
**OFFICE OF
THE INSPECTOR GENERAL**

SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

**THE SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION
FIELD OFFICES' TRAINING OF STAFF**

July 2008

A-13-08-18029

AUDIT REPORT



Mission

By conducting independent and objective audits, evaluations and investigations, we inspire public confidence in the integrity and security of SSA's programs and operations and protect them against fraud, waste and abuse. We provide timely, useful and reliable information and advice to Administration officials, Congress and the public.

Authority

The Inspector General Act created independent audit and investigative units, called the Office of Inspector General (OIG). The mission of the OIG, as spelled out in the Act, is to:

- Conduct and supervise independent and objective audits and investigations relating to agency programs and operations.**
- Promote economy, effectiveness, and efficiency within the agency.**
- Prevent and detect fraud, waste, and abuse in agency programs and operations.**
- Review and make recommendations regarding existing and proposed legislation and regulations relating to agency programs and operations.**
- Keep the agency head and the Congress fully and currently informed of problems in agency programs and operations.**

To ensure objectivity, the IG Act empowers the IG with:

- Independence to determine what reviews to perform.**
- Access to all information necessary for the reviews.**
- Authority to publish findings and recommendations based on the reviews.**

Vision

We strive for continual improvement in SSA's programs, operations and management by proactively seeking new ways to prevent and deter fraud, waste and abuse. We commit to integrity and excellence by supporting an environment that provides a valuable public service while encouraging employee development and retention and fostering diversity and innovation.



SOCIAL SECURITY

MEMORANDUM

Date: July 28, 2008

Refer To:

To: The Commissioner

From: Inspector General

Subject: The Social Security Administration Field Offices' Training of Staff (A-13-08-18029)

OBJECTIVE

The objectives were to review Social Security Administration (SSA) field offices' training of claims (CR) and service representatives (SR) and determine field office employees' perception of the training provided.

BACKGROUND

SSA has about 1,300 field offices nationwide where individuals can apply for Old-Age, Survivors and Disability Insurance and Supplemental Security Income payments, apply for a Social Security number, and report changes affecting their benefits. Field office staff comprises approximately 14,000 CRs and 5,000 SRs who provide front-line service to the public.

The National Council of Social Security Management Associations (NCSSMA) conducted surveys in 2005 and 2007 on key SSA service issues, such as training. According to NCSSMA, its membership is composed of management officials from the Agency's field offices and teleservice centers nationwide. NCSSMA surveyed its over 3,300 members on SSA service issues and received about a 55-percent return rate. The survey findings showed "There was inadequate time to provide adequate ongoing training in many field offices. [Eighty-nine percent] of the respondents who stated they did not receive adequate ongoing training said the greatest barrier was lack of time."

For SSA field offices to continue providing the quality service its customers expect, we believe training is needed to enable staff to remain current on Agency policies, procedures, operations, and changes in technology. This review provides SSA with field office employees' perception of training received. Since Congress and the public have expressed interest in the Agency's disability-related workload, our questions focused on general and disability-related training. To determine field office employees'

training satisfaction, we asked a random sample of 275 CRs and 275 SRs to complete a questionnaire pertaining to their perception of the training they received during Fiscal Years 2006 through 2007. We emailed each employee the Intranet Website that contained the questionnaire.

Of the 550 field office employees in our sample, we received responses from 426: 216 CRs and 210 SRs. The CR and SR grade levels ranged from 5 to 11. We found 197 of the respondent CRs and 151 of the respondent SRs were at the highest pay grade for the CR (grade 11) and SR (grade 8) positions. See Appendix A for detailed discussions of the Scope and Methodology. See Appendix B for the Sampling Methodology.

RESULTS OF REVIEW

We reviewed SSA field offices' training of CRs and SRs and found that SSA had a structured training program, and the training was accessible to field office employees. We also determined field office employees' perception of the training provided and found most CR and SR staff responding to our questionnaire were satisfied that the general and disability-related training received for their position had helped them do their job effectively and efficiently, and the training was provided timely. However, most staff perceived barriers to training existed and expressed a need for SSA to improve the training experience.

Training Was Structured and Accessible

We reviewed SSA's training program and found that SSA had a structured training program and the training was accessible to field office employees. For Fiscal Years 2006 through 2007, training was available to CRs and SRs for policy, systems, and legislation changes using Interactive Video Teletraining (IVT), Video On Demand on-line lessons, and Web-based training. Field offices and Headquarters components also provided classroom training.

Entry-level classes for CRs and SRs (grade 5) started with the Core Curriculum. For example, the Service Representative Basic Training, Title II Claims Representative Basic Training, and Title XVI Claims Representative Basic Training were included in the Core Curriculum. Instruction for these classes was provided through the IVT system.

Most Staff Questioned Were Satisfied with Training

We received responses from 426 staff members about their satisfaction with the general and disability-related training they received. We found most CR and SR staff responding to our questionnaire were satisfied that the general and disability-related training received for their position had helped them do their job effectively and efficiently, and the training was provided timely (see Tables 1 and 2).

Table 1: General and Disability-Related Training¹

Level of Satisfaction	Training Helped You Do Your Job Effectively and Efficiently				Training Was Provided In a Timely Manner			
	Disability-Related		General		Disability-Related		General	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Very Satisfied	43	10	46	11	49	12	51	12
Satisfied	200	47	220	52	205	48	229	54
Subtotal	243	57	266	63	254	60	280	66
Very Dissatisfied	15	4	22	5	11	3	9	2
Dissatisfied	40	9	42	10	35	8	48	11
Subtotal	55	13	64	15	46	11	57	13
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	79	19	77	18	82	19	74	17
Subtotal	79	19	77	18	82	19	74	17
No Training Within 2 Years	49	11	19	4	44	10	15	4
Subtotal	49	11	19	4	44	10	15	4
Total	426	100	426	100	426	100	426	100

**Table 2: General and Disability-Related Training²
CR and SR Breakdown**

Level of Satisfaction	Training Helped You Do Your Job Effectively and Efficiently				Training Was Provided In a Timely Manner			
	Disability-Related		General		Disability-Related		General	
	CR	SR	CR	SR	CR	SR	CR	SR
Very Satisfied	22	21	19	27	24	25	17	34
Satisfied	110	90	108	112	114	91	121	108
Subtotal	132	111	127	139	138	116	138	142
Very Dissatisfied	9	6	13	9	9	2	7	2
Dissatisfied	27	13	25	17	22	13	27	21
Subtotal	36	19	38	26	31	15	34	23
Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	41	38	47	30	41	41	42	32
Subtotal	41	38	47	30	41	41	42	32
No Training within 2 Years	7	42	4	15	6	38	2	13
Subtotal	7	42	4	15	6	38	2	13
Total	216	210	216	210	216	210	216	210

Most Staff Questioned Perceived Barriers to Training

¹ Appendix D, Questions 2 and 3.

² Appendix D, Questions 2 and 3.

We asked staff their perception of barriers to training, and most staff perceived the existence of barriers that prevented them from receiving training needed to perform the duties of their position.

- About 79 percent (338/426) of staff perceived barriers to training that prevented them from receiving training to perform their duties.
 - ✓ About 81 percent (198/243) of satisfied and very satisfied staff and 77 percent (140/183) of other than satisfied staff perceived there were barriers to training.
- The barriers include lack of time, insufficient staff; pressure to move work, and training not available (see Table 3).

Table 3: Barriers to Training

Barrier	Satisfied and Very Satisfied Staff		Other Than Satisfied Staff		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Lack of time	76	38	47	34	123	36
Insufficient staff	48	24	35	25	83	25
Pressure to move work	39	20	37	26	76	22
Training not available	8	4	2	1	10	3
Other	27	14	19	14	46	14
Total	198	100³	140	100	338	100

Most Staff Perceived a Lack of Communication with Management

We asked staff about their communication with management regarding their general and disability-related training needs and found the following.

- About 71 percent (304/426) indicated they did not have a personal training plan.
- About 59 percent (251/426) indicated they did not have a discussion with their supervisor or manager regarding the type of training or a specific curriculum (that is, a series of training classes) they should complete.

The Agency’s Performance Assessment and Communication System (PACS) is intended to promote communication and teamwork among management and employees. Agency officials have stated, and we acknowledge, PACS provides an opportunity for increased communication between employees and management on such topics as CR and SR training needed to achieve and maintain proficiency. Therefore, the Agency should use PACS to promote communication between field office management and staff regarding general and disability-related training needs.

³ The percentages were rounded.

Most Staff Expressed Ways to Improve Training

We asked CRs and SRs to express ways SSA could improve training for their positions and found about 74 percent (316/426) expressed ways the Agency can improve training for their position (see Table 4).

Table 4: Ways to Improve Training

Improvement	Satisfied and Very Satisfied Staff		Other Than Satisfied Staff		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Hands on training	46	27	56	38	102	32
More time for training	49	29	26	18	75	24
More staff	16	10	13	9	29	9
Cross training	11	7	5	3	16	5
Refresher training	10	6	17	11	27	9
Communicate training needs to management	9	5	6	4	15	5
Timeliness of training	5	3	8	5	13	4
Other	22	13	17	12	39	12
Total	168	100	148	100	316	100

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Periodic enhancements and policy changes create challenges for CRs and SRs to remain proficient in the delivery of services provided to the public. We found most CR and SR staff who responded to our questionnaire were satisfied that the general and disability-related training received for their position helped them do their job effectively and efficiently, and the training was provided timely. However, most staff perceived that barriers to training existed and expressed a need for SSA to improve their training experience. As the Agency makes great strides to enhance, automate, and streamline the disability claims process and other workloads, we believe it is imperative that these perceived barriers to field office training be addressed.

We recommend SSA improve CR and SR training as follows:

1. Provide more “hands on” and refresher training to reinforce lessons learned and resolve questions that emerge from work experiences.
2. Provide more time for training to permit staff to remain proficient in the delivery of services to the public.
3. Ensure staff members are aware they can communicate their training needs to management.

AGENCY COMMENTS

SSA agreed with our recommendations. The Agency recognized the importance of training its employees. Investing in SSA's workforce is essential to achieving its mission and programmatic goals. As resources allow, SSA indicated it would continue to train its employees so the Agency can provide the quality service its customers expect and deserve (see Appendix E).

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Patrick P. O'Carroll, Jr.", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Patrick P. O'Carroll, Jr.

Appendices

APPENDIX A – Scope and Methodology

APPENDIX B – Sampling Methodology

APPENDIX C – Questionnaire

APPENDIX D – Questionnaire Responses

APPENDIX E – Agency Comments

APPENDIX F – OIG Contacts and Staff Acknowledgements

Scope and Methodology

Our audit covered training provided during the period of Fiscal Years 2006 and 2007. To achieve our objectives, we

- reviewed applicable Federal laws and regulations,
- reviewed National Council of Social Security Management Associations (NCSSMA) survey of management report,
- interviewed the NCSSMA president to determine the survey methodology used by the organization,
- obtained information about claims and service representative training requirements and training availability for Fiscal Years 2006 and 2007,
- developed an Intranet Website for our questionnaire with the help of Office of Communications personnel,
- provided a questionnaire to 550 randomly selected field office employees nationwide regarding their satisfaction with their ongoing training (see Appendix B),
- analyzed results of questionnaire responses, and
- interviewed officials and staff from the Social Security Administration's Offices of the Deputy Commissioner of Operations and Training regarding the results of our questionnaire.

We determined the questionnaire data gathered using the Intranet Website to be sufficiently reliable for their intended use. The data were collected using SSA's Website and not collected on our Website. However, we took the following actions to ensure the data collected would not lead to an incorrect or unintentional message.

- Field office employees were directly contacted and requested to complete the Intranet Website questionnaire.
- Field office employees were assigned a unique identification number to gain access to, and complete, the questionnaire.
- Used only those responses having unique identification numbers that were assigned to selected field office employees.

- Examined questionnaire responses and found no patterns to indicate responses were not valid.

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. Our audit was performed between August and December 2007 in Baltimore, Maryland. The entities audited were the Offices of the Deputy Commissioners of Operations and Human Resources.

Sampling Methodology

As of June 2007, the Social Security Administration had about 1,300 field offices nationwide. There were 14,495 claims (CR) and 4,629 service representatives (SR) nationwide. We

- obtained a list of all CRs and SRs as of June 28, 2007,
- selected a random sample of 275 CRs and 275 SRs from the population,
- measured CR and SR satisfaction with their training during Fiscal Years 2006 and 2007.

We requested selected employees complete the questionnaire in 2 weeks. At the end of 2 weeks, we sent another email request to the non-responders. After sending the second email request, at the end of 1 week, we sent the non-responders "final" email and telephone requests. We allowed these employees 1 week to complete the questionnaire.

Table 1. Sample Results

	CR	SR	Total
Population Size	14,495	4,629	19,124
Sample Size	275	275	550
Responses	216	210	426

Table 2. Response Rate

Pay Grade	CR Sample	CR Responses	Response Rate	SR Sample	SR Responses	Response Rate
5	2	1	50%	14	10	71%
6				26	23	88%
7				31	26	84%
8				204	151	74%
9	20	18	90%			
11	253	197	78%			
Total	275	216	79%	275	210	76%

Questionnaire

The Social Security Administration, Office of the Inspector General is conducting a review of field office training. We want to hear from you about your level of training satisfaction. We would appreciate it if you could take a few minutes to complete this questionnaire about your training activities during **Fiscal Years 2006 through 2007**. Since Congress and the general public have expressed significant interest in the Agency’s disability-related workload, our questions focus on your general and disability-related training. It is important for us to hear from you in order for us to report overall training satisfaction and recommend any enhancements.

YOUR INDIVIDUAL RESPONSES TO THIS SURVEY ARE CONFIDENTIAL.

Response Identification Number _____ (**REQUIRED FIELD**)

1. What percentage of your time do you spend on the disability workload (for example, claims, reconsiderations, hearings, CDRs, and post-entitlement actions for disability beneficiaries or recipients)?

- _____ None
- _____ 1-25%
- _____ 26-50%
- _____ 51-75%
- _____ 76-100%

Please answer the following questions relating to your training during the past two years.

2. Overall, how satisfied are you that the training you have received, for your position, has helped you do your **job effectively and efficiently**? (If you have not received training in the past two years, please indicate so.)

Overall Satisfaction: Job effectiveness and efficiency	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	No training within 2 years
Disability Training						
Other Training						

2a. If you are not satisfied with the training you received, please explain why (If satisfied, go to the next question):

Disability training _____

Other training _____

3. Generally, how satisfied are you that the training you have received, for your position, was provided in a "timely manner." That is, was the training provided at a time when it could have had the most significant impact on your ability to perform your assigned duties?

Timeliness of Training	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	No training within 2 years
Disability Training						
Other Training						

3a. If you are not satisfied with the timeliness of the training received, please explain why (If satisfied, go to the next question):

Disability training _____

Other training _____

4. What do you perceive to be the most significant barrier, if any, which prevents you from receiving training to perform the duties of your position?

- None
 - Lack of time
 - Pressure to move work
 - Insufficient staff
 - Training not available
 - Other, please explain
-
-

5. For the duties of your position, have you and your manager or supervisor established a personal training plan?

- Yes
- No

5a. If no, from your perspective, why was a plan not established?

- Time constraints
 - Not needed
 - Oversight
 - Other, please explain
-
-

6. For the duties of your position, have you had a discussion with your supervisor or manager regarding the type of training or a specific curriculum (i.e., a series of training classes) that you should complete?

- Yes
- No

In conclusion, please express, from your perspective, how SSA can improve training for your position.

Thank you for taking the time to assist us in our efforts to report overall training satisfaction and recommend improvements to field office training. If you have any questions, please contact Alan Carr at (410) 965-9713. You may also email us at Alan.Carr@ssa.gov.

Questionnaire Responses

Question 1

What percentage of your time do you spend on the disability workload (for example, claims, reconsiderations, hearings, CDRs, and post-entitlement actions for disability beneficiaries or recipients)?

• None	35 (8%)
• 1-25%	84 (20%)
• 26-50%	76 (18%)
• 51-75%	104 (24%)
• 76-100%	127 (30%)
Total	426 (100%)

Question 2: Disability Training

Overall, how satisfied are you that the training you have received, for your position, has helped you do your **job effectively and efficiently**? (If you have not received training in the past two years, please indicate so.)

• Very Satisfied	43 (10%)
• Satisfied	200 (47%)
• Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	79 (19%)
• Dissatisfied	40 (9%)
• Very Dissatisfied	15 (4%)
• No training within 2 years	<u>49 (11%)</u>
Total	426 (100%)

Question 2a: If you are not satisfied with the training you received, please explain why.

Disability Training

	Description	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	No Training Within 2 yrs	Total
1	IVT or VOD: Trainers have little knowledge, questions unanswered, just referred to POMS, only a summary, already seen in emails, confusing, no discussions, you are on your own, not relevant, no handouts			6	11	5		22
2	Mentor (TE): not enough time to help, lax attitude, not good teacher		1		2	1		4
3	Training rushed, fast pace			1	2			3
4	Heavy Workload Demands			2				2
5	Lack of time	1		2	1	2		6
6	Training not available, not refreshed, not given		1	4	6		2	13
7	Training too basic, Not enough detail given, summary only, just an overview			4	6		1	11
8	Need hands on training with case examples			2	5			7
9	Poor quality		1		3	3		7
10	Understaffed							0
11	Training given too soon, use or lose it				2			2
12	Other			1	1			2
	Total	1	3	22	39	11	3	79¹

Question 2: Other Training

Overall, how satisfied are you that the training you have received, for your position, has helped you do your **job effectively and efficiently**? (If you have not received training in the past two years, please indicate so.)

- Very Satisfied 46 (11%)
- Satisfied 220 (52%)
- Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied 77 (18%)
- Dissatisfied 42 (10%)
- Very Dissatisfied 22 (5%)
- No training within 2 years 19 (4%)
- Total 426 (100%)

¹ This number does not agree with the number of respondents that were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. This occurred because all respondents had the option to respond or not to respond to this question.

Question 2b: If you are not satisfied with the training you received, please explain why.
Other Training

	Description	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	Total
1	IVT or VOD: questions unanswered, only a summary, already seen in emails, confusing, no discussions, you are on your own, not relevant, no handouts		1	5	13	9	28
2	Mentor (TE): not enough time to help, lax attitude, not good teacher				1	1	2
3	Training rushed, fast pace			1	2	1	4
4	Heavy Workload Demands				2	2	4
5	Lack of time			2	1		3
6	Training not available, not refreshed, not given			7	9		16
7	Training too basic, Not enough detail given, summary only, just an overview			4	3		7
8	Need hands on training with case examples			1	3		4
9	Poor quality		1	2	1	2	6
10	Understaffed				1		1
11	Training given too soon, use or lose it		1	3	1	1	6
12	Other				1	1	2
	Total	0	3	25	38	17	83 ²

² This number does not agree with the number of respondents that were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. This occurred because all respondents had the option to respond or not to respond to this question.

Question 3: Disability Training

Generally, how satisfied are you that the training you have received, for your position, was provided in a **“timely manner.”** That is, was the training provided at a time when it could have had the most significant impact on your ability to perform your assigned duties?

• Very Satisfied	49	(12%)
• Satisfied	205	(48%)
• Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	82	(19%)
• Dissatisfied	35	(8%)
• Very Dissatisfied	11	(3%)
• No training within 2 years	<u>44</u>	<u>(10%)</u>
Total	426	(100%)

Question 3a: If you are not satisfied with the training you received, please explain why.
Disability Training

	Description	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	No Training Within 2 yrs	Total
1	IVT or VOD: No reference material or follow up instruction				1	1		2
2	Mentor (TE): no time to help, lax attitude, not good teacher		1		3	1		5
3	Training rushed, fast pace				1	1		2
4	Heavy Workload Demands							0
5	Lack of time		1	1	2			4
6	Training not available, not refreshed, not given			1	3	2	1	7
7	Training too basic, Not enough detail given, summary only, just an overview			1				1
8	Need hands on training with case examples			1				1
9	Poor quality		2	1	2			5
10	Understaffed			1				1
11	Training given too soon or too late, use or lose it		1	6	20	2		29
12	Other			5	3	1		9
	Total	0	5	17	35	8	1	66³

³ This number does not agree with the number of respondents that were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. This occurred because all respondents had the option to respond or not to respond to this question.

Question 3: Other Training

Generally, how satisfied are you that the training you have received, for your position, was provided in a “**timely manner.**” That is, was the training provided at a time when it could have had the most significant impact on your ability to perform your assigned duties?

• Very Satisfied	51 (12%)
• Satisfied	229 (54%)
• Neither Satisfied nor Dissatisfied	74 (17%)
• Dissatisfied	48 (11%)
• Very Dissatisfied	9 (2%)
• No training within 2 years	15 (4%)
Total	426 (100%)

Question 3b: If you are not satisfied with the training you received, please explain why.
Other Training

	Description	Very Satisfied	Satisfied	Neutral	Dissatisfied	Very Dissatisfied	No Training Within 2 yrs	Total
1	IVT or VOD: Little or no useful training, doesn't answer questions			1	2	1		4
2	Mentoring: no time to help, lax attitude, not good teacher, doesn't have time to help	1		1	1	1		4
3	Training rushed, fast pace			1	4			5
4	Heavy Workload Demands				1			1
5	Lack of time		1	1				2
6	Training not available, not refreshed, not given			1	3	1	1	6
7	Training too basic, Not enough detail given, summary only, just an overview				1			1
8	Need hands on training with case examples			1	2			3
9	Poor quality		1	2	2			5
10	Understaffed				2	1		3
11	Training given too soon or too late, use it or lose it		1	9	24	2		36
12	Other		1		1			2
	Total	1	4	17	43	6	1	72⁴

⁴ This number does not agree with the number of respondents that were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. This occurred because all respondents had the option to respond or not to respond to this question.

Question 4

What do you perceive to be the most significant barrier, if any, which prevents you from receiving training to perform the duties of your position?

• None	88 (21%)
• Lack of time	123 (29%)
• Pressure to move work	76 (18%)
• Insufficient staff	83 (19%)
• Training not available	10 (2%)
• Other, please explain	<u>46 (11%)</u>
Total	426 (100%)

Question 4 Other, Please explain:

	Description	Other Barriers
1	IVT or VOD Inadequate	1
2	Mentoring: not enough time to help	3
3	Not enough detail	1
4	Low budget for training	2
5	Training not meaningful, not well developed	8
6	All or some of the above: lack of time, pressure to move work, insufficient staff, training not available	25
	Total	40⁵

Question 5

For the duties of your position, have you and your manager or supervisor established a personal training plan?

Yes	122 (29%)
No	304 (71%)
Total	426 (100%)

⁵ This number does not agree with the number of respondents that were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. This occurred because all respondents had the option to respond or not to respond to this question.

Question 5a

If no, from your perspective, why was a plan not established?

• Time Constraints	103 (35%)
• Not Needed	91 (31%)
• Oversight	21 (8%)
• Other	77 (26%)
Total	295 (100%)

5a.

Other

	Description	Other Barriers
1	All Training is Video on Demand	2
2	Mentoring not available	1
3	Don't know	25
4	Personal Training Plans do not exist in our office	2
5	Training not available, not refreshed , not given	0
6	Has not been discussed	6
7	Requested but not provided	2
8	Lack of time	6
9	Never heard of a personal training plan	1
10	New Manager	2
11	Staffing Problems	2
12	Should know how to look it up in POMS	2
13	I am new, just promoted	8
14	I can do it myself	2
15	Management not concerned	4
16	Mentored	1
17	Training done as needed	6
	Total	72⁶

⁶ This number does not agree with the number of respondents that were either dissatisfied or very dissatisfied. This occurred because all respondents had the option to respond or not to respond to this question.

Question 6

For the duties of your position, have you had a discussion with your supervisor or manager regarding the type of training or a specific curriculum (that is, a series of training classes) that you should complete?

Yes	175 (41%)
No	251 (59%)
Total	426 (100%)

Questions 7: In conclusion, please express, from your perspective, how SSA can improve training for your position.

Ways to Improve Training

Improvement	Satisfied and Very Satisfied Staff		Other Than Satisfied Staff		Total	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Hands on training	46	27	56	38	102	32
More time for training	49	29	26	18	75	24
More staff	16	10	13	9	29	9
Cross Training	11	7	5	3	16	5
Refresher training	10	6	17	11	27	9
Communicate training needs to management	9	5	6	4	15	5
Timeliness of training	5	3	8	5	13	4
Other	22	13	17	11	39	12
Total	168	100	148	100	316	100

Agency Comments



SOCIAL SECURITY

MEMORANDUM

Date: July 14, 2008 **Refer To:** S1J-3

To: Patrick P. O'Carroll, Jr.
Inspector General

From: David V. Foster /s/
Acting Chief of Staff

Subject: Office of the Inspector General (OIG) Draft Report, "The Social Security Administration Field Office Training of Staff" (A-13-08-18029)--INFORMATION

We appreciate OIG's efforts in conducting this review. Attached is our response to the recommendations.

Please let me know if we can be of further assistance. Direct staff inquiries to Ms. Candace Skurnik, Director, Audit Management and Liaison Staff, at (410) 965-4636.

Attachment

**COMMENTS ON THE OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL’S DRAFT REPORT,
“THE SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION FIELD OFFICE TRAINING OF
STAFF” (A-13-08-18029)**

Thank you for the opportunity to review and provide comments on this draft report. We recognize the importance of training our employees. Investing in our workforce is essential to achieving our mission and programmatic goals. Your audit reports indicate that we are making that investment. As our resources allow, we will continue to train our employees so that they can provide the quality service our customers expect and deserve.

Recommendation 1

Provide “hands on” and refresher training to reinforce lessons learned and resolve questions that emerge from work experiences.

Comment

We agree. We are exploring technological tools that will provide additional hands-on training to reinforce lessons learned. We issue numerous systems releases each year, including the years addressed by this review. When we issue a systems release, we provide advance training to all affected employees. That training is a carefully constructed, multi-disciplinary approach to learning, consisting of a live interactive video teletraining (IVT) broadcast, a panel of experts to answer questions, and a student guide with ready reference charts. Our employees use the Mainframe Training Region for hands-on practice to enter screens and use cloned Social Security numbers (SSN) developed for systems releases. For example, in May 2008, we issued the Dual Entitlement Release, which contained all of these practice elements.

Since the survey was completed, we have placed computers in IVT training rooms during Basic Entry- Level and Crossover training to facilitate hands-on practice of skills. Also, we are modifying the way we present lessons to allow for on-air practice exercises.

Many of our in-service IVT refresher training programs are available on Video on Demand (VOD), including the Title II, Title XVI, and Service Representative Advanced Training lessons. After completion of the Basic Entry-Level classes, advanced training is available; this includes some of the more complex lessons for trainees. Moving these courses to VOD allows all employees more flexibility in viewing the training.

Recommendation 2

Provide more time for training to permit staff to remain proficient in the delivery of services to the public.

Comment

We agree. While we are always looking for ways to provide additional training, we must always be mindful of our limited resources and increasing workload. In fiscal year (FY) 2007, we used almost 1,300 workyears in field offices (FO) for ongoing training, or an average of over two hours per employee per pay period. This critical training advises employees of new policies and procedures, refreshes their knowledge, and teaches new skills. As the data in your review suggests, we are doing an acceptable job of meeting the training needs of both new hires and experienced employees.

We recognize that, as staffing levels fall, the stress on management and employees increases. Any activity perceived as discretionary tends to take a secondary role to production. The barriers cited in the report: 1) lack of time; 2) insufficient staff; and 3) pressure to move work-- which together account for 82 percent of the responses are exacerbated by having fewer people available to handle the increasing workload.

Training can be prepared and packaged to maximize skill building as we described in recommendation 1. However, employees have an option to view the VOD version of the live broadcast which does not contain the interactive questioning, or postpone viewing that VOD indefinitely.

After numerous requests over the years for additional funds to replenish staff, in FY 2008, Congress appropriated \$148 million more than the President's budget. As a result, we are able to replace all of our FO staff losses for the year and get a head start on hiring for FY 2009. This cycle of hiring not only reduces the stress caused by insufficient staff, but also provides another avenue for providing training to our experienced personnel. As they mentor new employees, they have the opportunity to refresh their knowledge of critical systems and procedures.

Our budget shortfall is cumulative for many years. The FY 2008 budget increase will not make us whole. However, we are hopeful that this trend to rebuild our staff will afford us the necessary resources we need to work down backlogs as well as address any additional training needs.

Recommendation 3

Ensure staff members are aware they can communicate their training needs to management.

Comment

We agree. In October 2007, we completed the first appraisal discussions under the Performance Assessment and Communications System (PACS). In May 2008, a workgroup made recommendations for the next appraisal cycle based on information from focus groups.

Managers and employees alike expressed satisfaction with the increased level of discussion and feedback. Future iterations of PACS are likely to make the administrative process less burdensome for managers resulting in more time for meaningful dialog between employee and manager, including training needs.

We encourage a proactive approach by the individual to employee development. We post annual training reminders that contain intranet links to resources the employee can utilize for personal development. This year, accessible to all employees, is a multi-part Career Makeover DVD. We encourage employees to do research on our intranet links, pursue networking opportunities and enhance their skills with training classes. We counsel employees to perform well in their current job, which includes staying informed of new systems and procedures. Further, we advise them to seek guidance from others who have succeeded in their desired career path. We are a very active partner in providing employees with the training and development they seek and deserve.

OIG Contacts and Staff Acknowledgments

OIG Contacts

Shirley E. Todd, Director, Evaluation Division, 410-966-9365

Randy Townsley, Audit Manager, 410-966-1039

Acknowledgments

In addition to those named above:

Alan Carr, Auditor in Charge

Brennan Kraje, Statistician

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