# KEY FOUNDATIONAL ELEMENTS

Our success in achieving our strategic goals depends on two key elements: our employees and information technology. We must make the investments necessary to develop and support our employees and information technology because they are essential to everything we do.

Key Foundational Element: Our employees

Beneficiary and Staffing Trends*
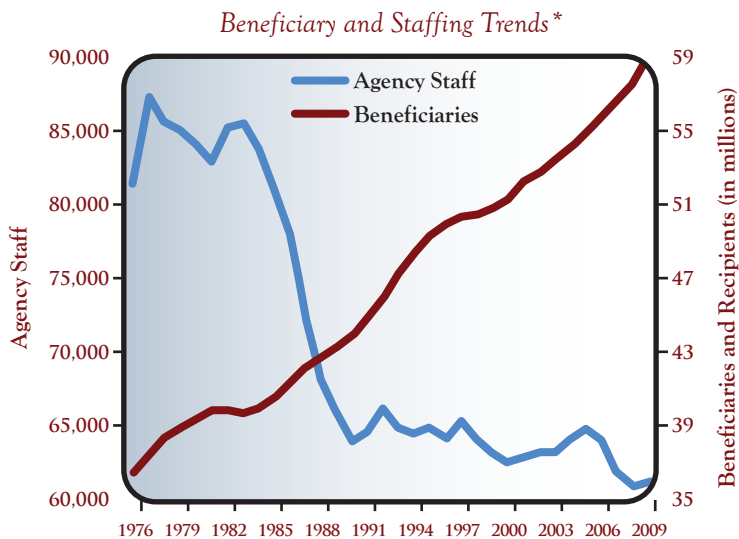
*Productivity increases have allowed us to handle some of our increased workloads despite lower staffing levels.

Social Security employees, as well as the employees of our partners, the Disability Determination Services, are key to ensuring we are positioned to deliver world-class service. They are the foundation of this agency and our most valuable asset for providing the service the public expects and deserves. We want to be the finest public service organization in government, with a diverse workforce and a workplace second to none.

As we prepare for the workforce of the future, our greatest challenge is the projected retirement of many of our employees. Over 53 percent of our total workforce, including 70 percent of our supervisors, will be eligible to retire by FY 2017. This loss of institutional knowledge is even more striking because staff levels are at their lowest since 1972, before the Supplemental Security Income program began, and the number of individuals we serve is at an all-time high and growing. Although we have a history of productivity improvements, such improvements alone cannot fully offset the increase in our workloads and loss of staff.

To meet this human capital challenge, we will refine our innovative human capital management strategies to enhance our ability to attract, retain, develop, motivate, and reward a diverse workforce and foster a culture of continuous improvement. Our efforts will include:

- Capitalizing on recruitment programs that will attract a multi-generational, multi-cultural workforce with the competencies needed to achieve our mission;

- Developing leaders at all levels through comprehensive succession management, outstanding development programs, and an extensive array of learning opportunities;

- Improving employee performance by fostering better management-employee communication and rewarding excellence; and

- Providing an environment and culture that fosters employee retention, promotes achievement in public service, and encourages the pursuit of personal excellence through continual learning.

We must continue to invest in a strong and productive workforce that, when combined with our information technology investment, will equip our employees with the skills to tackle our challenges. We cannot achieve the goals and strategies in this plan without steady investment in our employees.

Key Foundational Element: Information technology

Technology is the foundation of our ability to provide the services so vital to the Nation's economic well-being and to ensure we are positioned to deliver world-class service. For these reasons, information technology is a critical priority for us, and achievement of the goals set forth in this plan, as well as the accomplishment of our day-to-day business, requires a state-of-the-art systems infrastructure.

Our computers currently maintain demographic, earnings, and benefit information on almost every American. We are processing an all-time high of over 75 million business transactions per day, and we currently store nearly 250 million medical records, while adding 2 million more each week. We exchange over 1 billion data files annually with government and business entities for benefit management and homeland security purposes. As the 21st century moves forward, the public increasingly expects that our electronic services will be secure, easy-to-use, and available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

While once a state-of-the-art data center, our National Computer Center is approaching 30 years of age, and its design is no longer optimal for the systems necessary to accomplish our mission. The National Computer Center's capacity to keep up with increasing volumes of work, new and expanded responsibilities, and new ways of doing business is severely limited. All of our plans depend upon a strong, 21st century data center. As a result, we will begin to evaluate options to build or lease a new primary data support center with a modern infrastructure and the capability for further expansion as our workloads and data needs continue to grow.

In addition to building a new primary data support center, we must modernize the rest of our information technology infrastructure. Our field offices cannot accommodate growing workloads and responsibilities unless we automate wherever possible and offer more modern service delivery channels. We need to bring our information technology structure into the 21st century to address workload increases, maintain service levels, support future productivity improvements, and protect the sensitive information entrusted to us. Our information technology infrastructure is currently resting on a foundation of aging computer programs, many COBOL-based, which will make it increasingly difficult to implement new business processes and service delivery models unless we make necessary updates now. We must develop new and improved web-based technologies to support enhanced online services and third-party information exchanges, available at all times, day or night. We must improve telephone service delivery by moving toward a new intelligent system with the capability for integrated e-mail and web-based communications — a system that will not only be more convenient and timely for the public to use, but also more cost-effective for us.

We must continue to position our information technology systems to respond to changing security threats that demand greater and more sophisticated protections. Recent cyber-attacks on U.S. government computer assets have proven that these threats are real and that all agencies are vulnerable. For that reason, we will continue to implement new security procedures and systems to better protect against such threats.

In summary, we must modernize our information technology infrastructure to be prepared for 21st century workload volumes and responsibilities, new service delivery modes, and increasing security and privacy threats. We must have a state-of-the-art information technology infrastructure to allow us to provide citizen-centered services that are available, accurate, adaptable, and secure, and will ensure we can effectively respond to the changing needs of the public.