

Programmatic Information

This section supplements the GPRA Performance Report with more detail on how effectively and efficiently SSA performs its day-to-day business processes and service delivery functions. Included are performance indicators to assess the effectiveness in achieving intended results relating to service delivery goals and objectives outlined in the Agency's strategic plan published in FY 1997 and workload and unit cost data to measure the efficiency of operations. Many of the performance indicators which appeared in this

section in past reports are now contained in the GPRA Annual Performance Report beginning on page 78.

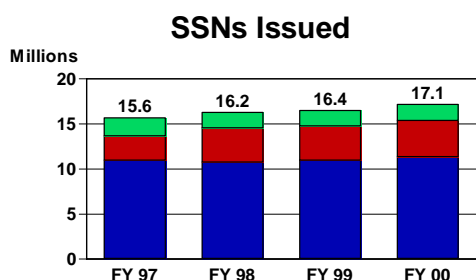
"NA" indicates that actual data are unavailable for that particular fiscal period. When current dollars are presented to restate prior period costs at the 2000 cost levels, the conversion from "actual dollars" to current dollars is calculated based on the change in the cost of an average SSA workyear. The indices used to adjust prior period costs are 1.063292 for 1999, 1.075684 for 1998, 1.168371 for 1997 and 1.173177 for 1996.

Enumeration Process

Enumeration is the process by which SSA assigns Social Security numbers (SSN) to individuals who request them and issues original and replacement cards as a record of each number assigned to a particular individual. The purpose of the number is to maintain accurate records of earnings covered by the Social Security Act and to pay benefits accurately under the various Social Security programs.

original SSN cards issued. As part of the State's birth registration process in the hospital, a parent can request an SSN be assigned to his/her newborn. The State's office of vital statistics then extracts the data SSA needs to assign a number and transmits the data to SSA Headquarters where the cards are issued.

The issuance of original and replacement cards must be prompt and efficient. SSA's ability to advise applicants of their assigned SSN within 24 hours of initial processing has remained very high over the last several years.



	FY 97	FY 98	FY 99	FY 00
Replacement	10.9	10.7	10.9	11.3
Original at Birth	2.7	3.8	3.8	4.0
Other Original	2.0	1.7	1.7	1.8

Application for both original and replacement cards is made through SSA field offices and the data is transmitted to SSA Headquarters in Baltimore where the numbers are assigned and the cards are issued. Application for original SSNs for newborns is also made through another process called Enumeration at Birth, which accounts for the majority of

% of applicants that can be notified orally of their SSN within 24 hours of initial processing of application			
FY 97	FY 98	FY 99	FY 00
94.4%	98.9%	96.5%	96.8%

Requests for SSNs are processed timely, without sacrificing the integrity of the numbers issued. SSA has assigned about 405 million SSNs since the program began in 1936.

Average Processing Time (days)			
FY 97	FY 98	FY 99	FY 00
0.4	0.1	0.3	0.3

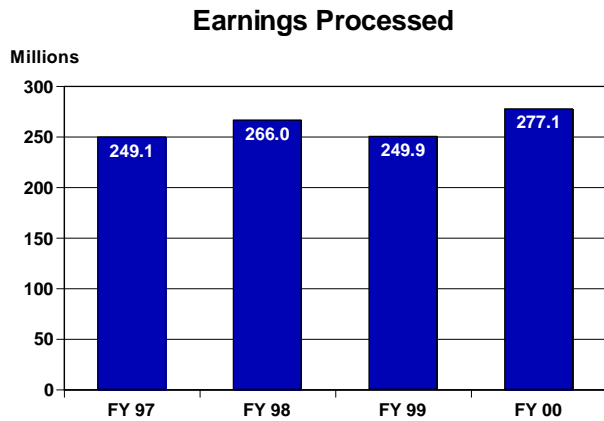
Enumeration Workload Data	FY 97	FY 98	FY 99	FY 00
Workyears	2,811	2,902	2,692	2,909
Production Per Workyear	5,539	5,584	6,063	5,888
Unit Costs (Current \$)	\$15.86	\$15.07	\$14.77	\$15.29

Earnings Process

Reports of earnings must be filed annually by every employer who is liable for Social Security and Medicare taxes. Employers may submit wage reports to SSA on paper or on electronic or magnetic media. To ensure completeness of earnings data, wage items are matched yearly against employer tax data reported to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). Record corrections may be initiated by an employer, IRS, SSA or an employee. Individuals may request statements of their earnings records and corrections to those records by contacting SSA in person, by phone or through the mail or the Internet.

year processing. Once all wage and self-employment income information is processed, these measures are recalculated using actual data.

Number of months to post 98.5 percent of AWRs for the tax year			
FY 97	FY 98	FY 99	FY 00
9.8	9.0	9.5	NA



% of AWRs Posted Following the Close of the Tax Year				
	FY 97	FY 98	FY 99	FY 00
Within 6 months	86.9%	83.0%	83.1%	90.1%*
Within 9 months	97.8%	98.5%	92.9%	97.6%*

* Estimates

The data on the following charts shown as FY 2000 performance relates to the processing of tax year 1999 data. SSA annually estimates the number of annual wage reports (AWRs) and the amount of self-employment income that will be posted for a particular tax year. These estimates are used to monitor current

% of Self-Employment Income Posted Following the Close of the Tax Year				
	FY 97	FY 98	FY 99	FY 00
Within 9 months	80.4%	89.5%	88.5%	93.5%*
Within 12 months	99.5%	99.8%	100%	NA

* Estimate

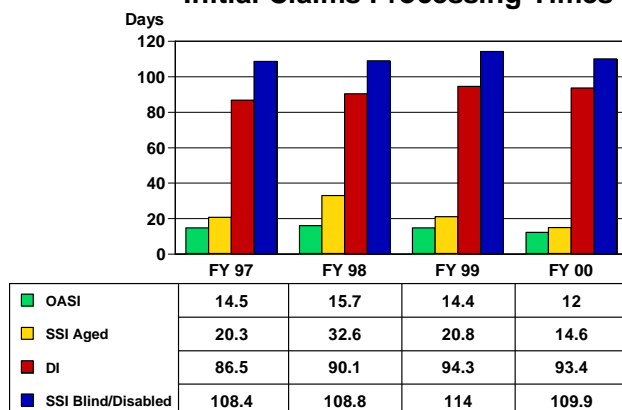
Earnings Workload Data	FY 97	FY 98	FY 99	FY 00
Earnings Processed	249,123,545	266,011,984	249,867,974	277,145,696
Workyears	1,303	1,223	1,007	904
Production Per Workyear	191,210	217,440	248,131	306,577
Unit Costs (Current \$)	\$0.44	\$0.37	\$0.31	\$0.25

Claims Process

To become entitled to benefits under any of the programs that SSA administers, an individual must file an application and submit proof of eligibility. Those who are dissatisfied with SSA's decisions may request further review. The claims process comprises the actions that SSA takes to determine an individual's eligibility for benefits, beginning with the individual's initial contact through payment effectuation or administrative appeal.

The process for determining eligibility for benefits involves certain basic functions that are consistent across each of the programs that SSA administers: outreach and information, intake, evidence collection, determination of eligibility, notification of award or denial and initial payment. However, eligibility requirements vary considerably by program and type of benefit.

Initial Claims Processing Times



Following are several performance measures for this particular business process.

% of continuing monthly payments made on the scheduled delivery date				
	FY 97	FY 98	FY 99	FY 00
OASI	99.9%	99.9%	99.9%	99.9%
SSI	99.9%	99.9%	99.9%	99.9%

The "Initial Payment Accuracy Rate" is the measure of accuracy of the first payment made to newly awarded OASI and SSI claimants. It is calculated by dividing the amount of payments made correctly by the total amount that should have been paid. Although it would appear that performance had declined, the changes from FY 1998 to FY 1999 are not statistically significant.

Initial Payment Accuracy Rate				
	FY 97	FY 98	FY 99	FY 00
OASI	95.6%	97.1%	93.4%	NA
SSI	92.5%	93.3%	91.6%	NA

The Index of Dollar Accuracy is based on a statistically reliable sample of the workloads reviewed. It measures the dollar accuracy of adjudicative decisions over the retrospective, current and prospective lifetime of the payment. For OASI, the Index of Dollar Accuracy rate represents total dollars paid divided by dollars that should have been paid over the life cycle of the award. For SSI, it expresses the relationship of field office processed initial claims and redetermination dollars paid to dollars that should have been paid over the expected life of the award or redetermination. The lifetime of the SSI award continues until termination or redetermination. The percent of lifetime OASI initial awards has remained consistently high for the past several years. The changes in the SSI index of dollar accuracy rate from one year to the next are not statistically significant.

% of lifetime dollars from a claims award or redetermination that are paid correctly				
	FY 97	FY 98	FY 99	FY 00
OASI	99.8%	99.8%	99.6%	NA
SSI	93.0%	93.9%	94.2%	NA
- Awards	90.4%	94.8%	93.2%	NA
- Redets.	94.3%	93.5%	94.5%	NA

Claims Workload Data	FY 97	FY 98	FY 99	FY 00
Workload Receipts				
- OASI	3,112,022	2,992,786	3,041,782	3,368,093
- DI	1,529,513	1,487,545	1,505,689	1,598,479
- SSI Aged	128,492	138,570	149,716	153,536
- SSI Blind/Disabled	1,496,408	1,444,351	1,480,536	1,546,883
Total	6,266,435	6,063,252	6,177,723	6,666,991
Year-to-Year Change	-5.6%	-3.2%	1.9%	7.92%
Workloads Processed				
- OASI	3,129,238	3,020,268	3,076,937	3,404,938
- DI	1,662,353	1,536,900	1,513,780	1,577,815
- SSI Aged	125,680	135,442	148,382	153,474
- SSI Blind/Disabled	1,498,520	1,429,247	1,440,689	1,493,390
Total	6,415,791	6,121,857	6,179,788	6,629,617
Year-to-Year Change	-4.1%	-4.6%	0.6%	8.29%
End-of-Year Pendings				
- OASI	56,844	55,505	38,531	30,667
- DI	167,081	259,018	291,104	343,362
- SSI Aged	8,138	8,469	9,101	7,602
- SSI Blind/Disabled	367,625	328,260	365,281	412,495
Total	599,688	651,252	704,017	794,126
End of Year Pendings as % of Current Year's Dispositions				
- OASI	1.8%	1.8%	1.3%	0.9%
- DI	10.1%	16.9%	19.2%	21.8%
- SSI Aged	6.5%	6.3%	6.1%	5.0%
- SSI Disabled	24.5%	23.0%	25.4%	27.6%
Workyears	19,560	17,263	16,714	17,236
Production Per Workyear	328	355	370	385
Unit Cost (Current \$)				
- OASI	\$235.10	\$208.42	\$201.89	\$189.84
- DI	635.87	620.08	643.93	616.90
- SSI Aged	363.42	312.71	282.72	224.65
- SSI Disabled	606.35	555.15	555.66	543.88
- Overall Average	428.17	395.02	394.61	372.03

Disability Determination Services (DDS)

The following tables illustrate the DDS performance accuracy for disability determinations. Performance accuracy rates reflect the estimated percentages of initial disability determinations and reconsideration disability determinations that do not have to be returned to the DDS for development of additional documentation or correction of the disability determination. Accuracy of initial disability determinations have remained relatively constant over the last 5 years.

Performance accuracy				
	FY 97	FY 98	FY 99	FY 00
Initial Disability Determinations:				
- Overall Avg.	94.0%	93.7%	94.3%	94.2%
- Allowances	95.9%	96.1%	96.5%	97.0%
- Denials	93.1%	92.3%	93.0%	92.4%
Reconsideration Disability Determinations:				
- Overall Avg.	92.3%	91.6%	92.3%	92.2%
- Allowances	94.0%	95.6%	96.0%	96.9%
- Denials	92.0%	90.9%	91.6%	91.3%

The following table reflects the net accuracy of initial disability determinations. Net accuracy is the percentage of correct DDS disability determinations. The net accuracy rate is based on the net error rate (defined as the number of corrected deficient cases with changed disability decisions, plus the number of deficient cases that are not corrected within 90 days following the period covered by the report) divided by the number of cases reviewed. Net accuracy of initial disability determinations has remained fairly stable over the past 4 years.

Net accuracy of initial disability determinations				
	FY 97	FY 98	FY 99	FY 00
- Overall Avg.	96.5%	96.2%	96.7%	NA
- Allowances	97.6%	97.9%	98.0%	NA
- Denials	95.9%	95.3%	95.8%	NA

SSA is mandated by statute to review at least 50 percent of the favorable disability insurance determinations made by State DDSs. These reviews of initial and reconsideration allowances are conducted prior to

effectuation of the DDS determination. We also perform preeffectuation reviews of DDS determinations of continuing eligibility. SSA uses a profiling system to select cases for review. This helps to ensure the cost-effectiveness of preeffectuation reviews, and satisfies the legislative requirement that the cases reviewed are those that are most likely to be incorrect.

Preeffectuation Reviews				
	FY 97	FY 98	FY 99	FY 00
% of accurate decisions to allow or continue benefits by State DDSs	96.4%	96.4%	96.4%	96.6%
No. of cases reviewed	249,321	241,611	254,134	259,785
No. of cases returned to DDS due to error or inadequate documentation	9,013	8,729	9,082	8,748

SSA also performs quality assurance reviews to measure the level of decisional accuracy for the State DDSs against standards mandated by regulations. These reviews are conducted prior to effectuation of the DDS determinations and cover initial claims, reconsiderations and determinations of continuing eligibility. The tables below show that the State DDS have consistently made the correct decision to allow benefits.

Quality Assurance Review				
	FY 97	FY 98	FY 99	FY 00
% of accurate decisions to allow or continue benefits by State DDSs	95.8%	96.1%	96.1%	96.7%
No. of cases reviewed	42,402	42,303	43,863	42,196
No. of cases returned to DDS due to error or inadequate documentation	1,801	1,638	1,705	1,381

DDS Workload Data¹	FY 97	FY 98	FY 99	FY 00
Workload Receipts				
- Initial Disability Cases	2,075,074	2,040,738	2,053,492	2,116,667
- Total Cases	3,805,920	3,848,878	3,786,564	3,887,035
Workload Processed				
- Initial Disability Cases	2,186,136	2,023,748	2,012,047	2,035,627
- Total Cases	3,804,111	3,792,151	3,774,209	3,756,923
End-of-Year Pending				
- Initial Disability Cases	399,392	416,378	457,823	535,407
- Total Cases	703,696	760,026	772,381	900,502
Production Per Workyear	269	265	258	264

1. The initial disability case data for FYs 1997-1999 for workload receipts and workload processed have changed from those presented in the FY 1999 report due to the removal of Federal Medicare reconsideration and hearings cases, which were erroneously shown as initial Federal Medicare cases. The overall total disability cases were not affected.

Due Process Operations

Due process operations consists of reconsiderations, hearings and appeals. Data for the hearings processing time performance indicator may be found in the GPRA Annual Performance Report.

The following measure focuses on the reconsiderations of initial claims (which constitute the majority of all reconsideration actions). Should a reconsideration be filed, it is expected that the beneficiary will receive a prompt reply.

% of requests for reconsideration of denied disability claims completed within 60 days of filing			
FY 97	FY 98	FY 99	FY 00
53.2%	50.9%	46.2%	43.9%

In FY 2000, the processing time for the appeals workload increased to an average of 505 days.

Appeals Council Processing Time (Days)			
FY 97	FY 98	FY 99	FY 00
340	430	458	505

The average processing time was 47 days higher than in FY 1999. Early in calendar year 2000, the Appeals Council Process Improvement (ACPI) Plan was implemented with an eye toward reducing average processing time for the appeals workload. Differential case management was implemented as one means of increasing the number of appeals processed. Additional sources were tapped to increase the number of

adjudicators available to process claims. Productivity increased as the result of these initiatives and the pending level began to decline as did the processing time. However, the pending during the year included a greater percentage of aged cases than in prior years. Therefore, the average processing time for those cases cleared during the FY increased.

This is the seventh year that the percentage of Appeals Council reviews that have decisions made and notices sent within 90 days after filing the appeal was tracked. At the beginning of the year, one percent of reviews was processed within 90 days. Early in calendar year 2000, the Appeals Council implemented the ACPI Plan. The plan contained numerous initiatives aimed at reducing both the number of pending request for review cases as well as the processing time.

The initiatives included differential case management and case processing by managers and Office of the General Counsel adjudicators. As the year progressed, the number of cases being processed on a monthly basis increased and decreases occurred in both the pending level and the processing time. However, because of the number of aged cases pending before the Council, only a slight improvement in this indicator occurred. Accordingly, the percentage of reviews processed within 90 days increased, albeit slightly, to two percent.

% of reviews with decisions made and notices sent within 90 days after filing			
FY 97	FY 98	FY 99	FY 00
1.0%	1.0%	1.0%	2.0%

Due Process Workload Data	FY 97	FY 98	FY 99	FY 00
Workload Receipts				
- Hearings	547,612	519,179	524,644	569,276
- Appeals	128,970	129,033	135,379	130,534
Workloads Processed				
- Reconsiderations	1,052,732	1,054,512	981,347	910,921
- Hearings	574,795	618,578	596,999	539,426
- Appeals	104,876	119,271	109,691	146,980
End-of-Year Pendings				
- Hearings	483,712	384,313	311,958	346,756
- Appeals	117,605	127,367	153,056	136,002
End-of-Year Pendings as a % of Current Year's Dispositions				
- Hearings	84.2%	62.1%	52.3%	64.3%
- Appeals	112.1%	106.8%	139.5%	92.5%
Workyears	12,773	13,218	12,951	12,149
Production per Workyear (total)	136	136	130	131
Unit Costs (Current \$)				
- Reconsiderations	\$430	\$413	\$431	\$428
- Hearings	1,451	1,490	1,491	1,510
- Appeals	511	489	547	440
- Overall Average	831	844	865	838

Postentitlement Process

Once individuals become entitled to Social Security or SSI benefits, any changes in their circumstances that affect the amount or continuation of payment must be reflected in SSA's records. The postentitlement process encompasses the actions that SSA takes, after an OASDI or SSI claim is processed to an initial award, to ensure continuing eligibility and timely and correct payment of benefits. Examples of these actions include change of address, benefit recomputations, overpayments and reviews of disability beneficiaries to determine their continuing eligibility for benefits. The

performance accuracy of these continuing disability reviews (CDR) is displayed below.

CDR Performance Accuracy				
	FY 97	FY 98	FY 99	FY 00
- Overall Avg.	94.7%	94.8%	95.3%	96.1%
- Allowances	95.1%	95.7%	95.8%	96.5%
- Denials	94.0%	91.5%	93.3%	93.6%

Postentitlement Workload Data	FY 97	FY 98	FY 99	FY 00
Workloads Processed				
- OASI	65,677,579	64,970,602	58,571,017	63,883,455
- DI	13,095,777	14,101,384	13,139,294	14,158,427
- SSI	22,175,293	21,783,670	20,192,328	20,379,354
- Total	100,948,649	100,855,656	91,902,639	98,421,236
Workyears	20,289	20,175	20,420	20,236
Production per Workyear	4,976	4,999	4,501	4,864
Periodic CDRs Processed	690,478	1,391,889	1,703,414	1,836,510
Redeterminations Conducted	1,772,818	1,852,842	2,122,279	2,182,027
Representative Payee Actions	6,295,379	7,063,595	7,644,563	6,151,264
Unit Costs (Current \$)				
- OASI	\$11.67	\$10.27	\$10.78	\$9.98
- DI	40.31	40.02	39.48	37.60
- SSI	44.54	43.47	53.32	48.46
- Overall Average				
- Per Work Unit	20.61	21.35	24.23	21.92
- Per Beneficiary	41.37	42.58	43.77	42.03

800 Number Telephone Service

In addition to providing face-to-face service, SSA offers a single nationwide toll-free number (1-800-SSA-1213) weekdays from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. in each time zone. Service is available for the hearing-impaired community during the same hours using a telecommunication device for the deaf. Automated services are also available at all times including after normal business hours, on weekends and holidays. Using the automated services, callers can request applications for SSNs, Social Security statements, verification of monthly benefit amounts, Medicare information and a replacement Medicare card, and recorded information on local field offices and Medicare carriers and intermediaries.

SSA conducts an ongoing evaluation of the national 800 number service. National 800 number accuracy rates are derived from the remote monitoring of calls handled by teleservice representatives and program service center SPIKE employees (individuals in Program Service Centers who answer 800 number calls during high volume periods).

Portion of National 800 Number calls handled accurately				
	FY 97	FY 98	FY 99	FY 00
% of responses leading to correct payments (payment accuracy - all calls)	97.1%	97.0%	97.4%	NA
% of responses leading to correct payments (payment accuracy -payment affecting calls)	95.2%	94.7%	95.4%	NA
% of responses which did not result in inconvenience to the caller or cause additional SSA workloads (service accuracy)	84.3%	81.7%	81.8%	NA

The payment accuracy rates represent the percentage of all calls free of teleservice failures which have a reasonable potential to improperly affect payment of or eligibility to benefits. There are two measures of payment accuracy: 1) Payment accuracy based on the universe of all calls; and 2) payment accuracy based only on calls with the potential to affect payment of or eligibility to benefits. The service accuracy rate represents the percentage of calls free of teleservice failures in service delivery which do not have a reasonable potential to improperly affect payment or eligibility to benefits. Service errors involve situations which can: 1) Result in inconvenience to the public; 2) cause additional SSA workloads; or 3) result in situations where information is released from SSA records or reports which affect SSA records and are accepted before obtaining all identifying information required by SSA.

While staff courtesy ratings from 800 number customers remained high based on the February 2000 survey results, overall satisfaction fell to 81 percent excellent, very good or good. The decline from the FY 1999 satisfaction rate of 84 percent was statistically significant. Access to 800 number service continued to be the issue adversely affecting the overall rating, with customer ratings falling significantly when they had difficulty getting through. Time spent on hold contributed to poor perceptions of access.

Staff Courtesy			
FY 97	FY 98	FY 99	FY 00
98%	97%	90%	91%

Service Satisfaction			
FY 97	FY 98	FY 99	FY 00
89%	83%	84%	81%

The chart below displays SSA's 800 Number workload data. Calls placed represent the actual number of calls placed to the 800 number including busy signals. Calls received consists of all callers that get through and either conduct business or hang up while on hold. Calls handled represent all callers that conduct business with SSA.

SSA's 800 Number Workloads (In Millions)				
	FY 97	FY 98	FY 99	FY 00
Calls Placed	75.3	78.9	78.7	87.1
Calls Received	68.4	70.5	71.8	76.0
Calls Handled	55.5	54.7	58.8	59.5

Informing the Public

Keeping the public informed about the Social Security program is one of the most important things that SSA does. Effective, factual communication about the nation's Social Security programs has been a priority for SSA during the past two years of national debate. The public needs to fully understand the programs, the benefits to themselves and society as a whole, and the financing principles so they can actively participate in the national discussions about the future of Social Security. SSA has also realized that it should go beyond providing basic information about Social Security, and that the Agency should take the lead in educating workers and their families about retirement planning.

SSA has committed to an aggressive, proactive public education outreach campaign. The campaign includes: 1) public events and media campaigns; 2) the development of new brochures and printed materials;

3) the *Social Security Statement*; and 4) making maximum use of new technology, including the Internet.

Within the last two years, SSA employees have participated in more than 10,000 public events and media opportunities on Social Security. The Agency also developed special public information materials to support the national dialogue on long-range Social Security financial issues. On October 1, 1999, SSA launched the largest customized mailing ever undertaken by a Federal agency, the *Social Security Statement*, potentially the Agency's most valuable public information and education tool. This automatic mailing takes place at a rate of over 500,000 *Statements* per business day, with about 10 million issued each month. Workers receive their *Statement* about three months before their birthday. This timing will be

especially helpful to individuals who are thinking about retirement because it will provide them with a current benefit estimate.

Percent of Covered Workers Receiving Social Security Statements			
FY 97	FY 98	FY 99	FY 00
7.1%	10.6%	12.8%	57.3%

SSA is working to further expand the use of the Internet as an information source. SSA's website is recognized as among the most innovative and information-rich in government. The website provides visitors with program information, and with downloadable versions of the top two dozen forms used by the public. It attracts more than 10 million individuals per year-up from 22,000 just six years ago. The website provides access to "Benefit Planners" which allows individuals of any age to compute estimates of their Social Security

benefits. This "Calculator" which provides benefit calculations and estimates based strictly on input from users to ensure that there are no privacy concerns regarding the service.

SSA's website also offers both English and Spanish language version of most information pamphlets and fact sheets that SSA publishes on its benefit programs as well as informational material on the SSI and Medicare programs. The website provides additional information about the *Social Security Statement* for individuals who may have questions after receiving their *Statement*, as well as providing information to those individuals who may have problems such as a mistake in their name, date of birth or earnings record information. SSA's website is not only a convenience for the increasing number of Americans, who look to the Internet as their "information source of choice", it also helps reduce the 800 number traffic for the operations components.

Informing the Public Workload Data	FY 97	FY 98	FY 99	FY 00
Earnings Statements				
- Total Number Issued	15,702,739	24,109,695	30,140,944	137,538,881
- Workyears	357	267	252	220
- Unit Costs (Current \$)	\$1.97	\$0.96	\$0.69	\$0.45

Face-to-Face Service

SSA has a long tradition of providing face-to-face service for customers in its field offices (FO). SSA has 1,343 FOs nationwide which provide a full array of services for customers, from answering general questions about programs to making complex eligibility determinations. Providing prompt, courteous service in our FOs is crucial to becoming an Agency that truly provides "World-Class Service." An indicator of this type of service is the length of time visitors spend in FOs waiting for service.

The following tables display the results of the waiting times in SSA's FOs.

National Field Office Waiting Times				
	FY 97	FY 98	FY 99	FY 00
Wait time to first contact (in minutes)	11.4	12.5	12.9	14.3

National Field Office Waiting Times				
	FY 97	FY 98	FY 99	FY 00
Visitors with appointments				
- Avg. wait time (in minutes)	5.6	5.8	6.6	6.2
- % seen within 10 minutes	84.9%	87.4%	84.6%	84.2%
- % seen within 15 minutes	90.3%	92.5%	89.9%	90.2%
Visitors without appointments				
- Avg. wait time (in minutes)	23.9	25.8	25.6	24.3
- % seen within 30 minutes	72.7%	71.9%	71.6%	73.2%
- % seen within 60 minutes	91.6%	89.9%	90.4%	91.5%

SSA's interaction tracking survey of office visitors, introduced for FY 2000 performance reporting, obtains customer impressions of service in field and hearings offices shortly after the contact. Survey results show customers were highly satisfied with SSA's in-person service: Nine out of ten survey responders rated overall service on the day of the contact as excellent, very good or good. This high degree of satisfaction is mainly attributable to very positive impressions of the service provided by SSA employees. Among the specific aspects of service rated in the Office Visitor survey, employee attributes received the highest ratings, which

The public can initiate requests for all information and services by writing to SSA. Though members of the public do not often make their first contact with SSA through the mail, SSA's need to make contact on a large scale means that SSA frequently interacts with customers by mail. General program information is mailed to requesters and notices are sent to explain eligibility and payment decisions and to inform clients of their rights and responsibilities.

Previous Accountability Reports have included an annual customer's rating of the clarity of SSA mail. This rating, which was derived from a survey of our

seemed to outweigh more negative opinions of such tangible aspects of service as waiting time and privacy in the office.

The table below provides satisfaction ratings, defined as the percent rating service as excellent, very good or good, for the various aspects on office survey rated in the survey.

Office Visitors	
Aspect of Service:	Percent "Satisfied"
Employee Attributes	
Staff helpfulness	91%
Staff courtesy	92%
Staff knowledge	93%
Clarity of staff explanations	90%
Office Environment	
Office location	89%
Office hours	90%
Signs/Instructions in waiting area	85%
Office comfort	79%
Office privacy	70%
Access to Service	
Appointment convenience	89%
Waiting time	75%
Forms Completion	
Ease of completion	87%

Mail

customers, has helped us monitor the effect on customer satisfaction of notice language and the notice improvements we make. Throughout the 1990's, there was a gradual increase in the percent of customers rating SSA notices as good to excellent. Satisfaction rose from 78 percent in 1996 to 86 percent in 1999. We discontinued that measure to pursue targeted notice studies that will provide specific information to help us improve the clarity of our most difficult notices.

Although approximately 90 percent of SSA notices have been improved, some of our most difficult notices are yet to be improved. In General Accounting

Office (GAO) audit number 11999024, “SSA: Longstanding Problems In SSA’s Letters to the Public Need to be Fixed,” GAO recommended that SSA develop performance measures to assess whether changes to notices achieve intended results.

We plan to secure benchmark information about how well our beneficiaries currently understand these problematic notices and will conduct a customer

satisfaction survey for targeted notices in FY 2001. Using feedback from the benchmark survey, we will develop performance measures that address GAO’s concerns. As we continue to revise notice language, we will conduct follow-up customer surveys targeted to measure the level of customer understanding of the revised notices and the degree to which the desired performance has been achieved.

Internet

The public can also quickly and conveniently access most general program information, frequently requested forms and other information of interest through SSA’s Internet website, *ssa.gov*. In FY 2000, our Internet customers downloaded nearly 6 million informational brochures addressing virtually every aspect of Social Security benefits. They also downloaded 4,250,000 commonly used forms using our Internet site.

We surveyed our online customers to determine their satisfaction with the services we provide at our website. A total of 79 percent of our customers rated SSA’s Web site as “good,” “very good” or “excellent” in FY 2000.

This was a slight drop from 81 percent achieved in FY 1999. However, we achieved a significant rise in those rating our site as “excellent;” 27 percent versus 17 percent in FY 1999.

% of online customers who rated SSA’s website as “good,” “very good” or “excellent”			
FY 97	FY 98	FY 99	FY 00
NA	NA	81.0%	79.0%