

.gov Reform Initiative

Social Security Administration Web Improvement Plan

Working Draft as of 10/11/2011

Background

In the [August 12, 2011 Agency Instructions for Completing Web Inventories and Web Improvement Plans](#), Agency CIOs were asked to work with their Agency Web Manager and Office of Public Affairs to submit an Interim Progress Report on their efforts to streamline Agency-managed .gov domains (due September 6, 2011) and to begin development of an Agency-wide Web Improvement Plan.

“By October 11, Agencies shall develop a Web Improvement Plan that communicates their **strategy for managing web resources more efficiently, improving online content, and enhancing the customer experience of Agency websites.**” This comprehensive plan will “address the broader objectives of **streamlining content, infrastructure, and ultimately improving customer service.**”

The purpose of this Web Improvement Plan is to identify the strategy, actions, measurements, and timelines that the Agency is using to streamline website infrastructure, improve web content, and enhance the customer experience with Executive Branch websites.

Agencies are being asked to create a Web Improvement Plan that will be developed iteratively over the next few months. In this plan, Agencies will describe Agency-wide efforts to effectively manage publicly accessible websites in the .gov domain. Only agencies in the Executive Branch are required to submit a Web Improvement Plan. The initial plan for the Social Security Administration, due to OMB by October 11, 2011, is in the following section.

Step 1: Current State of Agency-wide Web Improvement Efforts

Over the past few months, Agencies have been reviewing their .gov domains, web operations, and other web-related efforts in response to OMB .gov Reform data collection efforts (individual domain inventories, web governance survey, interim progress reports, etc.). The following describes the state of current web improvement efforts at the Social Security Administration.

1) Does your Agency currently have an Agency-wide web strategy?

Yes.

The Agency Strategic Plan (please see <http://www.socialsecurity.gov/asp/plan-2008-2013.html>) provides overall strategy, including the strategy for providing service over the Internet. The agency Strategic Information Technology Assessment and Review (SITAR) process allocates IT development resources annually. This approach provides the flexibility necessary for continuous evaluation of Internet customer satisfaction and available resources, and to adjust our electronic service plans accordingly.

2) How does your agency currently ensure that Agency-wide web resources are managed efficiently (e.g. governance, technology/infrastructure, hosting, staffing, operations, etc.)?

The SSA eServices Governance committee, in accordance with guidance provided by SSA Deputy Commissioners, oversees the governance of the website, and creates and develops the policies associated with that function. At the day-to-day level, the agency has essentially two governance systems: one governs the interactive applications interacting with mainframe systems, and the other governs the remaining (mostly informational) web-based content.

For interactive applications, an extensive library of reusable code has been developed and a detailed set of standards exist for how user interface is designed and tested.

For the remaining content, a set of standards based on OMB best practices have been in use for many years. However, the agency is in the middle of rolling out a new design template that takes advantage of newer standards and browser capabilities, and this (along with the emergence of cloud-based technologies) has triggered the need for a thorough review of the current governance rules. This also may lead to development of an intranet-based collaboration space for webmasters who manage the various subsites.

3) How does your Agency currently ensure that website content is readily accessible, updated, accurate, and routinely improved?

The eServices Governance committee consists of a core group of Associate Commissioners charged with providing oversight and guidance, and establishing standards on new and existing eServices. Established

by the eServices Governance Committee, the Web Steering Committee (WESCO), facilitates the coordination between responsible components on the development, management, and maintenance of the Internet. WESCO was charged with guiding and directing the implementation of Agency web policies, standards and procedures including the Certification of Web Content. Annually, WESCO certifies that the public content on the Agency's internet websites are current and accurate. The certification includes compliance of WESCO established and NIST standards. This process identifies priorities and allocates resources for each fiscal year. Also, SSA requires all subcomponents with public-facing content to annually review and certify that the content is current, accurate, accessible, and complies with existing standards.

4) How does your Agency currently ensure that websites are meeting user expectations and needs and that the customer experience with websites is continually enhanced?

SSA usability practitioners employ user-centered design methodologies to ensure a high level of usability within programmatic applications and across SSA's Internet web presence. The process includes eliciting business and user needs and an iterative cycle of design and usability testing to achieve measurable usability goals. Interface design standards are implemented through a reusable library of interaction patterns to ensure consistency across all SSA web-based applications and Internet pages. We also have a program called the Public Insight Process that assesses the potential user demand for a suggested website application before significant resources are committed to its development. We have in the past contracted with outside usability specialists to assess the proposed redesign of our informational sites. SSA uses the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) surveys to measure customer/users satisfaction, and to predict future behaviors and trends. ACSI uses a proven, scientific methodology to measure online satisfaction. The data is analyzed and used to help drive decisions on how to improve SSA's online services. SSA also values and solicits ongoing suggestions from our field employees. All of these avenues for feedback can result in site improvements.