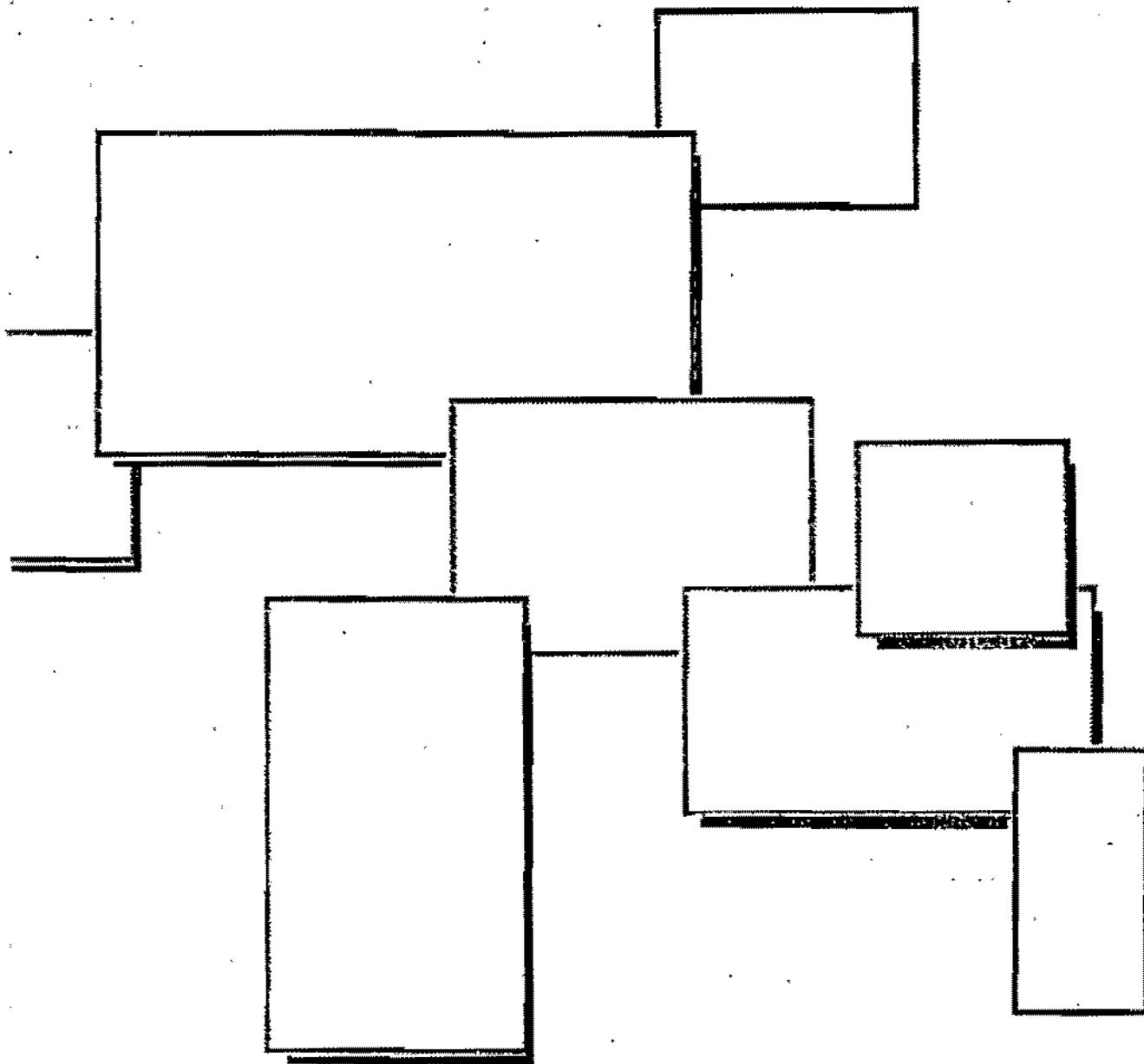


The Social Security Strategic Plan

A Framework For The Future



U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
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A Framework
For The Future

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Chapter 1: Introduction

SOCIAL SECURITY'S PROGRAMS

Social Security touches the life of nearly every American. We pay out nearly 300 billion dollars in benefits every year to nearly 45 million people. The number of beneficiaries served by the Social Security Administration (SSA) is expected to rise substantially over the next 25 years, as citizens over the age of 65 maintain their position as the nation's fastest-growing age group. In addition to providing direct service to our current beneficiaries, we maintain the earnings records of almost 140 million workers. During the decade of the 1990s and well into the 21st century, Social Security will continue to have a dramatic impact on American society. This impact requires that SSA be, in the future, the responsive and effective protector of the public trust that we are today. How SSA evolves during the coming years is of critical importance to all Americans.

As a key component of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), SSA administers several vital programs. Under title II of the Social Security Act, SSA administers three types of cash benefit programs. The most familiar of these is the retirement insurance program, which provides benefits to about 71% of all title II beneficiaries. This contributory social insurance program provides a measure of income security to retiring workers and their families. The other title II programs provide benefits to survivors of workers and to disabled workers and their families. The survivors and disability insurance programs provide benefits to the remaining 18% and 11%, respectively, of title II beneficiaries. Under title XVI of the Act, SSA administers the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program. This program pays benefits, which include federally administered State supplements, to provide a floor of protection to the needy who are age 65 or over or who are blind or disabled, including children. It provides critical linkage to other assistance programs, especially Medicaid and food stamps. SSA also provides significant support for other DHHS programs, particularly the Medicare program, and has responsibility for accepting and processing claims for Black Lung benefits.

To date, SSA has issued about 354 million Social Security numbers (SSN), 205 million of which are still active. In 1990, SSA issued 9.7 million new and 10 million replacement Social Security cards. SSA also received and processed over 270 million earnings reports. In 1990, SSA processed about 4.5 million new Retirement, Survivors and Disability Insurance (RSDI) claims and 1.4 million new SSI claims. We also processed about 64 million postretirement actions for individuals on the RSDI rolls and an additional 12 million for those receiving SSI.

THE AGENCY'S WORKFORCE

Most of SSA's services to the public are provided by a workforce of approximately 63,000 employees (full-time equivalents) through a national network of facilities. These physical facilities include some 1,300 field offices, 37 teleservice centers, 10 regional offices, 7 processing centers, 4 data operations centers, 132 hearings offices and a national headquarters. SSA staff also visit and conduct business at various off-site locations as may be necessary. Additionally, the disability program depends on the services of 54 State Disability Determination Services.

COMMITMENT TO PLANNING

SSA's strategic plan reflects our continuing commitment to using a comprehensive, unified planning system to guide the evolution of the Agency. We know that the future is the product of the actions we take and the decisions we make today. The strategic planning process at SSA is designed to help us construct our future by making the right decisions today. In this plan, we are going beyond the year 2000 and moving into the first decade of the 21st century. Our vision is a composite of what we believe will be put in place over time through the middle of that decade. Therefore, our strategic planning horizon, though not fixed, is about 15 years from now.

HOW THE PLAN IS ORGANIZED

The plan document is structured to mirror the planning process. Our first task was to look at expected conditions of the environment in which our plan would come to fruition: the demographic and economic trends that would predict the makeup of the SSA-served population; the technological innovations that could be exploited to improve service delivery; the political and social forces that would determine the legal basis of our programs; and the circumstances both of the government as a whole and within SSA specifically that we expect to continue free from change in the early part of the century. "A View of Our Environment" highlights the assumptions we made about the environment of the future.

Our second major task was to clarify the essential purpose of the organization and identify what must be attained if we are to fulfill our purpose. "A Framework For Planning" presents the mission statement of the Agency, the ideals and courses of action to which the Agency is philosophically committed and the levels of service that the Agency desires to achieve during the plan period.

The results of these activities were then used as guidance in preparing "A Vision of SSA: As We Enter the 21st Century." The vision is a cohesive mental image of the way SSA will be providing service during the first decade of the 21st century. Of course, none of us can actually predict the future. In fact, the vision is not overly process-specific, since the information that would allow SSA to choose among various process alternatives cannot be developed at this point in the planning cycle. But we can look to what has happened in the past, look at what is happening now in the world around us, look at what we ourselves are doing and paint a useful picture of what we intend to do in the years to come. By

presenting this picture, the vision provides the Agency the guidance we need to plan our moves in the right direction.

The final piece of the strategic plan presents "A Transitional View." It describes SSA's strategic priorities—the major areas in which we intend to focus our change efforts. It also briefly details the next steps we intend to take that will lead us to achieving our objectives and vision of the future.

THE UNIFIED PLANNING SYSTEM

The strategic plan is the most critical element of the unified planning system (UPS) that is being established at SSA. As the cornerstone on which the SSA's nearer-term plans will be built and the ultimate basis for SSA's day-to-day operations, the plan will be used as a working tool by SSA's employees and will be the yardstick against which all major SSA initiatives and accomplishments will be compared.

The material presented in the Agency Strategic Plan (ASP) sets the tone for the Agency in terms of where we would like to be as we enter the 21st century; it does not constitute a detailed blueprint for future actions. The ASP, in effect, frames the most critical strategic issues in a way that Agency management, as well as other executive and legislative branch authorities, can better understand the relative value of the direction contemplated in the plan. In addition, the ASP commits SSA to an ongoing process of change management and public accountability that can help us effectively translate our plans into an appropriate, defensible budget.

The transition process from ASP goals and visions to more specific plans and budgets will be accomplished through the implementation and subsequent institutionalization of the UPS. The UPS will be the broad umbrella under which all planning and budgeting activities will be conducted in the future. It will incorporate SSA's strategic planning process (which led to the creation of the ASP) with a new Planning and Budgeting System (PBS). The PBS will provide the process through which Agency-level tactical plans and budgets will be developed, implemented and monitored in the future. The PBS will also provide a necessary bridge between long-range planning at the strategic level and shorter-term operational or component-level planning that will be necessary to fully realize the vision of the ASP.

Chapter 2: A View of Our Environment

No organization operates in a vacuum. Just as each exists to have an impact on the world around it, that world has a reciprocal impact on the organizations it nurtures. Before any real planning can take place, an organization must peer into the future and try to anticipate what the world in its future will look like. What changes can the Social Security Administration (SSA) foresee that will affect the way we conduct our business? What kind of work will need to be done and how much of it will there be to do? What tools will be available to assist us and what constraints will limit our options? How will the needs of the people we serve differ from the needs of our public today, how will their motivations differ? The same must be asked about our employees: who will be doing the work of the future and what will their needs be? Without attempting to answer these questions, we risk planning to build an organization that functions correctly only in a world that does not exist.

A Changing World

In our first Agency Strategic Plan (ASP), we looked at our environment and identified the forces and trends that we believed would have a significant impact on our services in the year 2000. As the basis for the ASP renewal process, we have reexamined our premises about our environment of the future and have again asked the question, "What will the coming years bring?"

For the most part, our emphasis has been on the impact of changing conditions on the Social Security programs and the way we administer them. Change is a constant force in American society, and many of the changes that SSA identified in the ASP three years ago remain major forces today. Many of the assumptions we made about their impact have been reinforced by experience over the past three years. Changes thought to have only minor implications to SSA have taken on greater significance, and new trends have emerged from what were only seeds of change three years ago. The changing world around us, as described below, cannot be ignored.

The trends and forecasts discussed in the following pages have been drawn from various published and unpublished reports, magazines and journals. These include reports by the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), the Census Bureau, the Social Security Board of Trustees, the Department of Education, the Monthly Labor Review and various trend newsletters.

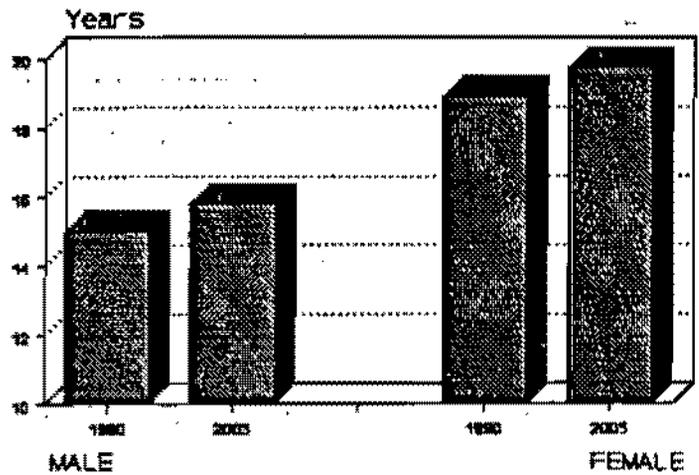
DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS

A MATURING POPULATION

Innumerable environmental factors promise to affect the way that SSA's programs are administered. Most apparent are those trends indicating an increasing demand for SSA's services.

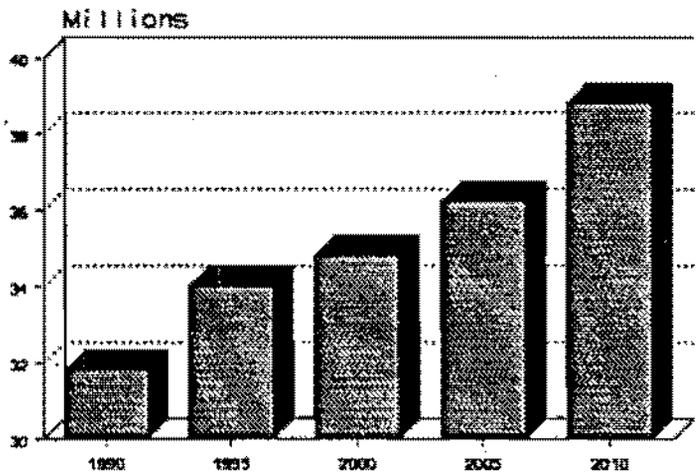
By 2005, there will be 4.8 million more persons who are age 65 and over than there were in 1990. For those who are 65 years old, life expectancy will be an additional 15.8 years for men and 19.7 years for women (as compared to 15.2 years and 18.9 years in 1989). This can be expected to result in a significant increase in the number of beneficiaries and a corresponding increase in the demand for claims-processing and payment-record maintenance services.

LIFE EXPECTANCY AT AGE 65



The growth in the number of people age 65 and over will occur unevenly across the nation and will be greatest in the South and West. Increases in the overall population will be

POPULATION OVER AGE 65



greater in metropolitan areas than in rural areas. This indicates a continuing need for SSA to build flexibility into our organizational structure to accommodate geographical variances both in the volume and mix of the work we must process.

INCREASED CLAIMS FOR BENEFITS

In terms of retirement claims, the baby-boomers (those born between 1947 and 1964) will not yet be a factor for SSA in the 1990s. However, current data indicate that a large portion of applicants for disability benefits are in the age 50-60 range. As the baby-boomers will begin reaching their 50s in 1997, an increase in disability claims can be anticipated. By 2012, when the baby-boomers begin reaching age 65, SSA can expect a rapid rise in retirement claims, and the ratio of retired to employed people will begin to increase dramatically.

AMERICAN HOUSEHOLDS

The number of American households will increase from 95 million in 1990 to 110 million in the year 2000, while the average number of persons per household will decrease from 2.7 to 2.5. The household will become more highly diversified, with a lower percentage being married-couple households and a higher percentage being childless couples, blended families, single-parent households and people living alone. The number of SSA record changes will increase.

BENEFIT STATEMENTS

Starting in FY 1995, SSA is under legislative mandate to begin sending personal earnings and benefit estimate statements (PEBES) to more segments of the working population. Current law requires that, by 2000, these statements be sent annually, unsolicited, to most workers. Implementation of the PEBES legislation will cause a significant workload increase. Additionally, an increase in the number of workers requesting PEBES may occur as the baby-boomers begin financial planning for their retirement.

VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

Other trends indicate that there are growing segments within the population that need those SSA services that require more human interaction and place greater demands on the time and effort of SSA staff. The number of people age 65 or over who are living in the community and need assistance due to limitations in activities necessary for daily living will increase from 4.2 million in 1990 to 5.1 million in 2000. The number of elderly in nursing homes will grow from 1.6 million in 1990 to 2 million. The number of homeless, currently estimated by the Census Bureau to be at least 250,000 people, appears to be growing. For homeless individuals receiving or eligible to receive Social Security or SSI benefits, a lack of a permanent address increases the difficulty of providing benefits due to them. With growth in each of these groups, SSA can expect increases in the need for representative payees. SSA will need to more actively seek appropriate representative payees within the community and find ways to improve the payee selection process.

INCREASED DISABILITY

SSA can expect a continuing increase in the number of disability claims based on mental illness. Because mental illness claims have historically proven to be difficult to adjudicate accurately, improved program policy specifications may be needed to

ensure adequate decisionmaking. Any change that affects this group is likely to have a significant impact on SSA service delivery, since mental illness, including mental retardation, is now the largest single diagnostic group among SSI disabled recipients and represents a substantial proportion of Disability Insurance (DI) beneficiaries. Delivering high-quality service to the mentally ill population will likely become more time-consuming per recipient, due to more extensive documentation required to establish eligibility, greater likelihood of representative payee involvement and more face-to-face contacts with SSA staff.

The number of human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) cases is projected to triple over the next ten years. As a result, a significant increase in disability claims filed on the basis of various physical and mental impairments associated with HIV can be expected. Claims for survivors' benefits can be expected to increase as well.

IMMIGRATION TRENDS

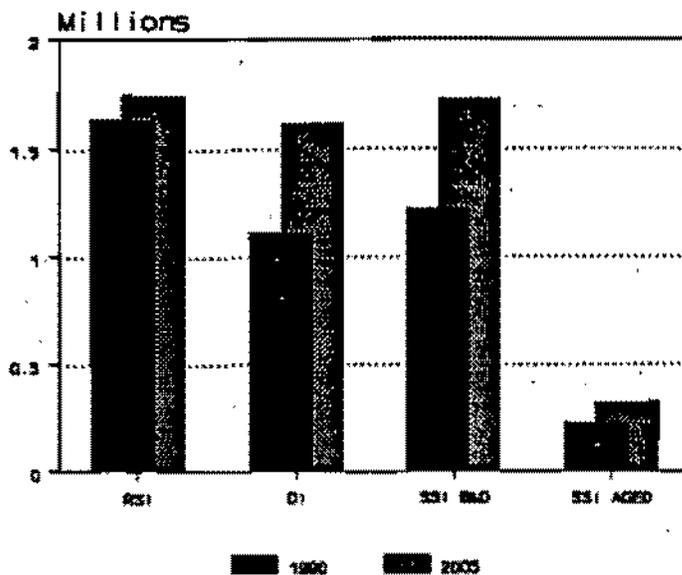
Net annual immigration is expected to continue at the rate of 550,000 legal immigrants per year and 200,000 other-than-legal immigrants per year. Immigrants create significant workloads for SSA, primarily associated with obtaining new and replacement Social Security cards. There will be an increased demand for SSA staff to have the capability to communicate with persons who do not speak the English language.

NEED FOR TECHNOLOGY

Because we expect Federal budget deficits to continue through the mid-1990s, our available administrative resources are likely to grow at a much slower rate than increases in the volume of our work would warrant. In that climate, finding ways to reduce administrative costs becomes more important. Our approach to this situation will be to utilize human resources in instances where their talents are irreplaceable and to utilize less-expensive automated mechanisms in other situations. This means further automating those routine tasks that can be performed more efficiently by computers. And it means developing and integrating systems that will enable our employees to perform more efficiently, eliminate duplication of effort and reduce labor-intensive paper processes.

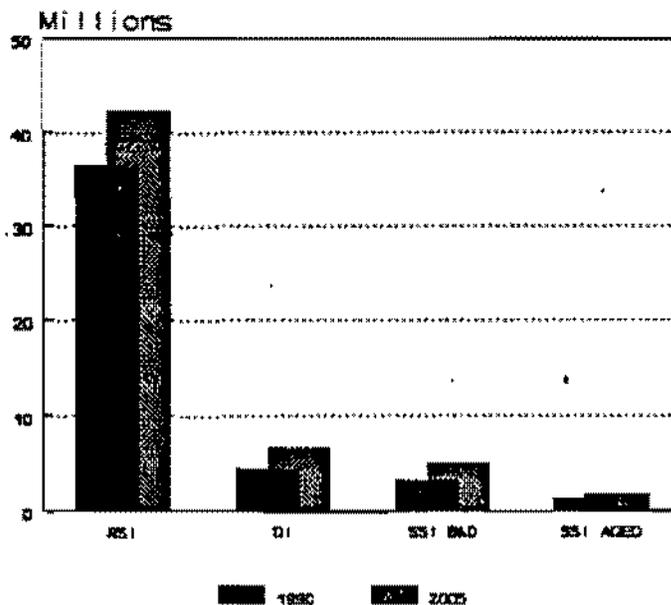
Reflected in the following graphs are actuarial projections of SSA's initial-claims workloads and entitled beneficiaries, which were developed based on statistical analyses of these and other demographic trends. We estimate that the Agency total workload will increase by approximately 26 percent from 1990 to 2005.

CLAIMS PROJECTIONS



NOTE: Claims Figures Represent Receipts
In Field Offices

PROJECTIONS OF SSI RECIPIENTS AND RSDI BENEFICIARIES-IN-FORCE



NOTE: "B&D" means "blind and disabled"

**BENEFICIARY AND CLAIMS PROJECTIONS
PERCENT CHANGE FISCAL YEAR 2005
OVER FISCAL YEAR 1990**

	RSI	DI	SSI B&D	SSI AGED
CLAIMS	+ 7%	+45%	+41%	+38%
BENEFICIARIES	+16%	+50%	+57%	+24%

RAPID CHANGE

TECHNOLOGICAL TRENDS

The rate of information-related technological change experienced from 1970 to 1990 will continue, if not accelerate. Many of the new technologies now just emerging in the marketplace will have matured and become mainstream during the 1990s. These include optical storage, expert systems, speech technology and machine-language-translation applications.

Optical storage will augment magnetic storage devices in many areas and provide the capability to store massive amounts of data. For example, depending on how this technology were implemented, we can envision that the 5.5 million paper claims files stored at SSA's Wilkes-Barre record-storage facility might be housed in a space the size of a single file cabinet. The Agency's program operations instructions, a series of manuals with over 40,000 pages, could be stored, with update capabilities, on a single 5" optical disk.

Use of expert systems in business and government will continue to expand. Expert systems are programs that capture in a computer the knowledge of experts in a specific subject. Expert systems and other decision-support systems would increase consistency in the application of rules, policies and procedures, thereby improving accuracy and efficiency. Use of expert systems to assist in making medical determinations of disability holds particular promise for SSA.

Speech technology (speech synthesis and speech recognition) offers numerous opportunities for SSA in the near future. For example, it could potentially be used for assisting visually-impaired employees or improving security in access to buildings, equipment or data.

Machine-language-translation applications, software that assists the user to translate from a source language to a target language, will continue to expand and improve in quality. Computer-assisted document translation (e.g., Spanish to English) will become commonplace. Today, SSA manually translates approximately 40,000 documents annually, with Spanish translation making up the largest amount of this work.

INCREASED TELECOMMUNICATIONS CAPACITY

Also in the near future, the installed base of fiber-optic cable will increase tremendously the total available telecommunications capacity (bandwidth). This expansion of capacity can be expected to make telecommunications more affordable and, as a result, increase the electronic exchange of data both within and among institutions. The availability of low-cost bandwidth would make it possible for SSA to design and implement an information architecture that supports bandwidth-intensive applications, such as image processing (for the collection, storage and display of documents such as medical evidence) and multi-media (voice, video, data) conferencing.

The large menu of hardware and software technologies from which SSA will be able to choose to build our information systems architecture will present a major challenge. That challenge will be to select the best combination of hardware and software components that will meet the information systems requirements of the Agency at an optimum cost.

HOME COMPUTER LINKS

There will be an expanding SSA clientele that is computer literate. SSA's service-delivery mechanisms may need to include the capability for direct computer link by those individuals who prefer to do business this way.

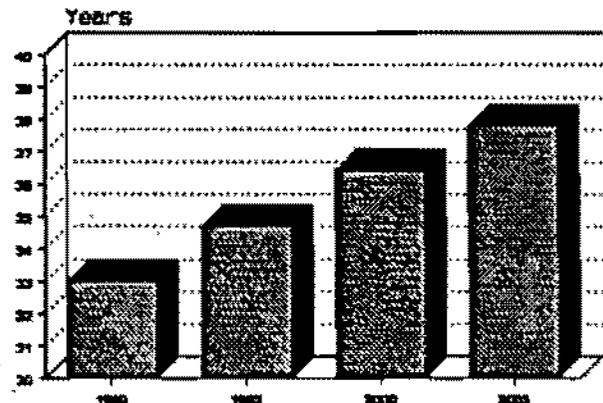
WORKFORCE TRENDS

A SHRINKING LABOR FORCE

A number of trends indicate that significant changes will occur in the workforce and the job market over the next decade. While the age 18-24 population will drop from 27.1 million in 1990 to 25.9 million by 2000, the median age of the population will

increase from 33 years in 1990 to 37.8 years in 2005. Growth in the labor force is estimated to fall from an annual rate of 1.6 percent in the 1980s to 0.9 percent in the 1990s. The labor force participation rate of women will climb, while the rate for men 55-64 years of age will continue its downward slide.

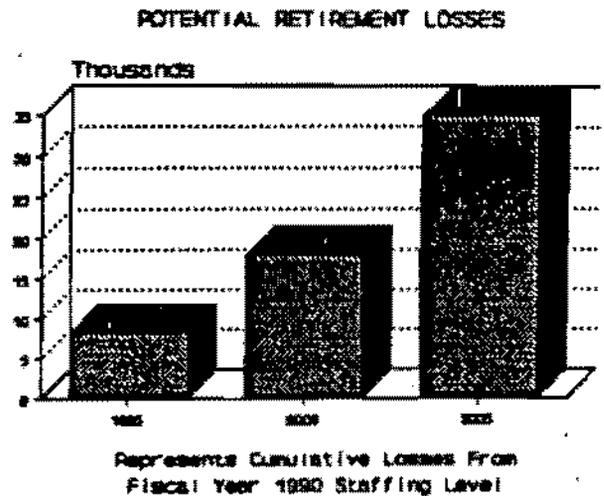
MEDIAN AGE OF POPULATION



SSA ATTRITION

SSA faces a potentially significant loss of employees due to retirement. Our employee population has remained relatively stable over the last 20 years. Because of that, we are at a point where a large percentage of our staff will become eligible for retirement during the next 15 years. Thus, the number of individuals retiring

between now and 2005 is likely to increase dramatically. Fully 75 percent of our current supervisory staff and over 50 percent of our current professional staff will be eligible to retire by the year 2005. This will occur during a period when the availability of their kind of expertise will be a critical



factor in our ensuring the successful implementation of new workloads, processes, procedures and technologies. The graph above provides some data on the number of employees eligible to retire. However, this picture represents a conservative view of the overall losses that SSA could suffer, since it relates to only one form of attrition--retirement. Other forms of attrition (for example, losses to other agencies and resignations) are more difficult to project but are expected to represent an additional significant loss that we must consider in our human resources planning.

THE FUTURE WORKFORCE

The changing composition of the workforce, coupled with a shrinking pool of new labor, will present challenges as well as opportunities to SSA. For example, SSA can expect to face increasing competition to retain experienced or specialized employees and to recruit well-qualified new employees. To compete successfully in the labor market, we may need to implement more flexible personnel practices and expand employee services to accommodate the changing priorities and needs of those highly productive workers we wish to keep or attract. Day-care and elder-care services, as well as such practices as job sharing, might need to expand in order for SSA to retain those employees who cannot work full-time or attract retirees who might prefer to work part-time.

With fewer workers available for entry-level positions, the demand for older workers will grow, and SSA may increasingly draw our employees from a wider spectrum of the labor pool. SSA will need to update the skills of older workers and those with disabilities to respond to emerging technology and to assist less qualified new entrants in acquiring the skills needed to perform effectively. SSA will also need to train our workforce to deal with increasingly wide differences in the literacy levels of those we serve.

INCREASED OPPORTUNITIES

The movement from a goods-producing to a service-producing economy will continue, with the service-producing sector expected to increase in size from 67.5 percent in 1988 to 70.8 percent in 2000. The changing nature of the job market over the next decade,

combined with demographic patterns, will provide increased opportunities for beneficiaries and applicants with disabilities to re-enter the workforce. This will present an opportunity to SSA to encourage and assist those beneficiaries with disabilities who want to return to work. To this end, SSA will likely need to explore and develop effective ways to actively promote SSA work incentives and to provide people with disabilities access to other services outside SSA that are needed to enable them to return to work.

Continuing Conditions

FACTORS THAT WILL NOT CHANGE

Perhaps just as significant to SSA's planning effort as our premises regarding change are the Agency's assumptions that certain conditions will continue into the future as they are today. These continuing conditions have a significant impact on Agency planning; while they may change, we are accepting them as "givens" and using them as legitimate boundary-setting attributes. These conditions are reflected in the following planning assumptions:

- o SSA will remain an integral component of the Department of Health and Human Services.
- o SSA will continue our current role in the administration of Medicare and Medicaid programs.
- o There will be no new major program legislation; as a result, SSA's legal basis and programs will remain relatively unchanged.
- o Trust fund investment policies will remain unchanged.
- o Less than 2 percent of total SSA outlays will be for administrative purposes; more than 98 percent will be expended on benefit payments or for other payments mandated by law.
- o SSA's administrative budget will remain constrained, but additional budget resources may be available for special needs and initiatives.
- o SSA will continue to operate in partnership with the State Disability Determination Services to administer the disability programs.
- o SSA will continue to administer and oversee the administrative appeals process.
- o SSA will continue to have a network of community-based field offices to meet the continuing demand for a wide range of integrated human services.
- o SSA's major processing workloads will be supported in an online systems environment where service requirements identify such a need.

MEETING THE CHALLENGES OF CHANGE

Having identified those elements of change that we expect to have an impact on SSA's future, as well as those conditions we expect to remain constant, SSA recognizes the necessity to plan for the future. The following chapters of this strategic plan set forth the Agency's response to this challenge.

Chapter 3: A Framework For Planning

Once an organization has formed a reasonable image of the world it expects in the future, the real task of planning begins. At the strategic level, such planning does not consist of identifying specific projects with schedules and budgets as it does at lower planning levels. Rather, it involves both establishing the framework in which such detailed planning will take place and creating a vision to provide direction to the Agency.

The framework creates, in effect, the boundaries within which our plans will be constructed. Like the framework of a building--its foundation and its supports--the planning framework defines what the organization is intended to do, establishes the levels at which it is expected to function and identifies the basic principles on which it is built.

ELEMENTS OF THE PLANNING FRAMEWORK

The planning framework consists of four distinct but intimately related parts:

- o The mission of the Agency, which broadly defines the Social Security Administration's (SSA) role and purpose.
- o The Agency's goals and objectives, which provide a working statement of SSA's internal and external operating philosophy for the 1990s and beyond.
- o The commitments of the Agency, which complement the goals and objectives by describing some of the most important characteristics of SSA's operating environment and further clarifying our organizational philosophy.
- o The service-delivery goals and objectives, which precisely define "service" and provide a measure of the level of service we wish to provide to the public.

The components of the framework are established in the context of the environmental conditions we have anticipated in the future, the legal requirements of the Social Security Act and other relevant legislation and the history and tradition of the Agency itself. A strong, clear planning framework is critical if we wish to move in concert into the 21st century. Knowing what the organization is intended to do, the levels at which it is expected to function and the basic principles on which it is built keeps us moving in the same direction toward the same end and ensures that the courses of action we choose work together to optimize our energy.

The Mission of the Agency

OUR MISSION

We expect SSA to be administering the same programs as we enter the 21st century that we do today. While we expect legislative and judicial modifications and incremental adjustments, we cannot anticipate or plan for the passage of legislation of a magnitude that would substantively alter the business functions of the Agency.

The assumption that our basic business functions will remain relatively stable leads us to conclude that our mission will, likewise, change little. The mission of the Agency can be stated simply as follows:

The mission of the Social Security Administration is to administer national Social Security programs as prescribed by legislation, in an equitable, effective, efficient and caring manner.

The Agency's Goals and Objectives

OUR FUNDAMENTAL GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

While the mission statement broadly defines SSA's role and purpose, Agency-level goals and objectives delineate the results we expect to accomplish in the fulfillment of our mission. The Agency has three broad, fundamental goals. These goals, together with their supporting objectives, provide the basic framework within which the Agency operates. They provide a working statement of SSA's operating and service-delivery philosophy for the 1990s and beyond.

The Agency's goals and objectives follow:

GOAL 1

To serve the public with compassion, courtesy, consideration, efficiency and accuracy.

Objectives

- o Pay benefits promptly and accurately.
- o Make dealing with SSA as easy and convenient as possible by providing options for service delivery.
- o Assure that those who need or desire personal, face-to-face service have ready access to that service.
- o Promote fairness, equity and responsiveness through all our policies, practices and decisions.
- o Provide for the prompt resolution of claims, including disability claims, and the reduction of existing backlogs.
- o Employ aggressive outreach activities to make current and potential beneficiaries fully aware of their rights under all Social Security programs.

- o Recognize that individuals have needs that go beyond SSA programs and provide for referral to related agencies, services and volunteers.
- o Use the most efficient methods and techniques in administering programs.
- o Identify and propose ways in which SSA programs can be improved to serve the American public more effectively.
- o Strengthen the Social Security programs' State/Federal relationship by emphasizing open communication and shared information.

GOAL 2

To protect and maintain the American people's investment in the Social Security Trust Funds and to instill public confidence in Social Security programs.

Objectives

- o Assure that the Trust Funds are available for the beneficiaries of the future.
- o Base benefit decisions on sound information along with careful and reliable procedures.
- o Maintain each person's recorded earnings accurately and protect the integrity of all information SSA holds.
- o Provide public information for workers and their families to make them aware of their protection under the Social Security programs and the role of Social Security in their financial future.

GOAL 3

To create an environment that ensures a highly skilled, motivated workforce dedicated to meeting the challenges of SSA's public service mission.

Objectives

- o Assure that the workforce has the stability, resources, continuous leadership, training and modern tools to do its job in an efficient, dedicated and caring way.
- o Demonstrate an unwavering commitment to equal opportunity.
- o Recognize and reward employee contributions.
- o Promote strong, two-way communication between managers and other employees.
- o Provide a variety of opportunities for career development.

Agency Commitments

Agency commitments are statements of organizational philosophy that help describe some of the most important characteristics of the SSA environment that we envision existing from now into the future. These commitments have been established at the strategic level because honoring them consistently on an Agency-wide basis is critical to the accomplishment of our mission.

COMMITMENTS TO THE PUBLIC WE SERVE

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

- o SSA is committed to using critical input from the public to improve the ease and convenience of our service delivery. SSA has traditionally provided service based upon an internal assessment of what the public wants and needs. SSA will, on an ongoing basis, gather information so as to provide the public with the level of service it needs. SSA and the public—taxpayers, employers, claimants and beneficiaries—share the responsibility for the accurate payment of benefits. However, SSA will work to increase the ease with which the public can discharge its responsibilities and will establish processes and systems that help minimize the adverse consequences of inappropriate action by the public.

PROGRAM IMPROVEMENTS

- o SSA is committed to taking a proactive role in identifying and working for legislative improvements to the Social Security programs. In our unique position as trustee for the American public as well as point of contact with the government for millions of individuals every year, SSA is well suited to identify the effects that various laws have or could have on the population. It is important that this advantage not be lost by SSA's taking a passive approach to legislative planning. While SSA has not assumed for strategic planning purposes that major programmatic changes will be forthcoming, we are committed to ensuring as best we can that the Social Security programs are responsive to the needs of the population. To support this commitment, SSA will maintain a strong capacity to undertake and support research in the social service arena.

THE HUMAN TOUCH

- o SSA is committed to balancing the use of technological solutions with the need for the "human touch." We need technology to perform our basic functions and to enhance service-delivery methods. However, SSA provides service to people, and we can only provide that service in a caring and compassionate way through the efforts of people. We expect that a balanced "high-tech, high-touch" environment will be the environment of choice well into the 21st century, and we will assure both the public and SSA's employees that the "people" part of SSA's service will not take a back seat to technology.

PERSON-TO-PERSON SKILLS

- o SSA is committed to selecting and developing the type of employee who can demonstrate the concern and respect that SSA has for the public we serve. SSA's goal to serve the public with compassion, courtesy, consideration, efficiency and accuracy implies that the SSA work force will be highly skilled in person-to-person skills. While each employee must exhibit the unique technical skills required in his/her position, the most basic and most valued characteristic of Agency employees will be an ability to demonstrate understanding and support of SSA's service- and quality-oriented culture.

EQUAL TREATMENT

- o SSA is committed to equal treatment of all of our claimants and beneficiaries. SSA will maintain high levels of service for claimants and beneficiaries of the Retirement and Survivors' Insurance (RSI) program while improving the service levels for participants in the Disability Insurance (DI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) programs; we intend to allocate resources in such a way that the long-term effect is the highest-caliber service for all of the people we serve.

COMMUNICATION

- o SSA is committed to ensuring that the Agency can effectively communicate with all individuals we serve. This means that we will ensure that those members of the public who do not speak the English language will be able to conduct their business with SSA. In order to fulfill this commitment, SSA will employ adequate numbers of bilingual or multi-lingual staff and take other steps to ensure appropriate service to these populations.

A BALANCED PERSPECTIVE

- o SSA is committed to ensuring that the costs and benefits considered when making Agency decisions include costs and benefits to the beneficiary and the public. In most businesses, a critical factor in deciding to take action is the relationship of the cost to the benefit of the action being considered. At SSA, we believe strongly that the methods by which our goals will be accomplished and our principles will be supported should be chosen on the basis of how effective the methods are in relation to their cost.

However, SSA is different from an ordinary business. SSA will not define "costs" purely in terms of financial resources. Nor will we limit the costs and benefits of a particular action to those that accrue solely to the government. As we deliberate the costs and benefits of alternative actions, SSA will give weight to the costs that the public might incur (for example, money, burden hours, inconvenience) and the benefits they might derive (for example, sense of security, savings, convenience) when comparing them with the more obvious SSA program and administrative costs and benefits.

SERVICE INTEGRATION

- o SSA is committed to participating in a program of service integration to assist the public in obtaining the social services they need. SSA recognizes that many people have needs beyond the programs that SSA offers. As a component of DHHS, we are committed to using our information and referral infrastructure to support improved, coordinated health and social services for the public.

HELP DISABLED RETURN TO WORK

- o SSA is committed to assisting those disability beneficiaries who seek to re-enter the workforce to do so. SSA recognizes that many recipients of disability benefits could once again become gainfully employed if they received the appropriate rehabilitation services and employment assistance. We intend to test several models designed to assist those beneficiaries who wish to rejoin the workforce.

COMMITMENTS TO EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT AND STEWARDSHIP

DETER ABUSE

- o SSA is committed to improving our ability to detect and deter fraud and abuse. As a custodian of the public trust, SSA is responsible for protecting the integrity of the trust funds, safeguarding the privacy of the individual and maintaining the completeness and accuracy of the information we keep. SSA's emphasis in this area will be to develop systems and processes that minimize the occurrence of unlawful or unscrupulous acts. In addition, SSA will establish improved procedures to detect such acts once they have occurred and to rectify as quickly as possible any adverse consequences they may have had.

CONTROL EXPENSES

- o SSA is committed to monitoring our administrative expenses continually, controlling them vigorously and researching process options regularly to optimize their use. SSA has a strong commitment to prudent spending of taxpayers' funds for SSA's administrative expenses. In addition to monitoring all expenditures, we will regularly conduct research to determine if other public- or private-sector organizations have cost-reduction experience from which we might benefit.

USE PROVEN TECHNOLOGY

- o SSA is committed to using only "proven" technology. The dependence of millions of individuals on our core operations requires the greater stability and reliability that field-proven technologies provide. On the other hand, technology must be current if it is to support both effective and efficient processing. SSA intends to use the most current technology that has been proven in the field. In addition, we will continually test new technologies and proven technologies in new applications to ensure that we keep abreast of important candidates for implementation at SSA.

QUALITY APPROACH

- o SSA is committed to establishing a systematic approach to quality at SSA. Every SSA employee will be continuously involved in measuring the quality of SSA's products and services, comparing the quality against the requirements of the individuals (both internal and external) for whom the products are intended and improving the quality to meet those requirements. This approach requires that our leaders and employees be allowed to effect change responsibly. It also requires that we use both qualitative and quantitative methods of determining what the needs of each affected individual are and how well we are meeting them. In establishing such an approach, up-front planning and analyzing efforts may result in a heavy resource expenditure earlier than we are used to in the cycle of improvement initiatives. But we are convinced that the overall outcome of our efforts will measurably increase benefits to both the government and the public, and we are prepared to expend those efforts to produce a quality product.

CHANGE MANAGEMENT

- o SSA is committed to effective change management. Change has been and will continue to be a hallmark of this Agency, if not in the programs, then in the way we carry them out. SSA recognizes the need to manage change of all types and at all levels. This means that we will make major changes in SSA policies and practices only after careful planning and successful piloting and testing. As far as possible, the impact of planned change will be fully communicated to the individuals, either employees or members of the public, who will be affected by the change, and all necessary preparation will be completed before the change is attempted.

COMMITMENTS TO SSA EMPLOYEES

EMPLOYEE INPUT

- o SSA is committed to using critical input from our employees and their officially-recognized representatives on issues that have an impact on their individual and collective well-being. SSA recognizes that, in order for the best possible decisions to be made about employees' well-being, including how, when and where they perform their work, the employees themselves must have the opportunity to express their views on the impact of those decisions. Consequently, the views of SSA's employees and their representatives will be sought.

EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT

- o SSA is committed to supporting and encouraging employee training and development at all grade and occupational levels. SSA's employees are the single most important resource of the Agency. SSA will ensure that employees are properly trained and provided with suitable opportunities for personal and professional development during the employees' tenure with SSA. The full development and utilization of employees' knowledge, skills and abilities require a rededication to the determination of individual training needs, the availability of appropriate training, retraining and development programs and the regular evaluation of the effectiveness of these programs.

POSITIVE WORK ENVIRONMENT

- o SSA is committed to establishing and enforcing standards of office habitability for employees. SSA employees work in a wide variety of geographical and physical settings nationwide; the buildings we occupy range in size, age, location and ownership. The only "constant" is the Agency's assurance that employees will have a safe and hospitable work environment that permits us to conduct SSA business efficiently and professionally. SSA is especially sensitive to correcting adverse health and safety conditions in our facilities when they are identified. However, the habitability standards will also provide that changes in office environment needed because of a change in policies or processes (e.g., the automation of manual systems) are made at the time the other change is implemented.

TEAMWORK

- o SSA is committed to fostering a participative management style that emphasizes the importance of human relations in achieving goals. SSA's employees are capable, willing individuals whose contributions as integral members of the SSA community are vital to the success of their individual components and the Agency as a whole. SSA must maximize the contribution of all members of the staff by tapping the creative participation of employees in determining and achieving component objectives. Through this act of participation, SSA will assure the marriage of individual goals with those of the organization.

Service-Delivery Goals and Objectives

SSA has identified seven strategic-level service-delivery goals for the Agency. The goals, together with their supporting objectives, define the levels of service that we are striving to provide to the American public. Along with the other parts of the planning framework, the service-delivery goals and objectives are supported by the various changes anticipated in the Agency vision (Chapter 4): once we have implemented the expected program, process and technology changes, with the effectiveness and productivity improvements they imply, SSA will be able to provide the level of service envisioned in the Agency Strategic Plan (ASP). In concert with the changes anticipated in the vision, the service-delivery goals and objectives provide guidance to the Agency in identifying the specific initiatives we will wish to undertake during the planning period.

It is very difficult to quantify "good" service; it is especially so when trying to determine challenging but achievable goals for 10 to 15 years into the future. In the pages that follow, we present a set of goals for service delivery that actually delineate what we consider "service" in the Agency. The objectives, on the other hand, indicate the areas of emphasis that we consider most basic to each of the goals. But they are not all-inclusive, and we expect that future refinements of the strategic plan will result in some changes in emphasis.

In developing service goals and objectives, there are some basic precepts that guide us:

- o People should not have to wait for Social Security numbers—a job might be at stake.
- o We must maintain highly accurate earnings records—otherwise, benefits can be lost or delayed.
- o We must make entitlement decisions quickly—people are depending on us and may be enduring hardships while they wait.
- o We must pay people the right amount—it is what they are due under the law, and it may be all many of them have.
- o We should serve people promptly and with compassion—crowded waiting rooms and an inability to reach us by telephone can result in unmet needs.
- o We need to ensure that all who are eligible for benefits are aware of their eligibility and can take advantage of it if they choose—difficulty in this regard often affects those most in need.
- o We must protect our records from intrusion and protect taxpayer dollars—individuals' privacy and the public's trust are at stake.

SSA expects to deliver a program that meets the needs of a changing society, and we want to achieve a high level of public confidence in the ability of our programs to do so. Together, these aims make up our ultimate goal of service to the public.

Both the goals and objectives, as written, imply that we are striving for perfection in our delivery of service to the public. This is true. However, we recognize that performance at the "100% level" will be difficult to achieve under any circumstance, so we intend to include more specificity when we develop the tactical, or shorter-term, goals and objectives that will mark attainable interim progress points. For example, for the service-delivery objective that now reads, "Establish correct initial payment amounts, and assure the payment accuracy of postentitlement transactions," a tactical-level objective might be established to read: "By the year 2000, achieve 99.6 percent dollar accuracy on initial title II payment amounts and postentitlement payment changes."

Because the goals and objectives outlined in this section directly support the mission of the Agency as well as the broader Agency goals and objectives, many Agency activities are already directed toward accomplishing them. Indeed, we continuously measure Agency performance related to these goals and have abundant information that has allowed us to gauge our success in the past at meeting the service needs of the public. For example, while we are just now developing a measure of the dollar accuracy related to postentitlement transactions, we have, in the past, measured compliance with the postentitlement processing procedures.

Nevertheless, we recognize that we do not currently have in place all the measurement systems we need to provide us a full picture of how successful we are in reaching our goals. SSA had earlier identified certain indicators, such as postentitlement payment accuracy, for which performance measurement systems are in various stages of development, and we have identified, through the very process of defining strategic goals and objectives, other indicators of performance that we must use as a basis for measurement. SSA is committed to developing new measurement systems for any situation where the establishment of current levels of service and monitoring of progress require us to do so. One of our near-term priorities is to implement such systems.

Finally, it is important to recognize that failure to achieve the goals and objectives we have established will have real consequences for our beneficiaries, the trust funds, the Agency, and the public at large. We attempt to provide some insights into these very real consequences.

ISSUE SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBERS PROPERLY

SERVICE-DELIVERY GOAL

The Social Security Administration will establish a Social Security number (SSN) for an individual when needed and maintain the accuracy and integrity of the number.

SUPPORTING SERVICE-DELIVERY OBJECTIVES

- o Within 24 hours of receiving appropriate documentation, be able to orally advise any individual of his/her number; and, issue an original or replacement card within 5 days¹ of receiving all necessary documentation.

Current level of service:

- 98% of applicants can be notified of their SSNs within 24 hours.
- SSA issues Social Security cards to 98% of applicants within 5 days.

- o Issue SSN cards accurately.

Current level of service:

- 99.8% of all SSNs are assigned correctly.

- o Correct SSN problems within 30 days of request.

Current level of service:

- The time required to correct SSN problems is not currently measured.

¹ Wherever the term "days" is used in this section, it refers to "calendar days" unless otherwise noted.

CONSEQUENCES

It is extremely important to the people who need a Social Security number or card that they get what they need and get it promptly. Incorrect cards and delays in issuing cards cause problems for both the number holder and SSA. Delay may result in difficulty in obtaining employment or needed social services. Over 1 million new numbers are assigned each year to people over age 16, many of whom have employment, taxpayer, or social service needs. Delays cause people to call or visit Social Security offices, and all such calls and visits that could have been avoided cost the Agency resources. For example, each 1% of the individuals seeking new and replacement cards who make contact with SSA more than once generate 197,000 inquiries, resulting in a cost to the taxpayer of \$500,000².

Incorrect numbers also cost the Agency resources. For each 0.1% of error, 19,700 SSNs would be incorrectly assigned, requiring a future investment of \$1,000,000 to correct the errors, including the work involved in unscrambling people's earnings records. Misassigned numbers also present the potential for payment loss or delay.

Misassigned SSNs are a potential source of problems well beyond their effects on the number holders' Social Security records, since SSNs are used extensively by other organizations. SSNs are used by IRS, the States and the financial community as taxpayer-identification numbers; by States for motor-vehicle licenses and registration; by law-enforcement agencies in criminal-records maintenance; by credit agencies for record maintenance and credit approval; and by a broad range of public and private benefit programs for personal identification. If the same SSN is incorrectly assigned to two people, tax-return processing and refunds can be delayed; taxes can be assessed to the wrong individual; one person can be denied a license or falsely arrested because of the second person's actions; credit may be denied or collection action taken against the wrong individual; and benefits may be denied or reduced under entitlement programs. Erroneous assignment of a second SSN to persons who already have one may prevent the number holders from being able to function in any of the above areas if those programs do not recognize them equally under both SSNs. Conversely, the number holders may use one SSN to hide activity under the other in order to evade legal obligations or to establish entitlement to something for which they are not otherwise eligible. In addition, misassigned numbers can result in failed systems matches, which in turn result in undetected overpayments or underpayments. These cost the taxpayers money, not only from the Social Security trust funds but from other government programs as well.

Significant delays, misassignment of numbers or failure to correct problems promptly can result in negative public reaction. People have the right to expect prompt and accurate service from SSA. If the Agency fails to provide this, its reputation and that of government service in general is tarnished.

²Wherever dollar amounts are presented in this section, they reflect the most current figures available at the time of publication.

MAINTAIN EARNINGS RECORDS PROPERLY

SERVICE-DELIVERY GOAL

The Social Security Administration will maintain each person's earnings record so that it is current and accurate.

SUPPORTING SERVICE-DELIVERY OBJECTIVES

- o Post earnings reports accurately.

Current level of service:

- 99.2% of reported earnings are posted accurately to the Summary Earnings Record

- o Within 6 months following the close of a tax year, post annual wage reports received.

Current level of service:

- 70% of reported earnings are posted within 6 months of the end of the tax year.

- o Within 30 days of receipt, resolve earnings corrections issues.

Current level of service:

- The time required to resolve earnings corrections issues is not presently measured.

CONSEQUENCES

The records of people's earnings that SSA maintains are the basis for determining the benefits they will receive later in life. Earnings records are used to determine whether a person has sufficient coverage to qualify for benefits as well as what the amount of those benefits should be. Therefore, it is critical that those records be accurate, complete and up-to-date.

Because keeping these records is such a huge job, even a small percentage of error can have an impact on thousands of people. For each 0.1% of error, 270,000 earnings items would be posted incorrectly. These errors can result in:

- o entitled individuals' being denied benefits or being paid an incorrect amount.
- o workers' receiving incorrect benefit estimates.
- o the trust funds' not receiving the proper amount of revenues.
- o the Agency's spending approximately \$500,000 to correct every 0.1% of wage errors in addition to spending an average of \$265 for each case to correct earnings posted to the wrong record.

Delay in processing people's annual earnings is also costly. For each 1.0% of wage reports not posted, 2 million earnings items would remain unavailable for use in establishing benefit amounts both for people claiming benefits and for those requesting benefit estimates.

If the delay causes SSA to take more than 6 months to post earnings, our ability to carry out our other responsibilities—such as reappraising people's earnings to find out if their benefits should be higher and to identify people who are incorrectly receiving benefits—is compromised. These situations are costly to the people involved as well as to the trust funds.

SSA conducts earnings-reappraisal operations throughout the year. If posting delays cause the earnings to be excluded from review when the reappraisals are first conducted, each 1.0% of earnings items excluded means that 2 million earnings items would not be evaluated for another 7 months. This increases the costs to people and losses to the trust funds.

Each year, the Agency has to compute the amount of earnings that will be subject to Federal Insurance Contributions Act (FICA) taxes the next year. This is done on the basis of the average wages for the prior year. For each 1.0% of wage reports not processed by the beginning of the next fiscal year (October 1), 2 million earnings items would be excluded from the computation of average wages. Since the computed amount determines the taxable wage base and other program amounts for the next calendar year, a computation that is in error due to unposted earnings can be very costly. For example, a reduction of 1% in processing completeness would generally result in the following consequences:

- o A \$300 understatement of the Social Security taxable wage base, causing the Social Security trust funds to lose \$350 million of FICA/Self Employment Contributions Act revenues annually.
- o A \$120 understatement of the annual retirement-test exempt amounts, causing beneficiaries to lose \$60 million in benefits.
- o A reduction in the benefit formula used in computing individual and family benefits, causing beneficiaries to lose \$5 million in benefit payments annually.
- o A reduction of 0.36% in the calculated average annual wage increase, causing beneficiaries to lose \$8 million in benefits annually due to inaccurate indexing of their earnings histories (performed as part of calculating benefit amounts).

PAY BENEFITS CORRECTLY

SERVICE-DELIVERY GOAL

The Social Security Administration will pay benefits correctly.

SUPPORTING SERVICE-DELIVERY OBJECTIVES

- o Establish correct initial-payment amounts and assure the payment accuracy of postentitlement (PE) transactions.

Current level of service - title II:

- The initial-claims dollar-accuracy rate³ is 99.81%.
- The postentitlement dollar-accuracy rate is not presently measured.
- The dollar-accuracy rate for initial claims and postentitlement combined is not presently measured.

Current level of service - title XVI:

- The dollar-accuracy rate for initial claims and field-office-processed redeterminations combined is 96.8%.
- The dollar-accuracy rate for other postentitlement actions is not presently measured.

- o Make accurate decisions on medical eligibility for disability benefits.

Current level of service:

- The accuracy rates of disability decisions (combined allowances and denials) at the initial, reconsideration and continuing disability review levels are 94.3%, 92.7% and 96.4%, respectively.

- o Ensure acceptable performance by all representative payees.

Current level of service:

- The level of unacceptable performance by all representative payees is not presently measured. However, a recent study of payees other than parent/spouse found 97.9% of them to be performing at an acceptable level.

³ The "dollar accuracy" percentages used in this section represent the amount of dollars correctly paid throughout the life of a claim, not just the accuracy of the initial payment made. The overpayment and underpayment dollars implied by the accuracy figures are also for the life of those claims. These accuracy rates do not reflect mispayments resulting from incorrect medical decisions.

CONSEQUENCES

Making sure that people get the right amount of benefits is one of the most important responsibilities of the Agency. Wrong amounts, even small errors, in a person's monthly benefit can have a severe negative effect on the individual and can cost the American taxpayers tens of millions of dollars.

For each 0.1% dollar error in Retirement, Survivors and Disability Insurance (RSDI) claims and payment changes, approximately \$210 million in error would be introduced, about two-thirds of which would involve people getting less than they should.

About half of the dollar error involving people getting more than they should goes undetected, costing \$35 million in unrecovered benefits and \$3.8 million (100 workyears) to find and collect the detected overpayments.

For each 0.1% of dollar error in Supplemental Security Income (SSI) claims and payment changes, approximately \$100 million in error would be introduced, about one-fifth of which would involve people getting less than they should.

About one-third of the dollar error involving people getting more than they should goes undetected, costing \$25 million; and collecting the detected overpayments costs the Agency \$5.0 million (over 100 workyears).

PAY BENEFITS WHEN DUE

SERVICE-DELIVERY GOAL

The Social Security Administration will ensure that decisions about entitlement are made in a timely manner; that payment of those benefits will be at the earliest point due; and that timely delivery of payments will continue.

SUPPORTING SERVICE-DELIVERY OBJECTIVES

- o Initial RSI and SSI-aged payments will be made at the earliest point due or, if later, no more than 15 days after filing for benefits.

Current level of service:

- In RSI cases, the percentage of cases in which payment is made within 15 days of filing is not presently measured, but the current average time from filing to payment is 17.0 days.
- In SSI-aged cases, 52.6% of payments are made within 15 days of filing for benefits; 94.8% are made within 60 days.

- o Initial disability claims will have the disability decision made and initial payment or denial notice issued as follows:

- title II: before the end of the sixth month after onset of disability (title II) or within 60 days of filing for benefits, whichever is later.
- title XVI: within 60 days after filing for benefits*

Current level of service:

- In title II disability cases, the percentage of cases in which payment is made within 6 months of onset or 60 days of filing is not presently measured, but the current average processing time is 87.6 days. Eighteen percent of allowed cases are entitled during the statutory waiting period.
- In title XVI disability cases, 28.7% of payments are made within 60 days; 49.8% are made within 90 days.
- Currently, SSA receives approximately 2.2 million new disability claims each year. SSA takes over 6 months to make a decision to award benefits on over 160,000 of these claims; and of these, over 120,000 require more than a year for us to make the initial decision to award benefits.

- o Regular continuing payments will be made on the scheduled delivery date, and, if a payment is not received, a replacement payment will be issued within 72 hours after an allegation of nonreceipt is filed.

*In the Disability Insurance program under title II, no benefits can be paid during a 5-month "waiting" period after onset of disability. Under title XVI, there is no comparable "waiting" period.

Current level of service:

- 99.9% of regular continuing payments are made on the scheduled delivery date.
- In nonreceipt situations, payments are replaced in title II cases in 20 - 28 days; title XVI payments are replaced in 3 - 5 days.
- o Denied claims will have a decision made and a notice sent within 60 days for reconsideration, 120 days for hearings, and 90 days for Appeals Council review, after the filing of a reconsideration, hearing or review request.

Current level of service:

- The number of reconsideration decisions made within 60 days of filing is not presently measured. The current average processing time is 70.2 days for title II decisions. Title XVI processing time is not available.
- The number of hearings decisions made within 120 days is not presently measured; however, percentages of cases decided within other timeframes range from 1.7% of cases within 50 days to 93.8% within 400 days.
- The current average processing time for hearings decisions in title II cases is 223 days; in title XVI, it is 216 days.
- The current average processing time for Appeals Council decisions is 255 days.

CONSEQUENCES

When people do not get the benefits they deserve at the time they need them, the impact can be devastating. For 1.4 million of the people awarded RSDI benefits each year, the benefit payment represents more than 50% of their income. For 600,000 of these people, the benefit represents more than 90% of their income. For recipients of SSI, a needs-based program, the impact of delay is even worse. For 475,000 of the people awarded benefits each year, the benefit represents more than 50% of income; and for over 230,000 of those, it represents more than 90% of income.

Delays often result in the need for "special" handling (i.e., expedited processing) outside of normal workflows. This requires the Agency to spend additional resources. To "specially handle" 100,000 cases yearly would add \$3 million to the processing costs for these actions. Moreover, if substantial numbers of cases have to receive special handling, additional delays would begin to be experienced in cases that do not receive special handling; this has a spiralling effect on processing and resources. And, of course, delays generate inquiries, which would cost the Agency resources to handle. If 10% of new claims are delayed and result in additional inquiries, the additional 587,000 actions would cost over \$1.3 million to process.

Delays when a person is appealing an adverse decision can also be devastating. To wait months or even a year to get a decision can be frustrating and debilitating to the people we serve. Finally, delays in starting benefits, replacing lost benefits and reaching a final decision can all lead to a loss of public confidence in the Agency and in government service in general.

PROVIDE PROMPT, COURTEOUS SERVICE

SERVICE-DELIVERY GOAL

The Social Security Administration will uniformly provide all members of the public with prompt, responsive and courteous service.

SUPPORTING SERVICE-DELIVERY OBJECTIVES

- o Waiting time in a field office will not exceed 15 minutes for people with an appointment nor 30 minutes for those without an appointment.

Current level of service:

- 87.4% of visitors with appointments are seen within 15 minutes.
- 82.3% of visitors without appointments are seen within 30 minutes.
- 4.7% of visitors wait more than 60 minutes.

- o Individuals calling the national telephone number will be served within 24 hours of their initial call. SSA will handle such calls accurately.

Current level of service:

- SSA currently measures two consequences of the accuracy of the information it provides to the public: inconvenience and payment inaccuracy. The information SSA provides leads to correct payment in 97.2% of total cases. In 92.9% of cases, SSA prevents inconvenience to the public resulting from incorrect information.
- Using "unique telephone number" to define "caller," we have determined that 92.0% of callers are able to access the 800 number system within 24 hours of their first call.

- o Inquiries or complaints from an individual member of the public will receive a substantive response within 15 calendar days of receipt.

Current level of service:

- Inquiries processed by the Office of Public Inquiries have an average processing time of 12.5 days. However, information on processing time in SSA's processing centers, field offices and the Office of Hearings and Appeals will have to be determined before an overall Agency response time for public inquiries can be established.

- o The public will receive courteous service when dealing with SSA.

Current level of service:

- According to the 1990 Client Satisfaction Survey, 85% of the public stated that they received courteous service when dealing with SSA. The highest level reached in these surveys was 93% in 1988.

CONSEQUENCES

SSA handles about 25 million in-office visitors annually. If we require 1% of those visitors to wait beyond the 30-minute outer limit, we will have inconvenienced 250,000 members of the public. If a field office reception area is full of people waiting for service, the field office staff members feel increased stress and may not devote the additional time necessary to provide people with a full understanding of their rights and responsibilities and availability of other support services.

SSA also receives over 60 million calls annually to the national 800 telephone number. If only 1.0% of those callers receive information that leads to inaccurate benefit payments or other service failure, 600,000 people would be affected. In addition, for each 1% of individuals who fail to make phone contact with SSA within 24 hours of their first attempt, 480,000 additional calls or visits to the field office could result. Every transaction processed during a visit to a field office costs 75% more than if that same transaction were processed over the phone.

Written correspondence with the public must also receive attention. When SSA fails to respond in a timely manner to written public inquiries, the result is often public frustration, requests for Congressional intercession and additional inquiries to SSA. Responding to the current inquiry workload in the field costs SSA about \$21.3 million annually (over 900 workyears).

Finally, discourteous service damages the reputation of both the Agency and the government in general. Moreover, being courteous is the right thing to do.

INFORM THE PUBLIC OF THEIR RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

SERVICE-DELIVERY GOAL

The Social Security Administration will assure that members of the public are fully informed about the Agency's programs, fully informed of their reporting responsibilities under those programs, and appropriately referred to related social service programs.

SUPPORTING SERVICE-DELIVERY OBJECTIVES

- o Fully inform the public about the programs administered by SSA, including their potential benefits under the programs and the role of the programs in both the economy and the social fabric of the nation.

Current Level of Service

-- SSA does not currently measure the awareness of the public.

- o Achieve full participation in SSA's programs by members of the eligible public who desire to participate.

Current Level of Service

-- SSA does not presently measure participation rates.

- o Make appropriate referrals to related social service programs to meet the needs of the individual.

Current Level of Service

-- SSA does not presently measure the incidence or appropriateness of referrals made by all of our employees.

- o Ensure public compliance with reporting requirements.

Current Level of Service

-- We do not currently measure in all of our systems the instances of non-reporting or incorrect reporting by the public.

- o Ensure that information mailed to the public is understandable.

Current Level of Service

-- According to the 1990 Client Satisfaction Survey, 63% of the individuals who receive mail from SSA find it easy or very easy to understand.

CONSEQUENCES

The success of the Social Security programs is dependent upon the public's willingness to support them. Public understanding of the Social Security programs and their importance to society is basic to ensuring that the programs continue to address the social needs they were designed to address. Understanding the types of circumstances in which benefits are payable and having a general sense of benefit levels provide a context for people to plan for retirement financing and other insurance and income-supplement needs.

A critical function of SSA is to make every effort to see that people are informed of their eligibility for the benefits we administer. Not knowing that benefits are available can be devastating to the lives and well-being of the people involved.

For every 1000 individuals who are not receiving RSDI benefits but who are eligible and would like to be receiving such benefits, there would be \$6 million in benefits not being paid annually. For every 1000 individuals who are not receiving SSI payments but who are eligible and would like to be receiving such benefits, there would be about \$2 million in payments not being made annually.

The services potentially available to the population SSA serves come from a wide variety of sources. SSA has long held that referral to benefits from related programs is a critical part of the Agency mission. If SSA does not refer people appropriately to agencies such as those that provide emergency assistance, Aid to Families with Dependent Children, Medicaid and local support services, the personal consequences can be dire. We currently refer about 250,000 people yearly to agencies that provide emergency assistance.

SSA also has an obligation to make sure that people are aware of their responsibilities to tell the Agency when certain events occur that could have an impact on their benefits. If SSA is to maintain the integrity of the funds that support our programs and if we are to retain public confidence, we must ensure compliance with existing statutes. Over \$500 million in overpayments and underpayments are currently being attributed to reporting failures.

The Agency also has a responsibility to explain clearly the actions that we take that have an impact on people's benefits. Each year SSA receives about 3 million written, telephone or in-office inquiries about notices that involve payment changes. For every 1.0% reduction in these, savings to SSA would be over \$100,000. Furthermore, some 30,000 fewer members of the public would be required to ask for assistance to understand the action being taken in their case.

ENSURE INTEGRITY OF PAYMENTS AND RECORDS

SERVICE-DELIVERY GOAL

The Social Security Administration will protect the public's investment in the Social Security programs and safeguard the information on individuals in our records systems.

SUPPORTING SERVICE-DELIVERY OBJECTIVES

- o Carry out overall program stewardship responsibilities to achieve:
 - oo Accuracy of trust fund outlays for all benefit payments for the RSI program.
Current level of service:
 - Dollar accuracy¹ for combined overpayments and underpayments is 99.6% in the RSI program.
 - oo Accuracy of general fund outlays for all benefit payments for the SSI program.
Current level of service:
 - Dollar accuracy for combined overpayments and underpayments is 95.5% when the non-medical aspects of SSI cases are reviewed. Dollar accuracy that would result from a review of the medical aspects of SSI cases is not presently measured.
 - oo Accuracy of trust fund outlays for all benefit payments for the DI program.
Current level of service:
 - SSA does not presently measure the rate of dollar accuracy in the DI program.
- o Maintain and regularly review an overall security program that permits no security breaches.
Current level of service:
 - We do not currently have a comprehensive measure of security breaches.

¹The dollar accuracy percentages cited for this service-delivery goal relate to the accuracy of payment for the entire universe of individuals currently being paid, not just the accuracy of current claims and postentitlement transactions. These stewardship numbers should not be confused with the payment accuracy rates related to the "Pay Benefits Correctly" goal and objectives discussed on pages 28 and 29, which deal with current transactions only.

CONSEQUENCES

The Agency is charged with ensuring the accuracy of trust fund outlays for all benefits paid under the various programs we administer, a responsibility known as "stewardship." Seemingly low error rates can and do translate into consequences of a financial nature that further undermine public trust.

In the RSI program, for example, we estimate that just a 0.1% dollar error in the total universe represents about \$220 million in total mispayments. About half of all of this error translates into overpayments while the other half results in underpayments.

Likewise, each 0.1% dollar error in the SSI universe would represent about \$14.4 million in mispayments. About three-fourths of all nonmedical-universe error is overpayment and one-fourth is underpayment.

Lastly, each 0.1% dollar error in the DI universe would represent about \$24 million in total dollar error. The distribution of error between overpayments and underpayments cannot be estimated until a stewardship review is available.

Needless to say, SSA's stewardship role is vital to the maintenance of public trust and confidence. It is also vital in terms of ensuring accurate records and payments to our beneficiaries.

As another way of meeting our goal to protect and maintain the American people's investment in the Social Security trust funds and instill public confidence in the Social Security programs, we consider it necessary to secure the information we maintain about individuals. The misuse or unlawful disclosure of privileged information violates individual privacy rights and needlessly subjects the Agency to civil suits. Moreover, such actions erode the public's confidence in our ability to maintain secure systems.

Chapter 4: A Vision Of SSA: As We Enter The 21st Century

This section, "A Vision of SSA," portrays how the organization will evolve. It provides an overview of how our work will be accomplished, of how we will deal with each other and the public we serve. In doing so, it suggests the programs, processes and systems that will need to be in place for us to accomplish the service-delivery goals of the Agency and to support the philosophy expressed in the commitments the Agency has made. The vision does not, however, describe the detailed projects and initiatives that will be required to construct it. Those will be determined during later, lower-level planning stages, and full commitment of resources to any project or initiative will only be undertaken after careful analyses and engineering have been completed.

In the vision that follows, we describe SSA as we believe we could be positioned to serve the public of the future.

SERVICE DELIVERY

CHOICE OF SERVICE METHOD

As we move into the 21st century, SSA will structure service-delivery options that will allow the Agency to meet our established service-level objectives while permitting people to choose the contact method that meets their needs. However, SSA expects to deliver service in two primary ways: by telephone and in person at community-based field offices. In a community-based field office, SSA will provide traditional services to the public in a variety of familiar and new ways and will supplement these services by supporting the initiatives of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) related to improved, coordinated health and social services for the public.

Both of these fundamental ways of doing business will be modified and expanded to broaden the total service spectrum. Workload and service-needs analysis will determine what activities are best handled by each means of contacting SSA. Technology enhancements will allow SSA to provide increasingly better and more accurate service both by telephone and personal contact. We will also take advantage of home computer and television enhancements to expand the ways we deal with the public. And we will increase as necessary our practice of taking our services to those who, due to personal circumstances, cannot conduct their business with us by phone, in an SSA office, or by some other method.

TELEPHONE PREFERENCE

Recent surveys indicate that the vast majority of the public will prefer to use the telephone to contact SSA in the future. The overwhelming response to SSA's national-telephone-number service has made it clear that a majority of the people SSA serves are already exercising this option. Similarly, the popularity of teleclaim

filing--nearly 50 percent of all RSI claims as the 1990s begin--is indicative of a growing public comfort with handling a major transaction primarily by phone. Thus, we will continue to improve and expand our telephone service.

The trend toward greater public use of telephone service is expected to shift the focus of the community office to dealing primarily with the more complex retirement and survivors situations, as well as those involving people with disabilities and SSI recipients. Individuals who need or want in-person service will be able to go to their community-based office and get that service.

OFFICE PLACEMENT

Office placement will reflect the service needs of the community as population shifts and changes in communications and transportation services occur. As the demographics of the population change, SSA will have to shift the locations of some field offices to provide the required level of service.

CONSISTENT SERVICE

SSA will have community-based offices in a range of operating environments. For example, some offices will be located as they are today in areas where Federal salary levels are less competitive, security is a larger concern and the work is more stressful, difficult and time-consuming. SSA will take steps to ensure that the necessary complement of resources is available to provide consistent service across all of our community-based offices.

OUTREACH

SSA will increase our efforts to ensure that people who are eligible for benefits are aware of them and are offered the opportunity to apply for them. Doing so will mean that SSA will enhance and augment our traditional outreach methods, including establishing networks with community-based agencies and service providers to reach out to potentially eligible persons. Those agencies/providers will be knowledgeable in program rules, particularly SSI, and will help applicants overcome barriers to eligibility through collaborative working arrangements.

SPECIAL COMMUNICATIONS NEEDS

We will improve our means of communicating with hearing-impaired and visually impaired individuals and our ability to process the increasing volume of transactions with individuals who need to conduct business in a language other than English. In community offices, staffing policies will be such that those languages common in the community are spoken by representative numbers of community-office personnel.

HANDLE PEAK WORKLOADS

The Agency will be configured and staffed so that personnel are available to meet peak demands for telephone service and can then return to other duties during non-peak periods. Expanding the base of personnel who interact with the public will have the meritorious effect of enriching the employee's scope of work so that job responsibilities are more appealing and fulfilling.

PEOPLE SKILLS

SSA's employees who are hired in the 1990s for personal-contact work will be selected for their interpersonal skills as well as the technical competence needed to administer SSA's programs. No matter how SSA delivers service, our employees must have the skill to deal with diverse types of people in a caring, compassionate and competent fashion.

MAIL CONTACT

Though mail will not be a primary mode of contact for most of the public, we will continue to initiate contact with the public by mail as appropriate. For example, large-volume contacts, such as representative payee accountings, annual reports and other non-time-sensitive contacts will continue to be handled by mail. SSA will be improving all notices and other correspondence we initiate to ensure that the public fully understands what we send them. And, of course, at any time that the public finds it more convenient or more efficient to use the mail, they will find SSA receptive and responsive to that means of communication.

IMPROVE DISABILITY PROCESS

SSA plans to streamline the disability application process both to reduce the time in which decisions are made and to promote consistency and accuracy in the decisionmaking process. We intend to develop ways such as using disability specialists to obtain more complete information about the claimant's condition and promote the quality of medical evidence. We also will utilize practices that enhance the claimant's understanding of and participation in the decisionmaking process.

RETURN TO WORK

In the early 1990s, SSA expects to test several models of assisting people with disabilities to re-enter the workforce. The primary purpose of these tests will be to determine in which ways SSA can best help ensure that the disability beneficiary receives the rehabilitation services and employment assistance necessary to gain employment. We will also be looking at how to create better incentives to work and how to ensure that beneficiaries are aware of what the incentives can do for them.

IMPROVE APPEALS PROCESS

SSA's administrative review system is the largest appeals process in the world. Clearly, its impact on the lives of SSA claimants dictates a need for an efficient, fair and speedy process. On the program side, we will be implementing procedural changes to facilitate preparation for hearings and to improve the quality of our decisions and their associated documentation.

IMPROVE PAYMENT PROCESS

SSA expects the year 2005 to see us making payments primarily through electronic funds transfer. This will increase the timeliness of service relating to payments and enhance processing efficiency. It will also improve the reliability of payment by reducing the threat of lost or stolen paper checks, and it will enhance the safety of beneficiaries by reducing the possibility of theft. SSA will continue to evaluate other changes to the payment process, such as check cycling, to ensure convenience for the public and economy for the government.

By working closely with State governments, SSA will refine and accelerate the processes whereby parents can obtain Social Security numbers (SSN) for their newborn children through the State birth-certificate-issuance process.

COLLOCATE SERVICES

We will be looking at which other State and Federal services, particularly those funded by the DHHS, should be available in SSA offices. We will strengthen our information and referral capacity and, where needed, collocate appropriate service-agency personnel with SSA to assist claimants and beneficiaries to meet more of their needs. This will reduce the burden on claimants and beneficiaries by giving them "one-stop" service where possible without requiring them to travel from agency to agency.

USE VOLUNTEERS

The Agency will be testing more creative ways of protecting a very vulnerable population, those incapable of handling their own benefit payments. The testing will lead to actions designed to reduce the misuse of benefit payments. We expect to use concerned volunteers from the community who will willingly shoulder the responsibility of ensuring that the benefit payments to this vulnerable population are appropriately spent. We also intend to develop tightened accounting processes, thus moving the Agency to a more responsible role in protecting beneficiaries against improper use of their benefits.

OTHER IMPROVED SERVICE

People other than applicants who interact with SSA--for example, employers, pre-retirees and other agencies seeking verification of information--will see their service substantially improved. Employers, accounting services and tax preparers will be provided formats and software packages that permit them to transmit earnings information to the Internal Revenue Service/SSA electronically. SSA, in turn, will accept electronic transmissions in a way that protects the integrity of Agency records while encouraging electronic reporting and minimizing the need for paper processing by both the employer and SSA.

EXPANDED DATA EXCHANGES

Because the information contained in SSA's records is important to the administration of many other programs, the exchange of data with other authorized Federal and State agencies will be continually expanded and improved during the 1990s. While the confidentiality of SSA's information will be carefully protected, agencies will find their access to that information much faster and more successful as the result of improved wire-to-wire communications. Likewise, SSA expects to obtain improved access to appropriate data in the data bases of States and other agencies. For example, in many States, we expect to be able to verify births, deaths and marriages simply by accessing the appropriate information electronically. Where this can be done, the burden of supplying proof of age, death or marriage will be lifted from many of our claimants for benefits. Early access to this kind of information should also help us reduce the volume of incorrect payments currently caused by late or missing reports by beneficiaries.

IMPROVE RESEARCH

SSA recognizes that the national social insurance and human services communities have a critical need for information if they are to continue to develop meaningful social programs. We intend to have the necessary social research capacity to provide the tools and analyses that they require. In doing so, we will reinforce our standing as a leader in the social research arena.

TECHNOLOGY

MODERNIZED PROCESSES

SSA must continue to exploit technology if we are to deal with the pressures of growing workloads and service demands. During the 1990s we will continue to improve and maintain our automated systems and processes. We will continue to modernize the title II and title XVI claims and postentitlement systems as well as the enumeration and earnings systems. And we will make major strides in modernizing the entire disability process, including the appeals process.

SSA will establish a cooperative processing architecture to optimize distribution of processing activities across various computing platforms (mainframe/mini/server/workstation). SSA will take our first significant step toward moving to a cooperative processing mode for programmatic applications when we fully modernize the SSI system. The distributed SSI system will provide the experience that will help us assess how to reshape the rest of SSA's systems.

INTELLIGENT WORKSTATIONS

SSA's service-delivery demands will lead to the installation of intelligent workstations for key positions in the Agency and the State Disability Determination Services (DDS). These user-friendly workstations will support nearly all functions of the Agency, including the work performed by our public-contact workers. A telecommunications network will connect all parts of SSA, allowing authorized employees access to any relevant beneficiary or claimant data from any workstation in the system. Besides helping us improve the effectiveness and efficiency of operations, the workstations will greatly enhance our ability to meet the ongoing training needs of our employees.

PROTECT RECORDS AND PROCESSES

Our efforts to ensure full backup and recovery capacity for our mainframe-based computer center will continue during the 1990s and be completed by the early years of the 21st century. In the 1990s, the Agency expects to be capable of processing most critical workloads in the event of a disaster. This includes the ability to maintain the critical online information processing environment in the event of a shutdown of the main computer center. As we develop distributed-processing systems, we will include backup-and-recovery strategies in the systems design to reduce exposure to risk and increase our ability to process our full critical workload in the event of an emergency.

DECISION SUPPORT

Our support systems will have a high degree of imbedded intelligence, mostly using sophisticated decision-support logic. During the 1990s we expect to invest significantly in expert systems to bring greater consistency into our decisionmaking processes and to increase the accuracy with which we serve the public. Employees who process many of our programs' more complex transactions will be assisted by computer programs that capture the knowledge of SSA's program experts, software prompts that guide the employee through a logical pattern of questions and computer workstations with a range of intelligent capabilities. These will allow employees to provide faster, more accurate and more consistent service across a wide range of subject matter.

REPLACE PAPER RECORDS

We will build an advanced office information system into SSA's systems architecture to support document creation and dissemination, image storage and retrieval, person-to-person communications and decision-support systems. Electronic filing systems with document replication capability are expected to become the traditional way of retaining records in SSA. We will need to retain far fewer documents in paper form, and most future transactions will not require the use of a paper folder.

BETTER MANAGEMENT INFORMATION

Built into our advanced systems will be an enhanced management information capability that will allow the Agency to facilitate workload management. For example, with complete and timely workload information, managers can better distribute and assign priorities to the workloads.

MULTI-MEDIA CONFERENCING

The Agency expects to install multi-media conferencing facilities at many locations, including those where the public is dealing with SSA. Through these facilities, multi-site video equipment will be used to connect the claimant, the SSA representative, any DDS employee, translation-service employees, Administrative Law Judges (ALJ), or off-site representatives of other agencies whose involvement is needed to serve the claimant. These facilities will also be used to improve inter- and intra-Agency communications and training delivery.

OTHER TECHNOLOGIES

Voice-to-print technology may be used to facilitate the documentation of judicial and other similar decisions. Other voice technologies may also be used for such applications as enhancing training and permitting full participation in the workplace by employees with disabilities.

Finally, SSA intends to review technological advances continually to determine how we might use them to improve service delivery. To the extent these reviews prove fruitful, the Agency could expect to build a "connection" with the public by providing a dial-up capability that allows the public to transact business with SSA through a home or business computer. The use of this innovation would be expected to grow dramatically in the first several years of the new century.

SSA could also take advantage of the expected new television-screen technology, which would allow people to use their cable-TV hookup to transact all kinds of business with banks, utilities and a host of other organizations. At any time that SSA permitted this kind of interaction with the public, we would protect the privacy and integrity of our records and systems.

HUMAN RESOURCES

A CHANGING WORKFORCE

The period between now and 2005 will be a time of dramatic change in SSA's workforce. Vast numbers of the employees hired in the 1960s will be eligible for retirement, and we could lose over three-quarters of our managerial and supervisory corps as well as half of our professional/technical staff.

Added to this problem is the potential for increased losses due to greater employment opportunities for our staff. The transferability of retirement benefits that came with the introduction of the Federal Employees' Retirement System in 1984 will make the more recently hired employees less "locked in" to federal employment than those in the old Civil Service Retirement System. In addition, the acquisition of computer skills by employees, which is becoming part of the normal way of doing business in SSA, will give employees skills that are more transferable to private industry and other government agencies.

Throughout the 1990s, SSA will have to struggle to hire, train and retain qualified personnel. We will need to rethink our options as an employer, reconfiguring some jobs with the likelihood that the Agency will not be able to retain the incumbents for long periods of time. At the same time, the Agency will need to find methods to attract and retain new people through a number of incentives. These will include broadened career-development opportunities and training and education programs that promote satisfaction on the job.

WORKFORCE ADJUSTMENTS

In terms of workforce size, the Agency expects to grow slightly in the early to mid-1990s. Increasing workloads and new legislative and judicial mandates make it likely that SSA will need some additional resources to deal with these many and varied required activities. Adjustments will also reflect our forecast that some workloads will show dramatic increases due to the baby-boom generation, whose members will be reaching the age where their numbers expand the disability and survivor rolls. But we do not expect large staff increases to be the rule in the 1990s. Recognizing the ongoing reality of funding limitations, SSA will use technology and new working techniques to reduce the impact of the expected workload growth as well as to improve service to the public.

WORKFORCE OF THE FUTURE

Demographic factors will have a great impact on SSA's workforce. We expect our workers to come from several sources. First, we intend to increase our efforts to hire new college graduates and to look, not only to local educational institutions, but also to those with

high minority populations to encourage equal opportunity and ensure a balanced workforce. Second, we will look to the aging population, expecting to find many older people interested in part-time or shared-time second careers. Third, we intend to look to the post-child-rearing group--people who have interrupted their careers to devote full time to raising a family but who are now in a position to re-enter the workforce on a full- or part-time basis. Fourth, we will seek workers from the young but undereducated groups of potential workers with the will, but often not the scholastic background, to do the job.

In addition, from all of these sources, we will be seeking to employ increasing numbers of people with disabilities. These individuals may require special supports and accommodation to help them become fully performing employees.

TRAINING

SSA will provide the training and development necessary to ensure that our workforce possesses the required knowledge, skills and abilities. This includes providing retraining to employees whose job responsibilities have changed while assuring them employment as long as they are committed to attaining the required skill levels. A strong program of management development activities, both for mid-level managers and for executives, will help ensure the continuity of strong leadership. Finally, we will maintain an emphasis on instilling in all of our employees the Agency's commitment to service delivery as well as the underlying philosophy of social insurance programs.

RE-ENGINEERED POSITIONS

We intend to carefully re-engineer many of our positions to allow flexibility and career opportunity based on our organizational needs and service-delivery requirements. We also intend to structure our jobs to allow entry at various points along the skill continuum, thus ensuring our ability to attract the better educated and/or more broadly experienced employee.

SUPPORT PROGRAMS

SSA intends to explore providing a variety of employee benefit options as a means of attracting and retaining employees. Initially, however, we expect a major attraction of SSA to be our flexible work hours and the fact that our major facilities will have onsite child-care and fitness centers. Another attraction will be the Agency's programs of job-sharing, work-at-home and part-time employment. SSA is hopeful that many older workers will opt for only partial retirement, taking positions that do not require them to put in a full week of work. Similarly, we expect many working parents to prefer having employment schedules that permit them more time with their families.

A POSITIVE WORK ENVIRONMENT

SSA will provide our employees a safe and pleasant work environment. By setting standards for both public and employee comfort and by constantly monitoring our success at achieving those standards, we will ensure that our employees enjoy a professional, secure office environment. The Agency will strive in the 1990s to

meet all applicable health and safety standards. We intend for all workstations to be environmentally sound, reducing health hazards and the likelihood of work-related injuries.

AN EMPLOYER OF PREFERENCE

SSA looks forward to a renewed reputation as a competent and caring service provider and an innovative employer. Such a reputation will make SSA a more attractive organization for which to work and guarantee us that, as SSA enters the 21st century, we will have a skilled and dedicated workforce to do the job before us.

FACILITIES AND ORGANIZATION

During the 1990s, we expect to reconfigure the Agency to match changing service needs in all of our major business processes.

SERVING THE NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY

The basic structure of regional offices is expected to remain aligned with the DHHS regional structure. Our community-based field office structure will reflect the service needs of local populations and will range from full-service to limited-service based on community-specific needs. When other service agencies or personnel are collocated with SSA, the size or configuration of the community offices where they are stationed may need to change. When Agency employees can conduct business from nearly any location using a laptop computer with the capacity to dial up SSA's systems directly, we expect to need fewer SSA-operated contact stations.

CONSOLIDATED FACILITIES

All of our facilities will be affected by the diminished need for storing and processing paper records. Some of our larger-scale facilities may become full-service multi-centers housing telephone centers, community offices, training centers, and processing centers with distributed access to Agency files. This consolidation will help SSA address the need to provide telephone-answering services at peak times by using staff who perform other work during the non-peak periods. In addition, the consolidation will have the benefit of broadening work experience for employees, creating better advancement opportunities and allowing SSA to obtain the operating efficiencies such larger-scale facilities provide.

FACILITATE COMMUNICATIONS

The interconnectivity of SSA workstations is expected to facilitate communications within the Agency. It will reduce the heavy flow of paper and ensure that the right people get important information at the right time. Training will also be facilitated by interconnectivity. Employees will be able to receive instruction in and gain mastery of critical new procedures right at their own workstations. Interconnectivity also gives SSA the flexibility to permit employees to work at home under appropriate circumstances.

QUALITY MANAGEMENT

DO IT RIGHT THE FIRST TIME

As a result of our commitment to the delivery of quality service, we will have an organizational structure that is more interactive and responsive. The Agency expects to find many solutions to our

managing and operating issues through the use of a team approach, which should make SSA a more efficient and dedicated organization. The theme of "do it right the first time" will ensure that SSA carefully examines and pilots new processes and approaches before putting them into full operation, reducing problems and the need to redo work later.

SSA's commitment to fostering a participative management style will help us maximize the creative resources that will underpin the achievement of our organizational goals and objectives. We expect all of our management practices, including the institutionalization of a unified planning system, to help the Agency minimize the expenditure of administrative funds by ensuring optimal use of the administrative resources available to us.

As an Agency in change, SSA will carefully undertake a process of effective change management. Planning for the impacts of change will be a central element of the Agency's management program.

READY FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

Taken together, we are confident that these changes will make SSA both a superior deliverer of service and a positive, cost-effective and concerned employer. We face the future believing firmly in the direction we have charted for ourselves, assured that our employees and the public we serve will benefit from the realization of our vision as we enter the 21st century.

Chapter 5: The Impact Of The Vision

Our vision of the future has been created for one reason: to guide us in our quest to accomplish the mission of the Agency. The elements of the vision represent those non-legislative changes we believe will move us toward achieving our service goals and objectives while at the same time reflecting the commitments we have made as an Agency and optimizing our use of limited human and financial resources. We have chosen to portray the impacts of the changes in three simple ways to underscore how important it is that we implement our vision.

The first of these portrayals, included as Exhibit 1, shows how the various elements of the vision have an impact on the Agency's service-delivery goals. It then shows the administrative or programmatic benefits that will occur when the vision is implemented. A key to understanding the presentation is to recognize that benefits will not necessarily accrue from the vision elements on a one-on-one basis. While some elements could be implemented in a stand-alone mode, the vision is really a "whole cloth" woven of the individual elements, and the contribution of any single item does not fully depict the total benefit that will occur from complete implementation.

The second portrayal is a very high-level view of how implementing the vision could affect the number of human resources we will need to process the workloads in our various components. To illustrate this effect, we estimated the number of people that would be required in each component *in the year 2005* to process our predicted workloads using the tools and processes of today and providing today's level of service to the public. Then, we analyzed the vision to identify the major elements of change and "walked through" the processing of each of our major workloads to estimate how each change element would affect how work is performed in each of our major job categories. While we were unable to attribute specific workyear changes to specific parts of the vision, we were able to decide whether a component would likely be larger or smaller under the vision of the future than it would be in a future without the vision. The results of this analysis are shown in Exhibit 2.

As this exhibit shows, implementing the vision will require that we concentrate a greater proportion of our workers in those areas where contact with the public is the prime mode of doing business--the community-based office and the teleservice center. Community-office staff will spend more of their time working with people who require an increased level of attention, particularly disability applicants and beneficiaries whom we are assisting to return to work. Our efforts to react to the public's preference of conducting their business with SSA by phone are expected to result in an increased proportion of work being done in the teleservice centers. On the other hand, processing efficiencies are expected to permit slowed

growth in our other facilities. For example, technological improvements and improved disability processing support should reduce growth rates in the Office of Hearings and Appeals (OHA). In the processing centers, more and more complex case processing will be automated, and electronic records systems will drastically change the location dependency of much of the workload. In the Central and Regional offices, automation will improve productivity, allowing us to consciously contain growth in the non-operational staff components.

Finally, the third portrayal provides a process view. It sets the vision in motion, so to speak, by showing how the various elements of change pictured in it would be applied to one of SSA's programmatic functions. Because the disability process is among the most complex of our processes, we have chosen to use it as an example to illustrate in Exhibit 3 the dynamics of the vision.

PAY BENEFITS CORRECTLY

VISION ELEMENTS	SERVICE GOAL IMPACTS	ADMINISTRATIVE/ PROGRAMMATIC BENEFITS
o Modernized Benefit Processing System	o Faster/More Accurate Benefit Payments	o Less Manual Processing o Less Rehandling of Data Edits
o Intelligent Workstations	o Better & Increased Access to Databases o Specialized Local Evidence Assistance	o Improved Local Management Information o Local Computation Assistance o Office Automation
o Integrated Telecom Network	o Faster/More Accurate Status Information	o Increased Ability to Assist Other Offices o Faster Work Movement
o Electronic Records	o Immediate Access to Files for Faster, More Accurate Service	o Less Data Transcription o Reduced Folder Handling Personnel o Fewer Public Recontacts o Postage Savings o Files, Forms/Paper Storage Space Reductions o Work Not Limited to One Physical Location o Allows Shifting Work to Match Resources o Potential Office Consolidations
o Disability and Appeals Process Reform	o Better Documented Claims o Faster and More Accurate, Consistent Decisions	o Fewer Public Recontacts o Fewer Appeals
o Representative Payee Volunteers	o Acceptable Performance by Payee	o Misuse of Funds Avoided
o Electronic Data Exchange	o Increased, Faster Data Availability From Sources Outside SSA	o Fewer, Faster Benefit Verification Activities o Fewer Consultative Examinations o Postage Savings
o Expert Systems/Decision Support Systems	o More Accurate/Consistent Decisions	o Savings to the Trust Fund Through Fewer Overpayments o Fewer Underpayments
o Multimedia Conferencing	o Better Documented Claims	o Better/Faster Trained Workers o Avoided Travel
o Quality Approach	o Errors Avoided	o Less Work Rehandling

PAY BENEFITS WHEN DUE

VISION ELEMENTS	SERVICE GOAL IMPACTS	ADMINISTRATIVE/ PROGRAMMATIC BENEFITS
o Modernized Benefit Processing System	o Faster/More Accurate Benefit Payments	o Less Manual Processing o Less Rehandling of Data Edits
o Intelligent Workstations	o Better & Increased Access to Databases o Specialized Local Evidence Assistance	o Improved Local Management Information o Local Computation Assistance o Office Automation
o Integrated Telecom Network	o Faster/More Accurate Status Information	o Increased Ability to Assist Other Offices o Faster Work Movement
o Electronic Records	o Immediate Access to Files for Faster, More Accurate Service	o Less Data Transcription o Reduced Folder Handling Personnel o Fewer Public Recontacts o Postage Savings o Files, Forms/Paper Storage Space Reductions o Work Not Limited to One Physical Location o Allows Shifting Work to Match Resources o Potential Office Consolidations
o Disability and Appeals Process Reform	o Better Documented Claims o Faster and More Accurate, Consistent Decisions	o Fewer Public Recontacts o Fewer Appeals
o Electronic Funds Transfer	o Fewer Lost or Stolen Checks	o More Level Service Demands o Less Duplicate Payment
o Electronic Data Exchange	o Increased, Faster Data Availability From Sources Outside SSA	o Fewer, Faster Benefit Verification Activities o Fewer Consultative Examinations o Postage Savings
o Expert Systems/Decision Support Systems	o Faster and More Accurate, Consistent Decisions	o Savings to Trust Funds Through Fewer Overpayments o Fewer Underpayments
o Voice-to-Print Technology	o Faster Decision Notices	o Reduced Clerical Support
o Multi-media Conferencing	o Shorter Waiting Times for Hearings	o Better/Faster Trained Workers o Avoided Travel
o Quality Approach	o Errors Avoided	o Less Work Rehandling

PROVIDE PROMPT, COURTEOUS SERVICE

VISION ELEMENTS	SERVICE GOAL IMPACTS	ADMINISTRATIVE/ PROGRAMMATIC BENEFITS
o Choice of Service Method	o Better Access to Agency	
o Improve Telephone Service to Meet Peak Demand	o Decreased Busy Rates o Decreased Telephone Waiting Times	o Fewer Recontacts by Public o Decreased Telephone Connect Time
o "People" Skills Training	o More Personal and Courteous Service	o Well-Served Public
o Portable Computers	o Data Access from Remote Locations for Better Outreach and Out-of-Office Service	o Fewer Public Recontacts
o Situate Community-Based Field Offices to Reflect Service Needs	o Reduced Office Waiting Times o More Uniform Service	o Improve Employee Morale o Improve Efficiency
o Accommodate Special Communications Needs (e.g., Translation Services)	o More Uniform Service for Those with Special Needs (e.g., Non-English Speaking Clientele)	o Multiple Contacts Avoided
o Quality Approach	o Errors Avoided	o Less Work Rehandling
o Electronic Records	o Immediate Access to Files for Faster, More Accurate Service	o Less Data Transcription o Fewer Public Recontacts o Postage Savings o Allows Shifting Work to Match Resources
o Electronic Funds Transfer	o Fewer Lost or Stolen Checks o Decreased Office/Telephone Waiting Times	o More Level Service Demands
o Modernized Systems	o Faster Online Access to Data o Faster Response to Public Inquiries	o Less Manual Processing o Less Rehandling of Data Edits
o Office Habitability	o Better Public Contact Conditions	o Improved Employee Morale
o Well Trained Workforce	o Provide Public Correct and Prompt Information	o Fewer Public Recontacts

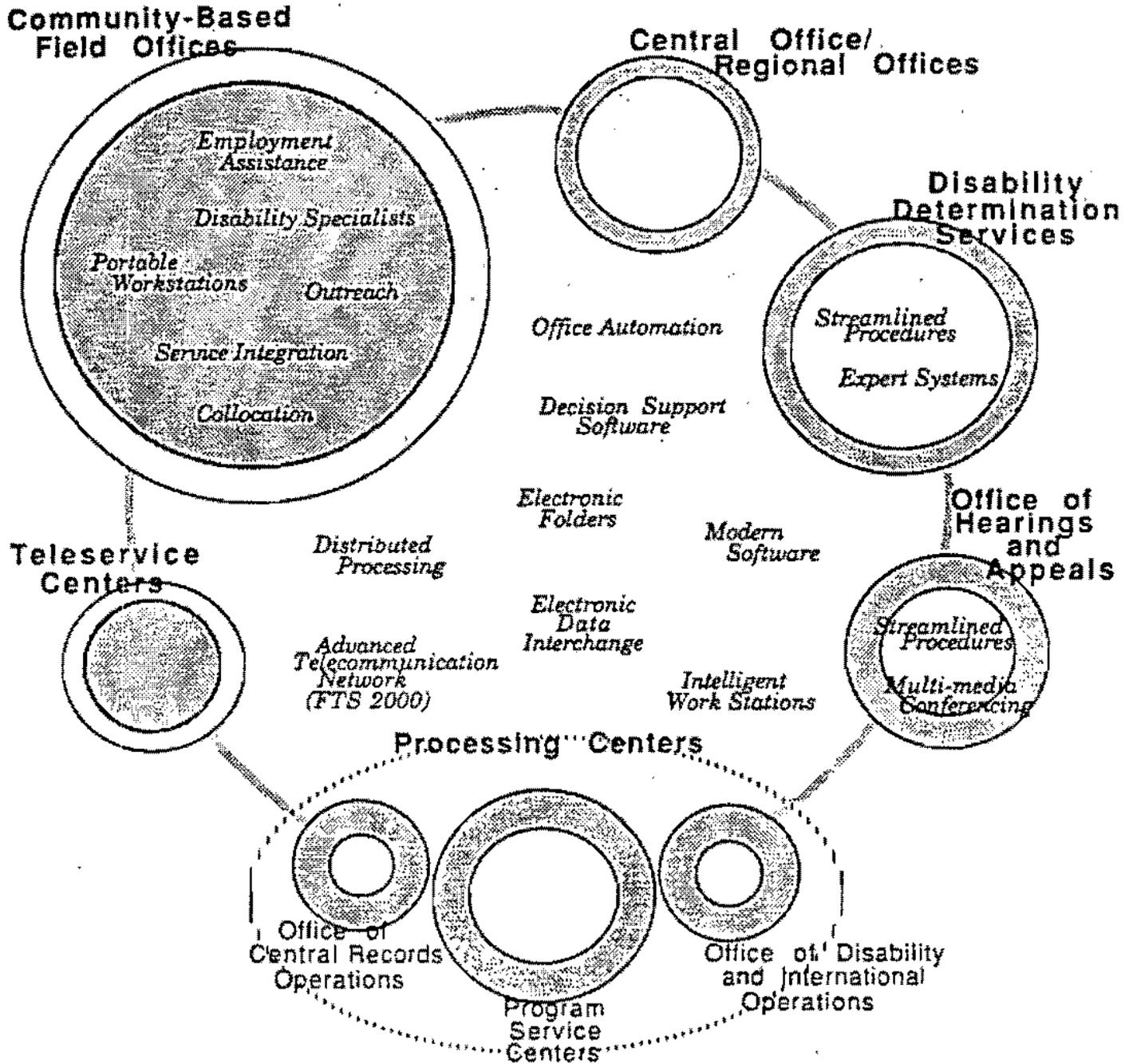
**INFORM THE PUBLIC OF ITS
RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

VISION ELEMENTS	SERVICE GOAL IMPACTS	ADMINISTRATIVE/ PROGRAMMATIC BENEFITS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Outreach to Potentially Eligible People o Expanded Social Research o Modernized Systems o Intelligent Workstations o Electronic Data Exchange o Collocated Services o Well Trained Workforce 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Greater Participation of Eligible Public o Improved Public Awareness of SSA Programs o Improved Notices for Better Public Understanding o Better Local Correspondence o Better "Policing" of Non-Reporting o Improved Public Awareness of SSA Programs Through Referral from Other Services o Improved Referral of SSA Clients to Other Services o Provide Accurate, Clear Explanations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Correctly Paid Public o Less Need to Explain Notices o Less Need to Explain Mail o Savings to Trust Funds Through Fewer Overpayments o Improved Efficiency o Fewer Recontacts by Public

ENSURE INTEGRITY OF PAYMENTS AND RECORDS

VISION ELEMENTS	SERVICE GOAL IMPACTS	ADMINISTRATIVE/ PROGRAMMATIC BENEFITS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Expert Systems o Modernized Systems o Quality Approach o Backup and Recovery o Improve Overpayment/ Underpayment Detection/ Resolution 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o More Accurate Decisions o More Accurate Benefit Payments o Errors Avoided o Safer Records and Systems in the Event of a Disaster o Accurate Trust Fund/General Fund Outlays 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Fewer Underpayments and Overpayments o Fewer Underpayments and Overpayments o Less Work Rehandling o Avoided Costs in Event of Disaster o Correctly Paid Public

VISION SERVICE PICTURE 2005



LEGEND

The ASP vision would result in a greater proportion of work being performed in field offices and TSCs in 2005 and a reduced proportion of work being performed in other locations in 2005.

-  Status Quo 2005
-  Vision 2005

EXHIBIT 3

THE DISABILITY PROCESS UNDER VISION 2005

Following is a description of the disability process as it would be carried out under the vision of the future in The Social Security Strategic Plan: A Framework for the Future.

SSA could be introduced to an applicant for disability benefits in a number of different ways. The applicant might choose to visit our community-based field office, might be referred from an agency collocated with our office, or might be approached by us on an outreach visit. In this walkthrough of the disability process of the future, our hypothetical applicant chooses to use the telephone and makes contact with SSA's teleservice center (TSC).

The call is automatically routed to the first available TSC representative. In taking the applicant's claim, the representative uses an intelligent workstation to access decision-support software. The software guides the representative through a set of questions and answers that experience has shown to be the most useful in helping initiate a disability claim. Among other things, the software will help SSA ascertain whether the applicant needs additional assistance to provide us with all of the information we need to completely process the claim. The representative establishes an electronic file for the applicant; it contains information from the current contact as well as information about the applicant's earnings record and any prior claim he/she may have made. The TSC representative schedules an interview between the applicant and a claims representative in a community-based field office. This interview may be held either face-to-face or over the telephone, depending on the applicant's condition and personal preference. It will be held at a time and place convenient to the applicant. During this initial telephone contact, SSA will inform the applicant of what documentation and other information must be provided to us at the time of the interview.

As the representative is establishing the file, SSA's integrated workload control system is activating the first of many workload control and management information annotations regarding this applicant. This information will not only help to ensure the continued timely processing of the claim, but also will provide information to assist in managing the overall SSA program.

The field-office representative who conducts the interview will be specially trained as a disability specialist and will possess interpersonal skills that are important to successfully serving the applicant. The interview, whether by phone or in person, will be guided by the decision-support software and expert systems resident on the disability specialist's workstation. Decision-support software can assist the interviewer in deciding whether this case meets the criteria for emergency payments, employment assistance, selection of a representative payee or expedited development of other non-disability issues. The specialist in the field office may refer the applicant to a collocated service provider during the visit. The results of the interview will be entered into the applicant's electronic file using the appropriate technology, and the specialist will begin the process to collect the "medical evidence of record" from the sources of medical treatment provided by the applicant. The applicant's claim is now ready to be handled at the DDS.

As soon as the applicant's file is created or updated at the field office, it is available electronically to the State DDS to use in making the disability decision. Immediately-available information in concert with decision-support software can help the examiner determine early what path must be taken to reach the best decision. For example, a review of the file might indicate that the adjudicative process would benefit from the examiner's talking directly with

the applicant about his/her condition. In that case, the field office could set up a telephone or video-conference between the claimant and the DDS examiner. As another example, a review of the available medical evidence or treatment-source information in the file may alert the DDS examiner to the need to order a consultative examination for the applicant right away. Once the decision-support software helps the examiner through the necessary case development steps, it will also provide expert system guidance in adjudicating the case by walking the examiner through the logic of the sequential evaluation process.

The ability to request and receive data electronically from various hospitals, consultants and other treating sources, in combination with office automation support in the DDS, will assist DDS examiners in obtaining medical information in a timely fashion. Workload control systems will be used to help offices evaluate and prioritize their workloads to be sure that cases are processed effectively and efficiently.

If the applicant is found to be disabled (at any stage of the adjudicative process), the workload control software will move the case to the next stage of processing. If the next stage is merely to initiate payment of the previously documented payment amount, this action will be taken automatically, and, at the proper time, the beneficiary's payment will be deposited directly into his bank account (if requested) or a check will be sent to the beneficiary or correct representative payee. If SSA needs to do additional work (either at the community office or at the processing center) before payment is made, the workload control software will schedule cases requiring immediate payment for completion first and will queue those with future payment dates appropriately. The field office or processing center will have the electronic file immediately available and will be able to take advantage of automated local intelligence to complete any development on evidence requirements. Electronic data exchanges with other benefit-paying agencies will assist SSA in computing the correct benefit amount.

If the applicant is denied at the DDS level and appeals the decision to the OHA, the workload control system can immediately transfer the electronic file to OHA. Analysts at OHA will review the electronic record, request additional evidence as necessary and set a hearing date. Office automation tools and decision-support software operating on intelligent workstations will be key in assisting analysts to develop cases quickly and accurately. Voice-to-print technology will assist OHA in issuing a timely notice of decision, avoiding a lengthy transcription process.

In some circumstances, SSA will use multi-media conferencing techniques. Because these techniques reduce the need for the claimant and/or the judge to travel to a hearing site, they make hearings more convenient to the public and allow SSA to hold hearings more quickly than otherwise possible while still preserving the face-to-face nature of the hearing.

Streamlined processes supported by automation reduce the time between the gathering of the initial evidence and developing the case for appeal. This means that there will be a substantial reduction in the number of consultative examinations that will need to be purchased. It also means that "cases" passing through the hearings process will be substantially the same as they were when they were processed as initial claims.

The individual receiving disability benefits may later make contact with SSA, either at our request or because the applicant, a member of the applicant's family, or the applicant's representative payee wishes to report a change in status. These contacts can be initiated by telephone, mail, computer or visits to the community office. Access to the applicant's electronic file will speed up the process of resolving the issue involved. In fact, should the SSA disability specialist need to visit the applicant where he/she lives, the specialist can still maintain contact with the electronic folder and the decision-support system through a "laptop," or notebook-sized, computer.

Better integration of the data in SSA's records should reduce the number of contacts we must make to address the individual's needs properly. If it is necessary to conduct a continuing disability review (CDR) for this beneficiary, the same tools that assisted us in improving the original entitlement-decision process will move the review through the CDR process with the same efficiencies, consistency and accuracy. In addition, the electronic record becomes available to those charged with management and integrity. At any point in the process, the electronic record can be reviewed by quality assurance and integrity officials for timeliness, accuracy, and consistency. Early feedback can be provided to managers and individual disability specialists and examiners.

Chapter 6: A TRANSITIONAL VIEW

Having set our objectives for service delivery, drawn our vision of SSA's operations of the future, and analyzed some of the impacts of the changes the Agency will undergo, SSA is ready to begin planning to reach our goals and make our vision a reality. In this planning activity, we will set forth challenging but realistic shorter-term objectives and develop specific proposals to meet them. We will schedule and estimate resource needs; prepare our initial cost and benefit analyses; identify discrete projects and interdependencies among projects; and develop defensible budgets that fit in the larger Departmental and governmental context. It is time for the visionary elements of change to be validated in the more rigorous environment of nearer-term thinking, and the specific "how-to's" of implementing the direction must bear out the benefits that the direction implies.

Because SSA is not a static organization, some of this planning has already been done. Major efforts to identify and implement needed programmatic improvements and automated systems enhancements already are underway. A Framework for the Future describes the context in which these efforts must fit and underscores the need for integration among all the initiatives.

To help us move more readily into an intensive, Agency-wide, integrated tactical-planning phase, we have identified our strategic priorities and next steps in the planning process.

Strategic Priorities

THE FIVE PRIORITIES

All of the changes described in A Framework for the Future are important, and we expect to pursue all of them with energy and determination. However, we have identified five major areas--SSA's strategic priorities--on which we intend to focus our change efforts because we consider them to be of paramount importance to our future and because, based upon the disparity between our current levels of service and the specific objectives that we established in Chapter 3, these are the areas most in need of immediate attention. We are not attempting to be all-inclusive in the activities identified for each of the strategic priorities. We recognize that further analysis may produce altered approaches to achieving the desired improvements in these priority areas.

Two of the priorities address programmatic areas--the disability process and the appeals process--where we have found that our current levels of service are far from where we would like them to be. The third involves the public's access to SSA's programs and processes. This encompasses such diverse concerns as how long claimants must wait to be served in a field office, how easy it is for individuals to conduct business with us over the telephone, how

close we are to maximizing program participation, and how easily employers can report earnings.

The fourth priority concerns the use of electronic claims folders in place of paper records. Implementation of this change would enhance significantly our ability to reach our goals in other priorities. We expect electronic folders to have a tremendous impact on the way we do work at SSA, who does it, where we do it, and at what cost we accomplish it. Establishing electronic claims folders would be a major step in moving us toward becoming a "paperless" agency.

The fifth priority concerns the establishment of the cooperative processing architecture that will lay the foundation for all of our automated systems modernization efforts and will touch virtually every aspect of the work we perform.

Below we describe more fully each of our strategic priorities together with the initiatives that are designed to support them and the service objectives they are designed to support.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1 - IMPROVE THE DISABILITY PROCESS

This priority includes processing title II and title XVI disability cases. It is aimed primarily at two aspects of the disability programs: 1) improving the accuracy and timeliness of the medical-decisionmaking process; and, 2) assisting people with disabilities to return to work.

Improving timeliness and accuracy in the process of making medical decisions involves changes specific to the disability process and improvements in the application of systems and technologies that we expect to apply, over time, to all of our programmatic processing. The average time required to process an initial disability claim under title II is currently 87.6 days, far in excess of the processing time required in our stated service objective. Our accuracy rates, while high, still leave room for important improvements.

In brief, some of the most prominent activities are as follows:

- o Reform the disability determination process
 - Improve ways to obtain more quickly all appropriate information about the claimant's condition as early as possible in the claims process
 - Enhance the quality of medical evidence obtained through such steps as providing guidance to the medical community

PROCESS IMPROVEMENTS

- Use enhanced research capabilities to ensure that disability criteria are complete and up-to-date
 - Investigate the utility of a face-to-face interview prior to making a disability decision
 - Streamline manual procedures through work-flow analyses
 - Enhance the sharing of "best practices" among offices, especially State DDSs
 - Improve the "profiling system" to increase the cost-effectiveness of both the initial and the continuing disability review processes
- o Modernize the disability systems through enhanced automation

ENHANCED AUTOMATION

- Install decision-support systems, including expert systems, to support accurate, consistent decisionmaking
- Establish electronic folders
- Use intelligent workstations and an integrated telecommunications network to move and process work quickly at the appropriate location
- Fully automate the State DDSs, including providing office automation tools
- Provide for mobile claims taking (for example, in nursing homes and neighborhood locations)
- Install telecommunications and videoconferencing capability to improve public access to and from SSA, the DDSs, and other participants in the disability process
- Expand data interchange between SSA and other governmental agencies, and increase electronic data gathering from private organizations

EMPLOYMENT ASSISTANCE

The second aspect of the strategic priority for disability--assisting people with disabilities to return to work--will be addressed in part through testing a service-delivery approach called "case management." This approach is designed to provide a variety of rehabilitation, job placement and employment-support services to disability beneficiaries. Today, only a very small proportion of disability beneficiaries return to work. While many more beneficiaries would prefer to be actively employed than remain on the disability rolls, adequate methods of rehabilitation and good placement for these individuals have not materialized.

**SUPPORT FOR
SERVICE
OBJECTIVES**

Under case management, SSA would provide, in or through our community-based field offices or other specialists, a point of contact for disability beneficiaries to ensure access to appropriate rehabilitation and employment services, promote the use of work incentives and assist SSA's beneficiaries and their families to receive services from all sources.

In addition, SSA will continue to examine and test programmatic incentives to promote employment of applicants and beneficiaries.

Several service objectives are directed specifically to the disability programs. Primarily, the activities we will pursue as part of the strategic priority for disability will help us ensure that we improve the accuracy of disability payments, make disability decisions and payments in a more timely manner and enhance payment integrity related to the disability programs.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2 - IMPROVE THE APPEALS PROCESS

The appeals process is available to claimants and beneficiaries in title II, title XVI and title XVIII (Medicare). Most requests for hearings involve disability claims. The appeals process under SSA's jurisdiction includes 3 steps: an administrative reconsideration; a hearing before an Administrative Law Judge; and review by the Appeals Council.

At present, the appeals process can be cumbersome and very time-consuming. For example, it takes on average 200 to 220 days to complete the hearings process, far in excess of our service objective. The strategic focus is to improve the timeliness and quality of the appeals process--making sure that individuals receive timely decisions and ensuring that the best possible decisions are made. We believe that automated support of a streamlined appeals process is the main mechanism by which we can bring about the timeliness and quality we desire. This will be done in such a way that we can continue to ensure all appropriate due process safeguards. As we did for the disability programs, we can break the development of an improved appeals process into two component parts:

**PROCESS
IMPROVEMENTS**

- o Implement process changes in the hearings and appeals process
 - Streamline the manual processes
 - Improve documentation of evidence and decision justifications in hearings cases
 - Examine alternatives to the current reconsideration process

ENHANCED AUTOMATION

- Expand the process of holding pre-hearings conferences to identify cases where full hearing is not necessary and to facilitate preparation for the hearing
- o Modernize the appeals systems through enhanced automation
 - Install decision-support systems, including expert systems, to support accurate, consistent decisionmaking
 - Establish electronic folders
 - Use intelligent workstations and an integrated telecommunications network to move and process work quickly at the appropriate location
 - Install videoconferencing capability to increase the accessibility of administrative law judges to the public
 - Implement voice-to-print technology to provide a more cost-effective way to document decisions
 - Provide office automation tools to OHA personnel
 - Expand data interchange between SSA and other governmental agencies, and increase electronic data gathering from private organizations

EFFECT OF DISABILITY PROCESS

Because very nearly all of the cases that reach the hearings level are disability cases, a quality disability process will mean that cases will reach this stage earlier. This will have a positive effect on the volume and kind of work that hearings and appeals staff must undertake. This is especially true if disability determinations are made quickly, documented adequately, and explained thoroughly. Therefore, we view improving the disability process as a critical companion activity to improving the appeals process.

SUPPORT FOR SERVICE OBJECTIVES

Improvements in the appeals process are intended to support the service objectives related to making timely decisions at the reconsideration, hearings, and Appeals Council levels. They will also help us achieve full participation in the programs by eligible individuals who wish to participate, provide courteous service to the public, and carry out our overall program stewardship responsibilities.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3 - IMPROVE ACCESS TO SSA

We have planned enhancements to our processes that employ both technological advances and human capabilities to ensure that all of the people we serve find ways of dealing with us that are effective, efficient, and convenient to them. Despite high rates of overall

satisfaction with SSA's services, many people still experience difficulties in reaching us by phone or obtaining appointments to see us. These difficulties are particularly apparent in large, metropolitan areas.

The activities that support improved access have been separated into categories relating to the degree of automation support. However, nearly every technological enhancement goes hand in hand with a non-automated enhancement that supports it.

ENHANCED AUTOMATION

o Improve processes with automated support

- Expand the types and amount of work that can be handled over the telephone, providing better service for those members of the public who prefer using the telephone
- Improve telephone service through intelligent queueing, the use of expert systems to improve response accuracy and the use of automated scripts
- Accommodate special communications needs of the population
- Expand use of automated tools for SSA employees who interact with the public, such as better application software systems, intelligent workstations, electronic folders and portable computers
- Establish the capability for the public to interact electronically with SSA
- Enhance the electronic-funds-transfer process
- Reduce the time to respond to requests received through the enumeration-at-birth process
- Facilitate electronic wage reporting by improving telecommunications and providing process tools
- Expand automated data exchange with other governmental organizations while assuring security and privacy
- Implement multi-media conferencing

ENHANCED NON-AUTOMATED SERVICE DELIVERY

o Improve "human" capabilities

- By collocating offices and/or personnel where needed, and other efforts, improve access to SSA through referral from other service agencies, and improve access for SSA claimants to related programs, especially those supported by the DHHS

- Emphasize good interpersonal skills as well as technical competence in our employees
- Maintain a strong community presence, and situate community-based offices to reflect service needs
- Establish and enforce office habitability standards to provide a safe, professional environment in which to conduct business
- Improve written communications, including decision notices and other notices, public information, and replies to correspondence
- Identify new ways to reach out to those who could be receiving benefits but are not

**SUPPORT FOR
SERVICE
OBJECTIVES**

Most of these service-delivery enhancements also support our programmatic priorities—improving the disability and appeals processes.

Because providing adequate means of access to SSA underlies our capability to deliver service in general, these activities will help us achieve most of our service objectives. The most obvious benefits will be obtained in the following:

- o Improving responsiveness by telephone and by mail
- o Establishing correct initial-payment amounts and ensuring the payment accuracy resulting from postentitlement transactions
- o Making accurate decisions on eligibility for disability benefits
- o Making benefit payments under all programs at the earliest appropriate point
- o Making regular continuing payments as scheduled
- o Improving the timeliness of the appeals process
- o Reducing waiting time in the community office
- o Posting earnings reports promptly and accurately
- o Providing courteous service to the public
- o Ensuring public compliance with reporting requirements
- o Ensuring that information mailed to the public is understandable

- o Carrying out our overall program-stewardship responsibilities

It is obvious that improving access to SSA is a major thrust in our strategic plan and is key to our developing the responsive, efficient organization we envision in the future.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4 - BEGIN TO TURN SSA INTO A "PAPERLESS" AGENCY BY ESTABLISHING ELECTRONIC CLAIMS FOLDERS

SSA is an information-intensive agency. Many of our work flows and procedures have been limited over the years by having to store, access and move the information contained in paper documents. Nowhere has this been more obvious or more critical than in our programmatic processing, where the paper claims folder began as our most important information store but now has become the "curse" of the organization. At present, we require between 1.0 and 1.5 million square feet of space to house our folders, a figure that, without dramatic changes, would double by 2005. In addition, significant resources are required to access these records if and when they are needed. Over the years we have been modernizing our automated systems and improving our data bases to the point that much of our processing now can be done without the physical claims folder present. But the folder still exists and is needed. Perhaps our most straightforward strategic thrust is to eliminate the need for the paper folder in all of our programmatic processing. The benefits of doing so include a dramatic reduction in the resources required to maintain the folders, including space, and increased flexibility in workload processing. And the tools that support the electronic folder also will support increased accuracy and reduced claims and postentitlement processing time.

ENABLING TECHNOLOGIES

Establishing an electronic folder is one of the keys to our programmatic priorities discussed above. For example, an electronic-folder environment will permit SSA to take optimum advantage of the decisionmaking assistance provided by expert systems. It, in turn, is an application dependent upon the Agency-wide implementation of certain enabling technologies. These include the following:

- o Installing intelligent workstations for every employee who will process folder-based workloads
- o Building a telecommunications network that interconnects those workstations with each other and with central and local electronic data stores
- o Implementing advanced office information systems that support document and image creation, storage, retrieval and dissemination

- o Installing high-technology security systems to protect the integrity of electronic signatures

Full use of the electronic folder is dependent also upon societal acceptance of electronic facsimiles as well as their utility and adaptability for the courts.

We note that our use of the term "electronic folder" should not be taken to imply that we are simply putting an existing entity into electronic form and that its contents will be the same in the future as they are today. To obtain the full benefits of an electronic folder, one of our first tasks will be to conduct an information analysis to determine exactly what information is needed and in what form it should be stored in order to operate our programs effectively. In this way, we will not simply be speeding up the collection and storage of massive amounts of unnecessary information to clutter our data bases instead of our file cabinets.

MANAGING THE CHANGE

Because the electronic folder represents a major change to the way we do business, managing the change will be a very important part of its implementation. We expect to implement the change gradually, so that we can manage the change effectively and expend resources for folder conversion at a reasonable level.

Since the folder is at the heart of all of our program-benefits processes, improving its accuracy and access will have a positive impact on a number of our service-delivery objectives. Among those it will affect directly are the following:

SUPPORT FOR SERVICE OBJECTIVES

- o Ensuring the payment accuracy of postentitlement transactions
- o Ensuring that postentitlement actions are processed in a timely manner
- o Making accurate decisions on eligibility for disability benefits
- o Making timely reconsideration and appeals decisions
- o Providing prompt, courteous service to individuals who call, write or visit with questions involving their records
- o Carrying out our overall program-stewardship responsibilities

SSA is moving in our vision of the future to an entirely paperless environment, where administrative, staff, and other programmatic work will be supported by the same tools and technologies as those described above for claims and postentitlement processing. This is very important to our ability to contain overhead costs and improve productivity throughout the Agency. But bringing the claims folder

into the future is so central to a modern, streamlined Agency that we have designated it our major process priority for the future. We expect the benefits to long outlast the intensive efforts we will require to accomplish bringing it about.

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 5 - ESTABLISH A COOPERATIVE PROCESSING ARCHITECTURE

As a large and complex information agency, SSA is already operating in an environment that uses a cooperative operating mode. That is, some of our data are obtained and stored locally and some are obtained and stored centrally; some of our processing is done locally and some centrally. However, most of our local data storage and processing relates to the manual processes and non-automated or locally-developed information stores that we use in components that are both geographically and programmatically distributed. Until now, our computer resources have had primarily a centralized focus, because using a centralized architecture, relying on large "mainframe" computers, was more efficient for SSA.

BENEFITS OF COOPERATIVE PROCESSING

Now, with technological advances in hardware, software and telecommunications that can support the "distribution" of systems as large as SSA's, we believe that a cooperative architecture can be developed that will increase our effectiveness and efficiency. The vision of SSA is to create an automated systems environment that mirrors and therefore facilitates the way we actually process our work. Such an architecture promises continuing improvements in the availability and reliability of our systems, supports our use of complex tools such as expert systems and imaging, and assists us in building into our automated systems a dependable capability for backup and recovery. Our integrated architecture will make it easy for all users to access all capabilities of the systems. In short, establishing a cooperative processing architecture means that we are actively determining the optimal mode of processing our automated workloads and that we will be consistently utilizing the systems platform that provides the greatest responsiveness for the least cost.

As with the implementation of all new procedures and technologies (such as the electronic folders discussed in Strategic Priority 4), we recognize that the move to a cooperative processing architecture will present a major challenge to both those who must develop it and those who must implement its effects.

The major activities that will be pursued in establishing a cooperative architecture include the following:

IMPLEMENTATION ACTIVITIES

- o Perform analyses of our major processes to determine what processing mode(s) would be most effective

- o Based on FTS 2000 capabilities, design and build a telecommunications network, including local-area networks and an enhanced wide-area network, to support the processing design
- o Install hardware components, such as intelligent workstations
- o Beginning with SSI systems modernization, redesign/build/install programmatic and administrative software as part of the architecture
- o Implement a backup and recovery strategy
- o Develop and install security systems and procedures
- o Develop a common user interface

SUPPORT FOR SERVICE OBJECTIVES

Because SSA relies heavily on our automated systems to deliver service to the public, general improvements to the systems architecture result in overall improvements to service. Establishing a cooperative processing architecture will allow us to reach our service-delivery objectives more quickly than we would if we used a non-flexible processing mode. It will ultimately prove critical to our maintaining an infrastructure that is adequate to process the very large workloads we expect when the baby-boomers come of retirement age.

Next Steps

With the identification of our strategic priorities, the Agency's strategic direction is complete. Next, we will face the difficult challenges of developing plans and committing ourselves to courses of action that will lead directly to the achievement of our goals and objectives. We must move forward to implement the rest of SSA's unified planning system--the Planning and Budgeting System (PBS)--that will form the bridge between the strategic direction set forth in this document and the more immediate considerations of budgets and schedules.

One step that SSA will take to implement the PBS is to set interim, tactical-level service goals and objectives as a way of making clear how we view the relative priority of our objectives during the next 5 to 7 years. We will develop Agency-level tactical plans that will support an orderly transition process. These will include plans to implement the five strategic priorities set forth in this document. They will also include plans for other changes to our business processes--major programs and initiatives that will move us toward attaining our service-delivery goals and objectives while supporting our fundamental Agency goals and reflecting our commitments.

We believe that major programs and initiatives must be managed individually so that their internal activities are conducted in an orderly fashion and a total "system" improvement can be accomplished. However, we are convinced that true integration of major plans at the Agency level requires at all times a two-dimensional (and sometimes multi-dimensional) approach to management. Not only must we manage initiatives individually but we must also manage their different resource components so that we can optimize the use of our resources and bring to bear specific management expertise of the Agency where it will be of most value. For example, if enhanced automated support of the SSI program depends on purchasing intelligent workstations and improved access to SSA relies on a similar purchase, sound management practice requires that we manage the way we acquire the resource just as we would manage each of the separate initiatives. We will develop such integrated resource plans as part of the PBS.

These tactical-level plans will be used to determine the Agency's budget requirements. The budgets built early during the planning period will reflect the resources required to develop new systems and processes and test new ways to apply technology to them as well as the resources required to perform the Agency's work as we currently perform it. These budgets are expected to emphasize the costs of addressing our strategic priorities. Later budgets will reflect developmental resources as well, but will also begin to reflect the savings that result from our new systems and processes and the resources expenditures we will never have to make because we implemented them. Intangible benefits and benefits to the public, though not reflected directly in the budget, will also begin to appear as SSA moves ahead in implementing the ASP.

Finally, we recognize two other types of activities that are key to implementing the ASP and that must take place in the near term. One, we must conduct comprehensive process analyses of workload-specific operations in order to help us establish the baseline against which the costs and benefits of specific process changes can be measured. And two, we must modify our current systems and processes or establish new ones that will enable us to collect the management information essential to identifying our current service levels (where we cannot yet do so) and monitoring our progress toward meeting the service levels we have set as objectives.

The ASP, as the keystone of SSA's unified planning system, has set in motion a comprehensive process by which the Agency will determine where we want to go in the long term and decide what must be done in the shorter term to get there. We are confident that the complexities of managing an agency as large and with as far-reaching impact as SSA will be made less daunting because of the direction the ASP sets for us.