

A high-contrast, black and white photograph of a statue of a woman, likely a historical figure, seated on a throne. She is wearing a long, flowing dress with a high collar and a crown or tiara. The background is dark with some light streaks. The text is overlaid on the top right of the image.

Training Business Plan: Creating A Learning Organization

Fiscal Years 2009 - 2013
Social Security Administration
Office of Learning



Table of Contents

Commissioner Message 4

Associate Commissioner Message 6

Mission/Vision 8

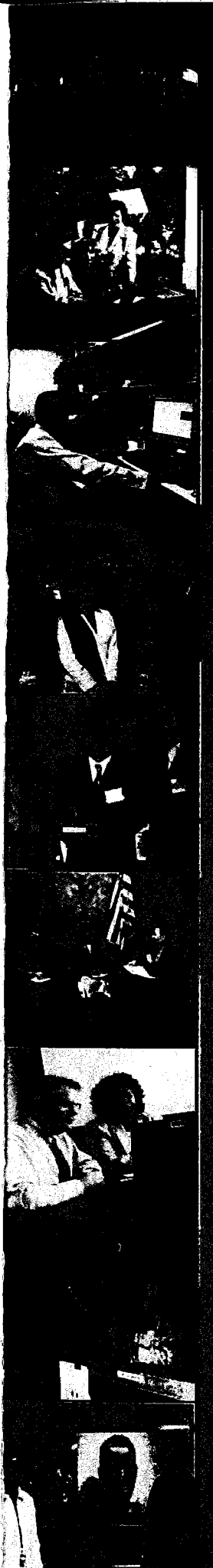
What We Do 9

Challenges We Face 11

Our Goals and Objectives 14

Special Initiative: Building
One Team with One Focus 50

Conclusion 53





MESSAGE FROM THE COMMISSIONER

I am pleased to share with you SSA's Training Business Plan. The plan describes initiatives that affect the entire agency and address many of the challenges that we must tackle to maintain and strengthen one of our key foundational elements: our employees.

Why do we have a separate business plan for training? When we released the Agency Strategic Plan in September, I commented that "the strategic planning process compels us to evaluate our current situation and future challenges and develop the incremental strategies needed to achieve our long-term goals." This is true not only for the agency as a whole but also for specific areas of our operations. The Office of Training took the initiative to work with agency executives, training staffs, and internal customers to develop a bold and detailed plan to ensure that SSA employees at all levels receive outstanding learning opportunities.

As discussed in the ASP, our employees are the foundation of this agency and our most valuable asset for providing the service the public expects and deserves. We have attempted to contend with diminished staffing levels through productivity improvements and have had some success in "doing more with less." However, improvements in work processes alone cannot fully offset the increase in our workloads and loss of staff. Now more than ever, the agency needs to have learning processes and programs in place to transfer agency knowledge, prepare our future leaders, and enable all of our employees to develop to their full potential.

In the business plan, the Office of Training lays out a strategy to move away from a focus on training to a focus on learning. While providing excellent training opportunities will remain an ongoing and vital activity, we will also concentrate on developing tools and methodologies that facilitate learning, evaluate the impact of training, and address the various learning styles of the four generations of employees currently working at the agency. To reflect this new focus on learning, the Office of Training plans to change its name to the Office of Learning.



MESSAGE FROM THE COMMISSIONER

The business plan aligns well with the agency's strategic plan and provides a roadmap on how to support the agency's goals through continuous learning and staff development. In all corners of our operations – from front-line employees to regional and headquarters' staff – we need to maximize the potential of our employees and give ample opportunities for continued professional development. Whether the challenges are eliminating the disability hearings backlog, improving the speed and quality of our disability process, improving our retiree and other core services, or preserving the public's trust in our programs, we need a well-trained and prepared workforce. The business plan sets forth a strategy that will not only take advantage of our existing strengths, but also bring about new and innovative programs that will transform how we carry out our training, learning, and employee development functions.

Just as the Office of Training solicited ideas from other agency components to develop this plan, the new Office of Learning will want - and need - your input and support to achieve the many desirable outcomes described in the conclusion of the plan. Therefore, I encourage all employees to read the plan and look for opportunities to help. Whether you offer ideas for improvement, assist in evaluating new programs, or actively contribute to these initiatives in other ways, together we can truly make SSA a world-class learning organization.

Michael J. Astrue

Commissioner



MESSAGE FROM THE ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER

After joining the Social Security Administration as its Chief Learning Officer, I sought to develop an agency-wide training business plan. This business plan aligns with the agency's strategic plan and provides a roadmap on how we can support the agency goals by developing the workforce with the skills and competencies to meet the challenges in the coming years. Whether these challenges are eliminating the disability hearings backlog, improving the speed and quality of our disability process, improving our retiree and other core services, or preserving the public's trust in our programs, we need a well-trained and dedicated workforce.

This plan lays out how we intend to train and develop our workforce through our business goals, objectives, and actions over the next two to four years. We will concentrate our energies on five business goals: (1) create an environment that fosters a learning organization and the development of talent; (2) establish more effective and efficient programmatic training; (3) develop leaders at all levels of the agency; (4) support succession planning through professional enhancement and employee development; and (5) develop a consistent results-based evaluation and assessment process.

The business plan describes the work and accomplishments of the current Office of Training, outlines the challenges we face as a learning organization, and details how we will meet those challenges. We have had many successes, but we believe we must move forward in partnership with our internal customers to build upon our accomplishments. In developing our training business plan, I have met with over 60 executives, visited every region and regional office as well as visited processing centers, field offices, disability determination services in several states, teleservice centers, and several headquarters components. I gathered information from our customers and stakeholders on what we do well, what we can do better, and what new initiatives and programs we should pursue.

We identified the five training business goals outlined above by meeting with our stakeholders and customers and aligning those goals to the agency's strategic plan.

First, when we create an environment that fosters a learning organization and the development of talent, we then help define the way Social Security will manage its training resources and develop its employees. We need to support continual learning and the development of employee talent, implement a national learning management system, develop methods for transfer of knowledge to a new generation of leaders and employees, and create blended learning solutions for our training programs.

Second, we will establish more effective and efficient programmatic training. As we transform how we deliver services to the public, we will also transform how we train our employees in the delivery of those services. We intend to transform the programmatic entry-level and programmatic disability training as well as implement a national coaching program to provide a consistent training and evaluation cadre for the programs we will develop and implement. I believe that the enhanced programmatic training for incumbent employees will further develop our current employees. I expect us to work closely with Systems and Operations to enhance and expand the abilities of cloned numbers in the training regions.

Undoubtedly our third goal to develop leaders at all levels of Social Security Administration is a critical one. Although we are often cited as a model for best practices in leadership development, we will implement enhancements to the leadership and career development curriculum.

Fourth, I know that support for succession planning is vital to the long-term success of the agency. We intend to promote professional enhancement and employee development through competency-based training and addressing skill gaps at all levels of employee development.

Finally, we want to evaluate, on a regular basis, how effective and cost efficient our training programs and plans are, and how well such plans and programs contribute to mission accomplishment and strategic objectives.

I am confident that accomplishing the goals set forth in the business plan will provide our workforce with the knowledge and skills we need to meet the challenges we face as an agency. The business plan is a result of input and recommendations from executives and employees across the agency and addresses all stages of training development from initial design to evaluation. The Office of Training values the input of our stakeholders and customers and is committed to working with them to create a learning organization that meets the training and development needs of our workforce.

Steven Patrick

Chief Learning Officer
Associate Commissioner - The Office of Training

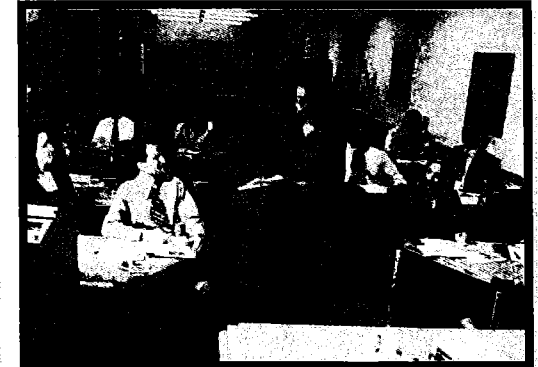
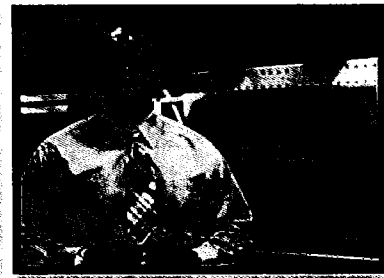
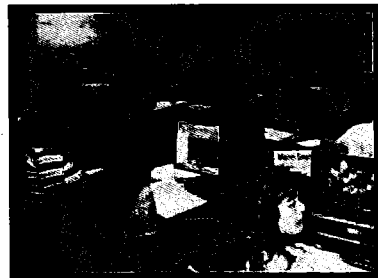
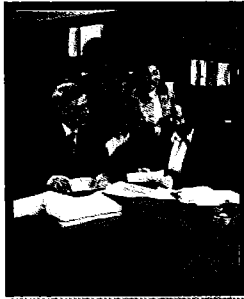
Mission/Vision

Mission Statement:

Be one team with one focus in building the Social Security Administration as a learning organization.

Vision Statement:

Create a premier learning organization that supports the development of talent and transfers organizational knowledge to the next generation of Social Security employees.



What We Do

The Office of Training is committed to ensuring that the Social Security Administration's workforce possesses the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to support the mission of the agency. We are responsible for the administration of the Social Security Administration's national training and career development programs, as well as the agency's Interactive Video Teletraining network. We work cooperatively with components agency-wide to provide training and development opportunities that cover a wide range of programmatic, technical, personal growth, supervisory, managerial, and executive training needs.

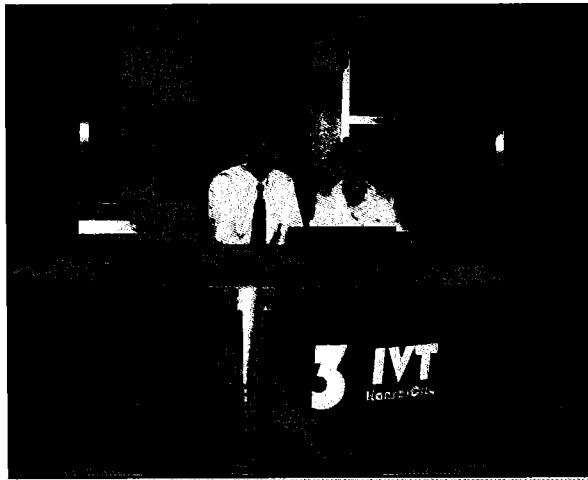
Our primary activities include:

- *Providing programmatic/technical training.* This effort includes designing, developing, implementing and evaluating programmatic/technical training in the areas of Disability, Title II Retirement, Survivors and Auxiliary, Title XVIII Medicare, and Title XVI Supplemental Security Income to meet the needs of the Social Security Administration's direct service employees, components agency-wide, and the Disability Determination Services.
- *Producing, directing, scripting and presenting Video on Demand (VOD) lessons and Interactive Video Teletraining (IVT).* VOD lessons and IVT lessons are used for training employees on general skills, programmatic/technical training including in-service training on new systems releases and major policy changes, transmittal training, training on updates for field office employees, the 1-800 Number Agents and training on Disability topics. The VOD on-line lesson library now contains more than 460 lessons and has already been accessed over one million times. Those lessons include extended IVT content as well as VOD only projects that take advantage of VOD's unique capabilities such as high resolution graphics and interactive simulation.
- *Providing Leadership Training.* The Office of Training has responsibility for directing, designing, implementing, and evaluating a leadership curriculum that includes training opportunities for all levels of leadership. Courses are presented for newly promoted and seasoned managers via IVT/VOD, classroom training, symposia, and online courses.



OT manages SSA's national career development programs and various managerial, supervisory, and executive training courses.

- *Managing the Social Security Administration's national career development programs.* This work involves developing the programs, coordinating the application and selection processes, monitoring the progress of each participant, and assessing each program. The programs include the Senior Executive Service Candidate Development Program, Advanced Leadership Program, Leadership Development Program, and Presidential Management Fellows Program.
- *Developing and coordinating training curricula for professional skills training.* This activity includes assessing the general skills needs of employees, evaluating course content, contracting with vendors for specific courses, soliciting for participants to attend course offerings, processing the registrations for the course offerings and evaluating the course offerings. Courses are offered through classrooms, IVT, and SSA Learn.



IVT and VOD are used to broadcast policy updates and training.

- *Providing online training support services.* These services compliment and enhance the courses that we offer. For example, through the Office of Training web site, we provide for the online ordering, printing and delivery of course materials, provide for IVT course registration online and store accessible versions of all training materials for employees with disabilities.

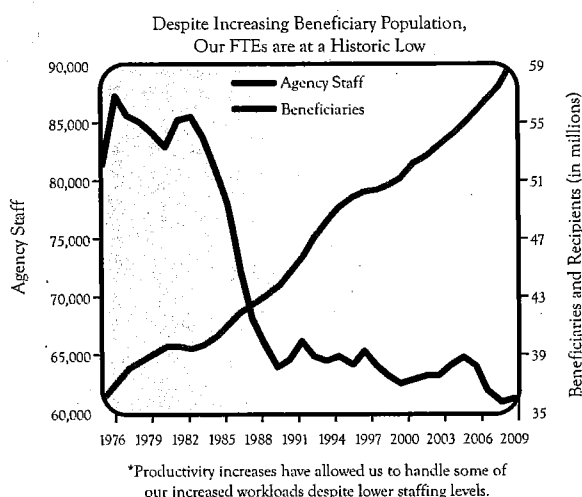
- *Providing national training technology support services.* As VOD content is created by every region, we provide Regional Office staff with direction and guidance on the development and

production of VOD products. In addition, we support the many tools that create our blended learning approach such as, Blackboard, SharePoint, SSA Learn, and a host of other national applications. We create custom programming and database applications, are responsible for the SLC/ASC classes and create specialized lessons to support our EWD community.

Challenges We Face

We recognize that there are a number of challenges in establishing the Social Security Administration as a premier learning organization. As illustrated in Figure 1, over the past 30 years the agency has gone from a peak staffing level of 78,000 down to 62,000 for a decrease of approximately 21 percent. During this same period, the number of beneficiaries has gone from 35 million to 60 million for an increase of approximately 71 percent. In addition, over 53 percent of our total workforce will be eligible to retire by FY 2017.

Figure 1 - Beneficiary and Staffing Trends



Although we have a history of successful productivity improvements and have become accustomed to doing more with less, such improvements alone cannot fully offset the increase in our workloads and loss of staff. To overcome these challenges, the agency needs to provide training and development opportunities to equip employees with the knowledge and skills necessary to perform successfully.

Serving the public is the agency's utmost priority. Therefore, in the past, training resources have been redirected to support the increasing beneficiary population. Moving forward, we must make the necessary investments to develop our employees so we can continue to support the agency's mission into the future.

In addition to increasing workloads and shrinking staff levels, we face a number of other challenges in establishing the Social Security Administration as a learning organization, including:

Organizational Challenges

- The Social Security Administration's training functions are decentralized, which presents challenges in communications, coordination, and evaluation and too often results in duplicative efforts; and
- The agency's retirement wave requires that we effectively transfer knowledge and abilities to new and current employees.

Cultural Challenges

- Due to workload pressures, our leaders sometimes have difficulty modeling an interest in continual learning and devoting sufficient time to employee development.
- The Social Security Administration needs to institutionalize a way to recognize outstanding leaders who actively support employee learning and development; and
- We need to develop and standardize a streamlined process in which supervisors and employees discuss training and development needs so we can maximize the potential of our workforce. We need to provide supervisors with tools for promoting those discussions that will facilitate the creation of a roadmap for individualized employee learning.

Training Design and Delivery Challenges

- We need effective strategies to mentor and coach others, providing personalized support to improve performance and productivity;
- We need to address the retirement wave in the management ranks through comprehensive succession management strategies, development programs, and learning opportunities to prepare the next generation of leaders;
- Employees who occupy or aspire to specific jobs like analysts, human resources specialists, or project managers need training to transition from other roles, often technical in nature;
- Evaluation standards are needed to ensure our programs are effective and our time and money are well spent;
- Lengthy and detailed training is often needed due to the complexity of agency program policies; and
- With four generations in our workforce, we must address diverse preferences in learning styles and deliver effective training via multiple modalities.

Resource Challenges

- Implementing change while maintaining current critical training activities requires additional human and financial resources; and
- Time spent in entry-level training or in mentoring trainees is counted as "production" time, which can discourage managers supporting training.

Support Systems Challenges

- More programs like the Customer Help and Information Program are needed to provide online systems-based guidance;
- We are currently unable to track whether or not employees have completed online training material;
- The agency lacks a comprehensive, unified system that manages the training function. Basic data about training needs, costs, attendance, and results is not consolidated or readily available but would greatly improve planning and reporting;
- Adults learn best by applying new learning yet adequate practice is hampered by an insufficient number of cloned SSNs, a limited number of scenarios and the poor functionality of some of the systems in the training region such as the Manual Adjustment, Credit, and Award Data Entry/Manual Adjustment, Credit, and Award Process, the Customer Help and Information Program, and the Modernized Claim System;
- The inability to request certain types of queries in the training region such as Numident; and
- The competition for Office of Systems resources through the Information Technology Advisory Board process is intense. Training technology projects often do not get adequate technology resources.

Through the action items described in the business plan, we will confront these challenges and, with your help, greatly improve our learning environment and programs.

Our Goals and Objectives

Goal 1: Create an environment that fosters a learning organization and the development of talent

Objective A: Promote continual learning and talent management

Objective B: Establish methodologies and tools to facilitate knowledge transfer

Objective C: Implement a national learning management system

Objective D: Increase use of blended learning solutions

Goal 2: Establish more effective and efficient programmatic training

Objective A: Transform programmatic entry-level training

Objective B: Implement a national coaching program

Objective C: Enhance programmatic training for incumbent employees

Objective D: Enhance and expand the abilities of cloned social security numbers in the training region

Goal 3: Develop leaders at all levels

Objective A: Continue and expand the leadership symposia

Objective B: Enhance the leadership and career development curricula

Objective C: Expand executive training opportunities

Goal 4: Support succession planning through professional enhancement and employee development

Objective A: Develop curricula for specific jobs or roles

Objective B: Encourage employee development

Goal 5: Develop a consistent results-based evaluation process

Objective A: Establish and evaluate proficiency criteria for entry-level courses

Objective B: Improve and standardize incumbent training evaluations

Objective C: Standardize evaluation processes for leadership, career development, and professional skills training

Goal 1: Create an Environment that Fosters a Learning Organization and the Development of Talent

Overview:

The Social Security Administration is operating in times of unprecedented change. As the retirement wave looms, as increasing numbers of baby boomers near retirement age, and as technology continues to advance, we are facing one of the most challenging times in the agency's history. Now more than ever, our agency needs to have the processes, initiatives, and programs in place that foster a learning organization and the development of talent.



Continuous learning and knowledge sharing are vital in conquering challenges resulting from the retirement wave.

One of the most important things the Social Security Administration can do to meet these challenges is to support and encourage the acquisition and sharing of knowledge. Learning should be a continuous process at our agency and should occur on both a formal and informal basis. In other words, the Social Security Administration needs to become a learning organization.

This goal has four objectives:

- Promote continual learning and talent management throughout the agency;
- Establish methodologies and tools to facilitate knowledge transfer;
- Implement a national Learning Management System (LMS); and
- Increase use of blended learning solutions for all training.

OBJECTIVE A: PROMOTE CONTINUAL LEARNING AND TALENT MANAGEMENT

Author, professor and founder of the Society for Organizational Learning Peter Senge introduced the concept of the "learning organization" nearly two decades ago. In his book "The Fifth Discipline: The art and practice of the learning organization," Senge defines a learning organization as one where "... people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together."

The Social Security Administration needs to focus on “big picture” thinking and develop a shared vision and focus on what we need to accomplish and examine the attitudes and behaviors that would enable us to succeed. Acquiring and sharing knowledge on a continuous basis is crucial to this success.

We recognize that workloads in every component are challenging and time-consuming. Therefore, it is sometimes tempting to forego training and developmental opportunities in order to process current workloads. While we acknowledge the validity of concerns in this area, in our executive interviews we have also heard substantial support for the need to offer ongoing training for employees at all levels. The challenge is how to foster a collective belief that it is “okay” and even desirable for employees to set aside time to develop new skills and strengthen current competencies through learning and educational opportunities.

To meet this challenge, it is important that we leverage the executive-level support for learning that was shared with us during our interviews. Executives can provide the leadership and guidance we need to foster a learning organization at the Social Security Administration and to develop successful talent management initiatives. We will provide a forum for executives across the agency to share ideas as well as develop general direction and policy for agency learning and talent development initiatives.

ACTION 1.A.1: Establish an Executive Learning Council to provide general direction and policy for agency learning and talent development initiatives. The Council should consist of eight executives from regional and headquarters components as well as the Chief Learning Officer.

While executives provide general direction and policy, it is also clear that managers play a crucial role in the implementation of learning and talent development initiatives. Managers have a keen understanding of both the priorities of the executive team as well as the needs of the staff working on the front lines. This distinctive position makes managers uniquely qualified to determine the most effective strategies to implement the direction and policy set forth by senior leaders. These implementation strategies would best be developed by a team of managers from across the agency to ensure adequate input and examination from a variety of organizational perspectives.

ACTION 1.A.2: Establish a Learning Advisory Team to develop guidelines and implementation strategies based on the direction and policies of the Executive Learning Council. The Team should consist of fifteen managers, including representatives from both the National Council of Social Security Management Associations and the Federal Managers Association.

In addition to executive and management support of learning, another effective method to encourage employee development is to recognize managers for their efforts to develop their employees. This recognition is especially true as we begin to communicate the importance of continual learning to all employees. Recognition programs reinforce the agency's commitment to learning, provide a direct positive effect on employees who learn and share knowledge, and set a positive example for others to follow suit.

ACTION 1.A.3: Establish the "Leader in Learning" Award to recognize and reward managers across the agency that encourage employee development and provide ample developmental opportunities to their employees. We will develop a nomination process and specific criteria for the award.

OBJECTIVE B: ESTABLISH METHODOLOGIES AND TOOLS TO FACILITATE KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER

Knowledge that employees possess is perhaps the greatest asset of an organization, but is difficult to capture and manage due to its sheer volume. Informal knowledge sharing is useful and should be encouraged, but a more systematic method of capturing, prioritizing, and sharing knowledge is needed for effective knowledge transfer.

Developing a systematic method removes any geographic and organizational boundaries and ensures that knowledge is available to anyone who is in need across the enterprise. An organization that is able to prioritize and categorize knowledge, to facilitate knowledge retrieval, and to ensure that captured knowledge is accurate and up-to-date will benefit tremendously. While it is often easier to capture explicit knowledge, tools can be developed to capture employees' tacit knowledge, which may not be captured using more informal methods.

This type of knowledge capture and transfer is particularly relevant in the areas of career development and leadership development. As our employees strive to advance and as many prepare to take the reigns of leadership, we will ensure that they have access to the knowledge and expertise of others to assist them in their developmental efforts. An effective methodology to facilitate this transfer of knowledge is through the use of cases. In this way, employees can search for knowledge and expertise that were applied in a case similar to their specific situation or circumstance.

ACTION 1.B.1: Establish a case-based tool to capture and transfer knowledge and lessons learned from Social Security employees for use in our career and leadership development programs.

In addition to knowledge and lessons learned captured for internal cases, it is also important to capture leadership and supervisory best practices throughout the agency as well as from across government and private industry. In this way, employees looking to further their careers and assume leadership roles have access through a central repository to best practices and expertise from successful organizations and renowned leaders across industries.

ACTION 1.B.2: Establish a relevant collection of best practices on management and supervisory topics.

OBJECTIVE C: IMPLEMENT A NATIONAL LEARNING MANAGEMENT SYSTEM

The current framework for addressing administrative training functions such as identifying training needs, enrolling students, tracking course completion, and evaluating courses is based on the training environment of the past. Often, the methods rely on traditional bureaucratic paper-based processes with multiple hand-offs. These methods were adequate when localized classroom-based training was the norm. Clearly, the new methods of training delivery and advances in technology have brought with them challenges in administering training and development programs.

As a further complication, multiple disbursed systems are employed for administrative purposes. As a result, generating accurate, useful data regarding training needs, costs, and results is time consuming at best and in many cases, impractical or impossible. The consequence is that the Social Security Administration lacks means to efficiently and effectively identify, address, and evaluate the training needs of its employees.

Finally, as we speak to our colleagues in the training community throughout the agency, we hear similar concerns about the availability of training information and the need for better tools to identify and meet training needs. The Office of Training recognizes the need to improve and modernize the agency's employee training and development processes. We plan to implement a Learning Management System (LMS) to address these concerns and make significant improvements to the agency's ability to manage training functions.



A Learning Management System is a comprehensive system that enables you to assess, plan, deliver, manage, and improve employee training and development, regardless of the delivery method. Our LMS will serve as the single point of entry for all training in the agency. The LMS will provide the agency with the administrative infrastructure to successfully administer, manage, and integrate data and information related to the following functions:

- Identifying available training resources including online training, video training and classroom training;
- Training requests and registration;
- Maintaining detailed personalized training transcripts;
- Electronic updating of personnel training records upon successful completion of training;
- Resource allocation of physical, electronic and intellectual assets to support training;
- Employee evaluation of training;
- Closing employee skill gaps;
- Maintaining independent training plans based on career path;
- Budget requirements planning, execution and tracking; and
- Reporting capability at all levels of the organization;

In order to maximize the value and utility of these functions, a key goal of the LMS implementation effort is standardization of processes and procedures. We will establish national standards to categorize and classify training, which will ensure that training content is consistent, that terminology conveys the same meaning across audiences, and that training opportunities can be easily identified agency-wide.

We will capture business requirements and seek budget approval for a national Learning Management System. Once approved, we will then begin the procurement process to select the best LMS product to meet the needs of the Social Security Administration's training community. Headquarters and regional staff as well as managers and supervisors will be trained on how to use the LMS and obtain the data and information they need.

ACTION 1.C.1: Implement a national Learning Management System.

OBJECTIVE D: INCREASE USE OF BLENDED LEARNING SOLUTIONS

Center for Training Delivery

The Social Security Administration has long been a leader in promoting a blended approach to learning. We use various training delivery methods to maximize access to training and improve the effectiveness of training by acknowledging different adult learning styles. For example, the Interactive Video Teletraining (IVT) Network creates and provides valuable synchronous training products and services on a national scale. Video on Demand (VOD) enables us to deliver training to regional

and component employees on an as-needed, just-in-time basis. We also offer web-based training through the Office of Training web site and through our Internet-based training site, SSA Learn.

Through these and other initiatives, the Office of Training has made significant advances in the variety of training modalities at its disposal. However, given the anticipated growth in our training workloads, especially those that will be necessary to achieve the goals set forth in the Agency Strategic Plan, the Office of Training needs to centralize its training delivery methods. We will centralize our delivery methods in the Office of Training by creating the Center for Training Delivery.

The creation of the Center for Training Delivery will enable us not only to expand and improve upon our delivery methods, but also renew our focus on applying the training modality that best meets the needs of a particular training package or curriculum. In addition, the Center for Training Delivery will work with other training staff and subject matter experts to analyze training programs and curricula, develop and refine the agency's training delivery methods, and develop strategies to increase the use of blended learning in all of the agency's training programs.

ACTION 1.D.1: Create the Center for Training Delivery.

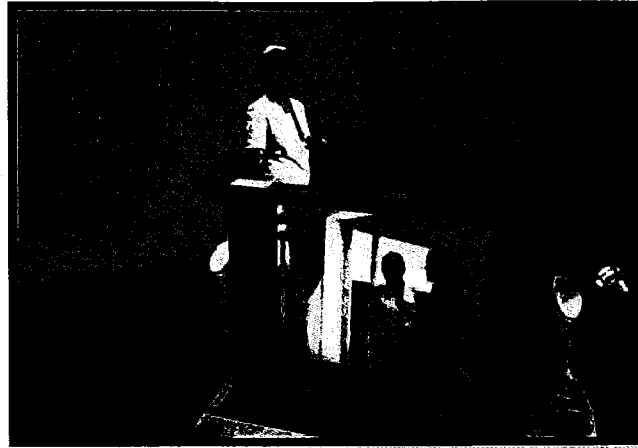
Additional IVT Studio

One of the primary delivery methods the agency uses to train employees is IVT. In FY 2008 alone, the Social Security Administration's IVT Network provided over 3,500 hours of training to Social Security Administration and Disability Determination Services employees. Table 1.1 lists the studios in the IVT network and the type of training delivered at each studio.

Table 1.1 – Current IVT Studios with Training Subjects Delivered

Studio	Training Delivered
Baltimore – Studios 1, 2 and 7	Newer Legislative, Policy, and Systems Training
Kansas City – Studio 3	Title II Claims Representatives Entry Level Training
Atlanta – Studio 4	Title XVI Claims Representative Entry Level Training
Dallas – Studio 5	Service Representative Entry Level Training
Seattle – Studio 6	Automation and Management Training

Two of the four goals in the Social Security Administration's Strategic Plan focus on the disability claims processes. These goals are to "Eliminate Our Hearings Backlog and Prevent its Recurrence" and to "Improve the Speed and Quality of the Disability Process." The Office of Training will work closely with the Office of Disability Adjudication and Review and the Disability Determination Services to develop and deliver the training necessary to meet these goals. The creation of an additional IVT studio will greatly enhance our ability to handle this additional training workload.



IVT is an inexpensive, effective tool for delivering training agency-wide



An additional IVT studio would enable us to increase timeliness and training opportunities.

The new IVT studio will be used to deliver the courses that are already managed by the Office of Training such as the Legal Assistant, Decision Writer, Administrative Law Judge and the Unified Basic Disability Training courses. The agency will benefit from delivery of these courses via IVT, which has demonstrated its value in policy areas where a high degree of consistency is needed. In fact, support already exists for such material to be delivered via IVT. In September 2008, the Associate Commissioner for the Office of Disability Determinations met with the Associate Commissioner for Training and reinforced the need for a significant increase in

Disability Determinations Services training with IVT as the primary training delivery method.

IVT has proven to be an effective way to deliver training to employees, saving money and resources while enabling more efficient completion of major training initiatives. However, the current IVT studios deliver training at their capacity and are unable to significantly increase the amount of training delivered to meet the needs of the Office of Disability Adjudication and Review and the Disability Determination Services. An additional IVT Studio would best enable us to meet the needs of these audiences and provide them with consistent and timely training, immediate interaction with experts, and savings in local development and delivery resources.

ACTION 1.D.2: Add an IVT studio to the Social Security Administration's IVT network to create and deliver a significant increase in training to the Office of Disability Adjudication and Review and the Office of Disability Determinations.

Video on Demand Centers

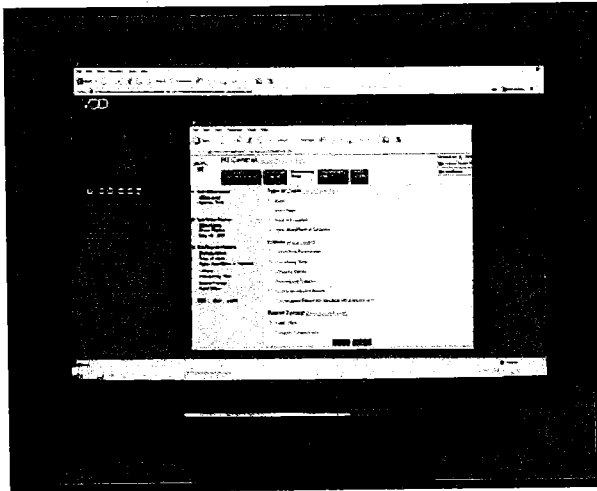
Video on Demand is a centrally managed system for electronic distribution, storage, and retrieval of training content. VOD allows employees to select training material from a web site and view it at their desktop on a just-in-time, as needed basis. Training delivered through VOD can be easily updated to reflect the most recent changes in policy and regulations, saving time and allowing for more accurate, up-to-date training.

Available at the Social Security Administration for only about two years, VOD has rapidly become one of the primary and most popular training modalities. Table 1.2 provides a list of the benefits that contribute to its popularity.

Table 1.2 – Benefits of Video on Demand

Benefits of Video on Demand	
Asynchronous	• Watch what you need when you need it
	• Watch only the portion that you need
	• All lessons are available instantly
Scalable	• Current library has over 400 lessons
	• Low cost of distribution
	• Library size is only limited by available server space
Flexible	• Currently supports audio, video and interactive models
	• Updates and improvements are easily added
	• Provides platform for development of simulations
	• Hardware and software are readily available
	• Production does not require an IVT studio
	• Development can be distributed across the Agency
	• Lessons can be electronically linked to one another

In the programmatic area, VOD is currently used primarily for in-service training, but a need exists for its use in other curricula such as Field Office, Program Service Center, and Teleservice Center entry-level training. The Office of Training needs to extend the use of Video on Demand in its other training programs as well, such as in the areas of leadership and general skills. The Office of Training will establish three VOD Centers throughout the country to provide the resources to meet the demand for additional training content as well as to ensure the consistency and quality of that content.



VOD allows employees to view training at their convenience.

These centers would have the tools and staff to create high quality VOD training with audio, video, graphic, and simulation content capabilities.

Most of the content currently in Video on Demand begins as IVT lessons, but in order to truly leverage the capabilities of VOD we must renew our efforts to develop content specifically for this training modality. The VOD centers will be crucial to this effort. In addition to producing and maintaining content, the VOD centers will also play a lead role in research and development efforts, making recommendations on how we can improve upon and fully utilize the capabilities of this training modality.

ACTION 1.D.3: Create three VOD Centers in the regions or the Office of Central Operations to produce, update, and maintain VOD content.

Online Learning – SSA Learn

SSA Learn is an Internet-based system available to all Social Security Administration employees on a 24x7 basis. It currently offers approximately 2,500 online courses covering a wide range of topics from leadership to communication skills to office automation. SSA Learn enables employees to keep detailed records of the online courses they have taken and automatically updates the employee's training records upon successful completion of a course.

The SSA Learn program has been very successful and we have received much positive feedback. We plan to improve upon the system by expanding the level and types of online training offered to employees through SSA Learn. For example, we will offer tools to enable the viewing of books online as well as other asynchronous training events not currently available on the site. Employees will have access to the latest research, technology trends and perspectives of experts in areas such as strategic management, organizational development and federal government topics.

Further, the Office of Training will leverage the depth and breadth of content available through SSA Learn by integrating SSA Learn course offerings into the national leadership, career development and professional skills programs. This already happens in the programs to a limited extent. However, we plan to formalize requirements for the use of SSA Learn into these programs and integrate SSA Learn course offerings into the curriculum development process.

Finally, we will capitalize upon the tracking capabilities of SSA Learn by offering online courses and VODs through the SSA Learn site. These lessons are currently only available from the Office of Training's web site where completions are not currently being tracked. The tracking capability is especially useful in terms of tracking the completion of required training such as security awareness, Constitution and ethics training. The current tracking process is very much still a manual, paper-based process and in many cases relies heavily on employee self-certification. Using SSA Learn for tracking the completion of required courses will result in a significant savings in the time and effort required in the current process.

ACTION 1.D.4: Expand the online offerings available through SSA Learn to include online books and other asynchronous training events.

ACTION 1.D.5: Integrate SSA Learn course offerings into the national leadership, career development, and professional skills programs.

ACTION 1.D.6: Offer online courses and VODs through SSA Learn on required training topics that are currently only available through the Office of Training web site.

Goal 2: Establish More Effective and Efficient Programmatic Training

Overview:

The Social Security Administration has always given high-priority to training our mission critical employees in programmatic jobs. Currently, classroom training and IVT are the primary training modalities for much of this training for field offices; and, classroom training is the primary training modality for processing centers, teleservice centers, and disability programs. In an effort to maximize available resources, reduce redundancies, and leverage e-Learning solutions now available to us, we need to reexamine how we deliver programmatic training.



Redesigning entry-level programmatic training will enable us to meet future challenges.

This goal is about how we transform the design and delivery of programmatic training to ensure both proficiency of the trained employees and efficiency in the costs and time it takes to deliver the training. Also, we will increase the use of multiple training modalities in the delivery of technical training to support adult learning.

This goal has four objectives:

- Transform Programmatic Entry-Level Training;
- Implement a National Coaching Program;
- Enhance Programmatic Training for Incumbent Employees; and
- Enhance and Expand the Abilities of Cloned Social Security Numbers in the Training Region



OBJECTIVE A: TRANSFORM PROGRAMMATIC ENTRY-LEVEL TRAINING

The Office of Training manages entry-level programmatic training programs to support the following positions:

- Title II Claims Representatives, Title XVI Claims Representatives and Service Representatives (Field Offices);
- Teleservice Representatives (Teleservice Centers);
- Benefit Authorizers/Benefit Technical Examiners, Claims Authorizers/Claims Technical Examiners and Technical Support Technicians/Technical Support Assistants (Processing Centers);
- Legal Assistant, Decision Writer, Administrative Law Judge (Office of Disability Adjudication and Review); and
- Disability Examiner/Adjudicator (Social Security Administration and Disability Determination Services Components)

Course update activity is shared between the Office of Training, the Office of Operations and the Office of Disability Adjudication and Review. Office of Training staff oversee and manage the update activity.

Input received during the Office of Training's 2008 interviews with agency executives suggests that the entry-level programmatic training courses should be revised to shorten training time, include different modalities for delivery, and consider the adult learning styles for four generations currently working at the Social Security Administration.

These findings were reinforced by a September 2008 draft report from the Interactive Video Teletraining Quality Workgroup, comprised of representatives from the Office of Training and the Office of Operations, including the Atlanta, Dallas, Kansas City, and Seattle regions as well as the Office of Public Service and Operations Support. The report strongly recommends a reexamination of how we deliver entry-level curricula. The report identifies the need to address adult learning theories and generational preferences, to add more and better options for demonstrations and hands-on learning experiences, and to support students, mentors, and managers with learning strategies that engage and retain our employees.



OT will continue to manage entry-level programmatic training for technical employees

The transformation of programmatic entry-level training is a key initiative to meet these needs.

As the demands on the agency increase and resources decrease, this transformation will provide additional support to trainees and mentors for entry-level training. A pilot will be developed in one course before determining the schedule for implementing the changes in the other courses.

For Field Office, Processing Center and Teleservice Center entry-level training, we propose the following:

ACTION 2.A.1: Transform the entry-level and crossover training courses delivered to field offices, processing centers, and teleservice centers. Apply adult learning techniques and the appropriate use of training modalities.

ACTION 2.A.2: Create a "Simulation Collection" to provide hands-on opportunities to become familiar with Social Security Administration systems for taking basic applications and entering changes to records after entitlement to benefits.

In order to develop accurate and effective training, instructors and course developers need access to the same systems and information as the employees that are receiving the training. The technical environment in which the training is developed should be as close to the "real-world" environment as possible. The Office of Training needs to have access to computer configurations similar to those found in field office, processing center, and teleservice center settings. These computers can be located in Instructional Design Laboratories accessible to instructors in the Office of Training who are developing and producing Interactive Video Teletraining broadcasts, Video on Demand, simulations, student guides and online lessons.

We will coordinate with the Office of Operations, the Office of Systems, and other security staff as needed to create the workstation/server configurations and security profiles that mirror those used by different positions.

ACTION 2.A.3: Create Instructional Design Labs that mirror the actual technical environment of field offices, processing centers, and teleservice centers.

Productivity goals are currently determined according to the number of Full Time Permanent employees in the field office, including trainees and mentors. Employees in training may process some workloads, but essentially are not fully productive. Because the agency counts trainees as being fully productive, workload information for offices with trainees does not reflect the fact that the trainees are not devoted to production on a full-time basis.

During the Office of Training's 2008 interviews with field office managers, some of the barriers cited for providing additional mentoring support for entry-level training included lack of time, insufficient staff, and the pressure to move work. The barriers are exacerbated by having fewer people available to handle the increasing workloads. The "Operations Principles for Mentoring" document developed for entry-level Interactive Video Teletraining delivery addressed some of these issues. The document points out that one of the agency's most important commitments is to achieve high quality mentoring in order to build a high performing workforce. There needs to be recognition of the importance of mentoring for entry-level training and an effort should be made to protect mentoring time. To further support the effort of providing time for mentors to adequately assist and guide trainees, we propose the following:

ACTION 2.A.4: Exclude the entry-level students from the Full Time Permanent position for productivity purposes during the time they are in training.

ACTION 2.A.5: Exclude 50% of a Full Time Permanent position for productivity purposes for mentors who are spending at least 50% of their day with students during training.

An important component of establishing effective, efficient programmatic training is to determine what subjects we teach that are similar across programmatic positions. We will identify similarities in training lessons and consolidate those lessons into a "core" training program. We already have such "core" training in the Claims Representative and Service Representative entry-level training. We also believe program topics that are vital to all of our programmatic jobs exist. Additionally, soft skills topics such as interviewing, communication, and writing skills would be useful in all programmatic jobs as well. All of these topics can be consolidated into a single core training course and be delivered throughout all of our entry-level training. Combining these topics into a single course is a key effort to reduce duplication of efforts and to ensure that course developers can focus their attention on the job-specific curricula.

ACTION 2.A.6: Develop "core" training consisting of lessons that span across all programmatic entry-level training.

Two of the four goals in the Social Security Administration's Strategic Plan focus on the disability claims process. The first goal is to "Eliminate Our Hearings Backlog and Prevent Its Recurrence." Training will be a key element in achieving this goal. The Office of Training manages the Legal Assistant, Decision Writer and Administrative Law Judge courses for the Office of Disability Adjudication and Review. These courses were updated in FY 2008 and we are planning to update these courses again in FY 2009.

ACTION 2.A.7: Transform the Legal Assistant, Decision Writer and Administrative Law Judge training courses, including different modalities for training delivery.

The second goal in the Social Security Administration's Strategic Plan is to "Improve the Speed and Quality of the Disability Process." Training will be a key element in achieving this goal as well. The Office of Training manages the Disability Examiner Basic Training Program which is used to train disability adjudicators in the Disability Determination Services and Social Security Administration components. The Disability Examiner Basic Training Program was last updated in 2007. The Office of Training is planning another update to this training to include transferring some of the lessons for delivery online and preparing advanced course material.



OT plans to redesign the Disability Examiner Basic Training Program.

The Social Security Administration's Office of Disability Determinations/Disability Determination Services "Recruitment and Retention Project" workgroup report raised issues regarding the need to provide training support to the Disability Determination Services that is timely, current, relevant

and consistent, using up-to-date materials and state-of-the art training techniques. The workgroup also recommended establishing a central core training group through a partnership of the Disability Determination Services and the Social Security Administration to design, deliver, and review basic training for Disability Determination Services employees. In addition to these recommendations, the Office of Training plans to add lessons on topics such as Case Management and Vocational Issues and standardize training material on Continuing Disability Reviews.

ACTION 2.A.8: Transform the Disability Examiner Basic Training Program, including different modalities for training delivery.

The Integrated Disability Process initiative which began in September 2007 is aimed at addressing policy and procedural differences between adjudicatory levels. Included in the Integrated Disability Process initiative was the development of the "Unified Basic Disability Training" curriculum. The "Unified Disability Training" workgroup report identified that a strong need for centralized organization of training materials for all positions involved in the disability process exists.

The "Unified Basic Disability Training" curriculum recommended by the "Unified Disability Training" workgroup will be included in all the programmatic training courses. All Social Security Administration and Disability Determination Services basic disability training will be affected by the recommendations adopted from the "Unified Disability Training" workgroup report. The implementation of the "Unified Basic Disability Training" curriculum will provide the opportunity for the Social Security Administration's training community to reexamine national disability training and develop different modalities for delivery.

The workgroup report also recommended that the agency sponsor a National Disability Trainers' Workshop to provide continued education to designated Social Security Administration and Disability Determination Services trainers.

ACTION 2.A.9: The Office of Training will develop the "Unified Basic Disability Core Training" curriculum to be used in all programmatic entry-level training courses.

ACTION 2.A.10: Sponsor a bi-annual National Disability Trainers' Workshop.

OBJECTIVE B: IMPLEMENT A NATIONAL COACHING PROGRAM

In Webster's New World Dictionary, a mentor is defined as a wise, loyal advisor or a teacher or coach. The Social Security Administration uses mentors to assist students in entry-level programmatic training programs in our field offices, processing centers and teleservice centers. However, the term "mentor" causes some confusion in the Social Security Administration due to the "mentor" designation also being used in the agency's leadership and executive development programs. The Office of Training recommends that employees assisting entry-level programmatic students should be called coaches. For the purposes of this objective, the term coach is used to eliminate confusion.



The National Coaching Program will transform entry-level training.

Good coaching is absolutely critical to the programmatic entry-level training process. Coaching is an investment in the future of the student, the success of the office, and the achievement of the agency's expectations. A coach not only shares expertise and knowledge, but also conveys the agency's culture, traditions, values, and strategies for accomplishing goals. Experience has shown that the success and retention of our employees are highly dependent upon the support provided.

During the Office of Training's visits to the regions, we received many comments regarding the difficulty offices face in providing coaches to entry-level students, especially due to the retirement wave. The variation in availability of good coaches highlights the increasing need for more coaching support for programmatic entry-level students. The regions also suggested that training should be required to develop effective coaches.

To provide this support, the Office of Training recommends selecting 100 coaches to participate in a National Coaching Program pilot. This cadre will:

- develop proficiency standards for entry-level training;
- assist in reviewing cases for proficiency;
- deliver train-the-trainer sessions to in-office coaches;
- assist in conducting pilots for transformation of the entry-level courses;
- provide support remotely to students without a coach; and
- assist in developing and conducting evaluation surveys;

We recognize that the current coaches are expert technicians and adjudicators, and there may be an initial strain on resources for some field offices. However, the long term benefit of creating a National Coaching Cadre will benefit the entire Social Security Administration community.

The coaches will officially report to the Office of Training, but most will not be physically located at Headquarters. During the development of the program, the Office of Training will develop position descriptions as well as the standards and procedures for the program. In addition, in close coordination with all affected components, physical locations for the coaches will be determined and any infrastructure, facilities and space issues will be addressed. The Office of Training will provide training to the coaches prior to the start of the pilot.

ACTION 2.B.1: Develop a National Coaching Program pilot to support entry-level training.

OBJECTIVE C: ENHANCE PROGRAMMATIC TRAINING FOR INCUMBENT EMPLOYEES

Incumbent Social Security Administration employees must be kept up-to-date on changes to agency policies, programs and procedures in order to be productive in the performance of their jobs. The training programs for incumbent employees developed and delivered by the Office of Training have continuously evolved over the years by incorporating newer technologies and by improving the overall quality of training content and materials. The Office of Training will make additional critical changes to our incumbent training programs to ensure that they accurately and efficiently address training needs.

Field Office Training

The Office of the Inspector General recently reviewed the Social Security Administration field offices' training of Claims and Service Representatives to determine field office employees' perception of the training provided. In the report released in July 2008, it was noted that most of the staff questioned were satisfied with training. The report stated "We found that most Claims Representative and Service Representative staff responding to our questionnaire were satisfied that the general and disability-related training received for their position had helped them do their jobs effectively and efficiently, and the training was provided timely."

The same audit report also offered two recommendations for the Office of Training:

- Provide more "hands-on" and refresher training to reinforce lessons learned and resolve questions that emerge from work experiences; and
- Provide more training to permit staff to remain proficient in the delivery of services to the public.

In order to adopt these recommendations, it is important that the Office of Training be involved earlier in the planning stages for system and policy releases. This will improve the Social Security Administration's ability to offer timely training on new topics and to incorporate updates into existing training programs.

ACTION 2.C.1: Establish a process that secures the Office of Training's participation earlier in the planning stages for system and policy releases.

ACTION 2.C.2: Establish a process that identifies refresher training needs with input from the Office of Quality Performance and other Social Security Administration components.

ACTION 2.C.3: Revamp the tools and methodologies currently used in incumbent training programs to improve and increase student interaction. The use of "hands-on" exercises such as simulations, interactive quizzes, and discussion boards will be increased.

Processing Centers / Teleservice Centers

Due to the large number of employees located in the processing centers and mega teleservice centers, required training on policy and system releases needs to start several weeks in advance of the implementation date. Usually, this means training development begins before the most current Program Operations Manual System and Modernized Systems Operations Manual procedures are available. Therefore, the training provided does not always reflect the most current information, resulting in the need for additional updates and clarification to be provided as a follow-up.

To provide timely, effective and high quality training, the Office of Training needs to be involved in the planning and development of policy and systems changes so that training can be delivered according to project implementation schedules. This will ensure that training is accurate when initially delivered and reduces the need for follow-up on certain topics.

ACTION 2.C.4: Develop a process that includes the Office of Training, the Office of Operations, and the Office of Systems to determine the training dates that best meet the needs of the processing and teleservice centers during the planning and development of policy and systems changes.

ACTION 2.C.5: Increase the use and quality of Interactive Video Teletraining offered to the processing centers and teleservice centers.

ACTION 2.C.6: Develop and maintain additional online lessons, simulations and Video on Demand for the processing centers and the teleservice centers.

Disability Determination Services

The Office of Training currently provides incumbent training to support the Disability Determination Services. This training is currently delivered by Interactive Video Teletraining, Video on Demand and online lessons. The training consists of electronic disability systems training, Disability Topics, Medical Listings training, and training on other revised systems and policy instructions. During the site visits to the regions, eight regions requested more support for Disability Determination Services incumbent training. As recommended by the Social Security Administration's Office of Disability Determinations/Disability Determination Services "Recruitment and Retention Project" workgroup report from December 2007, we will work with the Office of Disability Determinations to ensure that the training needs are well understood and incorporated into our annual training plan.

Office of Disability Adjudication and Review

The Office of Training currently provides incumbent training for the Office of Disability Adjudication and Review hearing office employees. This training is currently delivered by classroom, Interactive Video Teletraining, Video on Demand, and online lessons. The support consists of electronic disability systems training, Disability Topics, Medical Listings training, Findings Integrated Template training, Supplemental Decision Writer training, and training on other revised systems and policy instructions. To further meet the Office of Disability Adjudication and Review training needs, the Office of Training will work with the Office of Disability Adjudication and Review to ensure that the training needs are well understood and incorporated into our annual training plan.

ACTION 2.C.7: Create the Center for Programmatic Disability Training in the Office of Training. The Center will include a team dedicated to Disability Determination Services training. The Center will also include a team dedicated to the training needs of the Office of Disability Adjudication and Review. This includes integrating the Disability Determination Services and Office of Disability Adjudication and Review programmatic training into the Center for Programmatic Disability Training's annual training plan.

OBJECTIVE D: ENHANCE AND EXPAND THE ABILITIES OF CLONED NUMBERS IN THE TRAINING REGION

The training region is an area in the Social Security Administration's system that gives students the ability to access production software and take claims related actions without affecting the actual Social Security Administration record. Working claims in the training region allows students to learn, practice, and experiment with new and/or existing software systems without fear of adversely affecting live data.



The training region uses cloned SSNs used for hands-on claims related training.

The process of obtaining cloned numbers needs to be reexamined and expanded due to the increasing development of systems software programs, expanding expectations of training customers, and recognition of additional training needs. The majority of cases and software programs represented in the training region represent workloads processed by most field office employees. However,

employees of teleservice centers, processing centers, Disability Determination Services, and the Office of Disability Adjudication and Review have similar training needs. Currently, their ability to learn software programs through hands-on exercises is limited. In some instances, there are no cases in the training region readily available for use. Instructors spend hours completing application screens for their students, only to have the records refreshed overnight. If records are available, they may be set up incorrectly and cannot be used by the trainee or mentor. Further, other cases used successfully in the past may become inadequate or unusable due to new systems releases or changes in policy and procedures.



OT will work with the Office of Systems to enhance the training region and cloned SSNs for claims related training.

Using cloned numbers in the training region is vital to our national training efforts for all programmatic jobs and is the only means currently available where trainees can learn to use claims related software programs through hands-on exercises. We will make every effort to ensure that the training region is accurate, consistent, and meets the needs of the entire programmatic training audience.

ACTION 2.D.1: In absence of a current process for developing cloned social security numbers, the Office of Training will coordinate with the Office of Systems to establish a process for developing cloned social security numbers for training.

ACTION 2.D.2: Establish a national workgroup with participants from all programmatic job positions to update and identify case characteristics for additional case scenarios and review the current record refresh rates.

ACTION 2.D.3: Create 1,000 cloned social security numbers for each case scenario identified and developed for the programmatic job positions.

Goal 3: Develop Leaders at All Levels

Overview:

The value of effective leadership is immeasurable. Effective leaders not only set the direction for an organization, but also foster a working environment that encourages success and achievement. Employees feel supported by their leaders and share the leaders' commitment to the organization's mission. Strong leadership is the foundational element that enables the Social Security Administration to provide the services the public expects and deserves. To continue the agency's success moving forward, we will develop current leaders and prepare future leaders for the challenges ahead.

Reactions gathered through the Office of Training's interviews with agency executives and staffs suggest that the current leadership training curriculum is well received. Widespread support exists for the "Leadership Matters" Symposium; we also receive positive feedback about the curriculum of courses for new supervisors and the Leadership IVT series. There are areas, though, where new or expanded offerings would further enhance our leadership training. Two themes we heard involved expanding training for new supervisors and providing more training for experienced supervisors.

This goal has three objectives:

- Continue and expand the leadership symposia;
- Enhance the leadership and career development curricula; and
- Expand executive training opportunities.

OBJECTIVE A: CONTINUE AND EXPAND THE LEADERSHIP SYMPOSIA

The current national "Leadership Matters" Symposium is a 3-day off-site offering conducted six times each fiscal year for 150 seasoned mid-level managers per session. Attendees select from multiple competency-based classes based on their individual needs and interests. The participants also benefit from presentations by agency executives who share their perspectives on leadership.



Leadership Symposium participants benefit from various competency-based courses and presentations by SSA executives.

The audience is drawn nationwide, affording the unique opportunity of knowledge sharing and networking. By the end of 2008, a total of 3,000 supervisors and managers will have attended a symposium.

Reactions from attendees as well as executives have been extremely positive. Participants have indicated that the events are having a positive effect when they return to their offices. Executive interviews indicate high-level support. One suggested change is to expand the audience so other managers may attend since opportunities for face-to-face leadership training after the first year of supervision decreases. In recognition of the support for the symposia and the suggested expansion of the audience, the Office of Training will implement the next generation of the Leadership Symposium, Symposium II.

ACTION 3.A.1: Roll out Symposium II in FY 09. The audience will include managers who attended Symposium I and, for the first time, first-line supervisors at the GS-12 equivalent level or above with at least two years of supervisory experience. Symposium II will focus on management competencies not covered in Symposium I and go into more depth on those competencies covered in Symposium I that are still deemed a priority.

OBJECTIVE B: ENHANCE THE LEADERSHIP AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT CURRICULA

The current "Transition to Leadership Curriculum" was developed three years ago with inter-component input and support. Many improvements have resulted: new supervisor training has been standardized and delivered more timely to new supervisors; to the extent possible, funding for standard courses such as the TL-301 "Nuts and Bolts" course has been centralized; and we have taken advantage of blended learning opportunities by presenting a monthly IVT series on leadership topics. We propose to build on this successful effort in a number of ways, such as seeking increased centralized funding for the TL-501 "Key Training for Facility Managers" course.

In addition, many of the regions have expressed a need to increase the number of topics covered in the "Nuts and Bolts" course and the need to deliver the information in a more timely way to new supervisors. Additional funds would be needed to cover the travel and per diem costs of extending the course.

ACTION 3.B.1: Expand the TL-301 "Nuts and Bolts" course offering to a two-week course and coordinate with components on an improved delivery schedule.

Classroom-based courses such as TL-301 provide agency leaders with the foundational information they need to do their job. Managers should also have resources available to them on a just-in-time basis so that they have accurate, up-to-date information at the time of need. To provide these resources, we propose creating a VOD Supervisory Collection. This VOD Supervisory Collection would contain VODs on a wide range of management and supervisory subjects. It would be a tool for new supervisors to supplement the formal training they receive and would also serve as a ready-resource for experienced supervisors who infrequently confront some issues or need to refresh their understanding on a particular topic.

ACTION 3.B.2: Create a Video on Demand (VOD) Supervisory Collection.

The Social Security Administration's current leadership and supervisory training is targeted for employees who are considered part of management and hold non-bargaining unit positions. We propose leadership and career development opportunities for employees at all grade levels. This next action supports a long-term view of leadership development and succession planning by developing employees who have not yet reached the supervisory and management ranks.

Expanding our leadership training programs to reach this audience will present a significant challenge. In order to extend our reach, we must coordinate with and provide funding support to regional offices and headquarters components to provide career and personal development opportunities for employees at the GS-12 level and below. These opportunities may include one or two-day conferences, similar to what some regions currently provide. The Office of Training would work with headquarters components to provide similar training opportunities.

ACTION 3.B.3: Expand leadership and career development opportunities to employees at the GS-12 equivalent level and below.

OBJECTIVE C: EXPAND EXECUTIVE TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

In support of the Commissioner's goal to provide senior management with recurring, thought-provoking educational opportunities, the Office of Training developed the Executive Leadership Consortium. The Executive Leadership Consortium is a series of quarterly lectures and interactive discussions designed specifically for the agency's Senior Executive Service and GS-15 executives. This series covers a wide range of topics relevant to agency leaders, including teambuilding, risk

taking, and utilizing technological advancements to operate more effectively and efficiently. Executive training is also provided via off-site classroom seminars, IVT, VOD, and online courses.

We propose to build upon the success of the Executive Leadership Consortium by providing additional opportunities for executive learning and development. The creation of an Executive Symposium would provide a forum for executives to network and learn from each other as well as attend valuable educational sessions. These events would have approximately 50 attendees and offer several tracks of learning opportunities. The focus would reflect key executive competencies, such as strategic thinking, vision, and entrepreneurship.

ACTION 3.C.1: Create a two-day Executive Symposium modeled after the Leadership Symposium that would be held twice per year.

In addition to internal opportunities, we realize the value and importance of providing training to executives that is external to the agency as well. External training enables executives to attend courses at renowned educational institutions and universities and encourages the sharing of ideas among executives in both the public and private sectors. The creation of a special funding source would be required to facilitate individual attendance at top-quality, advanced courses and to enable the agency to sponsor executive only classes for groups of leaders.

ACTION 3.C.2: Expand opportunities for external advanced leadership training for executives.

While providing training opportunities is a key component to executive development, some learning can best take place on a more individualized basis. This individualized development is especially important when executives face difficult situations and need advice and guidance from someone whose input and experience they can trust. To foster these relationships, we propose to establish an Executive Coaching Program that would enable individualized, focused coaching support for addressing the varied challenges that face our executives.

ACTION 3.C.3: Establish an Executive Coaching Program for ongoing development of executives.

Goal 4: Support Succession Planning Through Professional Enhancement and Employee Development

Overview:

The Social Security Administration provides a wide variety of learning opportunities including training conferences, classroom courses, thousands of online courses, IVTs, and VODs. We will continue to employ all of these delivery methods to provide blended learning opportunities for employees. We heard feedback, though, that suggests it is sometimes difficult to navigate through the wide-range of available opportunities and identify those that pertain to an individual's role and needs. Many of the comments we heard regarding professional skills training had to do with organizing the opportunities in a manner that enables employees and their managers to readily determine what training might be best for different roles and different levels of competence. Therefore, this goal addresses the need to provide guidance and oversight through the organization of course content and creation of new curricula and to help employees navigate the agency's learning opportunities.

Further, we want to facilitate communication between managers and employees regarding training needs and development opportunities. While some of our leaders foster effective and frequent conversations about staff development, others would benefit from improved communication tools and training.

This goal has two objectives:

- Develop curricula for analysts and project managers and address training needs in the area of human resources; and
- Encourage employee development by creating a streamlined Individual Development Plan (IDP) form and training managers on its use.

OBJECTIVE A: DEVELOP CURRICULA FOR SPECIFIC JOBS OR ROLES

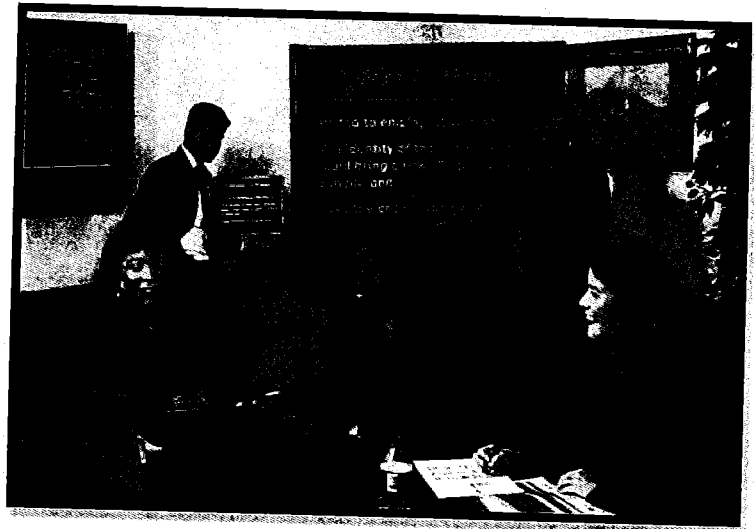
The Social Security Administration has been successful in creating curricula for some roles in the agency. One success story that a number of regions and training leaders have cited is the creation of "Transition to Leadership" Curriculum. Courses are offered for new supervisors using multiple delivery modalities while increasingly advanced learning opportunities such as the Leadership Symposia are offered to upper-level managers and experienced leaders. As suggested by comments from our customers, we plan to use this model to provide curricula for additional roles in the agency.

For example, our interviews suggest a curriculum for analyst roles is needed. Several components have created their own training course for new analyst training and we would like to tap those

courses to identify appropriate topics. However, rather than offer one course, we envision a series of courses to cover various competencies called for in analytical roles. Likely subject areas would include writing, briefing, designing and analyzing research, critical thinking, and problem solving. We will develop a standard generic curriculum for analysts and seek funding to enable national implementation. In addition, we will take parts of this curriculum and integrate it into the leadership and career development programs we offer nationally. In this way, we will ensure training on these competencies is consistent across all of our programs.

ACTION 4.A.1: Implement an Analyst Curriculum to develop employee skills in writing, briefing and presenting, thinking critically, and analyzing.

For a number of years, the Office of Training has disbursed funds for human resources training to ensure that those in human resources related positions could increase their expertise and improve their competencies. Generally, individuals in human resources roles attended public offerings by vendors who offered training in various human resources fields. Feedback has suggested that there may be better ways to use these training funds, such as sponsoring courses in various



OT will design Analyst and Human Capital curriculums to provide employees with the skills needed to perform effectively.

locations around the country and bringing agency experts together to receive training. Another option is to sponsor recurring conferences to bring human resources personnel together for competency-based training.

ACTION 4.A.2: Establish a Human Capital Curriculum. We will gather input from other components to determine the most effective and efficient combination of courses and training modalities.

Some progress has been made in headquarters to make multiple levels of courses available for project managers but we want to continue to build a curriculum in this area to support all components. In particular, we need a curriculum for employees who lead projects but do not necessarily interact with contracts or vendors. To identify the most fruitful opportunities for curricula development and develop lists of competencies needed to support those roles, we will work with other components to develop a complete national curriculum.

ACTION 4.A.3: Implement a Project Management Curriculum to develop general project management skills.

OBJECTIVE B: ENCOURAGE EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT

In a true learning environment, the training and development components are not solely responsible for fostering learning. Individual employees and supervisors also have a role. Individuals should help identify their training needs and interests. Similarly, managers should communicate with employees to identify their needs and interests while also factoring in the organizations' current or anticipated skill and knowledge gaps. Further, managers can be "learning leaders," modeling an interest in continual learning and showing a sincere interest in creating developmental opportunities for subordinate employees.

The Social Security Administration has a sanctioned Individual Development Plan, but it is viewed as lengthy and is not often used. A streamlined format that is easily updated and a process that focuses attention on each employee's needs and interests would benefit succession planning and staff development. The goal is to institutionalize a "best practice" of some of the agency's leaders – to have recurring discussions with each subordinate regarding professional development, training needs and interests. A streamlined form that collects an employee's needs and interests would facilitate this practice.



A streamlined IDP process will help employees identify professional development opportunities and training needs.

Goal 4

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To overcome the current reluctance by some managers to use Individual Development Plans, we will effectively describe the merits of the new format and process. Also, we will ensure that managers understand the many training options available within the agency and think broadly about developmental opportunities, including ones in their own offices. In short, we will equip managers with a toolbox of training options for their use in addressing the needs of their staff.

To implement these changes, we will:

ACTION 4.B.1: Create a streamlined Individual Development Plan process and encourage its annual use. Use this process to support the development of a learning organization and to assess agency training needs. Additionally, this process would help support employee professional and personal growth.

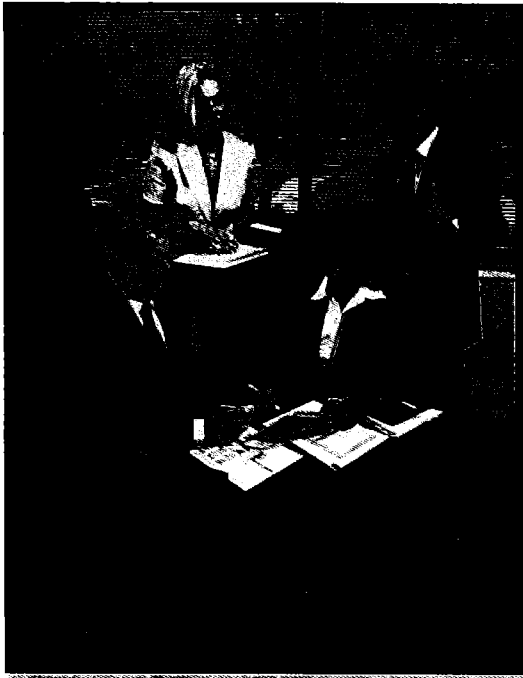
ACTION 4.B.2: Train managers and employees on the use of the streamlined IDP process. Training, online guidance, and other support resources would be developed and provided to supervisors and managers on the role they play in providing information about opportunities to help employees develop.



Goal 5: Develop a Consistent Results-Based Evaluation Process

Overview:

In the coming years, the Social Security Administration will be faced with many challenges resulting from the retirement wave. In addition to diminishing resources and an increase in the volume of retirement claims, we will also witness an exodus of our retirement age employees. The Office of Training needs to provide training and developmental opportunities that will equip employees with the skills and competencies needed to perform their jobs successfully. To ensure that the agency's programs and training activities are effective, we will develop a consistent, results-based evaluation process.



A standard evaluation process will enable us to assess course content, delivery methods, & trainees' productivity & proficiency.

Although some evaluation processes exist for the agency's training and development programs, the tools and methodologies used for assessing these programs are designed and employed by various regions and components. As a result, these evaluation practices do not provide us with a uniform, consistent approach to evaluation of programs, training, and employee proficiency levels. Moreover, disparities in our evaluative processes make it difficult to assess the cost savings and the degree of learning in our training and development programs.

The Interactive Video Teletraining Quality Workgroup's September 2008 draft report addresses the need for standardized and improved evaluations. The report strongly recommends the development of an evaluation capable of accurately measuring trainees' productivity and proficiency. Additionally, the report suggests the evaluation include an analysis of course design, an appraisal of course content, a critique of the delivery method, a measure of on-the-job activities, a review of hands-on applications, and an assessment of the flexibility of the training delivery method.

Developing a standardized evaluation process for all of the agency's training and development programs will enable us to:

- Determine the degree to which the development and training programs enhance or broaden employees' skills and competencies;
- Assess entry-level employees' proficiency and learning in their job functions after receiving training;
- Reduce the time to train employees in field offices, processing centers, teleservice centers, and disability programs;
- Reduce operating costs by identifying the most effective training programs and delivery methods;
- Identify changes in our employees and the agency;
- Increase the quality of the agency's training programs and delivery methods; and
- Assist the agency in achieving its goals and objectives.

Ultimately a standardized evaluation process will result in increased customer satisfaction, learning, and workforce excellence. To achieve these results, the Office of Training will collaborate with the Office of Quality Performance and will establish an Office of Training evaluation team dedicated to overseeing these evaluation objectives.

This goal has three objectives:

- Establish and evaluate proficiency criteria for entry-level courses;
- Improve and standardize incumbent training evaluations; and
- Standardize evaluation processes for leadership, career development, and professional skills training.

OBJECTIVE A: ESTABLISH AND EVALUATE PROFICIENCY CRITERIA FOR ENTRY-LEVEL COURSES

In an effort to ensure that employees are proficient in their job functions, we propose evaluating all entry-level trainees on the essential elements they need to perform successfully in their positions. The evaluation process for the trainees and the courses should be cost effective, practical, and efficient. The proficiency criteria designed for evaluating entry-level employees should focus on a narrow range of topics and processes. Our ultimate goal is to place employees in productive activities at a faster rate by reducing the time it takes to train employees and evaluate proficiency. The Office of Training plans to collaborate with other components, including the Office of Quality Performance, to develop standards for proficiency and with the Office of Budget to develop cost benefit analyses for transformed entry-level training courses. After conducting a pilot in several courses, we will establish proficiency standards for all programmatic areas.

ACTION 5.A.1: Conduct a pilot that validates the proficiency criteria for two to three programmatic entry-level courses. Compare current entry-level training courses to the transformed training courses on proficiency. Evaluate new training modalities used in the pilot.

ACTION 5.A.2: Identify cost of training for all entry-level courses. Conduct a cost benefit analysis for transformed entry-level training courses in the pilot in Action – 5.A.1.

ACTION 5.A.3: Identify the proficiency criteria for all of the transformed entry-level training courses for field offices, processing centers, teleservice centers, and disability programs based upon findings of the pilot in Action – 5.A.1.

OBJECTIVE B: IMPROVE AND STANDARDIZE INCUMBENT TRAINING EVALUATIONS

Our current evaluation process provides data regarding the presenter's communication abilities, the instructional design aspects of the training program, and the student's initial reaction to the training. To effectively measure the success of our training programs, we will establish an evaluation tool that allows us to identify the degree of learning by the employee. Additionally, the new evaluation process will assist us in determining the methods for improving the training we provide. Finally, the evaluation process for incumbent training will be standardized for use by various training components throughout the agency. By standardizing this evaluation process, we can accurately assess the effectiveness of agency-wide incumbent training and reduce the inconsistencies that exist in the evaluative processes currently used.

ACTION 5.B.1: Establish a standard evaluation tool for incumbent training that assists in identifying employee learning and proficiency.

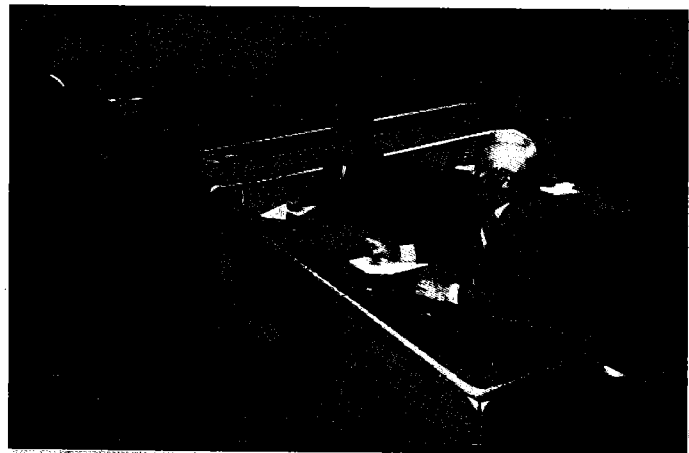
OBJECTIVE C: STANDARDIZE EVALUATION PROCESSES FOR LEADERSHIP, CAREER DEVELOPMENT, AND PROFESSIONAL SKILLS TRAINING

The Social Security Administration's training offices currently employ various methods for evaluating leadership, career development, and professional skills training. While we recognize the importance of evaluating our programs, inconsistencies exist in the tools and methods used to conduct evaluations. To reduce inconsistencies and increase the effectiveness of the agency's training evaluation processes, the Office of Training will work with the Office of Quality Performance to develop a standardized evaluation tool for the leadership, career development, and professional training programs. The new standardized evaluation processes will be introduced agency-wide to all regions and components responsible for training.

ACTION 5.C.1: Design and use agency-wide course evaluations for leadership and professional skills training. These evaluations will identify strengths and weaknesses and measure effectiveness. The results of these evaluations will be used to improve, change, and introduce new training.

ACTION 5.C.2: Use an approach that includes multiple measurement methods to ensure reliability and validity.

The Office of Training, regional offices, and many headquarters components have developed career development programs. Many share similar features such as rotational assignments, executive interviews or shadowing, and training opportunities. Significant staff time and money are devoted to these programs.

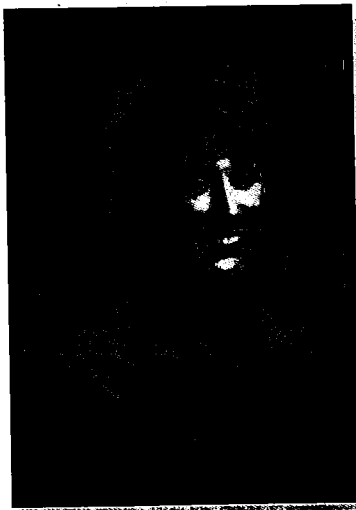
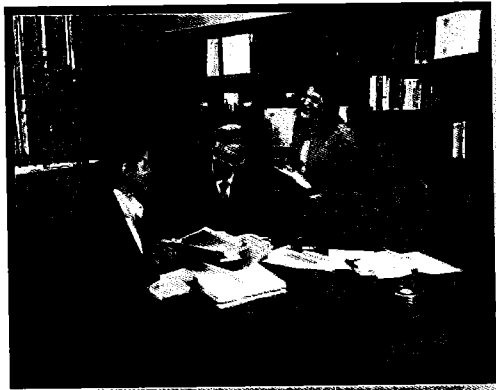


Development programs often incorporate rotational assignments, executive interviews, training, and other activities to enhance employee development.

The participants in the programs tend to be positive about the value of the programs, and many are promoted during or soon after their participation. Some end-of-program surveys have been conducted, though not for all programs. The training community needs to determine what factors beyond promotion rates should be considered to truly understand the value these programs offer. Given the similarity of many of the programs, there should be consistent standards for assessing their effectiveness.

Therefore, we propose to:

ACTION 5.C.3: Establish a comprehensive, consistent evaluation process for career development programs throughout the agency.



Special Initiative: Building One Team with One Focus

The Office of Training is responsible for training and developing the agency's employees and for providing national policy and standards for development and training delivery. According to the Federal Register, the Office of Training is also responsible for directing the management of training funds to ensure accountability of money spent. The training business plan outlines how we will carry out these responsibilities by building a learning organization, transforming programmatic and technical training, developing talent, promoting the transfer of knowledge, and evaluating learning.

The Office of Training can best meet its responsibilities and achieve its business goals by having the agency's training assets properly aligned. Although the Office of Training provides valuable products and services on a national scale, regional and component level training offices also perform similar training functions. While this decentralized structure is well suited to meet localized, specific training needs, it often results in inconsistencies in the evaluation and quality of training programs, as well as a duplication of efforts.

Although there are some standard evaluations for national training initiatives used across the agency, each training staff often develops and employs its own evaluations for the courses and programs it offers. The inconsistencies and lack of evaluation standards in our current structure significantly reduce the agency's ability to manage training resources efficiently, to assess the effect of training, and to account for the level of effort and expenditures invested in its training programs.

In addition to standardizing evaluations for agency programs, we must also create consistency in the quality of the agency's training programs. During our regional visits, we received comments regarding differences in the quality of IVT instruction produced by various studios. Such variances are likely to occur as a result of gaps in communication, minimum coordination, and a decentralized structure.

Duplicative efforts also make differences in quality more apparent and wastes resources that can be better used in other areas. We find that multiple regions and components often produce and provide their own training on common subjects, such as diversity training and travel management. Since these subjects are agency-wide in scope and usually do not differ by component or region, training on these and many other topics could most effectively and efficiently be developed and delivered on a national level.

To improve the evaluation process and the quality of our training programs, the agency's training community needs to be structured in a way that provides for unity of direction, eliminates duplicative efforts, achieves greater consistency in training across the agency, and uses resources more efficiently. Our strength and added value to the agency comes from us working cooperatively as a single training community. We need to establish a learning community that operates as one team with one focus, working together to implement the programs and processes that will enable the Social Security Administration to become a learning organization.

Key components of any successful training program include quality, consistency, efficiency and accountability. Working together as one team, the Social Security Administration's learning community will ensure we attain these key components. The changes we seek in this special initiative can occur in two phases. In phase one, the agency training staff and resources should be aligned and report to the newly named Office of Learning, the new name that we propose for the Office of Training to reflect our new emphasis on creating a learning organization. In phase two, the Office of Learning should undergo an internal reorganization to support the changes in phase one and to achieve the goals set forth in this plan.

Phase One

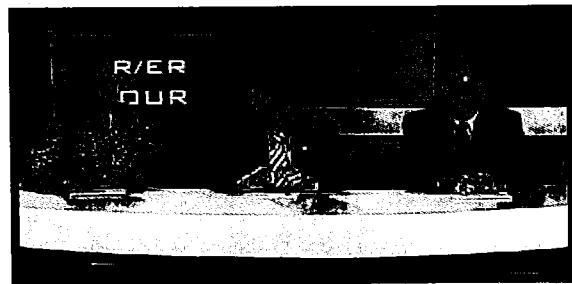
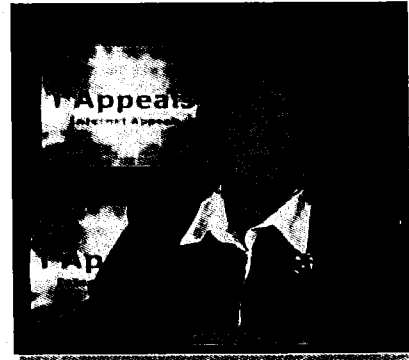
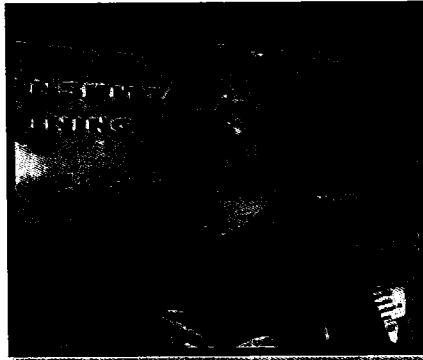
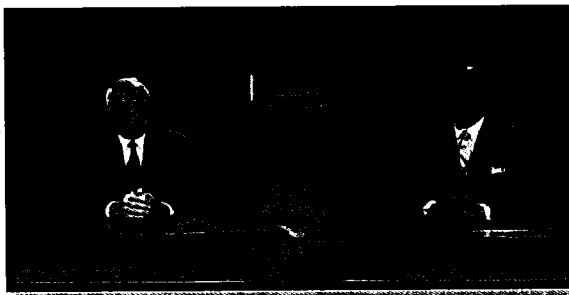
We propose that all agency training staff and functions be reorganized to report directly to the Office of Learning. Aligning the various agency training staffs under the Office of Learning would not only improve our ability to deliver consistent, quality training, but also would enable other components to focus their resources on addressing other crucial operational workloads. This is especially important as we face the retirement wave and as baby boomers retire in greater numbers.

Under a centralized training structure, we will be better able to assess performance gaps, coordinate with the field and other components where appropriate, and deliver training that effectively targets identified needs. The Office of Learning employees within components and regions would extend the highest levels of training and development expertise to Social Security employees, support new initiatives and programs in the creation of a learning organization, and help implement evaluation strategies to assess the value of new programs and learning.

We also realize that local training needs exist that cannot be met at the national level. Local training staffs would continue to support field and component work under Deputy, Associate, and Regional Commissioners.

Phase Two

The Office of Learning would also reorganize internally to support the goals of this training business plan. The primary change in the Office of Learning would be the creation of three new centers. The current Center for Curricula Development and Delivery would be replaced with the Center for Programmatic Disability Training, the Center for Programmatic Operations Training, and the Center for Training Delivery. The creation of these three centers will allow the Office of Learning to focus more closely on meeting the needs of the Social Security Administration's programmatic audiences as well as to maximize the use of the available training modalities to deliver training. An additional change would be the creation of a dedicated evaluation team to develop evaluation standards as well as assess our programs on a regular basis and recommend improvements as needed. These changes would allow the Office of Learning to deliver a national curriculum of courses, identify and meet regional and local training needs, and evaluate our programs in a timely and cost-effective manner.



Conclusion

The Social Security Administration's training business plan proposes business goals, objectives, and specific action items that will guide the agency's training community in supporting the strategic goals of the agency. In this plan, we aim to solidify the Social Security Administration as a model organization for developing employees and continually improving performance. We will provide ways for the agency to successfully manage its talent, to support managers in the development of effective succession plans, to develop methods for knowledge transfer, and to model the best practices of high-performing learning organizations.

When implemented, the actions described in this plan will create:

- A well-organized, knowledgeable training community that maximizes its resources and anticipates its customers' needs;
- Agency-wide support for continual learning at all levels of the organization;
- Effective and efficient training to prepare new employees to serve the public;
- Outstanding leadership training that hones the skills of supervisors at all levels and helps create the best leadership cadre in government;
- Defined development paths for professional development;
- Effective use of multiple training-delivery modalities that recognize differences in learning styles and generational preferences;
- Training programs that are aligned with, and help accomplish, the agency's strategic goals and performance plans; and
- An evaluation process that ensures training and development are indeed improving the performance of our employees.

We look forward to your continued support and active participation in making this vision a reality.



Building One Team with One Focus