Drug, Improvement, and Modernization Act of 2003*, the Social Security Administration is also assisting the Department of Health and Human Services in providing seniors and people living with disabilities a prescription drug benefit that offers more choices and better benefits under Medicare.



Putting A Face On Social Security

Social Security is about people-- people striving to build economic security, people who overcome tremendous odds to return to the workplace, people who are able to hold their families together with the help of Social Security.

AGENCY ORGANIZATION



Agency Organization

The Social Security Administration's organization is centrally managed, with a decentralized nationwide network of over 1,500 offices that include Regional Offices, Field Offices, Teleservice Centers (800-number), Program Service Centers and Hearings Offices. The Social Security Administration's organizational structure is designed to provide timely, accurate and responsive service to the American public. By integrating support services for all of its programs, the Agency enhances efficiency, avoids duplication of effort, and increases opportunities to provide one-stop service to the public.

Field Offices are the primary points for face-to-face contact with the public. Teleservice Centers offer national toll-free service (1-800-772-1213). The Program Service Centers process a wide variety of workloads, as well as take 800-number calls. The Office of Central Operations, which includes the Data Operations Center, processes a wide variety of workloads involving disability, international and earnings operations, ongoing eligibility for Supplemental Security Income benefits, and also has an expanding role in taking 800-number calls. The Hearings Offices and Appeals Council make decisions on appeals of Social Security determinations in claims for benefits.

Approximately 60,910 of the Social Security Administration's 65,000 employees deliver direct service to the public or directly support the services provided by front-line workers. Employees in Headquarters and Regional Offices directly support the services delivered by the Agency's direct service staff. These include the employees who build and maintain the Agency's expanding Internet services. Additionally, the disability programs depend upon the work of about 16,275 employees in the State Disability Determination Services offices.

The Agency's remaining employees perform equally important functions in developing other information technology and public information products, ensuring sound fiscal stewardship, developing and implementing uniform program policy and procedures, and supporting the workforce by providing, maintaining and safeguarding its work spaces. Each and every employee in front-line and staff positions plays an important role in the success of the Nation's Social Security programs.

STRATEGIC GOALS AND OBJECTIVES



Strategic Goals and Objectives

Introduction

The Social Security Administration faces great challenges: giving the American people the service they expect and deserve, particularly as the number of beneficiaries increases each year with the aging of the baby boomers; improving program integrity through sound fiscal stewardship; ensuring the program's solvency for future generations and maintaining the high quality staff the Social Security Administration needs to meet these challenges. The Agency's strategic goals--Service, Stewardship, Solvency and Staff--directly address these challenges.

The Social Security Administration's four strategic goals are comprehensive. They are linked directly to the resource needs of the Agency and provide employees direction in all major areas of their work. The Agency's nine supporting strategic objectives focus on key areas of strategic importance or those needing improvement. The performance measures the Social Security Administration uses to gauge progress towards meeting these objectives also focus on these priority areas. In addition, the Agency tracks other areas of performance to ensure balance among competing workloads. Although the Old-Age and Survivors Insurance program and the non-disability aspects of the Supplemental Security Income program are critical Agency workloads, the primary focus of this strategic plan continues to be the disability program which is in need of the most improvement. The Social Security Administration will be vigilant in maintaining and improving performance in all workloads.

In determining Agency strategic goals and objectives, numerous internal and external evaluations were used, many of which are addressed in the issues section for each strategic objective. Information from ongoing service satisfaction surveys and quality assurance reviews, as well as many other internal studies of targeted areas, were considered. Various Government Accountability Office reports, Office of the Inspector General audits, reports by the Social Security Advisory Board, the concerns of the public and Congressional interests were also considered in developing the Agency's strategic goals and objectives.

A key force in shaping Social Security's strategic direction is the President's Management Agenda. The President's Management Agenda identifies five government-wide initiatives intended to work together as a mutually reinforcing set of reforms to improve Federal management and deliver results that are important to the American people. These five government-wide initiatives - Strategic Management of Human Capital, Competitive Sourcing, Improved Financial Performance, Expanded Electronic Government and Budget and Performance Integration - are interwoven into the means and strategies for achieving the Agency's strategic objectives. In addition, the Social Security Administration is a participant in the agency-specific President Management Agenda initiative Eliminating Improper Payments.

The section that follows conveys the performance issues the Agency faces, identifies the specific long term outcomes the Social Security Administration aims to achieve and describes the means and strategies for achieving them as well as external factors that may serve as barriers.

SERVICE

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



The Social Security Administration's Service goal focuses not only on the delivery of quality service, but also encompasses traditional and electronic services to applicants for benefits, beneficiaries and the general public, as well as services to and from States, other agencies, third parties, employers and other organizations such as financial institutions and medical providers. This goal also supports the expansion of the electronic government element of the President's Management Agenda.

The measures of service that define quality include accuracy, productivity, cost, timeliness and service satisfaction. The three strategic objectives related to the Service goal focus on these aspects of service:

- One of the Social Security Administration's highest priorities is to improve service to individuals filing disability claims and appeals. The time it now takes to process these actions is unacceptable. Some people who are clearly disabled deserve, but cannot get, an immediate decision. Delays place significant burdens on applicants and their families and drain Agency resources. The Social Security Administration's proposed improvements to the disability determination process, made possible by the Agency's electronic disability process, are designed to accelerate decision times and pay benefits much earlier in the process to people who are clearly disabled.
- After going through a long process to receive disability benefits, few people currently risk going back to work. Only a small percentage of disabled beneficiaries work and earn enough to leave the disability rolls on a temporary or permanent basis. Through its Comprehensive Work Opportunity Initiative, the Agency plans to work with individuals with disabilities, employers, and community service providers to overcome multiple barriers that hinder employment. This initiative will move forward through both regulatory change and demonstration projects.
- Improved productivity is essential to meeting the converging workload and retirement wave challenges ahead. Technology is essential to achieving efficiencies and enabling employees to deliver the kind of service that every claimant, beneficiary and citizen needs and deserves.

Strategic Objective: Make the right decision in the disability process as early as possible

Long Term Outcomes

- Reduce significantly the time it takes for a disability claimant to receive a final Agency decision.
- Improve decisional consistency and accuracy.
- Ensure that beneficiaries who are clearly disabled receive determinations within 20 calendar days or less.

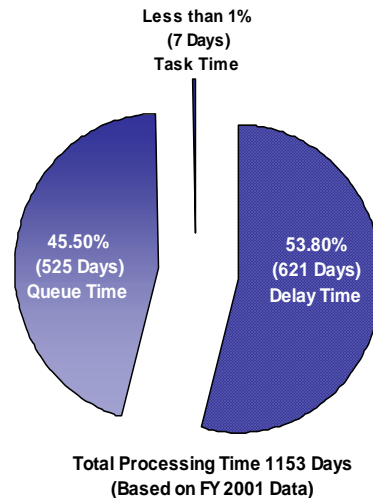
Issues

The Social Security Administration is responsible for the Nation’s two major federal disability programs, Disability Insurance and Supplemental Security Income. The Agency is committed to providing the type of service the American people expect and deserve. In light of the significant growth in disability claims, the increased complexity of those claims, and the younger age of beneficiaries in recent years, the need to make substantial changes in the Agency’s disability determination process has become urgent. The length of time it now takes to process these claims

is unacceptable. It places a significant physical, financial, and emotional burden on applicants and their families. It also leads to re-contacts and re-handling, thus placing an enormous drain on Agency resources.

According to the Agency’s service delivery assessment of the disability process conducted in 2001, persons pursuing their disability claims through all levels of Agency appeal wait an average of 1,153 days for that final decision. Cases that go through all levels of appeal spend an average of 525 days in backlogs waiting for the Agency’s action. A variety of factors account for the remaining delay time (621 days), including factors outside of the Agency’s control such as time periods afforded claimants to request the next step in due process (more than 200 days). Actual hands-on or task time takes only seven days, less than one percent of the elapsed time.

Disability Processing Time Through the Appeals Council From the Claimant's Perspective



External Factors

The most significant external factors affecting the Social Security Administration’s ability to improve service to disability applicants are the dramatic growth of workloads and the increasing complexity of those workloads. Receipts will continue to rise as more baby boomers enter their disability-prone and then retirement years. With Disability Insurance rolls projected to grow 35 percent in the ten years ending 2012, the Social Security Administration cannot keep doing things the same way. Moreover, the type of impairments that have formed the basis for disability claims have changed over the years. The percentage of claims involving allegations of mental impairments has increased dramatically, particularly in the Supplemental Security Income

program. Claims of disability involving mental impairments raise particular administrative resource issues because they involve complex psychological issues and the evidence for these claims may be difficult to develop. The percentage of claims decided on the basis of vocational considerations rather than more readily determinable medical factors have also been increasing steadily. Thus, in addition to the growth in the number of claims, there has been a corresponding increase in the volume of complex claims.

Means and Strategies

There is no one solution to making the disability decision process faster and better. More efficient processing will require many improvements – some large, some small – to achieve the Social Security Administration’s Service goal. The Agency’s strategic initiatives fall into two main categories:

- A new disability determination process in order to improve accuracy, consistency, and timeliness of decision making throughout the process. As part of the new process, the Agency is continuing implementation of the electronic disability project; and
- A Comprehensive Work Opportunity Initiative to assist individuals with disabilities who want to become more economically self-sufficient through employment.

In July 2005, the Social Security Administration proposed regulatory changes to the disability determination process. Specifically, these improvements will:

- Establish a Quick Disability Determination process through which State agencies will expedite initial determinations for claimants who are clearly disabled;
- Create a Federal Expert Unit to augment and strengthen medical and vocational expertise for disability adjudicators at all levels of the disability determination process;
- Eliminate the State agency reconsideration step and terminate the disability prototype that the Agency is currently conducting in 10 States;
- Establish Federal reviewing officials to review State agency initial determinations upon the request of claimants;
- Preserve the right of claimants to request and be provided a de novo hearing, which will be conducted by an Administrative Law Judge;
- Close the record after the Administrative Law Judge issues a decision, but allow for the consideration of new and material evidence under certain limited circumstances;
- Gradually shift certain Appeals Council functions to a newly established Decision Review Board; and
- Strengthen in-line and end-of-line quality review mechanisms at the State agency, reviewing official, hearing, and Decision Review Board levels of the disability determination process.

This new disability process preserves many significant features of the current system. Initial disability claims will continue to be handled by the Agency’s field offices; employees in the Disability Determination Service offices will continue to adjudicate claims for benefits; and Administrative Law Judges will continue to conduct hearings and issue decisions.

One reason it is essential for the Social Security Administration to make the right decision in the disability process as early as possible is that the current lengthy processes can actually present

barriers to an individual's ability to enter or re-enter the workforce. The Agency's Comprehensive Work Opportunity Initiative, which is described under the *Increase Employment for People with Disabilities by Expanding Opportunities* strategic objective, supports the new disability approach with several demonstration projects designed to overcome barriers to employment during the application and adjudication process, and afterward.

The *Early Intervention* project will offer interventions to a nationwide sample of Disability Insurance applicants and beneficiaries with impairments that may be reasonably presumed to be disabling (i.e., they are likely to be awarded Disability Insurance benefits) and who are likely to return to work as a result of the program. The interventions will address multiple barriers to employment. For example, a participating applicant may have access to a wide range of employment services, a one-year cash stipend equal to the applicant's estimated Disability Insurance benefit, and access to appropriate health care.

The *Accelerated Benefits* demonstration project will provide immediate health benefits and employment supports to certain newly entitled Disability Insurance beneficiaries who have medical conditions that are expected to improve or could possibly improve with access to appropriate medical care. Under current law, most Disability Insurance beneficiaries must wait 24 months after cash benefits begin before they become eligible for Medicare. Thus, many people have no health insurance and limited access to medical care during a period of time when access to those resources might serve to help improve their medical condition, thereby increasing their ability to improve their self-sufficiency through employment.

The *Interim Medical Benefits* project would provide medical benefits to applicants with no medical insurance during the period of adjudication. This project would both be likely to improve a participating applicant's medical condition and facilitate the development of the necessary documentation for disability adjudication while providing the applicant needed services.

Through the newly implemented electronic disability process, each adjudicative component involved in the disability determination process is able to work with claims by electronically accessing and retrieving information that is collected, produced, and stored as part of an electronic disability folder. The transition from a paper to an electronic disability process is currently taking place. The complete implementation of electronic disability throughout the country and at every level of the adjudicatory process will assist the Agency in addressing to a significant degree the unacceptably long case processing times.

In a further effort to improve the Agency's disability programs, the Social Security Administration will establish a Disability Program Policy Council to provide a forum to discuss policy issues and to make policy and procedural recommendations.

In addition to these initiatives, others aimed at improving the disability determination process include elimination of disability workload backlogs, revising the medical listings, updating vocational policy to reflect market changes (including developing ways of effectively measuring physical and mental requirements of jobs that exist in the national economy), and improving training of disability examiners.

Strategic Objective: Increase employment for people with disabilities by expanding opportunities

Long Term Outcomes

- Increase awareness of opportunities to achieve greater financial independence through employment.
- Increase participation of beneficiaries and service providers in work opportunity initiatives.

Issues

The Social Security Administration is looking at a new approach to serve individuals with disabilities more effectively. The population of individuals with disabilities represents various age groups and has different impairments, levels of education, work experience, and capacities for working. Many changes in law, medicine, technology, and society have transpired since the Agency's

disability programs were established. The workplace has also been made more accessible. The President's *New Freedom Initiative* is expanding employment opportunities for Americans with disabilities.

While many individuals with disabilities cannot work at all or on a sustained basis, many others want to and can work on a part-time or full-time basis. Unfortunately, despite advances in medicine, law, technology, and society, multiple barriers to work still exist (see chart on next page). Most individuals with disabilities face more than one barrier, often three, four or more. To effectively assist individuals with disabilities who want to work, the Social Security Administration is working to address all barriers. To leave just one barrier standing is to keep a beneficiary from working.

Within this changing environment, the Agency has implemented a number of strategies to expand the opportunities for individuals with disabilities in order to achieve economic self-sufficiency. These strategies also support the President's *New Freedom Initiative*.

External Factors

Of the multiple barriers that may hinder employment, several are external to the Social Security Administration, though Agency policies and procedures are designed to address them. The external factors include:

- lack of access to training and employment services;
- loss of employment supports;
- job loss and difficulty of reinstatement;
- fear of work-related overpayments.

BUILDING BRIDGES TO THE WORKPLACE

Former Recipient Obtains Self-Sufficiency

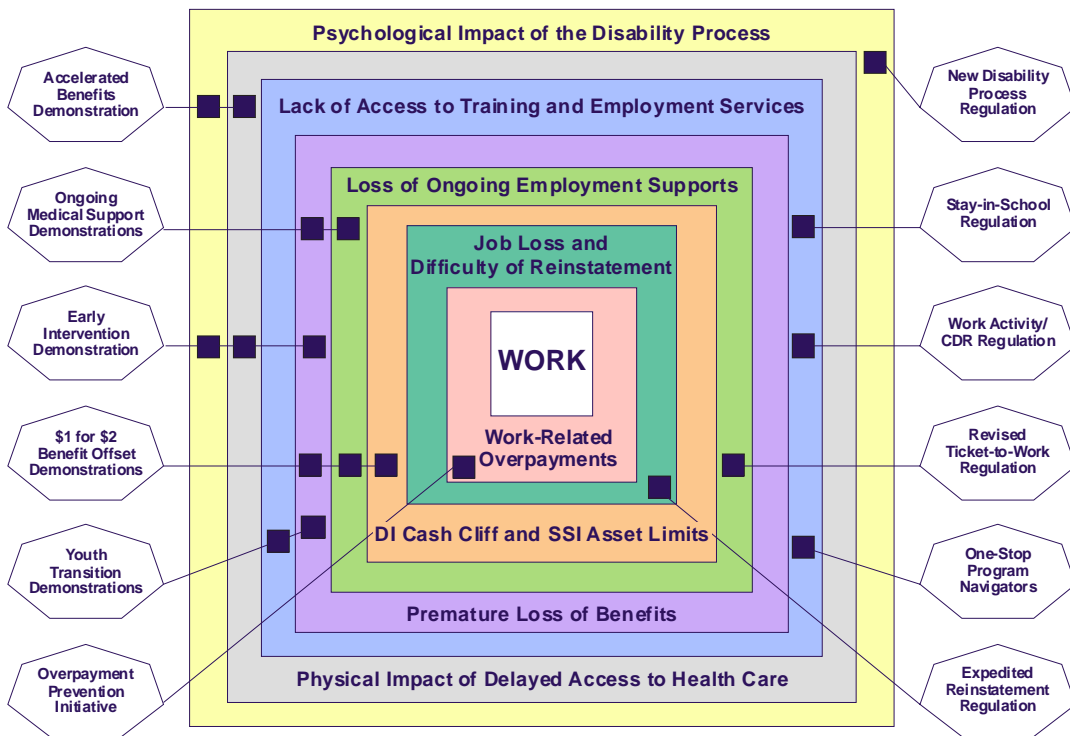
Jeff is an individual with quadriplegia who was receiving both Supplemental Security Income and Social Security Disability Insurance. His goal was to become an internet coordinator, but he needed some help. He took advantage of a Plan for Achieving Self Support (PASS) which allowed him to save his wages and to exclude them as a resource. The PASS allowed him to set aside \$18,000 in wages, which he used to purchase the van he needed for the job. Due to the trial work period, another important work incentive, Jeff's Social Security benefits did not cease until twelve months after his PASS ended. He currently works out of his home as an Internet Coordinator.

(The following graphic indicates both external barriers that may hinder employment, as well as those barriers directly related to current or past Social Security law or policies.)

Means and Strategies

The Social Security Administration is working to ensure that individuals with disabilities who want to work have the opportunity to do so. The Comprehensive Work Opportunity Initiative represents the Agency’s overarching strategy to assist individuals with disabilities who want to become more self-sufficient through employment.

Figure 1: Comprehensive Work Opportunity Initiative: Overcoming Multiple Barriers to Employment



Source: Social Security Administration’s Office of Disability and Income Security Programs, 2005

The Comprehensive Work Opportunity Initiative addresses these multiple barriers to employment through a three-pronged approach. First, the Social Security Administration will strengthen and continue to market the Ticket to Work program. Second, the Agency will design, implement, and evaluate demonstration projects aimed at supporting the efforts of individuals with disabilities who wish to enter or re-enter the workforce. For many of these projects, the Social Security Administration will work in conjunction with other Federal and State agencies such as the Department of Education and Department of Labor in order to provide support across a broad range of areas. Third, the Agency will continue to develop and offer appropriate legislative and regulatory proposals aimed at encouraging participation by beneficiaries and service providers in work incentive initiatives.

Ticket to Work strategies, which directly support the President's *New Freedom Initiative*, include:

- Providing improved marketing materials to beneficiaries with disabilities to increase awareness of the Ticket Program. The Agency will continue to reach out into the communities by means of expositions, meetings, conferences, community forums and media events. Social Security focus groups will continue to ensure that the Agency is providing, in the appropriate formats, products Social Security beneficiaries want and need.
- Making benefits planning services more available and usable for beneficiaries to increase their awareness of return-to-work options.
- Focusing on the improvement and expansion of the Agency's partnerships with other Federal, State, community-based organizations and other public agencies, as well as private individuals and groups, who serve Social Security beneficiaries with disabilities.

The Social Security Administration continues to develop demonstration projects and other innovative initiatives that test strategies to increase opportunities and break down potential barriers for people with disabilities who wish to enter or re-enter the workforce. The demonstrations will be evaluated over the course of the multi-year projects. A final evaluation report will be issued upon completion of each of these projects.

- The *Disability Program Navigator*, jointly funded with the Department of Labor, provides seamless employment services to individuals with disabilities seeking to enter or re-enter the workforce. Navigators work in One-Stop Career Centers administered by the State Workforce Investment Boards and provide a critical link to the local employment market and facilitate access to programs and services. The initial Disability Program Navigator orientation and training took place in November 2003. The project is expected to continue into FY 2007. The Department of Labor has contracted with the University of Iowa to perform an independent evaluation of the project.
- The *Youth Transition Process Demonstration* assesses ways to facilitate the transition of youth with disabilities from school to independence as adults. Projects will continue to provide services through 2009. A contract was awarded in September 2005 to evaluate the effectiveness of the project.
- The Social Security Administration was provided funding by Congress for the *Homeless Outreach Projects and Evaluation*, which address homelessness and support the President's initiative to end chronic homelessness in 10 years. Through cooperative agreements, forty one service providers nationwide will provide application assistance to homeless populations into calendar year 2007. A separate contract was awarded in FY 2004 to evaluate the effectiveness of outreach and interventions.
- The *Mental Health Treatment Study* will test the impact of providing health care to Disability Insurance beneficiaries who have a mental impairment as their primary diagnosis. Study participants will receive access to outpatient mental health disorder treatments and/or employment supports to determine if these interventions have an impact on their ability to return to work. A contract for implementing and evaluating the project was awarded in September 2005. The Agency expects enrollments to begin in mid-2006.

- The *Benefit Offset Demonstration* will allow the Social Security Administration to test the impact and cost of a sliding scale benefit offset for Disability Insurance beneficiaries and applicants. Under this test, disability benefits would be reduced \$1 for every \$2 a Disability Insurance beneficiary earns above a given threshold. Under current rules, a beneficiary will lose Disability Insurance cash and Medicare benefits after completing a trial work period. This demonstration is being conducted in two distinct phases: the initial four-state pilot project in Connecticut, Utah, Vermont, and Wisconsin and the national study. Social Security began enrollments for the four-state pilot early in August 2005. The Agency hopes to begin enrollments for the national study by the end of 2006.
- The *Ongoing Medical Benefits* project will test the effects of providing ongoing health insurance coverage to beneficiaries who wish to work, but have no other affordable access to health insurance. The pilot study will target individuals with HIV/auto-immune disorders. Plans call for enrollments to begin in late 2006.

The Social Security Administration will continue to develop legislative and regulatory proposals aimed at simplifying work incentive policies. The Agency's goal is to increase beneficiaries' understanding and use of the financial incentives that could support their efforts to return to work. In 2005, the Social Security Administration proposed a number of changes to the Ticket-to-Work program, which required regulatory changes, to expand beneficiary eligibility, increase beneficiary choice and flexibility of services available from both Vocational Rehabilitation agencies and employment networks, and modify the payment systems to increase the incentive for smaller employment networks to participate in the program and accelerate milestone payments. Other proposed regulatory changes aimed at breaking down potential barriers to work include changes to the rules regarding continuing disability reviews for some beneficiaries to remove the potential disincentive of work activity within the Ticket program.

Also in 2005, the Agency made several final regulatory changes to remove barriers to employment including:

- Allowing the continuation of benefit payments to certain individuals who are participating in a program of vocational rehabilitation services, employment services, or other support services and extending eligibility for continuing benefits to students age 18 through 21 who have individualized education programs; and
- Providing an expedited process for benefit reinstatement if a beneficiary's entitlement or eligibility for benefits is terminated due to work activity.

The Social Security Administration will continue to evaluate potential ways to further assist individuals with disabilities who are interested in entering or returning to work.

Strategic Objective: Improve service through technology, focusing on accuracy, security, and efficiency

Long Term Outcomes

- Allow the public to more easily interact with the Social Security Administration by increasing partnerships with government and non-governmental organizations to share data and processes.
- Improve and expand service capabilities by making optimal use of technology, including telephone and other electronic processes.
- Protect all sensitive data by ensuring that appropriate systems security and privacy safeguards continue to be in place.
- Eliminate backlogs for postentitlement work.

Issues

The maturing of the baby boomer generation will significantly increase the Social Security Administration’s workloads. In order to continue providing excellent service, the Agency must look to technological and systems enhancements to meet the public’s service delivery expectations.

The expectations of the American public are changing, and technologies that enable service improvements are evolving rapidly. A growing portion of the public will choose automated services and expect the same quality, ease of use and range of services that they are becoming increasingly accustomed to from other public and private service providers. They will expect fully electronic

transactions in a secure environment. They will increasingly expect to use e-mail and web chat to conduct business with the Agency. They will also expect problem resolution at the first point of contact, whether by telephone, in-person or via e-mail. The public will also demand real-time assistance when using the Agency’s more complex automated Internet applications.

In addition, industry experts predict that call volumes are likely to grow, even among Internet users. Surveys conducted in 2003 and 2004 by the Pew Internet and American Life project continue to show that Americans who contact government prefer to do so by telephone compared to other means. This preference applies to persons with disabilities as well. The Internet remains the second most preferred method and is gaining increasing acceptance.

The information technology revolution has changed the way the Social Security Administration operates. The growth in computer interconnectivity brings heightened awareness of and obligations in the areas of security and privacy. The Social Security Administration must continue to aggressively protect its information, as the public is less likely to use the Agency’s electronic services if they do not believe that their information is safe and secure.

External Factors

As an Agency that provides service, Federal budget and resource constraints are external factors for the Social Security Administration. While the Agency’s ability to achieve its performance goals is driven by productivity and other programmatic changes, as a service Agency, budgetary resources play an external role in the Agency’s ability to meet these goals.

The Social Security Administration is also affected by government-wide initiatives, such as the President's Management Agenda, which includes the initiative on expanded electronic government, and business consolidation efforts. These government-wide efforts can directly or indirectly affect current or planned Agency activities.

Means and Strategies

The Social Security Administration continues to be a leader in the innovative use of technology to serve the public. The President's Management Agenda directs Federal agencies to use today's technologies to provide high quality service, improve access and reduce costs. The Agency is committed to achieving the goals of expanded electronic government as it addresses the challenges of growing workloads, public expectations, scarce resources and external mandates.

The Agency will address the expanding service needs of the public. It will also address how the Agency can best be structured and integrated to meet those needs. An essential element in this process is the active involvement of the American public and business community as they respond to surveys and participate in focus groups.

The Social Security Administration will continue to pursue partnerships with government and business in order to improve its service through shared processing or data sharing. The Agency's data exchange efforts and its support of the various government-wide initiatives all promote better customer service through shared processing and data sharing.

In order to maximize usage of the telephone and Internet, the Agency needs to deploy its resources in ways that maximize their effectiveness. This means taking advantage of technological advances and related policy changes that will enable the Social Security Administration to respond to changing public preferences, improve existing electronic applications and increase the number of Social Security applications available to telephone and Internet users. The Agency continues to align its workforce skills to support these efforts to effectively direct these efforts into the future.

THE "BEST" WAY TO CHECK BENEFIT ELIGIBILITY

Have you ever wondered if you might now be eligible for monthly Social Security benefits, or if you qualify for Medicare health insurance? Sometimes it's hard to know where to begin when you are looking for information about large government programs.

Social Security has an online service available that can provide some real help for you. It's called the Benefit Eligibility Screening Tool (BEST). If you would like to know what benefits you may be eligible for, just log onto <http://best.ssa.gov>. It's available in both English and Spanish.

You can file for retirement, spouse and disability benefits online at www.ssa.gov/applyforbenefits. You also can file a retirement, spouse, survivor's, disability or Supplemental Security Income application by calling Social Security's toll-free number, 1-800-772-1213, or visiting your local Social Security office.

The Social Security Administration will continue to develop cost-effective Internet services. The Agency will also expand the usage of these services by improving their ease of use, encouraging the public to use the Agency's Internet website, and partnering with other governmental and private entities to promote integrated service delivery. The Social Security Administration has made substantial investments in electronic service delivery and will continue to do so as the Agency enhances and refines this increasingly more important service channel.

With the proliferation and increased sophistication of online governmental and private transactional services, the expectations of the public for Internet services are higher than in the past. The Agency will continue to respond to these expectations by developing applications that are fully electronic and permit the individual to complete a transaction at the initial point of contact, whether that be online or through the Agency's 800-number. This requires applications that promote self-service through use of efficient authentication methods, clear language and instructions and a structure with an orderly flow for the information requested.

Although the Social Security Administration will focus on the Internet, for the foreseeable future telephone service will remain a primary service channel for providing effective and efficient service to the public. The Agency will continue to take the steps necessary to assure that telephone service, whether through the 800-number or otherwise, is provided at a high level of excellence.

The Social Security Administration will improve operational efficiency through technologies aimed at optimizing the existing national 800-number network. These technologies will help the Agency forecast call volumes and staffing needs, balance inbound call queues across the network, and provide improved management information to those who manage the local call centers. In the future, the integration of systems networks and telephone networks through enhanced technology will provide a seamless service delivery channel for those individuals choosing self-service applications on the Agency's national 800-number or Internet. Increasingly sophisticated use of voice recognition technology will further enable the Social Security Administration to provide better and more efficient service.

At the same time Social Security must continue to ensure the security of its information and provide an integrated security, privacy and disclosure framework that protects the American public when using Agency services. By improving systems security and controls, the Agency will be able to use current and future technology more effectively to fulfill the public's needs. The Agency will continue to develop its integrated policy framework on privacy, security, and disclosure and to implement policy and information technology infrastructure safeguards to prevent fraud and abuse.

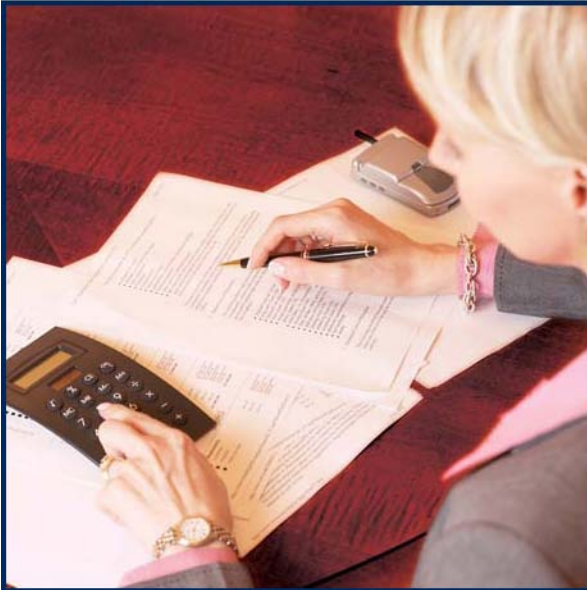
AGENCY PRINCIPLES FOR TELEPHONE AND INTERNET SERVICE DELIVERY

The Agency has focused its attention on how it can continue to meet extensive public service demands. The commitment of the Agency's employees to providing high quality service is strong, but as workloads increase this will become more difficult.

To address this issue, the Agency has developed a comprehensive set of telephone and internet service delivery principles, which can be found at www.socialsecurity.gov.

STEWARDSHIP

Strategic Goal: To protect the integrity of Social Security programs through superior Stewardship



Individuals who contribute to the Social Security Trust Fund through payroll deductions, self-employment taxes, or income taxes need to be confident their tax dollars are properly managed. Beneficiaries must be guaranteed their benefits are accurate and received timely.

Good stewardship goes beyond good money management. It includes ensuring the security of the Social Security Administration's information systems and the integrity and privacy of the personal information the Agency maintains. It is also an obligation to provide safe and secure environments in which employees can work and the public can transact business.

Information technology has altered the way the public interacts with government and the way government agencies interact with each other. The Social Security Administration's ability to obtain, verify, and match information and data electronically with other governmental agencies and organizations helps detect and prevent improper payments in the Old-Age, Survivors and Disability Insurance and Supplemental Security Income programs. The widespread interconnectivity of computer systems and the critical operations and infrastructures they support create new security-related vulnerabilities.

The Government Accountability Office and the Social Security Administration's Office of the Inspector General have identified Social Security Number protection as a major management challenge. The Social Security Advisory Board has expressed concern that the fraudulent use of the Social Security Number has become a significant public policy issue that is expected to grow as the number of Social Security Number-related crimes escalates. Strengthening the Social Security Number issuance and verification process is a top Agency priority.

Strategic Objective: Detect and prevent fraudulent and improper payments and improve debt management

Long Term Outcomes

- Increase the Agency's stewardship accuracy rate for Supplemental Security Income payments.
- Maintain the Agency's stewardship accuracy rates for Old-Age, Survivors and Disability Insurance payments.
- Increase the percent of outstanding debt that is in a collection arrangement.
- Remain current with Disability Insurance and Supplemental Security Income continuing disability reviews.
- Finish processing special disability cases.
- Reduce the backlog of workers' compensation cases.

Issues

The Social Security Administration issues benefit payments under the Old-Age, Survivors and Disability Insurance and Supplemental Security Income programs. The Agency is responsible for issuing timely benefit payments for complex entitlement programs to over 52 million individuals. Even the slightest error in the overall process can result in millions of dollars in over- or underpayments.

Improper payments are defined as payments that should not have been made or were made for incorrect amounts. By detecting, preventing and recovering fraudulent and improper payments, the Social Security Administration is ensuring that Americans receive the benefits they are due and building taxpayer confidence that the Agency is accurately managing all of its resources.

This strategic objective incorporates the Agency's activities addressing the President's Management Agenda program initiative "Eliminating Improper Payments". In the most recent scorecard issued by the Office of Management and Budget, the Agency received "yellow" for status and "green" for progress.

External Factors

As an Agency that provides service, Federal budget and resource constraints are external factors for the Social Security Administration. While the Agency's ability to achieve its performance goals is driven by productivity and other programmatic changes, as a service Agency, budgetary resources play an external role in the Agency's ability to meet these goals. In addition, the Social Security Administration's ability to achieve this objective is affected by factors such as:

- The need to improve information received from outside entities, such as Federal and State agencies, banks and other institutions;
- The lack of timely reporting by beneficiaries and recipients; and
- Limits on the actions the Social Security Administration can take to resolve outstanding debt, including Social Security Act restrictions on the payment withholding rates for SSI overpayments and Treasury regulations that limit the time period for collection of delinquent debt.

Means and Strategies

The Social Security Administration plans to build upon its aggressive efforts to reduce improper payments and resolve related debt by increasing cost effective program integrity initiatives. The Agency will pursue activities that have the most potential to improve program integrity across three fronts: prevention of overpayments; detection of improper payments; and resolution of debt.

The Agency will continue to conduct continuing disability reviews and non-disability redeterminations to detect and prevent improper payments to Social Security beneficiaries and Supplemental Security Income recipients to determine if factors affecting their eligibility or monthly benefit amount have changed. These reviews have proven to be highly cost-effective by producing program savings far in excess of the administrative costs expended to conduct them. For example, every \$1 expended to conduct continuing disability reviews has produced a \$10 return to the taxpayers.

The prevention of overpayments will be accomplished by testing and implementing, as appropriate, alternative ways for beneficiaries to report income to the Social Security Administration. The Agency is also implementing agreements with financial institutions to detect unreported income and resources. The Social Security Administration has tested methods to electronically access recipient financial account records, and tools are being expanded to additional field offices. This process is also being used to identify characteristics of recipients likely to have accounts that exceed the Supplemental Security Income limit.

The Agency has studied the use of touch-tone and voice activated telephone technology in the reporting of monthly wages, and is also evaluating the use of a centralized unit for wage reporting as opposed to localized field office collection of such information. As more enhancements to these tools are developed, they will be implemented nationwide and provide recipients with additional wage reporting options. By providing recipients with more choices and simplifying the reporting process, wage reporting compliance should improve.

The Social Security Administration has also secured access to a web-based online commercial public records database, which has successfully been used by the Agency to detect undisclosed real property ownership. The Agency is also working with the Department of Defense on a pilot project to identify undisclosed resources using multiple databases that the Department of Defense maintains. If this pilot proves successful, the Social Security Administration will have another inter-agency matching partnership to assist in preventing improper payments.

Increased detection of improper payments will be accomplished by moving more aggressively to electronic verification and exchanges of information in partnership with Federal and State agencies. The Social Security Administration has an extensive computer matching program to ensure accurate payment of benefits. The Agency will continue its emphasis on the use of computer matches to identify and prevent overpayments. Computer matching programs that will continue to be utilized include agreements with the Internal Revenue Service, the Department of Labor, the Department of Homeland Security, the Railroad Retirement Board, and the Veterans Administration, just to name a few.

In order to improve on its ability to recover outstanding debts, the Social Security Administration either has underway or plans to implement the following:

- A system that will prioritize unresolved debts. This will ensure that the Agency is addressing those debts that have the greatest likelihood of being recovered and the largest payoff.
- Improved ability to recover debts when the debtor is receiving benefits from a program other than the one in which the debt exists.
- Regulations to recover debts owed by Federal employees by offset of their salaries.
- Charging interest on debts, and using both private collection agencies and Treasury collection centers to recover debt.
- Improved Supplemental Security Income non-disability redeterminations. The new process will reduce the number non-disability redeterminations that require a face-to-face interview, thereby increasing payment accuracy while reducing costs.

The Agency will continue support of the cooperative disability investigation units, which investigate allegations of fraud and undertake legal actions when fraud is demonstrated. One of the Agency's most successful anti-fraud initiatives, these units play a vital role in improving stewardship responsibilities in the Social Security disability programs by promoting the Agency's policy of zero tolerance for fraud and abuse. The Agency hopes to add more investigative staff or units, as funding permits.

The Social Security Administration will also continue to pursue appropriate legislative changes, such as Supplemental Security Income program simplification, in order to make program requirements less complex and improve accuracy in the programs the Agency administers.

Strategic Objective: Strengthen the integrity of the Social Security Number issuance process to help prevent misuse and fraud of the Social Security Number and card

Long Term Outcomes

- Strengthen the integrity of the Social Security Number issuance process by engaging in ongoing policy development in partnership with other government entities.
- Assign Social Security Numbers and issue cards accurately and safeguard Agency-maintained identity information.
- Provide legally required Social Security Number record verification services to aid in the prevention of Social Security Number misuse.

Issues

Through the Social Security Number issuance process, the Agency assigns a unique Social Security Number to each United States citizen and qualified non-citizen who applies and provides required documentary evidence of age, identity, and citizenship or lawful immigration status. A non-citizen who qualifies for a Social Security card, but does not have permission to work in the United States, must also provide evidence of a valid non-work reason for needing a number.

A Social Security Number can aid in an individual's ability to obtain services, acquire State-issued licenses, and conduct financial business, as well as gain access to information in various databases. As such, it is a powerful tool that could be used to engage in fraud or terrorism. The Social Security Advisory Board, the Government Accountability Office, and the Social Security Administration's Office of the Inspector General have all identified Social Security Number misuse as one of the Agency's major challenges during the next decade. The Social Security Administration identifies four basic types of Social Security Number fraud:

- Use of fraudulent documents to establish an entirely new "fake" identity;
- Illegal acquisition of a number, or use of someone else's number;
- Identity theft, when an imposter assumes the identity of another; and
- Use of fictitious numbers.

External Factors

The Agency should do all it can to ensure the integrity and security of the Social Security Number and card. To that end, the Social Security Administration continually improves its policy and technical controls to protect personal identification information entrusted to the Agency.

Both the Government Accountability Office and the Social Security Administration's Office of the Inspector General have identified weaknesses in the use and display of Social Security Numbers by government agencies and the private sector. Although the Agency has no control over the use of the Social Security Number in public, private and commercial transactions, the Agency's unique relationship to the Social Security Number carries with it a certain responsibility to protect it from misuse.

Congressional interest in Social Security Number issuance continues to generate bills and laws that affect the Social Security Number and card. The Agency will continue to closely monitor issues developing in Congress and implement new policies brought about by changes in the law. The Social Security Administration is also subject to budgetary constraints, which will likely continue and affect the Agency's ability to make changes in the Social Security Number issuance process.

Means and Strategies

The Agency has taken many steps to strengthen its capability to prevent those with criminal intent from obtaining and misusing Social Security Numbers. The Agency is working closely with the Department of Homeland Security to develop a web-based verification system that will expedite the non-citizen immigration and work status verification process. To further curtail the use of fraudulent immigration documents to get a Social Security Number, the Agency established a cooperative program with the Department of Homeland Security and the Department of State. This program allows certain non-citizens to apply for a Social Security Number with the Department of State when applying for a visa to enter the United States.

The Intelligence Reform and Terrorism Prevention Act, requires the Agency to further improve its document verification processes, Social Security Number and card security, and Social Security Number verification systems. In consultation with the Department of Homeland Security, an interagency task force will be formed for the purpose of establishing Social Security Number and card security requirements, including standards for safeguarding cards from counterfeiting, tampering, alteration, and theft and for verifying documents submitted for the issuance of replacement cards. The task force will also develop and allow for enforcement actions against the fraudulent use of Social Security Numbers and cards. The Social Security Administration will be responsible for the implementation of the security requirements.

As part of the State birth registration process, hospitals offer parents an opportunity to request a Social Security Number for their newborn. The Agency has arranged for a study to determine options for ensuring the integrity of Social Security Numbers issued through this process, including methods to reconcile hospital birth records with State and local agency birth registrations and with information provided to the Social Security Administration. These improvements will be designed to prevent the assignment of Social Security Numbers to unnamed children, the assignment of multiple Social Security Numbers to the same child, and other opportunities for fraud.

The Social Security Administration will continue to address identified weaknesses in the Agency's information security environment. For example, the Agency plans to add death and fraud indicators to the Social Security Number verification systems used by employers and State agencies issuing drivers' licenses and identity cards. Improvements to automated systems for processing Social Security Number applications will make it easier for Agency employees to adhere to established policy.

Data sharing is a major tool used by the Agency to combat Social Security Number misuse and fraud. The Social Security Administration will continue to work with other government agencies to resolve data compatibility issues affecting electronic information exchanges. The Agency will

also work to improve the willingness of States to partner with the Social Security Administration to electronically verify information from their databases. The Agency has multiple agreements with the American Association for Motor Vehicle Administration through which the Agency provides Social Security Number verification for drivers' licenses and applications for State-issued identification cards. As a result of the *Help America Vote Act of 2002*, the Social Security Administration, in cooperation with American Association for Motor Vehicle Administration, provides and will continue to provide Social Security Number verification for voter registration purposes. The Agency will also work with employers to strengthen their compliance with the obligation to verify the Social Security Numbers of their employees through the use of Social Security Number verification tools.

As a means of guarding against identity theft and Social Security Number fraud, the Agency has removed Social Security Numbers from its two largest contract notice workloads: the Social Security Statement and the Benefit Rate Increase notice. Because many more centrally printed notices continue to display the full Social Security Number, the Agency is assessing the feasibility of replacing the Social Security Number with an alternate tracking code for those notices.

The Social Security Administration enjoys a relationship of public trust in safeguarding the personal information it maintains. Because of this trust, the public looks to the Agency to do all that it can to ensure the integrity and security of the Social Security Number. To that end, the Social Security Administration will continue to assess its policies concerning providing the best in policy and technical controls to protect the valuable and important personal identification information entrusted to it and to prevent Social Security Number and card misuse and fraud.

Strategic Objective: Ensure the accuracy of earnings records so that eligible individuals can receive the proper benefits due them

Long Term Outcomes

- Facilitate more accurate earnings reports by encouraging the use of electronic wage reporting.
- Reduce the number of annual earnings items posted to the Earnings Suspense File.

Issues

Social Security benefits are based on a worker's lifetime earnings. As the agency responsible for issuing Social Security Numbers and paying retirement, survivors, and disability benefits to eligible individuals, the Social Security Administration must have accurate records of every worker's earnings. Inaccurate

earnings records can create benefit payment errors. Any wages that cannot be posted to an individual worker's record of lifetime earnings, because of a mismatch of a worker's name and/or Social Security Number, are placed in an electronic holding file called the Earnings Suspense File.

Despite the Agency's efforts to reduce the number of records placed in the Earnings Suspense File, significant obstacles remain that hamper the Agency's ability to ensure the accuracy of earnings records.

External Factors

The Social Security Administration calculates benefit payments based on the earnings an individual has accumulated over his or her lifetime, and recording those earnings accurately is critical. However, the Agency's ability to accurately record earnings depends greatly on employers and employees reporting names and Social Security Numbers correctly.

There are various reasons why the names and Social Security Numbers reported by employers do not match the Agency's records resulting in these earnings being posted to the Earnings Suspense File. Some are due simply to mistakes or clerical errors (e.g., transposition of numbers in the Social Security Number). Other factors that may also contribute to the Agency's inability to match earnings to a worker's records include the following:

- The worker uses a different name at work than is shown on Social Security records;
- Issues related to a multicultural society where some individuals have multiple or hyphenated surnames;
- The transient nature of some occupations such as the agriculture and service industries; and
- The unauthorized use of Social Security Numbers by some undocumented aliens.

While the Social Security Administration cannot control many of the factors causing incorrect wage reports, the Agency is doing what it can to provide employers with tools for improving the

accuracy of wage reports. The Agency is also undertaking an educational campaign to inform the wage reporting community of the various tools available. However, use of the tools by employers remains voluntary.

The Social Security Administration continues to work closely with the Internal Revenue Service to improve all aspects of wage reporting. In addition, the Agency continues to share information with employers and employees on mismatches and, to the extent allowed by law, the Social Security Administration shares some information with other Federal agencies, including the Department of Homeland Security.

Means and Strategies

The Agency continues to pursue activities that will assist the employer community in the verification of name and Social Security Numbers prior to reporting end-of-year wage information. The Agency also continues to evaluate the needs of the employer community in an effort to ensure the Agency is able to provide them with the necessary tools to report correct name and Social Security Number information. One such tool is the *Basic Pilot*, which is an ongoing joint initiative whereby the Social Security Administration supports the Department of Homeland Security in assisting participating employers in confirming work eligibility for newly hired employees. The *Basic Pilot* is mandated under the Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996 (P.L. 104-208) and recently was expanded to allow employers in all 50 States to participate.

The Social Security Administration will continue to educate employers about electronic wage reporting through online information and resources, promotional materials, payroll and employer-focused conferences, articles in trade publications, and direct contact with employers. The Agency will also continue on-site visits with large payroll service providers and employers, encouraging them to report electronically. Through the use of marketing strategies, the Agency will continue to encourage employers to use the Social Security Number Verification Service, which now allows all employers to verify the names and Social Security Numbers of employees against Social Security's records via the Internet. The Agency will also strive to enhance its electronic reporting and verification systems, including providing employers with additional online access to their information.

The Social Security Administration is employing new matching routines that enable the Agency to post greater numbers of earnings suspense file items to the correct individual's earnings records. The new routines use information housed in the Agency's Social Security Number database, benefit records and earnings records to match to items in the suspense file. The software posts items to earnings records by utilizing name matching, employment history and earnings history.

Additionally, the Agency will continue to issue annual Social Security Statements to all eligible individuals age 25 and over so that they can review their earnings record for completeness and accuracy.

Strategic Objective: Manage Agency finances and assets to link resources effectively to performance outcomes

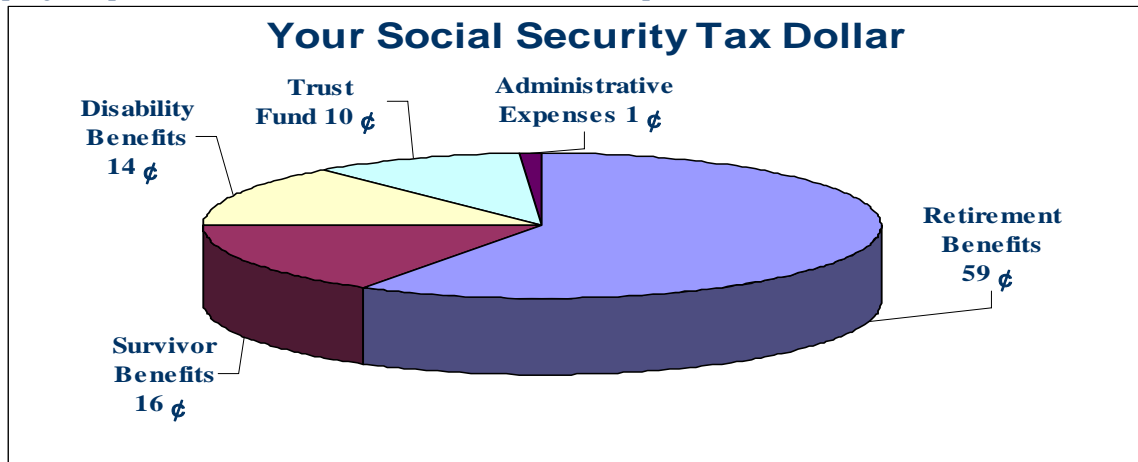
Long Term Outcomes

- Demonstrate the Agency’s commitment to sound financial management by creating a strong internal control structure and producing relevant and reliable accounting information, including receiving an “unqualified opinion” on the Agency’s financial statement audit.
- Maximize the ability of the Agency’s financial, performance, and management information systems to fulfill its mission by improving existing automated tools and developing new ones.
- Ensure the most effective use of limited Agency resources by continuing to achieve 2 percent, on average, annual productivity improvements.
- Ensure the security of the Agency’s information systems, physical assets, and employees by continuously performing security assessments and acquiring state-of-the-art protection systems.

Issues

The Social Security Administration is working to ensure that taxpayer dollars are directed at accomplishing its mission and goals with minimal administrative expense (see chart below) and that those dollars buy more and go further every year. The American taxpayers expect it and it is the Agency’s responsibility to deliver it. This objective focuses on the management aspects of administering the Social Security programs. Congress, external interested parties, and the general public need sound data to monitor and evaluate the Social Security Administration’s performance. The Agency relies primarily on internally generated data to manage the information it uses to administer its programs and report to Congress and the public.

The necessity for good internal data government-wide has resulted in the passage of several laws, including the Government Performance and Results Act, which calls for greater accountability within the government. Recognizing the importance of good management to the efficient and economic delivery of desired results, the President’s Management Agenda focuses on the integration of the budget and performance measurement process. It requires agencies to identify high quality outcome measures, accurately monitor the performance of programs, and link program performance to the costs associated with that performance.



Source: Social Security Administration’s Office of the Actuary, 2005

Note: This chart only includes SSA benefits.

Recent regulatory actions include the revision of the Office of Management and Budget Circular Number A-123, which is aimed at improving the accountability and effectiveness of programs and operations by developing, assessing, correcting and reporting on internal controls. This revised circular reaffirms that management is responsible for an effective internal control system and now requires management to provide separate assurances on internal controls over financial reporting along with a report on identified material weaknesses and corrective actions. This assurance statement will be in addition to the annual assurance statement already required by the Federal Managers' Financial Integrity Act. Revised Circular A-123 will require the Social Security Administration to continuously assess the risks inherent in its business processes, design and implement controls to mitigate these risks and institute monitoring procedures to ensure Agency controls are effective and deficiencies are corrected in a timely manner.

External Factors

Budgetary and resource constraints continue to play a significant role in the Agency's ability to meet its performance goals. The Social Security Administration's actual appropriations, based on the Agency's budget justifications and Congressional deliberations, will be a major factor in how successful the Agency is in meeting those goals. As an Agency that provides service, Federal budget and resource constraints are external factors for the Social Security Administration. While the Agency's ability to achieve its performance goals is driven by productivity and other programmatic changes, as a service Agency, budgetary resources play an external role in the Agency's ability to meet these goals.

Other government-wide policies and standards will continue to have an effect on the Agency's progress under this objective. Examples include the President's Management Agenda's emphasis on Budget and Performance Integration and Improving Financial Performance, which will help guide Agency performance in this area. Also, changes to audit standards and procedures could mean increased scrutiny of the Social Security Administration's use of funds (e.g., audits of Financial Statements). Additional factors that may have an effect on this objective include potential legislation to change Federal employee pay and performance systems, as well as ever-changing physical and cyber security standards.

Means and Strategies

The Agency defines sound financial management as the combination of the accurate reporting of financial data, as well as having a strong internal control structure in place. Each year the Social Security Administration receives unqualified audit opinions on its financial statements as well as unqualified audit opinions on management's assertion that the Agency's systems of accounting and internal control are in compliance with the Office of Management and Budget objectives. The Social Security Administration will strive to continue this record of achievement by improving and strengthening its financial and internal control environment. On an ongoing basis, the Agency will define its primary business process activities, identify the key controls within those areas, evaluate and define the major risks to each business process, ensure controls are in place to mitigate these risks, and design tests to ensure controls are operating as intended. This process will ensure the Agency's resources are directed to those areas most important to its mission and goals.

The Social Security Administration has established the relationship between resources and results through development of the Service Delivery Budget Plan. This multi-year plan details the resources required to support core Agency workloads and aligns costs with performance goals. The Service Delivery Budget Plan will continue to play an integral role in demonstrating the relationship between resources and the results that can be achieved with those resources.

The Agency will improve its budget formulation system by developing more automated tools that build on the financial performance and management information systems already in use. Advances in this area will enable the Agency to better project how incremental resource changes affect its workloads, outputs and outcomes.

The Social Security Administration will continue to develop and implement integrated work measurement, budget formulation and financial and cost accounting methodologies that fully and accurately capture the work that the Agency does. These methodologies will provide the detailed information managers need to make informed decisions on allocating resources to maximize performance outcomes.

To ensure that the Social Security Administration provides the maximum level of security for its employees, clients and assets, the Agency will continue to assess its security posture against changes in the latest Federal law, regulations and standards including the National Institute of Standards and Technology and the Office of Management and Budget security standards.

SOLVENCY

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



The Social Security Administration is the major source of income for most of the elderly population. In fact, more than 90 percent of individuals age 65 and over receive Social Security benefits. About two-thirds of these beneficiaries receive most of their income from Social Security, and for over 20 percent of them, Social Security is their only source of income. The Social Security Administration provides not only retirement benefits but also valuable survivorship and disability insurance protection for workers and their families. Almost one-third of today's Social Security beneficiaries qualify under these non-retirement programs.

There is an important national discussion going on concerning the future of Social Security. The Agency is committed to strengthening Social Security for current and future generations and is ready to assist the Administration and Congress in doing so. The 2005 Annual Report of the Social Security Administration's Board of Trustees states that the financing of Social Security is unsustainable over the long term at present payroll tax and scheduled benefit levels. Additionally, the Comptroller General of the United States has repeatedly testified that the current Social Security taxation and benefit structure is unsustainable over the long term. Social Security will need modifications in the future to address the challenges the program is currently facing. This goal and single strategic objective addresses the Agency's responsibility to continually assess Social Security's programs in the context of societal trends and support reforms to ensure the programs meet the needs of current and future generations.

Strategic Objective: Through education and research efforts, support reforms to ensure sustainable solvency and more responsive retirement and disability programs

Long Term Outcome

- Achieve reform that ensures long-term solvency.

Issues

Today, about 3.3 workers pay into Social Security for every person receiving benefits. By 2033, this ratio is expected to decline to

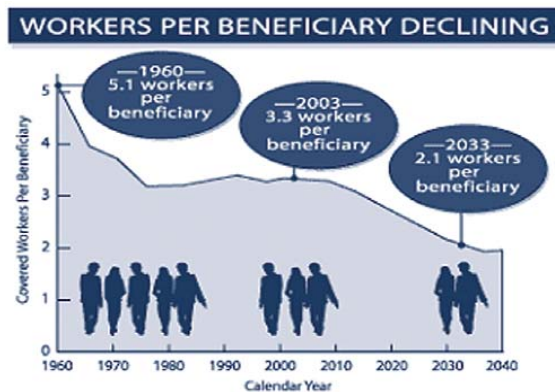
about 2.1 to 1. While Social Security is in sound fiscal health in the near term, future projected shortfalls should be addressed in a timely manner to allow for a gradual phasing in of the necessary changes.

Tax revenue coming into the Social Security Administration will cover the current level of scheduled benefits until 2017. In that year, Social Security will need to begin redeeming bonds. Initially these redemptions would represent no more than interest accruals on the funds. These bonds - backed by the full faith and credit of the United States government - will all be redeemed by 2041. This redemption process will require a flow of cash from the General Fund of Treasury. Pressure on the Federal Budget will thus emerge well before 2041. Unless changes are made at that time, there will only be enough money coming into the system to pay 74 percent of the scheduled benefits at that time. For most Americans this level of reduction would cause financial hardship.

Social Security is committed to support efforts to resolve the program's long-term financial challenges. As the debate moves forward on how best to strengthen Social Security for the future, the Agency must work to ensure that policymakers have the information needed to assess the implications of all proposals under consideration. Working with the Administration and Congress, Social Security will continue to help develop and review policy alternatives.

External Factors

Today, the country's demographics are working against the solvency of the Social Security Administration's Trust Funds: baby boomers are rapidly approaching retirement, families have been having fewer children, and people are living longer. As America ages, it will become more difficult to pay planned benefits without making changes. Any major program or legislative changes will require time and resources to implement, and those demands will depend on the complexity of the changes. Moreover, any program or legislative changes will require an intensified and comprehensive public information and education effort.



Since 1935, Congress has legislated changes as necessary to meet the needs of the American people and to ensure that the program was adequately funded for these changes. With the President's leadership and that of Congress, the needs of a changing society will be addressed to provide for a Social Security program that Americans can count on to be there for them.

Means and Strategies

To accomplish this objective, the Social Security Administration will provide analytical and data support to the Administration and Congress on legislative proposals to address Social Security reform issues related to the solvency of the Trust Funds, such as estimating how much a proposal is going to cost (cost estimates) and attempting to determine the effects of a given proposal on specific demographic segments of the population (distributional analysis).

Serving as the expert source of information on the different solvency proposals offered, the Agency will:

- Maintain an in-house capacity of policy, actuarial, and legislative expertise to respond to decision makers' questions about the fiscal, distributional, and administrative aspects of proposals to modernize the Social Security programs;
- Continue to educate the public about Social Security programs and financing facts through the Agency's ongoing communications program and issuance of the annual *Social Security Statement*; and
- Work with the Administration and Congress as legislative proposals to achieve sustainable solvency are developed, and subsequently implement such proposals.

Continued public acceptance of and confidence in the Social Security program requires that any changes and their impact on an individual's future benefits be clearly communicated. The American people will need to understand what the proposed changes are, why the changes are necessary, how they would be implemented and administered, and how they will affect a worker's own taxes and benefits. This will require that the Agency provide information that will assist future beneficiaries in planning their retirement and financial future accordingly.

The Social Security Administration's employees will continue to:

- Communicate with the public at seminars, conferences, and forums about key Social Security programs; and
- Educate the public about the expanded products and services available on the Agency's website, *Social Security Online*.

STAFF

Strategic Goal: To strategically manage and align Staff to support the mission of the Agency



The Social Security Administration and Disability Determinations Services are comprised of committed, creative and highly capable employees who provide a high level of service to the American public. The Agency's most critical asset in continuing to maintain this high level of service is the excellence of its workforce. It is anticipated that more than 40 percent of the Social Security Administration's employees will be retiring by 2014. The Agency's workloads are also expected to grow dramatically as the baby boom generation approaches their peak disability and retirement years. Consequently, the greatest human capital challenge facing the Social Security Administration is to develop effective strategies that will

ensure that the Agency maintains a high performing workforce that is prepared to deliver quality service. In addition, the Agency must develop effective strategies that promote superior employee performance and encourage employee retention.

The Social Security Administration's comprehensive human capital strategy describes how the Agency will use human capital to meet its mission and goals and ensures that there are employees in place with the skills necessary to continue the Social Security Administration's tradition of excellent public service. In recognition of the Agency's human capital accomplishments, the Social Security Administration received a President's Management Agenda score of "green" for the Strategic Management of Human Capital in June 2004. To date, the Agency has maintained its "green" status by successfully completing planned activities, continuing with initiatives underway and adding new ones that will further improve the Agency's management and delivery of successful human capital programs. The Social Security Administration recognizes the importance of strategic human capital planning and its relevance to achieving the mission, goals, and objectives of the Agency.

Strategic Objective: Recruit, develop and retain a high-performing workforce

Long Term Outcomes

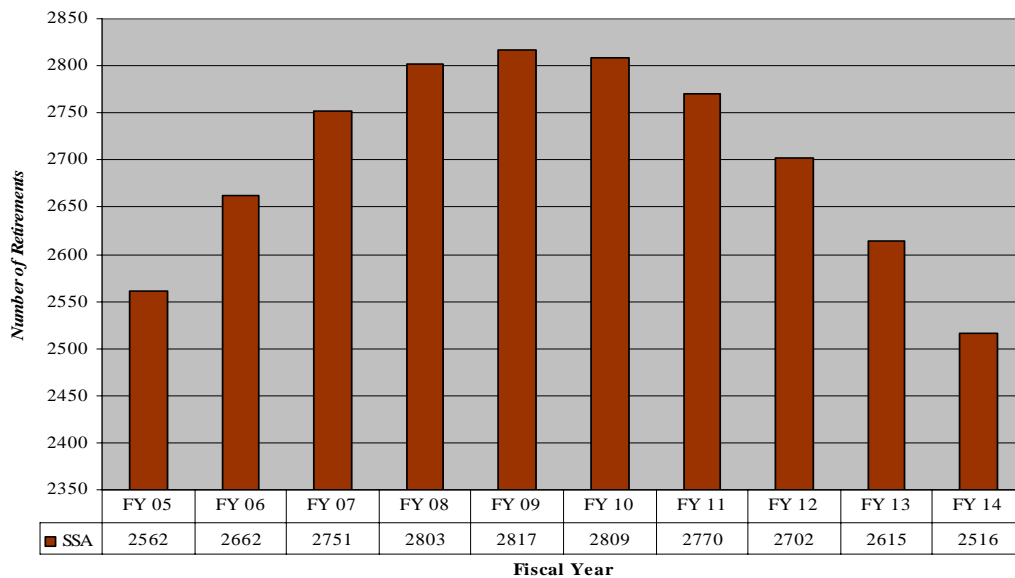
- Employ and develop a workforce that is diverse, committed to public service, skilled in the use of technology, and flexible in adapting to change.
- Continue to use advanced technology and automation that enables staff to provide quality service to the American public.
- Provide an environment and culture that encourages employee retention and motivates employees to deliver timely, quality, citizen-centered service.

Issues

Like the baby boomers in the general workforce, the Social Security Administration employees will begin to retire in greater numbers. The Agency’s 2005 Retirement Wave Report states that 56 percent of the workforce will have reached retirement eligibility by the year 2014. This “retirement wave” projection can affect the Agency’s ability to deliver service to the public. The retirement of the Social Security Administration’s employees can also result in a significant drain in institutional knowledge and expertise.

With the declining growth of the labor force, the Social Security Administration faces the challenge of recruiting, developing and retaining a highly skilled and diverse workforce in a very competitive job market. The Agency's means and strategies address these challenges and build upon the results of earlier workforce planning initiatives (see chart below).

*SSA Mean Retirement Projections:
FY 2005 to FY 2014*



Source: Social Security Administration’s Office of Human Resources Human Capital Planning Staff - 2005 Retirement Wave Report

External Factors

At the Agency, there are multiple external factors driving human capital planning and service delivery. These include, but are not limited to, a diversified and multilingual American public, Congressional and public interest group concerns, channeling employee commitment to excellent public service, increasing workloads, technological advances, and economic conditions. These factors have increased the awareness among managers and executives regarding the importance of human capital planning in achieving business objectives and resulted in the development and implementation of several human capital strategies. The means and strategies describe some of these factors and illustrate how the Agency will address them.

Means and Strategies

The President's Management Agenda continues to bring a new level of accountability to the Federal government in many areas, including the strategic management of human capital. The President's Management Agenda requires agencies to not only publicly demonstrate what they are doing in the human capital arena, but also to measure the impact of their human capital efforts - something that has not been done in the past. In 2004, the Social Security Administration developed its first Human Capital Plan as a tool to chart the Agency's course to achieve excellence in human capital management.

In July 2005, the Social Security Administration released its updated Human Capital Plan, which outlined the Agency's comprehensive strategy that demonstrates how the Agency plans to manage human capital in order to recruit, develop, and retain a diverse high-performing workforce. The Human Capital Plan uses five key activities to determine the Agency's success in achieving human capital results. They are:

- Strategic Alignment;
- Workforce Planning;
- Workforce Development and Knowledge Management;
- Performance Culture; and
- Leadership.

The Human Capital Plan will continue to serve as the framework to develop the Agency's workforce of the future. The Agency plans to update its Human Capital Plan annually so that it will continue to serve as the Agency's framework to track and measure human capital activities as well as the principal component of the Social Security Administration's workforce planning strategy.

As a supplement to the Human Capital Plan, the Social Security Administration developed the Future Workforce Transition Plan, which outlines the Agency's objective to successfully recruit, hire, develop, and retain a diverse workforce to carry out the mission of the Agency. The Future Workforce Transition Plan is the Social Security Administration's roadmap to developing and engaging the workforce of the future. It contains specific activities and action items and serves as the Agency's quarterly status report towards meeting initiatives outlined in the Human Capital Plan. The Future Workforce Transition Plan serves as a vital tool for managing the Agency's human capital activities and performance.

Retirement wave analysis serves as the foundation for the Social Security Administration's human capital planning activities. The continued analysis of current and future workforce needs is a cornerstone of the Agency's human capital planning efforts and an important part of the strategic management of human capital as defined by the President's Management Agenda. It is an undeniable fact that the Social Security Administration will lose many of its employees to retirement during the span of this strategic plan. This will also result in the loss of valuable skills, institutional knowledge and technical expertise. The Agency must plan now to ensure that it has employees in place, with the knowledge and skills necessary, to fill the unavoidable loss of technical and institutional knowledge that would result from the retirement of veteran employees. By projecting where and when these losses are likely to occur, the Agency can develop strategies for effective succession planning. For example, the Agency is redesigning entry-level training and providing for continuity of leadership knowledge and succession planning through the use of professional development programs. In addition, the Agency is committed to an increased emphasis on training particularly in support of the revised disability adjudication process. The Social Security Administration will continue to monitor the effect of the impending retirement wave by conducting annual forecasts and analysis of projected retirements.

For many Americans, the Social Security Administration is "the government". The Agency's interaction with the public will often shape their views of the entire Federal government. With diligent human capital planning, focused on mission-critical competencies, the Agency will ensure that its workforce is prepared to provide the kind of public service expected of the Social Security Administration. The Agency's vision of Service extends beyond professional and competent employees and encompasses the ideal that its workforce should be a reflection of the public it serves. By creating an environment of inclusiveness through workforce diversity and availability of bilingual services, the Agency gives everyone the opportunity to comfortably and confidently conduct their business with the Social Security Administration.

To be successful in retaining employees, the Social Security Administration must consider the differing demographic factors - age, gender, nationality, tenure, generational expectations, among other factors - of its workforce. The Agency must have strategies to engage employees in their career development and must also provide a balanced work/life environment that helps develop an even greater commitment to achieving organizational excellence.

The Agency will continue to plan, develop and implement strategic approaches for identifying internal and external activities and investments that align training to individual and organizational performance. The Agency's commitment to developing its workforce will also be reinforced through competency-based training opportunities. A competency is a characteristic and measurable pattern of behaviors, skills, knowledge, beliefs, values, traits or motives that contributes to an employee's superior performance and results within a defined job context. The Social Security Administration has an automated "competency self-assessment tool", which allows employees to assess and compare both their leadership and non-supervisory proficiencies against job-specific competencies. Subsequently, employees are empowered to identify the training they need to close their skill and performance gaps.

The Social Security Administration will continue to create a culture that acknowledges the value and complexity of the work employees perform, recognizes employees that perform at the

highest level and adapt well to the challenges of ongoing change. Improving Agency recruitment and hiring processes, analyzing the data captured during employee exit interviews and developing tools for managers and human resources specialists involved in orienting new employees, such as *The Managers Guide to Orienting New Employees*, are some of the strategies currently being used by the Agency to attract and retain its future workforce. The Agency will continue to build on its successes through an emphasis on targeted recruitment strategies, leadership development initiatives, and employee retention initiatives.

APPENDIX A: STRATEGIC PLANNING FRAMEWORK

Mission: *To advance the economic security of the Nation's people through compassionate and vigilant leadership in shaping and managing America's Social Security programs*

SERVICE – Social Security advances the economic security of the Nation's people through the services it provides.		
Strategic Goals	Strategic Objectives	Long Term Outcomes
<p><u>Service</u> To deliver high-quality, citizen-centered Service</p>	<p>Make the right decision in the disability process as early as possible</p>	<p>Reduce significantly the time it takes for a disability claimant to receive a final Agency decision.</p> <p>Improve decisional consistency and accuracy.</p> <p>Ensure that beneficiaries who are clearly disabled receive determinations within 20 calendar days or less.</p>
	<p>Increase employment for people with disabilities by expanding opportunities</p>	<p>Increase awareness of opportunities to achieve greater financial independence through employment.</p> <p>Increase participation of beneficiaries and service providers in work opportunity initiatives.</p>
	<p>Improve service through technology, focusing on accuracy, security, and efficiency</p>	<p>Allow the public to more easily interact with the Social Security Administration by increasing partnerships with government and non-governmental organizations to share data and processes.</p> <p>Improve and expand service capabilities by making optimal use of technology, including telephone and other electronic processes.</p> <p>Protect all sensitive data by ensuring that appropriate systems security and privacy safeguards continue to be in place.</p> <p>Eliminate backlogs for postentitlement work.</p>

STEWARDSHIP – Social Security manages America’s Social Security programs through superior stewardship.		
Strategic Goals	Strategic Objectives	Long Term Outcomes
<p><u>Stewardship</u></p> <p>To protect the integrity of Social Security programs through superior Stewardship</p>	<p>Detect and prevent fraudulent and improper payments and improve debt management</p>	<p>Increase the Agency’s stewardship accuracy rate for Supplemental Security Income payments.</p> <p>Maintain the Agency’s stewardship accuracy rates for Old-Age, Survivors and Disability Insurance payments.</p> <p>Increase the percent of outstanding debt that is in a collection arrangement.</p> <p>Remain current with Disability Insurance and Supplemental Security Income continuing disability reviews.</p> <p>Finish processing special disability cases.</p> <p>Reduce the backlog of workers’ compensation cases.</p>
	<p>Strengthen the integrity of the Social Security Number issuance process to help prevent misuse and fraud of the Social Security Number and card</p>	<p>Strengthen the integrity of the Social Security Number issuance process by engaging in ongoing policy development in partnership with other government entities.</p> <p>Assign Social Security Numbers and issue cards accurately and safeguard Agency-maintained identity information.</p> <p>Provide legally required Social Security Number record verification services to aid in the prevention of Social Security Number misuse.</p>
	<p>Ensure the accuracy of earnings records so that eligible individuals can receive the proper benefits due them</p>	<p>Facilitate more accurate earnings reports by encouraging the use of electronic wage reporting.</p> <p>Reduce the number of annual earnings items posted to the Earnings Suspense File.</p>

STEWARDSHIP – Social Security manages America’s Social Security programs through superior stewardship.		
Strategic Goals	Strategic Objectives	Long Term Outcomes
<i>Stewardship - continued</i>	Manage Agency finances and assets to link resources effectively to performance outcomes	<p>Demonstrate the Agency’s commitment to sound financial management by creating a strong internal control structure and producing relevant and reliable accounting information, including receiving an “unqualified opinion” on the Agency’s financial statement audit.</p> <p>Maximize the ability of the Agency’s financial, performance, and management information systems to fulfill its mission by improving existing automated tools and developing new ones.</p> <p>Ensure the most effective use of limited Agency resources by continuing to achieve 2 percent, on average, annual productivity improvements.</p> <p>Ensure the security of the Agency’s information systems, physical assets, and employees by continuously performing security assessments and acquiring state-of-the-art protection systems.</p>
SOLVENCY – Social Security demonstrates leadership in shaping America’s Social Security programs through its solvency education and research efforts.		
Strategic Goals	Strategic Objectives	Long Term Outcomes
<p><u>Solvency</u></p> <p>To achieve sustainable Solvency and ensure Social Security programs meet the needs of current and future generations</p>	Through education and research efforts, support reforms to ensure sustainable solvency and more responsive retirement and disability programs	Achieve reform that ensures long-term solvency.
STAFF – Social Security employs and develops staff that is compassionate, vigilant and committed to public service.		
Strategic Goals	Strategic Objectives	Long Term Outcomes
<p><u>Staff</u></p> <p>To strategically manage and align Staff to support the mission of the Agency</p>	Recruit, develop and retain a high-performing workforce	<p>Employ and develop a workforce that is diverse, committed to public service, skilled in the use of technology, and flexible in adapting to change.</p> <p>Continue to use advanced technology and automation that enables staff to provide quality service to the American public.</p> <p>Provide an environment and culture that encourages employee retention and motivates employees to deliver timely, quality, citizen-centered service.</p>

APPENDIX B: PROGRAM EVALUATION PLAN

Improving programs by focusing on results is an integral component of the President's Budget and Performance Integration initiative. Consistent and timely program evaluation is critical to identifying strengths and weaknesses in Social Security's programs and processes. It is also crucial in determining the effect of proposals for change and the actual effects of proposals after they are implemented.

The Agency will continue to use a variety of methods and tools to evaluate its work. The tools and methods offer varying levels of detail based on their intended audience, but each tool or method is critical to ensure the Agency evaluates all of its programs and is wisely spending resources to reach the tenets of the strategic plan.

The Performance and Accountability Report reflects the overall Agency performance and is used as an Agency evaluation tool that addresses all the goals. The table that follows displays the more specific major program evaluations the Agency will continue to use for the FY 2006 – FY 2011 period. Additional evaluations will be added as changes to the disability program occur.

Goal	Evaluation	Description	Completion Date
SERVICE	Service Satisfaction Survey	Surveys overall public satisfaction with service	Annually in September
	Internet Services Satisfaction Surveys	Surveys satisfaction related to new or expanded Internet services made available to the public or for other issues related to Internet service delivery	Contingent on Agency information needs
	Employer Survey	Surveys employer satisfaction with the Social Security Administration's service	Annually in April
	Congressional Report on Adequacy of Incentives under the Ticket-to-Work Program	Evaluates the progress of activities and the success of the Ticket-to-Work Program and any recommendations for program modifications	December 2005 and December 2007

Goal	Evaluation	Description	Completion Date
STEWARDSHIP	Safeguard Procedures Report/Activity Report	Reports to the Internal Revenue Service on security procedures in place for each Social Security system using or storing Internal Revenue Service data	Annually
	Federal Information Security Management Act Report to the Office of Management and Budget	Reports the status of the Agency's information security program	Annually
	Old-Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance Stewardship Review	Reviews dollar accuracy of payment outlay	Annually
	Supplemental Security Income Stewardship Review	Reviews dollar accuracy of payment outlays	Annually
	Supplemental Security Income Annual Report	Reports on the status of the Supplemental Security Income program	Annually in May
	Enumeration Review	Reviews the Social Security Number issuance process to ensure quality	Annually

Goal	Evaluation	Description	Completion Date
SOLVENCY	Trustees Report	Board of Trustees Report on the Old-Age, Survivors Insurance and Disability Insurance Trust Funds	Annually in April
	Evaluation of Changing Benefit Structures	Evaluates the distributional impact of changing Old-Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance and Supplemental Security Income benefits	Ongoing

Goal	Evaluation	Description	Completion Date
STAFF	Retirement Wave Report	Analysis that projects likely employee retirement rates in mission-critical occupational series	Annually
	Human Capital Plan	Outlines how the Social Security Administration will use Human Capital to ensure employees are in place with the skills necessary to continue the Agency's tradition of excellent, citizen-centered service	Annually

APPENDIX C: CONSULTATIONS

The Social Security Administration used its existing procedures for consulting with Congress and soliciting and considering the views of the Social Security Advisory Board and other interested parties in developing this plan.

The Agency maintains a close working relationship with key Congressional staff, who provide valuable insight into areas of Congressional interest. Congressional hearings provide a key venue for discussing topics of current concern with Congress. The Social Security Administration has used these opportunities to share with Congress its strategies for addressing many of the critical issues identified in this plan. These hearings also provide another means for advocates and other interested parties to provide their opinions on improving Social Security programs. The Agency responds to numerous inquiries from members of Congress and their staff, including those that are seeking information, asking for help with a specific problem, or discussing suggestions for improving Social Security's programs.

The Agency regularly briefs the Social Security Advisory Board on its plans for addressing areas of particular concern to the Board and the Board periodically issues findings and recommendations relating to Social Security's programs and processes. Oversight agencies, most notably the Government Accountability Office and the Social Security Administration's Office of the Inspector General, regularly review and audit Agency processes. Through a formal, established process, the Social Security Administration responds to findings and recommendations and initiates action to implement recommendations, where appropriate.

The Social Security Administration has a comprehensive system for collecting direct feedback through a variety of vehicles about service needs, expectations and levels of satisfaction from the people who do business with the Agency, and from major interest groups. Additionally, the Agency solicits public comments whenever it publishes a Notice of Proposed Rulemaking in the Federal Register and even publishes notices just to request comments on a subject.

Through a combination of focus groups, service satisfaction surveys, service expectation studies, ad hoc special studies and comment cards, the Agency regularly obtains input from the public to help identify areas for improvement. Through employer surveys and focus groups, meetings with industry representatives and annual conferences with the payroll community, the Agency solicits the views of businesses, employer groups, and the recipients of the Social Security Administration's employer services.

The Social Security Administration frequently meets with a wide range of interest groups that advocate for various populations in society, for example, the aging, the disabled, women, minorities and young workers. Meetings focus on issues of interest to a particular group, such as program financing, return-to-work initiatives and electronic service delivery. Periodically, the Agency conducts public forums on specific issues. Most recently the Social Security Administration hosted a series of Ticket to Work Conference and Expos around the country to promote increased use of the Ticket to Work program. Using the theme "It Pays to Check It Out!" these one-day Expos provided participants - beneficiaries, as well as employers and service providers - with a better understanding of how and why the Ticket can be useful for them. The

Expos also introduced beneficiaries to the employment search process and the interview skills and strategies that they may need to achieve their goal of successful employment.

The Social Security Administration has numerous ongoing working relationships with States and other agencies in the Federal sector. The character of these relationships ranges from simple data exchanges, through program coordination, to actual processing of each other's work. Coordinated efforts of strategic importance featured in this plan are those with the Department of Homeland Security on Social Security Number issuance improvements; the Internal Revenue Service on improving earnings accuracy; the States on increasing electronic access to vital statistics information; and the Department of Labor on providing coordinated programs to support employment of people with disabilities.

The Social Security Administration conducted extensive outreach and consultation efforts in advance of issuing its July 27, 2005 proposal to improve the disability determination process. At the same time that the Commissioner presented her new approach to disability determinations, she announced her intention to hear the views and suggestions of all interested parties so that the Agency could take them into account as it refined the approach and developed these proposed rules. The Social Security Administration also established an Internet site in order to hear from all interested parties and consider a wide variety of perspectives. During that time, Agency officials met with hundreds of interested organizations, groups, and individuals to hear their views regarding the new approach. The Social Security Administration published a list of the groups and organizations with whom it met in the preamble to the proposed rules. These groups and organizations included:

- Members of Congress and Congressional staff;
- Groups and organizations representing claimants, beneficiaries, retired individuals, and members of the public;
- Organizations representing legal and medical professionals, including Federal judges and Administrative Law Judges; and
- Organizations representing employees of the Social Security Administration and State agencies who are engaged in the disability determination process.

In addition, the Commissioner of Social Security and members of her Executive Staff met and consulted frequently with the Office of Management and Budget before issuing the proposed rules. As with the Agency's other efforts, the Social Security Administration's ability to propose effective and comprehensive strategies to improve the disability determination process was greatly enhanced by the consultations that elicited these views, suggestions, and recommendations.

The Social Security Administration was committed to seeking out and receiving early input from the public on the regulatory process of updating standards used to determine whether an individual is disabled. This process began with the publication of an Advance Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, in which members of the public and the representative community were encouraged to provide input on the content of the revised Medical Listing. Following the Advance Notice comment period, the Agency hosted public outreach forums. The outreach events were an opportunity for medical experts, representatives and claimants to come together and comment openly and frankly on the Agency's current policy and provide invaluable input on the future content of the Medical Listing.

Involving members of the public and the representative community early on in the listing development process created a sense of empowerment in these individuals by allowing them to have direct access and the ability to ultimately influence the Agency's policy. The reaction to the outreach efforts has been overwhelmingly positive. On May 17, 2005 Marty Ford, the Co-Chair of the Social Security Task Force of the Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities (CCD), testified before the Subcommittee on Social Security of the House Committee on Ways and Means that:

“CCD applauds the manner in which SSA is going about reviewing the current listings. In many cases, this has involved issuance of an advance notice of proposed rulemaking, providing the public with the opportunity to comment to SSA on a current listing before SSA issues an NPRM. In addition, we believe that the public forums that SSA has held on certain listings, including mental impairments, immune disorders, and chronic liver disease, will help to significantly improve the quality of the final provisions. These forums have served as an excellent source of cutting edge medical expertise for SSA.”



Social Security Administration
Office of the Chief Strategic Officer
Office of Strategic Management
SSA Pub. 04-002
January 2006