

CHAPTER SEVEN: PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING



"The American public looks to our agency for a base of factual information about the program and about the issues. Public education is one of the most important things that we do."

— Commissioner Kenneth Apfel

Educating the public on Social Security issues has always been an important part of the Agency's mission. From 1993 thru 2000, the Social Security Administration (SSA) continued its commitment to providing information to the public. This responsibility spanned from providing basic information to beneficiaries to entering the public policy arena by promoting an interest and knowledge of issues such as Social Security's long-range fiscal health. The significance of public understanding is reflected not only in the Agency's strategic plans, but also in the major change that has occurred within the Agency itself, namely that of Independent Agency.

Independence in 1995 provided an atmosphere that significantly changed the manner in which, and hence the effectiveness, of the Agency's efforts to reach the American public. Increased external visibility to Social Security's stakeholders¹ and internal reorganization necessitated by independence required the Agency to change its focus, vision, and emphasis. The Agency embarked on a number of initiatives to educate the American public, and to give its own employees the tools to become individual representatives for Social Security.

¹ The main external stakeholders are the American Public, the Congress, the White House, and the media.

For 65 years, the Agency has delivered service to the American public in a manner that has fostered confidence and trust in the quality of its programs and employees. But this confidence and trust are premised upon both outstanding service and a public understanding of what Social Security is and means to the American public. Millions of Americans are directly benefited by the Agency and take a more active and personal interest in Social Security. Many more millions, however, are not directly affected by the Agency, and they often do not understand how Social Security works, how it will benefit them in the future, and how best to protect its integrity. Without this broader public understanding, the Agency cannot build the trust and confidence of the American public in the importance of Social Security. Also, the Agency would not be able to fulfill its mandate to serve the public in an effective and compassionate manner.

SSA has the responsibility to communicate in an authoritative, credible, accurate, and accessible manner with the 200 million Americans, as of calendar year 1999, who are affected by and/or benefit from its many programs. These include the 48 million individuals who are receiving Social Security benefits, and the 153 million workers who pay the taxes that finance the program.² The Agency has a special obligation to inform these workers about the benefit protections, the financing of benefits, and the operations of the Trust Fund. Public confidence in the Agency is directly linked to public understanding of the programs, and the American public has a vital need and interest in information about Social Security, a program that has become a part of the fabric of our society.

INDEPENDENT AGENCY

1993-1995: PRE-INDEPENDENT AGENCY

"The Commissioner of Social Security must be an active, ardent, and forceful voice in educating the American public as to the value of Social Security protection to individuals and families, now and in the future. We must work to turn public opinion around before eroding public confidence in Social Security is transformed into popular support for measures that could diminish the system's effectiveness and endanger the financial security of millions of Americans."

- Commissioner Shirley S. Chater³

² *Fast Facts & Figures: About Social Security*, Office of Policy, August, 2000, pgs 9, 30.

³ "Shirley S. Chater, Ph.D., becomes 12th Commissioner of Social Security", HHS News, Press Release, October 8, 1993.

The Agency in 1993 was relatively passive and reactive in educating the public. Protected by the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) from public scrutiny, and more importantly, Congressional attention, the Agency's self prescribed mandate did not extend beyond the straightforward: to provide basic, programmatic information to those who inquire about it. However, the idea was born that the Agency should do more to promote a broader understanding of the public policy issues surrounding Social Security, and increase efforts to educate the broader American public about Social Security. This idea expanded with new leadership, and was acknowledged as part of the fundamental mission of the Agency.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In 1936, when the Social Security Board began operation, an Office of Information was created with direct access to the agency's top administrator. The need for and value of public information were clear. First, there was a nationwide effort to explain the difference between the new concept of "social insurance" and to create a distinction between this government program and the widely accepted though stigmatized notion of "public relief." On a practical level, wide publicity was needed to register people with Social Security numbers and to respond to privacy concerns about that number.

During 1937, 50 million leaflets explaining the use of the Social Security number were printed and distributed to workers at factory gates and offices throughout the country. These workers also needed to be informed about their rights and responsibilities under the Social Security program, such as tax contribution rates, benefit formulas and eligibility criteria. In 1936, for example, the Board said "if the public is fully informed about eligibility requirements, the agency is saved much trouble and expense since few ineligibles apply."

By the post World War II years, the program was maturing and quickly becoming part of the fabric of American life. Public information responsibilities of the Agency, while important, now played a subordinate role. Public education and public information efforts increasingly focused on program eligibility requirements, with comparatively lesser attention given to basic program philosophy and financing structure. This lack of priority was reflected in the institutional placement of the Office of Communications (OCOMM) within the Agency.

Until 1996, OCOMM (and its predecessors) functioned as a staff component headed by an Associate Commissioner. For example, in 1990, the Office of Public Affairs was a subcomponent of the Office of the Deputy Commissioner for Policy and External Affairs. The Associate Commissioner for Public Affairs was one of five associate commissioners reporting to a Deputy Commissioner, and one of 35 associate commissioners within the agency.

Access to the Commissioner and the Executive Staff was limited. Professional advice about communications issues and vital communications concerns on policy issues was filtered through other components, as were questions from the Executive Staff about appropriate communications policies. Broad issues about national public affairs policy were often deferred

to the Agency's then parent agency, HHS, much like most other issues within the Agency at the time.

More significantly, this arrangement kept the Agency from the glare of public scrutiny and Congressional attention, and there was little direct pressure for the Agency to go beyond the basic responsibility of providing programmatic information to the public. Throughout most of the past 25 years, and until it became an independent agency in 1995, the Agency's communications activities were often scattered, unfocused, and uncoordinated. For example:

- The Press Office was part of the Office of the Commissioner;
- Employee communications were located within the Office of Human Resources;
- Speechwriting was first a function of the Office of Policy, and then switched to the Office of the Commissioner;
- Regional communications efforts were directed by the Office of Operations; and,
- Internet public information responsibilities were primarily under the Office of Systems, but a number of other components also had control over other aspects of it, leading to an unfocused and inefficient use of resources.

The result of a non-centralized communications policy was an inability to define or effectively present core Social Security public information messages. Communications efforts were often duplicative and wasteful of limited agency resources.

In short, the Agency's emphasis on public education and public information efforts was comparatively less than in the early years, and OCOMM often did not have a "seat at the table" when important communications policy decisions about SSA and its programs were being made.

Moreover, other collateral issues had an impact upon how the Agency carried out its mandate to educate the American public. For instance, one of the legacies of downsizing in the 1980s was a decreasing workforce with increasing workload. This never ending "trimming of the fat" led to less and less time and energy devoted by the Agency to educate its own workforce on program philosophy and financial structure, and an increase in focus on workload management, resulting in many field office Managers unable or unwilling to grant much time for the long term investment of workforce development at the expense of short term workload product. The unfortunate and unforeseen result of this shortsighted course of action has been that the Agency's own employees, arguably its greatest public education tool, have become less effective as representatives of their own employer, the Social Security Administration, to the American public.

These institutional and collateral forces made Agency efforts to educate the public less than effective. Because of the insularity afforded by HHS, SSA could not achieve the full scope of its mission, causing the appearance of a lack of initiative in the Agency's education efforts. The lack of cohesion and focus in communications efforts ensured that any initiatives undertaken

by the OCOMM were going to be less than successful. And with its actions usually below the radar of the Executive Staff (not to mention the leadership of HHS), there was often a lack of interest and support from the leadership.

However, new leadership under Commissioner Chater sought to change some of these systemic problems. Whereas the strategic goals set in 1991 did not directly address the issue of public understanding,⁴ one of the three strategic goals articulated by Commissioner Chater in 1994 specifically addressed communication issues – Rebuild Public Confidence in Social Security.⁵ Rebuilding and revitalizing the communications function of the Agency was one of her highest priorities. To do so, Commissioner Chater brought in outside expertise to help develop this function within the newly independent Agency.

Commissioner Chater understood that public confidence was predicated upon a public that understands the issues surrounding Social Security. More significantly, she understood that while not directly related to the actual work of Social Security, the confidence of the American public was critical to maintaining public backing, public involvement, and thus Congressional support for Social Security. She recognized that her standing with the White House was crucial to these efforts, and that proper handling of the media was critical. Her farsightedness would serve the Agency well through the changes to come, and the theme of public confidence was soon to be echoed by Congress in the most significant change to SSA during the Clinton Administration – its independence.

1995: SSA BECOMES AN INDEPENDENT AGENCY

"As Commissioner, one of my roles will be to help Americans understand Social Security today, so that they will be prepared to make the tough choices to ensure the program will be there for them tomorrow."

– Commissioner Kenneth S. Apfel⁶

⁴ The three 1991 goals were:

- (1) To serve the public with compassion, courtesy, consideration, efficiency, and accuracy;
- (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; and,
- (3) To create an environment that ensures a highly skilled, motivated workforce dedicated to meeting the challenge of SSA's public service mission.

⁵ Commissioner Chater's three strategic goals were:

- (1) Rebuild Public Confidence in Social Security;
- (2) Provide World-Class Service; and,
- (3) Create a Nurturing Environment for SSA Employees.

⁶ Confirmation hearing in U.S. Senate for Kenneth S. Apfel, Social Security Commissioner Designee, September 10, 1997.

In August 1994, the Congress passed and the President signed into law legislation that established the Social Security Administration as an independent agency within the Executive Branch of government. The reasons given by the Congress for establishing the SSA as an independent agency were to strengthen the public's confidence in Social Security by giving it more visibility and accountability, by promoting administrative efficiency, and by streamlining the operations of the Agency so that it could better serve the American public.

Independence changed the Agency in far more significant ways both externally and internally than the simple word would suggest. Externally, the Congressional goal to strengthen public confidence by promoting visibility and accountability was quickly achieved by the Agency's elevation to the center stage for both the public and the Congress. Internally, the advent of independence resulted in major organizational changes necessitated by the Agency separating from HHS; components and departments of SSA formerly underdeveloped or underutilized because of the protective shadow of HHS were forced to mature.

External visibility and internal reorganization began to reverse many of the roadblocks in the way of an effective Agency communications plan. Without the cover of HHS, the Agency was forced to deal directly with the American public, the Congress, the White House, and the media. Internal reorganization resulted in a much more consolidated communications team, leading to more cohesion and focus. And the elevation of OCOMM to the Deputy Commissioner level brought communication issues to the attention of the Executive Staff. OCOMM now had direct access to and full support of the entire leadership of the Agency.

EXTERNAL PRESSURE: INCREASED VISIBILITY

External visibility increased significantly with independence. The Agency would henceforth deal directly with its main external stakeholders – the American public, the Congress, the White House, and the media. Heightened attention given to Social Security public policy issues during this time period, especially around the issue of solvency after President Clinton's 1998 State of the Union Address, guaranteed that the Agency's voice would be heard. Moreover, the Agency would have to respond to public inquiries on its own.

After legislation making SSA independent became effective in March 1995, the Agency quickly gained a more prominent profile. For example:

- Media contacts became more frequent;
- The Agency set up a physical presence in Washington DC;

- The Commissioner made more public appearances and testified more often before Congress;⁷ and
- Agency employees began to participate more frequently in local discussions regarding Social Security.

These actions were a direct result of the increased visibility of the Agency to the American public.

Then, through his 1998 State of the Union Address, President Clinton further thrust the Agency into the public spotlight when he acknowledged the long-term financing problems that were facing the Social Security program. To “Save Social Security First,” the President stated that educating the American public so that they understand the issues facing Social Security programs was crucial. Thus began a full year of dialogue with the American public. The Agency was committed to talking with and listening to the American public.

The Agency also placed a new emphasis upon liaison with, and outreach efforts to national advocacy groups and major civic organizations. Periodic “brown-bag lunches” with stakeholders and others interested in Social Security issues were begun. These efforts promoted an informal discussion of issues and Agency initiatives, and efforts were also made to ensure that the Agency had a presence at every major convention across the country.

The Social Security Advisory Board noted at the time that SSA should take the lead in educating workers and their families about retirement planning. This will be especially important in the coming decades. There are as of 2000 roughly 80 million members of the “baby boom” generation in middle age, and in 2008 the first of these individuals will begin to retire. Many are just now starting to prepare financial plans for their retirement years.

INTERNAL PRESSURE: ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

Internal organizational change was required by independence because certain components were underutilized while the Agency was a component of HHS. For example, the pre-independence OCOMM was less than proactive because institutionally it was not given the responsibility beyond narrowly defined goals of providing specific program information. Typically, public and (especially) Congressional inquiries were dealt with by HHS; the Agency did not develop the structures necessary to respond to such requests. Independence changed all of this.

The elevation of OCOMM to a Deputy Commissioner level component resulted in bringing communication issues to the forefront of the Agency’s leadership and in allowing it to focus and consolidate formerly disjointed communication efforts. OCOMM began to slowly

⁷ For example, under the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (Public Law 104-193), Congress required the Commissioner to report annually to the President and to the Congress on the status of the SSI program. The first such report was issued in May 1997, and have been issued annually since.

consolidate the formerly scattered communication efforts of the Agency, providing a foundation for developing a comprehensive, focused, and cohesive communications plan. The Press Office, internal communication efforts, speechwriting, and eventually the running of the Agency's Internet website would come under its purview. Communication initiatives that were once unfocused and unrealized were given the focus and support that was previously missing.

While both Commissioner Chater and Commissioner Apfel have championed the cause of SSA being a force for public education in Social Security issues, they both realized that real change could only occur with institutional change. Without an institutional component advocating the communication perspective, the Agency could not provide the focused and cohesive leadership in education that was envisioned by the Commissioners and demanded by the President and the American public. But this change was not always easy or necessarily smooth.

Communications is not an explicit business process of the Social Security Administration, and the Agency's leadership sometimes had to work hard to convince others to understand the need for and value of communications. The linkage between effective communications, public and hence Congressional support, and the future stability of the Social Security program was not always clear. Moreover, the concept that public confidence is directly tied to an informed and educated public was sometimes lost to those who saw the Agency as just a technical program service provider rather than an integral part of Americans' lives. However, leadership directly from the Commissioners spearheaded both the elevation of communications within the institutional structure of the Agency, and also as a strategic goal.

One of the first challenges of the newly established OCOMM was finding its place within the strategic plans for the newly independent SSA. Under both new strategic plans,⁸ public understanding was recognized as one of five Agency-wide strategic goals; both plans defined the goal as: "[T]o strengthen public understanding of the social security programs."⁹ The inclusion of public understanding as a strategic goal of the Agency was not a forgone conclusion, but required the strong sponsorship of Commissioner Apfel. Only through his personal advocacy did the full Executive Staff become convinced of the need for communications as one of five strategic goals for the Agency.

In addition to OCOMM, the Office of Legislation and Congressional Affairs (OLCA) also went through significant changes as a result of independence. OLCA was forced to establish a physical presence in Washington DC,¹⁰ increase its staff substantially to take on all the responsibilities of a "full fledged" agency, and develop the institutional and human resource skills to become effective communicators with one of the Agency's most important external stakeholders – the Congress.

The appointment of the Agency's first confirmed Deputy Commissioner in November 1999 was a key component of improved Congressional relations. As the Chief Operating Officer

⁸ "Keeping the Promise": Strategic Plan 1997-2002, Office of Strategic Management, September, 1997; and "Mastering the Challenge": Strategic Plan 2000-2005, Office of Strategic Management, September, 2000.

⁹ Strategic Plan 1997-2002, pg 31; Strategic Plan 2000-2005, pg 44.

¹⁰ Under HHS, the Agency did not have an actual physical presence in Washington, D.C.

and working closely with the Commissioner, the Deputy Commissioner made a number of visits to members of Congress. These visits emphasized Social Security's appropriations and budgetary needs, the Agency's efforts to enhance service to the public through electronic service delivery initiatives, the impact of the repeal of the Retirement Earnings Test, and issues affecting Social Security's future.

The higher visibility of the Agency on the Hill helped facilitate such things as securing \$35 million in supplemental funding for the Agency in June 2000. In addition, Congressional awareness of the challenges facing Social Security increased, and the Agency's working relationship with Congress and numerous subcommittees was strengthened.

The Deputy Commissioner's Office also spearheaded the creation of an Agency task force to inform Congressional Members and their staffs about Social Security's Fiscal Year 2001 resource needs and to develop support for a proposal to take Social Security's administrative expenses out of the discretionary spending caps. As a result of this effort, on October 11, 2000, Congressman Clay Shaw and Congressman Ben Cardin introduced *The Social Security Administration Preparedness Act of 2000*. This legislation would exempt Social Security's administrative expenses from current budget caps and classifies these expenses under a new separate cap only for Social Security's administrative costs.¹¹ If enacted, Social Security will no longer compete with health research, education, and other important programs for resources to administer the nation's social insurance programs, placing the Agency in a much better position to deal with the substantial workload increases anticipated as the baby boom generation moves toward their disability prone years and retirement.

These two forces, the pressure of public scrutiny and internal reorganization, provided the impetus for the Agency to grow and mature quickly. These changes coupled with dynamic new leadership helped forge new initiatives and pushed the Agency to go further in educating the public. The leadership came from the Commissioner and his Executive Staff. Assistance also came from the Social Security Advisory Board, who noted that the Agency should go beyond providing basic information about Social Security and should take the lead in educating workers and their families about retirement planning.¹² During the national dialogue associated with solvency, the newly developed skills in communicating with the American public and the Congress would serve the Agency well.

¹¹ The legislation would also enable the Agency to recruit and hire personnel in anticipation of the "retirement wave" of large numbers of Social Security employees in the coming decade.

¹² This will become especially important in the coming decade as more than 80 million members of the "baby boom" generation reach middle age. In 2008 the first of these individuals will begin to retire, and many are just now starting to prepare financial plans for their retirement years.

MAJOR INITIATIVES

"Helping individuals understand what they need to do to ensure their economic security in retirement should be a major objective of the agency."

— Social Security Advisory Board¹³

In assessing communications needs soon after becoming independent, the Agency concluded that new initiatives were needed in three separate but related areas: 1) reliably measuring communications performance; 2) creating new public information products to address topical Social Security issues; and 3) training SSA executives and employees to communicate effectively with the public in a new communications environment. Additional emphasis by Vice President Gore, in the National Partnership for Reinventing Government, was given when he noted that the Federal government has a special responsibility to communicate concisely and understandably.

SSA committed itself to an aggressive, proactive public education outreach campaign. The campaign included the following: 1) public events and media campaigns; 2) the development of new brochures and printed materials; 3) the Social Security Statement; and 4) making maximum use of new technology, including the Internet.

From 1998 thru 2000, Agency employees participated in more than 10,000 public events and media opportunities on Social Security and issues affecting its future. These events included, for example, community events co-sponsored by such organizations as the Junior Chamber of Commerce and Americans Discuss Social Security, community forums held in conjunction with U.S. Congressional representatives, newspaper editorial board interviews, and Internet forums.

MEASURING COMMUNICATIONS PERFORMANCE

The Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) of 1993 redefined how government is evaluated, making every Federal program responsible for producing measurable results. In 1997, SSA established a Strategic Plan with five key strategic goals, with one of the goals being "to strengthen public understanding of the Social Security programs." In response to the GPRA's mandate to demonstrate tangible results,

¹³ Increasing Public Understanding of Social Security, Social Security Advisory Board, September, 1997, pg 3.

quantitative objectives were established for each of the five goals. For the public understanding goal, the Agency's objective was to have 90 percent of the American public knowledgeable about the Social Security program in five critical areas by 2005. Those areas are:

- (1) Basic program facts;
- (2) Financial value of the program to individuals;
- (3) Economic and social impact of the program;
- (4) Social Security's current financing; and
- (5) Financing issues.

As noted in the Agency's Strategic Plan, "the achievement of this goal [of strengthened public understanding] supports every other goal of the organization. It helps people knowledgeably debate the issues facing Social Security; it supports SSA's ability to provide world-class customer service; it helps customers understand their responsibilities under law, leading to payment accuracy and reduction of fraud; and it raises the level of public respect for SSA employees."

When the goal was established in 1997, available measures of public knowledge about Social Security were unsatisfactory, and the Agency was unable to determine if progress was being made toward achieving the objectives. It needed to identify the effectiveness of implemented programs among different segments of the national audience and program information areas that needed more emphasis. At the time, the best data available on public knowledge regarding Social Security were survey data on the degree to which individuals personally claimed to have knowledge about Social Security. These data were inadequate to answer the specific questions the Agency identified, and better measurement tools had to be devised.

In late 1997, SSA, with the help of the Gallup Organization, developed the Public Understanding Measurement System (PUMS) as a process to measure the public's baseline level of knowledge of Social Security programs. A series of 19 questions related to Social Security was created, and in 1998 a nationwide survey of 4,000 adults was conducted. The Agency determined that individuals who had 13 correct answers would be considered "knowledgeable."¹⁴

The 1998 results indicated that 55 percent of the public was knowledgeable about Social Security programs, and had an understanding of the basic programs and concepts. The results also indicated that the public was not as knowledgeable about the more technical features of Social Security, such as the average benefit amount. A statistical analysis showed that knowledge variance was chiefly due to demographic factors such as age, education, and income, with older, more educated, and high-income individuals showing the highest degree of knowledge.

¹⁴ See Exhibit 1.

A second survey was completed in January 2000, and it showed a slightly higher overall knowledge level. In addition, the results showed an increase in the public's knowledge about several questions related to an individual's own retirement planning. For example, knowledge that an individual can receive some retirement benefits before full retirement age rose from 62 percent to 65 percent, while knowledge that there will be an increase in the age for receipt of full retirement benefits rose from 65 percent to 72 percent. One pivotal factor in increasing the overall level of public knowledge about Social Security was receipt of the Social Security Statement.¹⁵

The PUMS survey was designed to answer both questions initially identified by SSA as important to further the strategic goal of educating the public on Social Security. It provides a valuable guide for identifying basic Social Security information not generally known by the public, and identifying subsets of the population in which an understanding of Social Security was lower than the general population. This knowledge will help facilitate focused communication efforts to target under informed segments of society.

The Agency has set performance targets for FY 2000 and FY 2001. Data and other analysis from the PUMS will be the primary method used to measure progress in achieving the strategic education objective. A national survey of 4,000 people will be conducted each October through the year 2005, and a series of quarterly surveys in several regions will help determine the effectiveness of specific public education initiatives.

THE SOCIAL SECURITY STATEMENT

"The Social Security Statement is a valuable tool that will help Americans prepare for their long-term financial security; it puts the future in their hands."

- Commissioner Kenneth S. Apfel

On October 1, 1999, the Social Security Administration launched the largest customized mailing ever undertaken by a Federal agency when it began to send an annual Social Security Statement (a redesigned Personal Earnings and Benefit Estimate Statement) to 125 million workers. Designed to increase the overall level of public knowledge about Social Security, the Social Security Statement potentially represents one of the Agency's most valuable public information and education tools. The 4-page statement helps workers with financial planning by providing estimates of their retirement, disability, and

¹⁵ The January 2000 survey results indicate that while 57 percent of the public was considered knowledgeable, 68 percent of those who received a Statement were found to be so.

survivors' benefits. The statement also provides workers an easy way to determine whether their earnings are accurately posted on their Social Security records.

The annual Social Security Statement was the result of efforts by Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan to establish in law the requirement that all Americans receive an annual statement of potential Social Security benefits. By law, the Agency will send the annual statements to workers who are ages 25 and older and not receiving Social Security benefits. The Agency staggers the mailing of the statements throughout the year, with approximately 500,000 statements delivered each day (about 10 million per month). Workers automatically receive their statements about three months before their birthday.

The Omnibus Budget and Reconciliation Acts of 1989 and 1990 required the Agency to begin providing the public with annual statements about each individual's Social Security earnings record and estimates of the amount of benefits individuals may receive. These Statements had been available to the public upon request since 1988. However, the legislation required the Agency to start sending these Statements automatically in FY 1995 to workers reaching age 60 (and older), and in FY 1996 through FY 1999 to those attaining age 60 in those years. The legislation further required that beginning in FY 2000, the Agency would issue the Statements annually to all workers age 25 and over, an estimated 133 million people. The intent of this provision was to assure that each worker is aware of the protection provided by Social Security and is periodically afforded the opportunity to review the accuracy of the his/her earnings record.

The results of the January 2000 PUMS survey undertaken with help by the Gallup Organization showed that receipt of the Statement played a significant role in increasing Americans' understanding of Social Security. The survey showed that individuals who have received a Social Security Statement have a significantly greater understanding of Social Security than those who did not receive a statement. The January 2000 survey results indicated that while about 57 percent of the public is knowledgeable, 68 percent of those who received a Statement were found to be knowledgeable. Those who have received a statement were significantly more likely to know:

- (1) The amount of Social Security benefits depends on how much they earned;
- (2) Social Security pays benefits to workers who become disabled;
- (3) Social Security provides benefits to dependents of workers who die; and,
- (4) Social Security was designed only to provide part of total retirement income.

Beginning October 2000, workers age 55 years and older began receiving a special insert in their annual Social Security Statement providing important information on retirement options that will help workers make important retirement planning decisions before reaching retirement age. The insert highlights the various factors workers nearing retirement need to consider, such as the long-term effects of taking a reduced benefit or the impact work would have on their benefit.

A decision was made to modify the mail-out schedule to accelerate the FY 2000 mailings. Rather than mail Statements to approximately 1.6 million people turning 60 each year between 1996 and 1999 and then jump to mailing to 133 million Statements, it was decided to phase in the FY 2000 mailings by adding to each of the scheduled annual mailings. Therefore, the following schedule was put into place:

	<u>Legislated</u>	<u>Accelerated</u>	<u>Actual</u>
1995			7.2 million
1996	1.6 million	5 million	5.6 million
1997	1.7 million	10 million	12.4 million
1998	1.8 million	20 million	20.6 million
1999	1.8 million	30 million	26.5 million

This schedule allowed the Agency to handle the two primary fallout workloads, inquiries and earnings corrections (both of which are considered to be one-time workloads), in advance of the annual mailing of 133 million Statements. By phasing in the additional recipients, when the annual mailings began in FY 2000, over 70 million of the 133 million scheduled recipients had already received one Statement.

The Agency began sending the Statements automatically to individuals age 60 and over in 1995. As of FY 2000, nearly 73 million statements have been mailed to individuals 40 and older. In addition, individuals have been able to request statements from the Agency since 1988, with roughly 37 million requests for statements over the past 12 years processed.

Along with working to assure that the Statement would be as comprehensive and understandable as possible, the Agency faced the additional challenge of planning for the fallout workloads associated with the Statements. Based on experience with the fallout workloads from the on-request Statements, the Agency focused its attention on two major workloads, inquiries and earnings corrections. For first time Statement recipients, it was projected that inquiries would occur at a rate of 5 percent and earnings corrections would occur at a rate of 0.19 percent. While every effort was made to encourage the public to contact us by telephone, plans were developed for handling these workloads in the field offices.

In the on-request Statement process, all fallout workloads were handled by a single-site component, the Office of Earnings Operations (OEO). To support the on-request inquiry workload, OEO had its own toll-free number. OEO was the only component with access to the various microfilm files with earnings information and therefore was the only site with the capability to correct earnings errors. If a field office received an earnings correction, they sent it to OEO for handling.

With the impending Statement workloads it was recognized that this single-site operation would not have sufficient staff to handle the workloads. Rather than staff-up OEO for what would be a limited period of peak workloads from 1995 through 2000, alternative processes were developed.

The first change was to expand the capability to correct earnings errors to other components beyond OEO. Software that supported OEO's processing of earnings correction actions was expanded to include field offices, program service centers, and teleservice centers. This software enabled any Agency processing site to establish earnings correction actions, perform searches of its on-line Suspense file, and effectuate earning corrections. This software also contained communication functionality so that sites could contact OEO for assistance, such as scouting to microfilm, as necessary. National training was conducted through "train-the-trainer" and Phoenix lessons. The training was provided to all claims technicians (claims representatives and service representatives), teleservice representatives, and program service center technicians (claims authorizers, benefit authorizers, technical support staff).

The second change necessary was to prepare for the Inquiry workload. For the first year of mailing Statements, the Statements contained the OEO toll-free number. However, OEO did not have adequate staff or telecommunication hardware sufficient to handle the anticipated call volumes that were expected in later years as the mail-out volumes grew. Thus after the first year, it was decided that the SSA National 800 Number Network (1-800-772-1213) would be used as the telephone contact point for the Statement Inquiries. Communication links were established to connect the OEO 800 number staff into the national 800 number call routing paths. Call routing plans and Statement specific menu prompts were developed to direct the Statement related traffic to OEO personnel as the first call location, with routing of overflow calls to other sites. Training was provided to all teleservice representatives, including program service center personnel who served as "spike" staff to assist the national 800 number staff during peak calling periods.

In later years, when the annual mailings reached 133 million Statements, other services were developed to handle more of the Inquiry workload. Studies and surveys were conducted to ascertain the nature of the inquiries, and the 800 number menu was expanded to allow the selection of various recorded informational messages on the topics that people called for most often. For example, answers to questions like why did I get this Statement, where did you get my address, etc. were dealt with in an automated menu so as to not require use of precious personnel resources. In addition, automated response scripts were developed to process such requests as for forms to request a new Statement and to correct a Social Security card. A website¹⁶ was developed specifically to handle questions from the Statement, containing responses to the most frequently asked questions and links to other sites among other things.

From the time of the first mailings in FY 1995, as changes occurred either in the Statement or in the software supporting the production of the Statement, instructional materials were updated and refresher training was conducted. The fallout workloads have always been closely monitored to assure that the public received the very best service from the Agency, beginning with the receipt of an accurate Statement to the satisfactory resolution of any questions or earnings correction actions.

Because the Statement is the Agency's most useful tool for increasing public understanding about Social Security and the need for personal financial retirement planning, SSA has developed a multi-media campaign to alert the public to the annual mailings. The

¹⁶ www.ssa.gov/mystatement.

office has also distributed a package of employee informational materials on the Statement, and the Agency's Internet website offers further information about the Statement to recipients or other individuals who have questions.

The Social Security Statement has received recognition from many outside organizations. The National Academy of Social Insurance has said that, "the Statement is SSA's most effective [public information] tool. The tangibility of this form, which includes earnings for every year in which that individual was employed by a job covered by Social Security, may help make this program more real to people. Getting a benefit statement on a regular basis is going to have a pronounced impact on people's expectations and attitudes about Social Security."

As Commissioner Apfel has noted, "[T]he results clearly demonstrate that Social Security Statements are increasing the public's understanding of the basic features of Social Security." In addition, he has stated that, "[T]he Statement is not only providing information that is useful and easy to understand, it is also prompting millions of Americans to take action to better prepare for retirement." And to help the American public do so, the Agency has used other outreach products and technological tools to aid their endeavors.

TECHNOLOGY

The Clinton Administration has overseen great advances in technology, enhancements in information sharing, more open systems, online access, and the emergence of a strong Internet presence throughout Government. In an increasingly complex and fast-moving society, technology has become synonymous with effective and efficient service. The new Information Highway has left the familiar communications landmarks of the past behind, and information now doubles every two to three years; available virtually everywhere, almost instantly. For example, the Library of Congress' entire collection of books could now be transmitted over optic transmission lines in less than 10 minutes. These new developments have greatly improved Government efficiency, public access, and employee job enrichment via advanced technology.

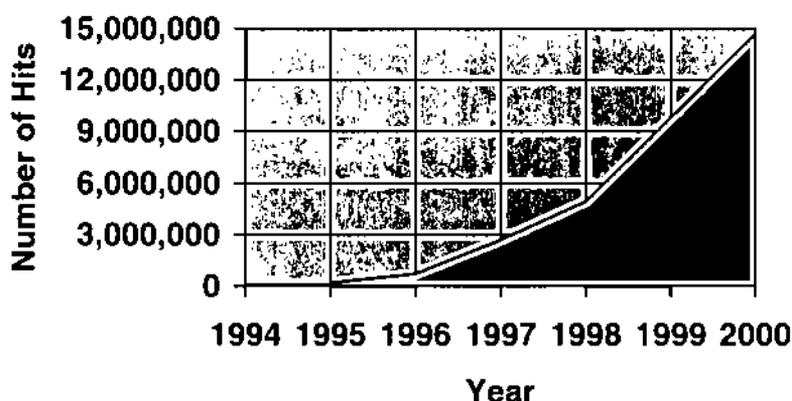
At the same time, these changes have made it difficult for many people to work through the flood of information available to find what is really useful. The increase in information vehicles that has made it easier for communicators to get messages out has also made it more difficult to get those messages through to their audiences. The Agency recognizes that in the 21st century, the Information Age, changes would continue and accelerate, and have embraced technology as an effective tool to reach and educate the American public.

In January 1994, Team Internet was assembled by the Office of Systems to begin the SSA Online initiative. Their purpose was to create an Internet service including Internet gopher, file-transfer protocol, and World Wide Web servers. Its success has been recognized by other agencies and other parts of the Administration who have used this system as a model to get on to the "Information Super Highway". The improved services have received positive media reviews

in WIRED magazine and The Washington Post, and PC Computing magazine honored SSA Online as one of "101 Best Internet Sites" in the May 1995 issue.

The Agency's Internet home page, Social Security Online (<http://www.ssa.gov/>), has been recognized as among the most innovative and information-rich in government. The Internet site provides visitors with program information, downloadable versions of the forms used by the public, and other new interactive services that are being adopted and added to the web site. It is continually undergoing major redesigns to allow the Agency to better manage future growth, prepare for the high volume of anticipated on line transactions, and increase the overall satisfaction and usability of visitors. The tremendous surge in visitors to the site is testament to its success:

SSA Home Page Visits



The site has grown since its start-up in 1994 (22,212 visitors), with almost 15 million projected visitors in 2000.¹⁷

The Agency has continually worked to further expand the use of the Internet as an information source. The sites providing general public information and press information have seen increased usage since 1996, and the phenomenal growth of the Internet as an information source is expected to continue to accelerate in the next several years. The sites also offer both English and Spanish¹⁸ language versions of most information pamphlets and fact sheets that the Agency publishes. In addition, they also provide information about the Social Security Statement for individuals who may have questions after receiving their Statement. And they also provide information to those individuals who may notice discrepancies in their name, date of birth, or earnings information.

¹⁷ Social Security: Performance and Accountability Report for Fiscal Year 2000, Office of Financial Policy and Operations, SSA Pub. No. 31-231, December, 2000, pg. 18.

¹⁸ www.ssa.gov/espanol/

In looking to the future, a recent survey reported that 64 percent of respondents said that "information provided on a web page on the Internet" was either very or somewhat useful. When the survey was conducted, only 50 percent of American households had a personal computer, and only 38 million households were using the Internet. Both of these numbers are expected to grow dramatically in the next five years.

The challenge now for the Agency's communicators is to market the Internet site effectively. All agency publications and public service announcements carry its web address for individuals seeking additional information. In addition, SSA Online has linked with other government organizations such as the Administration on Aging and the FirstGov Initiative¹⁹ and non-governmental organizations such as the American Savings Education Council and the American Association of Retired Persons.

The biggest potential audience for the Social Security's Internet site is younger Americans, who are most comfortable with and the most frequent users of this medium. In 1998, approximately 8.6 million children aged 8-12 and 8.4 million teenagers were online. As they reach adulthood, the Internet will be the information source of choice for most of them. The Agency is working to let younger Americans know now that there is information about its programs on the web. The Agency's website includes a "YouthLink" page²⁰ with age-appropriate material that teachers, in particular, may find useful in helping their students learn about the nation's social insurance program.

PUBLIC INFORMATION AND EDUCATIONAL SERVICES ON SSA ONLINE

SSA History Site:²¹

The SSA History Page made its debut in October 1996. It has since been rated by an independent research service as one of the best sites on the Internet (i.e., top 5%). Among Executive Branch agencies, the SSA History Page is second only to the National Archives in making historical material available over the Internet. The SSA History Page contains a large volume of materials, including several unique collections not available anywhere else.²² The site also makes many documents accessible that would otherwise be rare and difficult to find outside of large university libraries. In addition to written materials, the History Page also provides many audio and video recordings of individuals who were prominent in the Agency's past and who have made significant contributions to shaping the programs of today.

¹⁹ FirstGov was a Clinton Administration initiative (FY 2000) to combine all online federal services into one site for the American public's convenience (i.e., to become the portal site for government services). Its motto was: "Your First Click to the U.S. Government".

www.firstgov.gov

²⁰ www.ssa.gov/kids/

²¹ www.ssa.gov/history/

²² The History Page posted the first Social Security Trustees Report from 1942 and the Report on Health Insurance from the 1934 Committee on Economic Security, neither of which had been previously available.

Employer Site:²³

This site was created in April 1998 to provide the employer community a single source for employer-related information, publications, and forms, along with wage reporting tips and how-to instructions. This site has proven to be a very popular source of information; many employer-related web sites, both in the private and public sectors, have established direct links to this site.

Work Site:²⁴

In May 2000, the Work Site, designed to improve service to people with disabilities who want to work, was created. This site contains important information for Social Security and SSI disability beneficiaries, and it provides specific and reliable information for employers, service providers, advocates, and others that help individuals with disabilities find work. Visitors will find a wide range of information on the site, from training programs for people with disabilities to tax incentives for employers who hire them. In addition, the Work Site is fully accessible by those with disabilities.

Vendor Site:²⁵

Launched in October 1998, this site provides direct deposit information and an enrollment form to vendors and the administrative payments community. The site also has a quick link to the Payment Advice Internet Delivery system that allows vendors to register on the web and look up payment information when a direct deposit has been made to their account.

Retirement Planner:²⁶

In April 2000, the Agency premiered the "Retirement Planner" to help the public assess what income they will need in retirement, and what sources they can count on. The Planners contain valuable information about retirement, disability, and survivors benefits, and factors that can affect them. It provides links to important information on factors that can affect a worker's retirement benefit, such as military service or federal employment. And it provides links to the web site of the American Savings Education Council (ASEC), which has excellent information on the need for pensions and savings in retirement.

The Retirement Planner is an extension of the information provided in the Social Security Statement, giving customers who want more information an interactive ability to ask questions. Within the first four months of use, the Agency had more than 425,000 visitors to the site.

²³ www.ssa.gov/employer/

²⁴ www.ssa.gov/work/

²⁵ www.ssa.gov/vendor/

²⁶ www.ssa.gov/retire/

e-News:²⁷

In March 2000, Social Security introduced eNews, a consumer oriented electronic newsletter about Social Security programs and issues. The free monthly newsletter, which gathered over 100,000 subscribers in the first six months it was published, provides the latest Social Security news in a convenient readable email format. Social Security automatically sends the general edition of *eNews* to subscribers. Special delivery of selected topics of interest is also available for free monthly delivery upon request. Selected topics include: disability, retirement, survivors, Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Medicare, laws and regulations, press office, wage reporting, data, studies and research, and senior issues.

Access America for Seniors:²⁸

A result of the partnering with other government agencies and outside organizations initiated by the Agency, this site provides a wealth of information for older Americans, together with links to other servicing agencies. The Agency sponsored this site with other organizations such as the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP). This type of partnership was a priority of Vice President Gore's National Partnership for Reinventing Government.

Overseas Internet Service:²⁹

An Agency web site has been established specifically to provide information and assistance to people outside the U.S. Within the current restraints imposed by the Internet's lack of security for the transmission of private information, individuals abroad have been asking for and receiving service by e-mail at the rate of about 150 requests a month.

Social Security Forms:³⁰

This site offers a variety of different Social Security forms to the public that would accomplish different Agency services. A member of the public can do such things as request a new Social Security Statement or a new Social Security Card, to downloading the form to start the disability application process.

Online Resources for Public Policy Community:

Aside from the informational materials provided to the general public, the Agency also presents large amounts of data and analysis for the public policy community. The Office of Policy maintains a website providing various publications, research materials and policy papers, and links to other sites relating to Social Security public policy issues.³¹ The Office of the Chief Actuary maintains a website putting the actuarial tables driving Social Security public policy in easy access for the public policy community, and information on the Trust Funds, COLAs, and

²⁷ www.ssa.gov/enews/

²⁸ www.seniors.gov/

²⁹ www.ssa.gov/international/inter_intro.html

³⁰ www.ssa.gov/online/forms.html

³¹ <http://www.ssa.gov/policy/>

various publications and reports.³² These sites give the public policy community access to the same reports and figures that the Agency uses in determining the future of Social Security.

COMMUNICATIONS STAFF AND TRAINING

At the same time the Agency was expanding its communications tools, it also recognized that media efforts originating from Washington and Baltimore headquarters had limitations. Much of the public relies on local newspapers and broadcast media for information, and making use of these outlets was vital to any effective public information effort. The Agency increased the number of public affairs specialists (PASs) who work in major local media markets. Between 1998-2000, the number of PASs grew from less than 30 to about 100.

The PAS position was created to address the need for coordinated public affairs activities in the major metropolitan areas after the elimination of many of the Agency's field representative positions. In 1980, the Agency had about 1,400 field representatives who, among other duties, provided continuity of contacts within the community, especially with the local media. The effects of increased workloads and fewer staff in field offices caused the number of field representatives to diminish significantly to slightly over 400 in 2000. And the focus of the field representative's duties has gradually changed, placing relatively less emphasis on providing public information and more on taking benefit applications.

As the Social Security Advisory Board noted, "[T]he curtailment of public information work by local employees is believed by many long-time SSA employees to be linked to a decline in public understanding of the Social Security program."

Even with steps being taken to increase the number of public affairs specialists, an effective communications program must make use of all available resources. Staff professionals handled most communication efforts, and the Agency worked to increase the communications skills of its executive staff and managers. SSA also began to educate its employees about vital public issues so they can serve as its 65,000 individual representatives.

In 1999, the Agency provided training to 135 members of the executive and senior staff, including all of the Regional Commissioners, on messages, media, and communications skills. From 1995 thru 1999, 1,200 field managers, public affairs specialists, and regional public affairs officers received professionally sponsored communications training. The training began in 1995 with a one-week course developed specifically for the agency's regional public affairs officers and their assistants, together with public affairs specialists. The success of the course resulted in the development of smaller sessions (two or three days) tailored to the needs of managers and executives whose responsibilities include dealing with local or national media.

³² <http://www.ssa.gov/OACT/>

The Agency also created an “Employees as Ambassadors Program.” The purpose of this program was to provide all of the Agency’s 65,000 employees with information to respond to tough questions about Social Security from the general public, or from family, neighbors, and friends. As with most organizations and government agencies, the Agency’s workforce in the past 20 years had tended to become increasingly specialized. Computer technicians, human resources professionals, and administrative personnel often had little training in Social Security programs, and even among program staff the complexity of the programs resulted in program specialists – such as title II and title XVI specialists – who knew their own programs well but had little cross-training or training in big picture issues.

This increasing specialization led to the underutilization of the Agency workforce as a source of information for the public. To address this, a two-hour course on the basic facts, history, and philosophy of Social Security was developed, as well as a primer on the long-range financing issues facing the program. Every Agency employee received training through a live, instructor-based presentation, and after the initial training, the Agency developed an “Ambassador II” training program to inform employees about major Social Security issues for 1999 – such as our Y2K preparations and the new Social Security Statement. Future trainings were envisioned to keep the workforce aware of vital and current public issues. The effort proved worthwhile as Agency employees played a larger role in public education activities.

The Agency has also made use of the Intranet to keep our PAS employees and other field office employees engaged in public education, public information, and public outreach efforts with up-to-date, timely information material. A Public Affairs Resource Center (PARC) was created on the Employee Information Server (EIS), and it has proven to be very popular. In July 2000, the PARC was the third most popular source of information on the EIS. The site includes such features as a Correspondence Guide, the Daily News Digest, Publications and Periodicals, and a Newsroom. The Agency continues to expand and improve the PARC.

CHALLENGES

The Agency has identified the outlines of significant communications challenges facing it in the near future. These include satisfying public needs and desires for information about the future of Social Security, dealing with an increasingly diverse society, addressing intensified individual retirement concerns among “baby boomers,” and keeping up with technological changes.

Informing the Public:

In the present public policy context, informing the public about critical issues regarding the future of Social Security has become increasingly important. Ensuring the long-range future of Social Security and providing an adequate foundation of retirement income for Americans were and still are among the top domestic issues facing the nation. Though there are differing

views as to how this can best be accomplished, the American public needs resources and information to be able to participate in this national dialogue.

Throughout the national debate about the long-range financing of Social Security, there have been many claims by various sources, each seemingly authoritative, as to the dimensions of the long-range financing problem faced by Social Security. With mass media, the tendency to dramatize policy debates by seeking out and emphasizing areas of conflict did not contribute to developing an understanding of the issues involved or consensus for policy change.³³ With Social Security financing, the public was confronted with conflicting claims (sometimes called "stat wars"), and often did not know whom to rely for factual information and analysis.

The American public should be able to look to SSA for factual information about the program and the issues. One of the Agency's primary goals is to ensure that virtually all Americans are knowledgeable about the program within the next few years. Much work remains to be done in achieving this goal, but a focused and cohesive public information campaign and strategy has been in place and is currently being implemented. More importantly, tracking the progress of these initiatives through PUMS has contributed greatly to the Agency's effectiveness. This public education role for the agency is both critical and challenging as the nation continues to struggle with resolving the long-range financing issues facing the Social Security system.

Diversity and the Challenge of Many Audiences:

Increasing racial and ethnic diversity of the American population has caused the United States to become increasingly multi-cultural.³⁴ The Census Bureau estimates that by 2050 more than one-third of the population (139 million people of a projected 383 million), will be post-1970 immigrants and their descendants. This population growth raises several issues for Agency communicators.

The PUMS surveys indicate that public understanding of the Social Security program is uneven, with women and minority populations having comparatively lower knowledge levels about the Social Security program and long-range financing issues. To rectify this situation, the Agency will need to engage in more minority outreach, particularly with non-English media. In addition to minority outreach efforts, the Agency must be prepared to address the Social Security information needs of women. Fully 60 percent of Social Security beneficiaries are women, and Social Security represents a larger proportion of women's retirement income than men's. Thus the Agency has targeted a number of public information materials to women, and many of its public information materials are available in Spanish, other non-English language versions, and also Braille.

³³ The Securities and Exchange Commission, in the context of assessing workers' retirement planning, noted that most people were unable to independently sort through complex economic information.

³⁴ As of 2000, African-Americans comprise 12 percent of the general population, Hispanics approximately 11 percent, and Asian Americans, the fastest growing segment of the American population, 4 percent. Within the next 50 years, these percentages will grow dramatically. African-Americans are projected to comprise 13 percent of the population, Hispanics to more than 20 percent, and Asian Americans to more than 10 percent, with much of this increase resulting from immigration.

However, the challenge is in getting these materials to the audience for whom they are intended. One initiative involves using daily press and periodical publications to amplify its messages. The Agency is working to place articles regarding Social Security in national women's magazines and to meet with editorial boards of those periodical publications about topical Social Security issues. Similarly, in 2000 there were about 500 periodicals and 325 radio and television stations with largely Hispanic audiences for which the Agency is now developing and marketing brief consumer-oriented information articles.

The Internet is, as noted previously, an extremely promising information tool. And that is particularly true for certain sub-populations. For example, among Hispanic households with incomes over \$35,000, nearly half had a computer at home in 1998, a 20 percent leap from just two years earlier. Furthermore, over a quarter of this population uses the Internet.

Retirement Wave: The Baby Boom Generation

Intensified concerns about retirement among the "baby boom" generation have made financial planning an increasingly important communications issue that will remain so throughout the next decade. In 2000, there were more than 80 million members of the "baby boom" generation (those individuals born between 1946 and 1964) who are in middle-age and beginning to look toward or think about retirement. Between 2000 and 2010 the population aged 65 and older will grow slowly, by about four million, from 35 million to just over 39 million, as people born in the 1930s and early 1940s age. By contrast, between 2010 and 2030 with the baby boomers aging, the numbers will soar by about 30 million, reaching 70 million in 2030.

The aging of America will alter society. In the years immediately ahead, the American public will have ever-greater concerns about ensuring financial security in retirement. The Agency has worked very hard to communicate information about a worker's rights and responsibilities under the program, as well as basic facts about the program, the philosophy of the program, and the non-retirement benefits provided by Social Security.

But the dramatic demographic changes mean that the Agency needs to broaden its public information efforts to include more data on financial planning. For example, it is anticipated that there will be far greater public demand for more information about the income replacement value of Social Security benefits, the already scheduled rise in the normal retirement age, the retirement earnings test, and cost-of-living adjustments. It is also expected, due to a relatively high divorce rate since the late 1960s, that there will be a greater need for public information about divorced spouse benefits under Social Security.

Other federal government agencies, such as the Department of Labor and the Securities and Exchange Commission, are also undertaking national campaigns to increase public awareness about saving and investing for retirement. As more Americans near retirement age, there will be a need for greater coordination among federal agencies and other outside organizations regarding financial planning messages.

Broad public concern about financial security in retirement also presents an opportunity for cooperative education/information campaigns between Social Security and the private sector.

including banking and investment industry firms, and the life insurance industry. Because Social Security has always advocated a "three-legged" financial stool for retirement security (Social Security benefits, pensions, and individual savings), messages involving sectors such as these would be complementary, rather than competitive.

In the immediate future, the Agency must do more to help those individuals now in early to mid-50s understand the complexities of retirement decision-making, and working with other government agencies and private organizations, provide them with all of the information needed to make an informed decision.

Technology:

The communications revolution has not only changed the way the Agency distributes information, it has changed the way it conducts business. The reason is clear – the Internet is growing faster than all other technologies before it; radio was around for 38 years before it had 50 million listeners, television took 13 years to attract 50 million viewers, and the Internet got there in just four years. The Agency is now committed to exploring options for greater usage of the Internet, and the Commissioner has committed the Agency to deploying a suite of services over the Internet.

How the Agency prepares to continue to inform the public about Social Security will be tested as the population changes, the baby boomers begin to focus on retirement, and media attention about the future of Social Security becomes more widespread. Certainly the need to develop new communications tools and new approaches will continue, and the ever evolving development of the Internet and other communications technologies will demand that the Agency be both quicker to recognize and to adapt to a changing communications environment. But the "digital divide" also means that a public service agency such as SSA must be committed to providing Social Security and retirement planning information in the ways that the American public will want it, and in a manner that is accessible to it. The need for such a communications approach by the Agency has not been greater since the creation of the program 65 years ago.

Summary of the PUMS-II National Results

Introduction

The Social Security Administration (SSA) set a goal in its Agency Strategic Plan (ASP) "to strengthen public understanding of Social Security programs." To reach this goal, SSA's objective is to ensure that, by the year 2005, 90% of Americans will be knowledgeable about Social Security programs.

In order to measure progress toward achieving this goal, SSA developed the Public Understanding Measurement System (PUMS) to establish baseline data on the public's knowledge and to track changes in the public's level of knowledge through the year 2005. The PUMS initiative provides SSA with data and information needed to design annual public education programs targeted to address specific knowledge or performance gaps (e.g., areas where public knowledge is lower than 90%) and to evaluate the effectiveness of SSA public education initiatives in achieving its strategic objective.

SSA contracted with The Gallup Organization to develop and conduct the PUMS surveys. At this point, national surveys have been completed for 1998 and 1999 (referred to as PUMS-I and PUMS-II, respectively). For PUMS-II, a new section was added to the survey instrument to measure the usefulness and ease of understanding of the Social Security Statement.

In addition to the national survey, a one-year knowledge tracking study¹ was initiated in November 1999. This study was designed to test the effectiveness of various forms of public education and outreach in raising public awareness and knowledge of Social Security. The knowledge-tracking study is being carried out in sixteen communities located in the Philadelphia, Atlanta, Chicago, and San Francisco SSA regions. The knowledge-tracking instrument also includes the section concerning the Social Security Statement and an additional section on local outreach and education awareness. The results of the knowledge-tracking study will be available in the fall of 2000.

The national and knowledge-tracking survey instruments were developed through a collaborative effort between Gallup survey design experts and SSA officials. National Academy of Social Insurance (NASI) and academic experts were also consulted during this process. The resulting telephone survey instruments are 12 and 13 minutes in length for the national and knowledge-tracking studies, respectively. Both surveys are programmed in English and Spanish and offered in other languages when needed. Four thousand (4,000) respondents were surveyed for PUMS-II (400 in each SSA region).

¹ The knowledge-tracking study is also known as the "Move the Needle" study.

Twelve thousand (12,000) respondents are being surveyed for the knowledge-tracking survey (three thousand per quarter).

The purpose of this briefing book is to summarize the most notable findings of the PUMS-II national survey, completed January 25, 2000.

Overall Knowledge Scores²

The overall knowledge level of the adult population did not increase significantly between PUMS-I and PUMS-II. The results of PUMS-II indicate that 56.6% of the public is knowledgeable about Social Security programs as compared to 54.9% in PUMS-I. In addition, 24.1% of the public is "close to knowledgeable" (e.g., responded correctly to 11 or 12 of the 19 knowledge indicators) in PUMS-II.

Significant Changes between PUMS-I and PUMS-II

The results of PUMS-II are significantly different from the results of PUMS-I for a number of knowledge indicators. The following knowledge indicators received scores in PUMS-II that are significantly higher than the corresponding scores received in PUMS-I.

- **Early retirement.** Knowledge that an individual can receive some retirement benefits before the full retirement age rose from 61.8% to 65.4%.
- **Exact age of early retirement.** Knowledge that the exact age of eligibility for some retirement benefits is 62 rose from 45.6% to 48.9%.
- **Change in the retirement age.** Knowledge that the age for receiving full Social Security retirement benefits is increasing rose from 65.1% to 71.7%.
- **Benefits relate to earnings.** Knowledge that the amount of monthly Social Security retirement benefits depends on the level of past earnings rose from 88.9% to 91.8%.

The following knowledge indicators received scores in PUMS-II that are significantly lower than the corresponding scores received in PUMS-I.

- **Use of Social Security Taxes.** Knowledge of the use of Social Security taxes fell from 81.1% to 78.0%.
- **Fewer Workers, Future.** Knowledge about the insufficient number of workers to finance future benefits fell from 60.7% to 57.4%.
- **Not Food Stamps.** Knowledge that Social Security does not pay for the food stamp programs fell from 50.2% to 46.0%.

It is noteworthy that the indicators that increased significantly have high personal relevance while the indicators that decreased significantly are more system-related.

² Respondents are considered to be "knowledgeable" about Social Security programs if they respond correctly to at least 13 of the 19 knowledge indicators.

Another significant change between PUMS-I and PUMS-II is an increase in the level of confidence that Social Security benefits will be available for the public when they retire (from 38% to 44%).

Receipt and Awareness of the Social Security Statement

Two pivotal factors in increasing the level of public knowledge about Social Security are receipt and awareness of the Social Security Statement.

- Receipt of the Statement increased from 20.3% in PUMS-I to 24.2% in PUMS-II, although the difference is not statistically significant.
- Awareness of the Statement increased significantly from 49.5% in PUMS-I of the public to 62.2% in PUMS-II.

In addition to being statistically significant, the increased awareness of the Social Security Statement is meaningful, because awareness generally precedes a perceived need for information.

Relationship between the Social Security Statement, Knowledge, and Confidence

Receipt and knowledge of receiving a Social Security Statement significantly increase knowledge of Social Security programs. Sixty-eight percent (68.0%) of those who recall receiving a Statement are knowledgeable. Furthermore, knowledge about Social Security programs significantly increases confidence that Social Security retirement benefits will be there for you when you retire. The relationship can be modeled as follows:

$$\text{Receipt of an SS Statement} = \text{Knowledge} + \text{Confidence}$$

Response to the Social Security Statement

The proportion of the public (24% or about 48 million people) who recall having received a Social Security Statement had a positive response to it.

- 82.4% of the public (about 39 million people) report finding the Statement to be very to somewhat useful in increasing their knowledge of benefits that may affect them directly.
- 78.8% of the public (about 37 million people) report finding the Statement to be very to somewhat useful in helping to determine their level of need for additional sources of retirement income.
- 66.0% of the public (about 32 million people) report finding the Statement to be very to somewhat useful in helping with their financial planning.

- 83.7% of the public (about 40 million people) report finding the Statement to be very to somewhat easy to understand.

In addition, as a result of receiving a Social Security Statement, millions of Americans report being much more likely to take action to increase their own financial security.

- 52.4% of the public (about 25 million people) report being much more likely to file the statement with their important records.
- 16.9% of the public (about 8 million people) report being much more likely to contact the Social Security Administration for more information.
- 13.5% of the public (about 6.3 million people) report being much more likely to contact a financial advisor.
- 16.1% of the public (about 7.6 million people) report being much more likely to change their retirement plans.

Comparison of Social Security Statement and PEBES

The Social Security Statement is easier to understand than the PEBES document. Fifty-eight percent (58%) of Social Security Statement recipients reported finding it to be very easy to understand, while 50% reported finding the PEBES document very easy to understand. Ease of understanding is also reflected in the likelihood of recipients to contact SSA. One in five recipients (20%) of PEBES recipients stated that they are much more likely to contact SSA, while just over one in ten (12%) of Statement recipients feel likewise.

SSA Public Education Activities

While public need for Social Security information remains high, with over 20% of the population having sought information about Social Security, the public's response to SSA's public education activities is primarily positive.

- SSA continues to be the preferred source for information about Social Security programs. Of the 22.8% of the public (about 46 million people) who requested Social Security information, 80.8% (about 40 million people) report having requested this information from SSA.
- Use of SSA's website (SSA Online) as a source of information more than doubled from 1998 to 1999. Five percent (5%) of the public's reported requests for information (nearly 2 million contacts) were made via SSA's website.
- 74% of those who both contacted SSA and received a Social Security Statement (18 million people) were knowledgeable about Social Security programs.

CHAPTER EIGHT: WORKFORCE INVESTMENTS



Social Security Strategic Goal:

To be an employer that values and invests in each employee.

The years from 1993 through 2000 marked significant changes in how the Social Security Administration (SSA) treated and invested in its workforce. The legacy of downsizing in the 1980s had a profound effect upon the Agency, and in the 1990s, the impending Retirement Wave of the Agency's workforce received serious consideration. Attempts to ameliorate these issues, added to the other forces and advances in a rapidly changing workplace environment, obliged the Agency to focus on its workforce. SSA recognized the need to reflect the public it served, resulting in great advances in diversity. The relationship between its management and employees was recognized to be vital, and the Agency became a leader in partnership with labor. Technology and other advances in the workplace were beginning to be implemented with the goal of helping the workforce to be valued, efficient, and effective.

The impetus for change was stimulated by the Clinton Administration. Just before the second inauguration President Clinton and Vice President Gore called the new Cabinet to the Blair House to discuss the issue of reinvention. They gave the Cabinet a set of papers that was subsequently published in January 1997, called the Blair House Papers containing the principles and ideas for agencies to use to make further inroads towards better process designs and customer service enhancements.

Up to 1994, before independence, the Agency focused heavily on customer service initiatives. The Blair House Papers emphasized the importance of focusing on the Federal

workforce – getting the best from employees and raising the spirit of employees. The results of National Performance Review's (NPR) benchmarking studies indicated that the best in business organizations devoted substantial resources and attention to employee development and satisfaction. In addition, literature spoke to a strong and direct link between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction. With this as the backdrop, the Agency embarked on initiatives to listen to the concerns and better understand the needs of its employees

In 1998, Vice President Gore directed the NPR to conduct the first ever government-wide employee satisfaction survey, the NPR/OPM government-wide Employee Satisfaction Survey. The survey was sent to 34,000 federal employees selected at random, including 750 Agency employees. The survey created a baseline for measuring selected reinvention initiatives, assessed and benchmarked organizational change on key items, built on the Office of Personnel Management (OPM) Performance America database, and supported the collection of a set of balanced measures for federal agencies. The survey was conducted again in 1999 and 2000, reporting on and analyzing the results and developing an improvement strategy.¹

The Agency initiated its own surveys to better understand its workforce. The Agency Strategic Plan included an objective "to promote an Agency culture that successfully incorporates our values," a part of the Agency goal "to be an employer that values and invest in each employee." As a first step toward achieving this objective, the Office of Workforce Analysis conducted an employee survey, the Organization Culture Survey, to help determine what the Agency's organizational culture is, what it should be, and any gaps. A workgroup then reviewed the results of both the Culture Survey and the results of the NPR/OPM Employee Satisfaction Survey, and they developed an improvement plan including both short-term and long-term actions to address any shortcomings.²

In early FY 2000, the Agency began plans to implement the employee measurement strategy of the Market Measurement Program (MMP).³ Based on research that indicated employee satisfaction was most strongly influenced and determined at the local work unit level, a plan was developed for a comprehensive satisfaction survey that would provide information about satisfaction with the local work environment. This survey was intended to support and complement the Culture Survey because the it provided the Agency with information at the organization level and identified issues that need addressing. It also identified issues that may lend themselves to local solutions, but the information was not aggregated in a way that enabled the Agency to focus at this level. The MMP employee survey would solve this gap by focusing at the local level, and would also enable the Agency to address work place improvements identified in the OPM/NPR employee surveys.

¹ Survey results are in the Archive material.

² Improvement Plan is in the Archive material.

³ See description of MMP in SSA report "Gathering and Using Customer Information to Improve Service to the Public" issued March 2000.

In September 2000, the Agency hired a private contractor to plan and administer a test of an employee survey process that would:

- Provide up-front communication prior to conducting the survey to explain the purpose and importance of the survey to employees and managers;
- Ask questions market tested and validated to link to employee productivity;
- Be simple in order to increase the likelihood of a higher response rate; and
- Include a process for using the survey results using full participation of employees in planning improvements in their work unit based on the results.

The success of this initial pilot will result in its full implementation of the survey process for all employees.

More importantly, during the years from 1993 to 2000, the entire Agency grew to fully recognize that increased public trust and faith in the Agency and the programs it administers can only occur if the Agency demonstrates that it is a well-run organization whose employees feel valued and well-treated.

DIVERSITY

On September 18, 1998, the Advisory Board on the President's Initiative on Race concluded its work and presented a report containing its final recommendations to President Clinton. The report contained the Board's observations on what they had seen and heard about race and its impact upon communities throughout the country. The President's Initiative on Race later evolved into the President's Initiative for One America, and President Clinton established a permanent White House Office on the President's Initiative devoted to helping bridge the racial and ethnic divides in our society and to working to forge new coalitions across lines of color and class.

In keeping with the President's Initiative for One America, in his Oath of Office address, newly appointed Social Security Commissioner Kenneth S. Apfel, affirmed his commitment to establishing a diverse workforce. He stated, "[A]s the Agency enters the next century, we should continue to strive toward achieving a workforce that is like America: young and old, male and female, African American, Caucasian, Hispanic, Pacific-Asian, Native American, those with disabilities and those without."

Although the President's Initiative for One America was not instituted until 1998, the Agency has a long history of activities supporting the Initiative that precedes 1998. Throughout the period from 1993 through 2000, Special Emphasis Programs, Special Emphasis Managers, and Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Advisory Groups had an instrumental role in

promoting cultural diversity within the Agency. The Agency developed and monitors an Affirmative Employment Plan that identifies the representation of equal employment opportunity groups in its workforce, and recruitment efforts are targeted to address under-representation. EEO Advisory Groups were established to advise the Commissioner regarding the employment concerns of women, minorities, and disabled employees as well as the service delivery needs of the Agency's customers. The Agency also used special hiring authorities to recruit employees with disabilities, and provided reasonable accommodations to enable these employees to have a level playing field.

PROGRAMS AND POLICIES

Special Emphasis Programs were established in response to Presidential Executive Orders. The programs⁴ were the Asian Pacific American Program, Federal Women's Program, Hispanic Employment Program, Minority Concerns Program, and the Program for the Employment of Persons with Disabilities. The Asian Pacific American Program was established in 1992 to give attention to and focus on that fast growing, complex, and diverse group which had previously been part of the Minority Concerns Program. The Federal Women's Program was established to enhance employment and advancement opportunities for women. The purpose of the Hispanic Employment Program was to ensure that Federal employers recruit and hire Hispanics and once hired, provide them with career development opportunities. The Minority Concerns Program was initially established to address the employment concerns of African Americans, Asian Pacific Americans, and American Indians, and to improve services to their communities. The Program for Employees with Disabilities gave technical advice, leadership, and guidance to managers in providing greater career opportunities to employees with disabilities.

EEO Advisory Groups were also formed to advise the Commissioner and other Agency managers of the employment and service delivery concerns of their constituencies. The advisory groups were:

- Black Affairs Advisory Council (BAAC);
- National Advisory Council for Employees with Disabilities (NACED);
- Hispanic Affairs Advisory Council (HAAC);
- Pacific Asian American Advisory Council (PAAAC);

⁴ Full-time Special Emphasis Program Managers, located at the headquarters complex, administer each of the Special Emphasis Programs. In the regions, Civil Rights and Equal Opportunity Managers administer the Special Emphasis Programs. These managers conduct activities promoting the employment and advancement of their members; they provide advice and referral services to field and headquarters personnel on matters that include minority recruitment, community outreach, complaints of discrimination, and career development.

- Women's Affairs Advisory Committee (WAAC); and
- American Indian Alaska Native Advisory Council (AIAN).

These groups met periodically with the Commissioner and other members of the Executive Staff, pursued initiatives of interest to their groups, and held training conferences where employees and management came together to talk about service delivery, recruitment, training and career development and advancement. For example, the mission of HAAC is to ensure courteous, respectful, and sensitive treatment of all clientele, including non-English speaking persons. HAAC pursues this goal by educating others about the shared responsibility to provide services with sensitivity, and by advocating for and supporting the recruitment, development, and advancement of Hispanic and bilingual persons throughout the Agency.

AFFIRMATIVE EMPLOYMENT PROGRAM

The Agency had an Affirmative Employment Program (AEP) Plan for women and minorities to assess the state of equal opportunity in the Agency. The AEP Plan was a tool to strengthen EEO for women and minorities by identifying specific areas of under-representation, barriers to equal opportunity, and concrete actions to correct identified deficiencies. The completed plan contained:



SSI Training Class resembles United Nations.

- 1) Program analysis detailing the status of affirmative employment efforts within the Agency;
- 2) Description of identified problems and barriers in personnel and management policies, practices, systems, or procedures; and
- 3) Statement of objectives and action items to resolve identified problems and barriers.

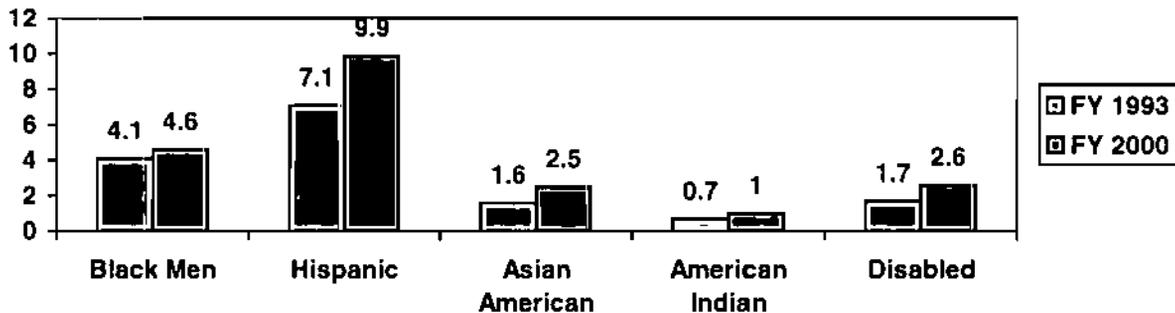
Numerical objectives were established when the workforce representation of an EEO group is severely below their corresponding civilian labor force (CLF) representation. The purpose of numerical objectives was to attain a workforce that was reflective of America; the objectives were goals, not quotas, stated in terms of a percentage of available opportunities.

A separate plan, the Affirmative Action Program Plan for People with Disabilities, addressed the hiring, placement, and advancement of individuals with disabilities. Additionally, the Agency used a Disabled Veterans Affirmative Action Program Plan to enhance employment opportunities for disabled veterans. The AEP program enabled the Agency to identify imbalances in the workforce and take corrective actions.

The SSA workforce consisted of 62,394 full-time and part-time permanent employees as of FY 1999, a decrease of 2,979 employees since FY 1993. While the workforce has decreased, it has become more diverse as a result of increases in the representation of women, minorities, and employees with disabilities. The overall representation of women and minorities in the Agency exceeds their representation in the (CLF).⁵ Women make up 70.7 percent of the Agency's workforce compared to 46.5 percent for the CLF. Minorities make up 40.2 percent of the Agency's workforce compared to 27.2 percent for the CLF.

As a result of targeted recruitment efforts, the workforce representation of Black men, Hispanics, Asian Americans, American Indians, and employees with disabilities have increased since FY 1993:

Percentage of Total SSA Workforce



RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES

In 1980, the Agency had over 84,000 employees, with this number decreasing over 20 percent during the downsizing that occurred between 1980 and 1989. While the staffing level as of FY 2000 was close to 62,000 full- and part-time employees, workloads continued to grow and were predicted to rise even more as the “baby boomers” reach retirement age.

As of FY 2000, the Agency possessed a mature workforce; the average worker was 46.7 years old and had an average of 20 years of Federal service. As large numbers of experienced employees prepared to leave, often with 25-35 years of service, the Agency recognized that those who follow were not likely to remain in the organization for such lengthy periods. These facts helped shape the new recruitment and retention strategies needed.

In 1996, the General Accounting Office (GAO) provided a report to Congress entitled SSA Faces Challenges. The report stated, “[the] SSA must build a workforce with the flexibility

⁵ The CLF comprises of persons 16 years of age or older who were employed or seeking employment. Persons in the Armed Forces are excluded from the CLF. CLF data comes from the Office of Personnel Management's 1999 Annual Report to Congress on Federal Equal Opportunity Recruitment.

and skills to operate in a changing environment.” In 1997, the GAO reported to Congress with the report, Significant Challenges Await New Commissioner. This report described challenges surrounding the issue of building a workforce with the flexibility and skills to operate in a changing environment, including a changing employee and client base.

In 1997, the Agency published its first strategic plan since independence, and the importance of workforce planning was reflected in the Agency Strategic Plan (ASP). One of the objectives listed in the ASP was “to create a workforce to serve SSA’s diverse customers in the 21st century.” The Agency recognized the need for the workforce to reflect the diverse population it serves, both today and as demographic changes occur in the future. To accomplish this, both a short-term and a long-term recruitment strategy to recruit employees from historically underrepresented groups were developed.

In October 1998, the Agency compared its diversity profile with the CLF and determined that it was severely under-represented in three EEO groups: Asians, Hispanics, and persons with severe disabilities (PWD). Further, based on the Census Bureau’s year 2000 projections, without a concerted recruitment effort, this gap between the CLF and the Agency’s workforce would widen for these three groups. In response, the Agency developed a short-term recruitment strategy to begin eliminating this gap and to take itself through the FY 1999 recruitment cycle.

The strategy proposed consisted of four action items:

- Advertising career opportunities via the internet and in key minority periodicals;
- Providing an e-mail application process;
- Establishing and/or strengthening our ties with State employment and vocational rehabilitation offices and secondary education placement centers; and
- Establishing multi-disciplinary recruitment teams with hiring authority to visit predetermined colleges and universities and attend recruitment fairs.

While this short-term strategy was in effect, the Agency made greater use of the Schedule A⁶ and Outstanding Scholar⁷ hiring authorities to recruit new employees from underrepresented groups. In addition, the Agency had also utilized the Office of Personnel Management’s Certificates of Eligibles to find candidates for employment who did not qualify under the aforementioned hiring authorities.

In May 1999, the Agency introduced its long-term strategy to address the under-representation of Asians, Hispanics, and employees with disabilities. This strategy expanded upon the framework already established in the short-term strategy and was designed to promote

⁶ Schedule A allows persons with disabilities to be evaluated and certified by State Vocational Rehabilitation Centers and appointed non-competitively.

⁷ This program allows college graduates from underrepresented groups who have completed their undergraduate programs with a 3.45 GPA or better (or finished in the top 10 percent of their graduating class) to be hired non-competitively.

the Agency as the employer of choice. The long-term strategy, which is intended to carry the Agency through the year 2013, includes a marketing strategy, formal recruitment methodologies, and a system to monitor progress and hold components accountable.

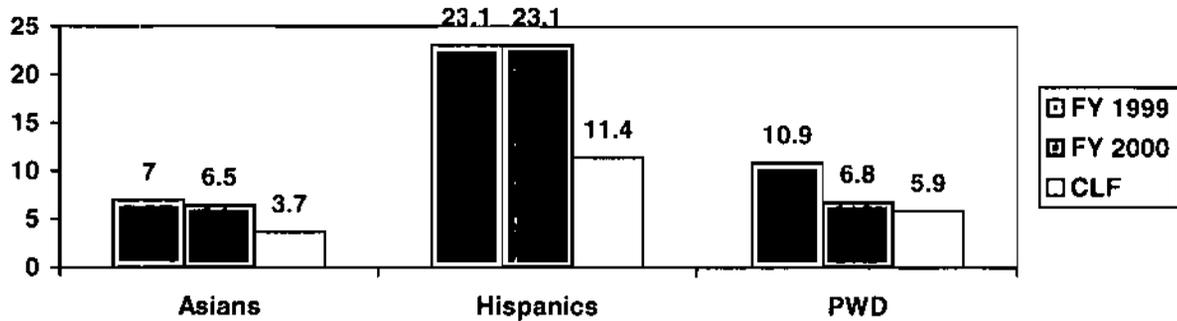
In specific, the long-term strategy included:

- Improving and expanding the recruitment relationships with colleges and universities that have high concentrations of the under-represented groups in their student populations;
- Creating stronger networks with State vocational rehabilitation and employment offices and the Department of Veterans Affairs in all states, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Isles;
- Using displaced private industry employees as a recruitment source;
- Using employment incentives (e.g., recruitment signing bonuses, a tuition reimbursement program, hiring at higher grade levels, paying relocation expenses, etc.) to attract top computer science candidates;
- Advertising extensively in key publications marketed to targeted populations;
- Investing in promotional items (e.g., pens, cups, notepads, mousepads, keychains, mini-flashlights, etc.) with SSA logo for distribution at recruitment events;
- Participating in the President's Committee for Employment of Persons with Disabilities Workforce Recruitment Program; and,
- Developing tailored recruitment packages for regional and field managers, including a pamphlet entitled "Working for Social Security" and other employment information.

As a formal recruitment methodology, the long-term recruitment strategy recommends the establishment of multi-discipline recruitment teams to conduct on-campus recruitment at predetermined schools, advertise vacancies, and maintain an Agency presence at career fairs. The teams are to include a Personnel Office representative familiar with hiring authorities, an employee from the group targeted for recruitment with whom potential candidates can identify, and a representative from component for which candidates are being recruited who can talk about the available positions.

As a result of implementing our recruitment strategies, the Agency in FY 1999 and FY 2000 hired Asians, Hispanics, and persons with disabilities at a rate significantly greater than their representation in the CLF. In FY 1999, the Agency hired a total of 2,603 new employees, and in FY 2000, as of August 30, 2000, the Agency hired 2,366 new employees:

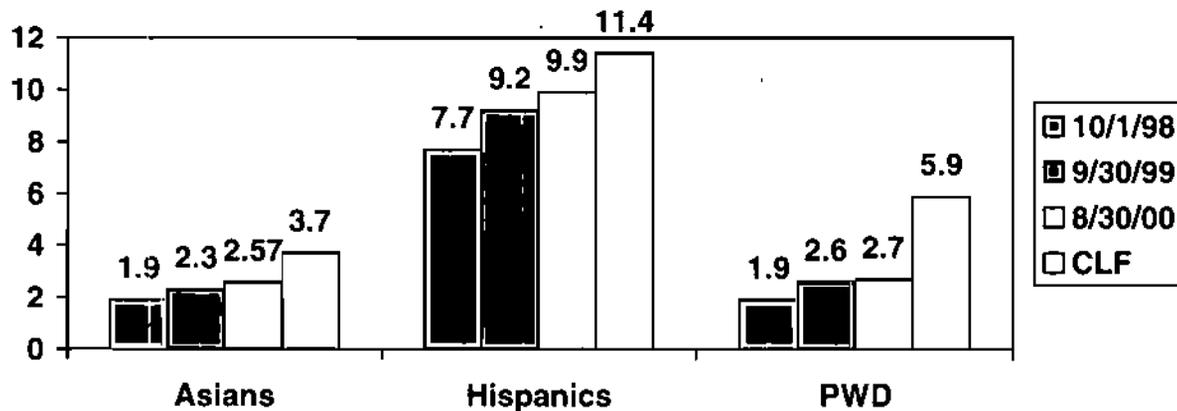
Comparison of Hiring Percentages



	<i>FY 1999</i>	<i>FY 2000 (thru 8/30/00)</i>	<i>CLF*</i>
Asians	181 (7.0%)	154 (6.5%)	3.7%
Hispanics	602 (23.1%)	547 (23.1%)	11.4%
PWD	285 (10.9%)	161 (6.8%)	5.9%

As depicted in the charts below, the workforce representation of Asians, Hispanics, and persons with disabilities is moving steadily closer to parity with their CLF representation.

Percentage of Total Workforce



	10/1/98	9/30/99	8/30/00	Net Change	CLF*
Asians	1.9%	2.3%	2.57%	+0.6	3.7%
Hispanics	7.7%	9.2%	9.9%	+2.2	11.4%
PWD	1.9%	2.6%	2.7%	+0.8%	5.9%

In 2000, the Agency received recognition for its progress when Equal Opportunity Publications (EOP), an outside organization, published a cover article calling SSA a model employer for improving the representation of persons with disabilities in their Winter 1999/2000 issue of CAREERS & the disABLED magazine.

AMERICAN INDIANS AND ALASKA NATIVES INITIATIVE

Although American Indians and Alaska Natives were not under-represented in the Agency's workforce, their numbers in the CLF had been so small they were not initially included along with Asians, Hispanics, and persons with disabilities for special recruitment activities. In March 2000, the Agency hosted an American Indian and Alaska Native Service Delivery Conference in Denver, Colorado to explore how to better serve and represent these communities. The conference served as a catalyst shifting attention and focus to this group.

The conference was attended by representatives from over 120 tribes, and the Conference's programs and activities focused on ways to increase their representation in the Agency's workforce and improve outreach and service delivery to American Indians and Alaska Natives. As a result, the Agency established an American Indian and Alaska Native Executive Steering Committee to develop and implement projects that would achieve the goals of increasing the workforce representation of American Indians and Alaska Natives and improving services to their communities. These goals included such steps as establishing a Cooperative Education Program⁸ for students of Tribal Colleges and Universities and establishing a formal relationship with the National Indian Council on Aging so that it could access the Council's extensive database on the public information needs and demographics of American Indians and Alaska Natives. In addition, the Agency developed a communications plan targeting American Indians and Alaska Natives.

The Agency also promoted the cultural awareness of its own workforce to the needs and concerns of this constituency group. A two-part interactive teletraining video series was broadcasted, delivering cultural and awareness training. Part I provided a broad prospective of the diversity in American Indian and Alaska Native cultures. In Part II, an Agency panel of American Indian employees representing various tribes discussed Social Security claims, legal and urban issues, and views from life on reservations.

DISABLED INDIVIDUALS: REASONABLE ACCOMMODATIONS

The Agency has always prided itself in providing reasonable accommodations to the known physical and/or mental limitations of qualified applicants or employees with disabilities (EWD).

⁸ The program authorizes the Agency to hire 25-50 students each year for service delivery positions; students will attend college full-time and work part-time each semester.

In 1993, the Agency began purchasing adaptive devices and personal computers configured with adaptive device software/hardware. The Office of Civil Rights and Equal Opportunity continued to manage the Agency's Full Time Employee (FTE) Pool that provided readers for blind and low-vision employees, personal assistants for severely mobility-impaired employees, and sign language interpreters for field offices with several deaf employees. In 1993, the Agency employed 450 employees with severe disabilities.

In 1994, SSA further progressed in dealing with its disabled employees. An Assistive Device Support Help Desk was established in the Agency's Model District Office to take calls from employees experiencing technical difficulties with their adaptive hardware/software, and the Agency began the Accessible Computer Configured Employee Support System (ACCESS) project. The ACCESS project had oversight responsibility for purchasing adaptive technology and upgrading obsolete equipment (i.e., its work became part of the Agency's procurement projects), providing employees with disabilities full accessibility to the Agency's computer systems environment.

The Agency received recognition for its progressivism. On September 8, 1994, the Agency received a "Golden Hammer" Reinvention of Government Award to recognize the Agency as "Heroes of Reinvention" for integrating adaptive hardware and software into the Agency's infrastructure and designing training programs to meet the needs of employees with disabilities. In addition, on October 20, 1994, the ACCESS workgroup was presented with an HHS Secretary's Continuation Improvement Recognition award for their efforts ensuring that Agency employees with disabilities would have full access to the new IWS/LAN system.

During 1995, the Agency provided reasonable accommodations to 575 of its employees with disabilities.⁹ It awarded contracts that significantly improved accessibility for employees with disabilities:

- Training for employees with disabilities provided computer and adaptive devices at the employee's worksite (generally on a one-to-one basis), nationally.
- Provide voice-activated computer workstations to employees with mobility impairments (i.e., voice-activated systems allow employees who do not have total use of their hands or upper bodies to use computer programs "hands free").

The first Agency wide contract for sign language interpreter services for deaf employees was awarded in June 1995.¹⁰ The contract was established to support the needs and provide reasonable accommodation for deaf employees, and it provides for nine full-time on-site interpreters at Agency headquarters as well as providing for interpreter services in field offices. In addition, an Employees with Disabilities inter-component Workgroup was formed to prepare for the large deployment of 1,742 local area networks and 56,600 computer workstations nationwide; the workgroup made the necessary plans and performed integration testing to insure that assistive technologies would be part of the national IWS/LAN rollout.

⁹ Combined budget of \$3.5 million was used to process and provide reasonable accommodations for over 500 requests.

¹⁰ The cost for interpreter services in 1995 was \$355,102.

The Agency was again recognized for its progress in 1996. The Ford Foundation and the John F. Kennedy School of Government selected the Agency as one of 25 finalists (from 1,560 applicants) for the 1996 "Innovations in Government Award" sponsored by Harvard University; the Agency was awarded a grant of \$20,000.

As the national IWS/LAN rollout entered 1998 and 1999, the Agency processed another 450 and 430 IWS/LAN site orders, respectively, for employees with disabilities. In recognition of its successes, the Agency received the Stevie Wonder Vision Award-Siemans Award of Excellence¹¹ and the City of Baltimore Mayor's Commission for Disabilities Kurt L. Schmoke Public Employer of the Year Award.¹² The Agency also provided refresher training¹³ on adaptive equipment. In addition, the EWD Workgroup designed a resource site on the Intranet to provide information for employees with disabilities and their managers regarding available devices and other helpful suggestions. This workgroup was given a special budget under the Agency's Diverse Workforce Key Initiative to use for special needs such as preparing training materials in accessible format and for ensuring that all training centers were accessible to employees with disabilities.

In 2000, the Agency processed over 500 reasonable accommodation requests, and in adherence with recent Executive Orders,¹⁴ continued its long-standing commitment to hiring people with disabilities through its competitive hiring process and the Selective Placement Program. In support of these Executive Orders, the Agency committed itself to hiring 1,300 additional persons with disabilities, or 13 percent of its hires for FY 2001-2005. Once hired, the Agency strived to insure that employees with disabilities were provided with equal opportunity in the workplace environment.

Throughout the Clinton Administration, the Agency worked hard to make its workforce accurately reflect the community it serves. By doing so, the Agency is better equipped to serve the public in an appropriate, effective, and efficient manner. While the Agency is not underrepresented as a whole in minority employees, targeted recruitment of specific underrepresented groups such as Asian Americans, Native Americans, and persons with disabilities led to large gains in both the recruitment and retention of these groups. Detailed initiatives to retain these underrepresented groups complemented these recruitment efforts, and with leadership initiatives from Commissioner Apfel, great strides were made.

¹¹ Siemens Nixdorf Information Systems gave the award to the Agency for being proactive in seeking to employ blind and visually impaired persons.

¹² Awarded for the Agency's high levels of hiring people with disabilities.

¹³ At a cost of \$230,000.

¹⁴ EO 13163 ("Increasing the Opportunity for Individuals With Disabilities To Be Employed in the Federal Government") and EO 13164 ("Requiring Federal Agencies to Establish Procedures to Facilitate the Provision of Reasonable Accommodation"); both signed and promulgated on July 26, 2000.

PARTNERSHIP

In 1993, President Clinton signed Executive Order (EO) 12871, "Labor-Management Partnership," mandating federal agencies to involve employees and union representatives as full partners to identify problems and develop solutions to accomplish the Agency's mission. By working in partnership with the American Federation of Government Employees (AFGE), the exclusive representative for approximately 50,000 bargaining unit employees, the Agency hoped to foster a much closer relationship between the union and management to create tangible benefits in service, cost-effectiveness, productivity, efficiency, and quality of its work environment.

Prior to EO 12871, the history of labor-management relations in many federal agencies was one of internecine conflict; SSA's story was similar. Labor-management relations were strained at best and dysfunctional at worst. However, the Agency applied itself to implementing EO 12871 vigorously, and both its management and union leadership saw an opportunity to break out of old patterns of behavior. It is this joint commitment, reaffirmed in the 2000 SSA/AFGE Ratification Agreement,¹⁵ that has made partnership an effective effort.

To address and formalize partnership at the national level, the National Partnership Council (NPC) was formed in 1994 comprised of high-level members in both the union and the Agency.¹⁶ The charter was signed on June 22, 1994, and it stated its purpose to be "...to design, implement and maintain within SSA a cooperative, constructive working relationship between AFGE and management to identify problems and craft solutions." The NPC strove to improve the day-to-day operations of the Agency's service delivery; help the leadership make better decisions than would be possible under traditional bargaining and consultation procedures; develop a framework within which management and the union can draft effective partnership decisions; and ensure that the process should be interest-based (i.e., that the legitimate needs and interests of all participants must be examined and understood before generating options).



Commissioner Shirley Chater and President John Sturdivant of the AFGE signing the NPC charter.

¹⁵ See Exhibit 1.

¹⁶ Membership consists of the Commissioner, Principal Deputy Commissioner, six Deputy Commissioners (or their Assistant Deputy Commissioner), and for the union, the AFGE President, General Committee Spokesperson, and six Component Heads (or their Principal Designee). The NPC currently (as of November 2000) meets the first Monday of every month.

The NPC's objectives were:

- Improve SSA's service delivery;
- Help SSA's leadership make better decisions;
- Deal with Agency-wide issues; and
- Generate guidance for lower level partnership levels.

The NPC worked towards achieving these objectives in many ways. For example, it encouraged the formation of partnership councils throughout the Agency. Originally, these councils were mandated to, among other things, establish alternative dispute resolution (ADR) methods and options for informal disposition of employment disputes.

Prior to independence, the Agency's ADR program was rudimentary with no coordinated approach. Since then, the Associate General Counsel for General Law has assumed the role of the Agency's ADR Officer and has been the focal point of its ADR efforts. In conformity with the Administrative Dispute Resolution Act (ADRA) and the President's directive on ADR, the Agency complied with the specific requirements of the ADRA and established ADR programs in various areas. Further, the Agency extensively trained managers and employees in ADR techniques; these techniques have been applied to collective bargaining and labor-management partnerships as well as in resolving employees' complaints of discrimination. These initiatives resulted in a marked decrease in the number of grievances and unfair labor practices filings.

For example, the number of arbitration requests from the period 1994 through 1996 showed a reduction from 488 requests in 1994 down to 331 in 1996.¹⁷ The principles of ADR have helped to reduce other types of litigation; the number of unfair labor practice charges filed in 1993 was 382, but fell to 167 in 1999. From the period 1994 through 1999, the number of union-management grievances decreased from a high of 465 in 1994 to only 171 filed in 1999.

The local partnership councils dealt with issues that might otherwise have required negotiation or litigation, and their success allowed the scope of their work to grow from personnel issues to encompassing the facilitation of work processes. Partnership councils dealt with matters relating to customer service, operational efficiency, employee empowerment, and labor-management issues. These partnership efforts resulted in enhancements in career opportunities, establishment of developmental programs, and joint efforts to improve family friendly practices within the Agency.

In changing the relationship that existed between labor and management, which was largely adversarial, the NPC provided for systematic training of agency employees in consensus building methods of dispute resolution. At the direction of the NPC, training programs and train-the-trainer sessions were developed in interest-based bargaining (IBB) covering partnership

¹⁷ The Philadelphia Region alone realized annual savings of approximately \$30,000 based solely on the reduction in the number of grievances advanced to arbitration during that period.

principles, conflict resolution, consensus decision-making, and other IBB techniques. This training consisted of the following:

- In May 1994, top Agency executives along with the AFGE Council Presidents attended a 3-day training session that included interest based techniques, consensus decision-making, and conflict resolution.
- Partnership councils (20 Agency-wide) received 3-day training sessions conducted by Syracuse University, emphasizing conflict resolution, consensus decision-making, and IBB problem solving techniques. The remaining councils received similar training provided by a variety of sources, including the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service (FMCS) and internal Agency resources.
- By 2000, the Agency had trained a national cadre of 220 facilitators in IBB problem solving, consensus decision-making, partnership principles, and various tools and techniques to help group processes. The facilitators would help address and resolve all types of problems and issues.

As partnership councils continue to be established, training will be an ongoing process. As the Agency and the union work in a collaborative fashion, this training will gradually provide the groundwork for a culture change throughout the organization.

One of the requirements in EO 12871 was for agencies to evaluate the impact of partnership on its organizational performance. The Agency, on July 8, 1997, formed the Partnership Evaluation Team (PET) to conduct an objective evaluation of how the process had been operating since its implementation. The NPC issued the team's report in March 1998, and it emphasized how the Agency had benefited from working together since its inception. The issuance of this report made the Agency the first to complete an agency-wide evaluation of the effects of labor-management partnerships on organizational performance, and the report identified over 1,500 activities that have aided effectiveness and performance and that had been initiated through or enhanced by partnership.

The PET found numerous examples of components that had been working with divisively polarized relationships between management and their union counterparts. After identifying these problem situations, and then implementing jointly developed plans for partnership, many were then able to work in collaboration. Moreover, these partnerships often times grew beyond their initial involvement in personnel issues and became problem-solving teams on methods to make the Agency serve its customers better.

The NPC and the PET were recognized for their successes in September 1998 with their receipt of the John N. Sturdivant National Partnership Award. The award cited the SSA/AFGE joint effort as "...an outstanding example of how labor-management partnerships are meeting the National Partnership for Reinventing Government's goal of a government that works better and costs less."

The SSA and the AFGE dealt together in partnership on many initiatives that have improved customer service (e.g., the 800 number telephone service; systems expansion; the reinvention of work processes). Other initiatives showing strong union and Agency cooperation included the Agency's 2010 Vision workgroup, which is helping to develop the customer service plans and goals of the future.

The NPC realized the importance of sharing policies, philosophies, and communicating with these councils, and thus sponsored a partnership conference in June 2000. Council members, high level union and management officials, and speakers such as Janice Lachance, Director of the Office of Personnel and Management (OPM), and David Feder, Assistant General Counsel of the Federal Labor Relations Authority, communicated their views and experiences. They also shared information about the types of resources and assistance available throughout the federal community to assist in establishing and maintaining workable partnerships. The NPC also used this forum to present the SSA/AFGE Partnership Recognition Awards to employees who had worked tirelessly and diligently over the previous year on partnership initiatives.

The NPC chartered a second workgroup to update the inventory of partnership projects and activities to determine if they had increased, how they may have changed, and the types of issues being addressed since the first evaluation report was released. In March 2000, this new team submitted its report to the NPC, identifying a total of about 400 new activities being taken by partnership councils. As with the first study, the responses showed that the councils have focused on a variety of matters dealing with customer service and operational issues.

The President's Memorandum on Reaffirmation of Partnership issued on October 28, 1999, required Federal agencies to report on progress being made in achieving the goals of the memorandum and the directives set forth in EO 12871. On April 14, 2000, the Agency submitted its report to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) for the President. In that report, the Agency highlighted the ways in which we have met the objectives by citing the many examples of partnership activities.

Since the latest report was released, the number of partnership councils increased to 67 as of August 2000. The councils were very productive and constructive in dealing with issues of concern to both the union and management. Through this continually evolving process, the Agency and its union, the AFGE, worked together to find ways to enhance the working environment through developmental and growth opportunities, to facilitate efforts to address productivity and efficiency, and to limit fiscal costs to the Agency.

By taking the initiative in partnership, the SSA fostered a close relationship between the union and its management for the benefit of both its internal and external customers. Internally, employees have felt more invested in management decisions, and frictions between union and management were resolved through ADR and other less costly and adversarial methods. Externally, suggestions for improved work processes came directly from those performing the work, increasing efficiency and creating cost savings for the American public. The investment by the Agency in this initiative had borne fruit and resulted in concrete progress.

TECHNOLOGY: IWS/LAN AND THE INTRANET

Fast changing technology has significantly affected not just how the Agency serves the public but also in how it does its work. While its workforce is one of its most valuable assets, technology is equally important because it is essential to the effectiveness of that workforce and indispensable to the success of the Agency's business approach. By providing the resources necessary and investing in the technology needed, the Agency has reaffirmed to its workforce that it takes seriously the new challenges of increased workload and government streamlining. SSA's investment in technology indicated the value the Agency placed on its workforce. The years from 1993 through 2000 were characterized by a surge of advances in providing the necessary technological tools to its employees to perform their work. Without this type of investment, the Agency would jeopardize its commitment to hiring and maintaining a highly skilled, high-performing, and highly motivated workforce that is critical to achieving the Agency's goals.

The Agency's ability to meet customer expectations and service depends on the expanded use of automation. The success of SSA to use technology to support improved or redesigned processes rests on a strategic technology infrastructure that provides automation at the employee's desktop, makes needed information immediately accessible in electronic form, and moves toward a paperless processing environment. The Agency established the Architecture Support Staff to coordinate the efforts of its Information Technology (IT) community with respect to the establishment and maintenance of an Enterprise-wide Information Technology Architecture (EITA). The Staff supports legal mandates¹⁸ and federal guidelines¹⁹.

While the push for better technology has been a constant through the Clinton Administration, the urgency had varied with time and circumstance. The early years of the Agency under DHHS were characterized as a slow evolution. Hardware and software improvements were done slowly without an overarching vision. There was no clear conception of how technology was going to completely change how Social Security does its work. Independent Agency status allowed SSA to move more quickly in creating an automated work environment.

Commissioner Kenneth Apfel and members of his leadership team embraced the coming changes, and provided the vision and energy to push forward from such setbacks as the PEBES online privacy predicament. While an important learning experience, it made the Agency slightly cautious in its approach to technological change and risk taking. But in recent years the Agency's leadership had become very strong proponents of technology, and have created the environment and the push for SSA to become a leader in the Federal Government in technology.

¹⁸ Such as the Clinger-Cohen Act of 1996 (Public Law 104-106) which assigns the Agency's Chief Information Officer the responsibility of developing, maintaining, and facilitating the implementation of IT architecture (ITA).

¹⁹ Such as the June 1997 memorandum from the Office of Management and Budget (OMB Memorandum M-97-16) providing guidance to federal agencies on the development and implementation of ITA. In accordance with OMB guidance, the ITA should integrate the business processes and goals of the agency with IT acquisitions and should focus on work processes, information flows, and standards.

INTELLIGENT WORKSTATION/LOCAL AREA NETWORK (IWS/LAN) **INSTALLATION**

The IWS/LAN initiative was the linchpin for both the Agency's customer service program and its entire business approach. It facilitated many of the planned productivity improvements and enabled full reengineering of the disability process, including processing time reductions and other improvements projected in the redesign. It will provide greater capacity and increased processing capabilities essential for the major service delivery and process redesign initiatives.

In 1993, the Agency's Information Technology Systems Review Staff (ITSRS) recommended funding strategies that included maintenance of separate placeholders for budgeting Agency workstation/software upgrades in anticipation of users' needs. This actually occurred prior to the IWS/LAN project implementation. The ITSRS also responded to concerns expressed by the Government Accounting Office (GAO), the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), and the Congress concerning the IWS/LAN initiative. This work helped promote support and funding²⁰ from these bodies required to move forward with an IWS/LAN strategy. They also recommended funding strategies for wide area network enhancements, support services, and expanded telecommunications infrastructure required for IWS/LAN future implementation.

The original decision to provide intelligent workstations to every employee, interconnect all the workstations by LAN, and connect all the offices to the regional computer centers/ National Computer Center by wide area network was made in 1993. With over 60,000 employees in over 1,600 offices nationwide, the Agency redesigned and prepared each facility nationally with new data cables and an upgraded electrical system.

Beginning in 1994 the Agency, with the support of GSA, began site preparation of all Agency offices at an average rate of one office each working day. The GSA used innovative methods to meet the Agency's needs in an economic manner, and mainframe computers and specialized software were used to track the site prep process and keep the program on schedule.

A seven-year IWS/LAN contract²¹ was awarded on June 14, 1996, and it provided for the installation of 1,742 LANs comprising 56,000 workstations at sites nationwide. Meaningful discussions with vendors during the acquisition process provided necessary information while protecting the integrity of the acquisition process.

In December 1996, the Agency began the installation of the National IWS/LAN contract, which by 1997 was completed in 487 sites. Additional workstations and LANs were purchased and installed at Headquarters and Regional Office locations, bringing the total installation to 91,650 workstations and 2,129 LANs by mid-1999. In addition, the Agency determined that it would need up to 300 additional IWS/LANs to complete the target systems environment. In

²⁰ Into the Automation Investment Fund.

²¹ At a value of \$279.5 million.

August 1999, OAG awarded a 3-year contract,²² which included 6,178 workstations. The ITSRS had guided this contract, adjusting quantities based on identified requirements and benefits.

The installation of the IWS/LAN in the Agency brought a host of new tools to improve and enhance work processes. The Office of Operations, responsible for direct customer support, was most dramatically affected in terms of impact on its business process. Technical and management staff recognized that these new tools were a means to improve productivity and enhance communication among its hundreds of facilities and thousands of employees. The most immediately significant of those new tools and technologies was the Intranet.

In recognition of its efforts with the IWS/LAN project, the Agency received the 1994 Federal Technology Leadership Award, sponsored by Government Executive magazine. The annual national competition recognizes outstanding achievement in making government more effective through the use of information systems.

Although IWS/LAN was installed in all Agency offices, the project evolved with the changes, expansions, and relocations of the offices. The standards set forth earlier and the processes in place, along with the GSA help, will ensure that the Agency continues to provide a safe and healthy work environment and reliable computer systems to all its employees.

INSTALLATION OF IWS/LAN IN FOREIGN SERVICE PROGRAMS (FSP)

The Agency, recognizing the needs to improve service and work environment in its foreign program, has installed its IWS/LAN in the Manila DVA office and eight of the largest claims-taking FSPs.²³ These overseas offices now have direct access to the Agency's databases and programs, and are no longer dependent on U.S.-based offices to provide them with information they require to serve foreign based Social Security customers. This results in more efficient work processing and the ability to assist many customers on first contact.

THE INTRANET

The IWS/LAN initiative allowed the development and utilization of the Agency's Intranet. The Intranet is more than the Internet in that it is a self-enclosed secure network comprising of only Social Security servers, and can only be accessed by Social Security employees with valid and current security clearance. The Intranet has become the vehicle by which components communicate with all other parts of the Agency, directly down to the individual employee. With over 1,600 offices nationwide, each office and each employee is no longer cut off from the rest of the Agency due to their distance from the headquarters

²² At a cost of \$50.2 million.

²³ The eight FSPs are in Mexico City, Guadalajara, Ciudad Juarez, Athens, Frankfurt, London, Rome and Naples.

complex or their regional office, but is now interconnected by technology. The possibilities for further collaboration and future synergies are only beginning to be realized.

More than just email, the Intranet allows a component to place the vast majority of its information in easy reach for almost every Social Security employee nationally. The entire resources of the Agency were now available as easily as opening an Internet browser. Moreover, because of its secure nature and availability only on internal Social Security networks, the Intranet allows the delivery of services to its internal customers in ways that are still being discovered.

SSA DIGITAL LIBRARY

The Digital Library was first unveiled in July 1998 at the headquarters complex. The size and scope of the Library was expanded in order to reach all Agency employees nationwide by Spring 2000. Its strength lies in its ease of use and accessibility. It contains a catalog listing of all of the hardcopy materials maintained by the Agency's Library, records management information, historical information, access to over 3,000 compact discs containing thousands of journals, books, newspapers and magazines, and the USA PhoneDisc. The Library also has access to online services such as Lexis/Nexis and WestLaw and NewsEdge (an up-to-the-minute accounting of current events worldwide). From the onset, the variety of materials available via the Digital Library has been determined based upon user needs and user requests. All materials resident in the Digital Library are intended to better serve the customer base and assist Agency employees in doing their jobs as efficiently and effectively as possible.

ELECTRONIC FORMS IMPLEMENTATION

On September 1, 1993, the Agency began working on a tactical plan for the national implementation of electronic forms. This initiative sought to put into an electronic format as many of the forms used by field offices as possible, thereby eliminating various costs (e.g., printing and shipping of forms from a centralized location) and streamlining the processing of the forms (directly into the workstation). This initiative was part of the Agency's strategic priority to evolve into a paperless agency.

Over several years, the Agency continued to investigate electronic forms and subsequently developed a contract with a vendor through the Government Printing Office for the conversion of paper forms into an electronic format using the FormFlow software. Initially as a pilot, 62 forms were converted and placed on the IWS/LAN systems of a few field offices. The success of this pilot resulted in its wider implementation in 1999 into other field offices.²⁴

²⁴ During FY 2000, approximately 300 of the Agency's 2,900 paper forms were converted into an intelligent fill-able electronic format.

In August 2000, a SSA Forms Repository was released onto the Agency's Intranet, allowing most field offices access to all of the electronic forms. The forms are provided in Adobe PDF format (Print-Only) and in JetForm FormFlow format (Intelligent Fill-able Forms). In addition, the Agency continued to work toward providing the general public access to various Social Security forms via the Internet.

The Agency depends on thousands of employees across the country to carry out its mission to provide world-class service. The Intranet has become a vehicle for effectively communicating information while providing employees with new tools to do their jobs more efficiently and more productively. The next task is to successfully implement this throughout the Agency and ensure that training is available for the efficient use of this tool. This will, in turn, provide the impetus for developing more creative applications to improve work processes and employee quality of the workplace environment.

OTHER ADVANCES IN TECHNOLOGY

With the need to improve IT infrastructure constantly, the Agency has made improving its standing on technology a key goal. Investments in technology infrastructure are necessary to support distributed computing, web-based processing, more robust management information, and the emergence of voice recognition and machine language translation technologies. Large efficiencies may be gained by linking web-based technologies with existing legacy systems and established service delivery models. The e-SSA Technology Strategy report released in November 2000 described Social Security's transition plans and highlights the productivity gains that the Agency expects to realize from the planned infrastructure upgrades.

Another key component was the need for regular hardware refreshment. The Agency's technological infrastructure must be refreshed at regular intervals to keep up with the rapid pace of technological change. The Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner have pushed to reduce the Agency's procurement cycle for new IT equipment from seven to three years. The decision to move to a three-year refreshment cycle meant that every Agency employee will have a new workstation by the end of 2002.

Between FY 2000-2002, the Agency will spend \$45 million a year to replace its 91,650 existing workstations and make limited upgrades to the supporting infrastructure of servers, printers, laptops, scanners, controllers, etc. As an initial step, in August 2000 the Agency purchased and began installing 40,000 personal computers in the first phase of this three-year cycle.²⁵

Another improvement was to the telecommunications network infrastructure. An adequate telecommunications infrastructure was required to support Social Security's electronic

²⁵ The workstations have more memory, faster processors, and 17-inch monitors.

service delivery initiatives, without which the Agency would not be able to take full advantage of current and future technologies. In August 2000, the Agency entered into a contract to obtain new “frame relay support” equipment and installation. This more efficient technology doubled the capacity of the Agency’s telecommunications lines; improved response times for network-based applications; improved manageability and reliability of the Agency’s computer network; and enhanced support for new network video and telephone services. As a result, all employees on IWS/LAN will have Internet access on their desktop by December 31, 2000.

The Agency also invested in an integrated human resources system. By using customized, commercial off-the-shelf software, this new system automated processing of personnel, administrative, and service functions. It also provided automated support for human resources management activities, including online ad hoc information retrieval.

In addition to the technology upgrades to improve customer service, the Agency also made several technological upgrades to improve its administrative processes. The Agency automated several processes including ordering supplies, processing purchase orders, and supporting electronic commerce. These advancements in technology reduced Agency operating costs by over one million dollars annually. The Agency also implemented video teleconferencing, a project to acquire the necessary technology to provide two-way video and audio that is used for training and public service announcements.

Numerous technological enhancements were made to the 800 number service. The Agency installed automated services, both in English and in Spanish so that callers are able to conduct business transactions 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The software to improve caller access was also updated, and these improvements have greatly improved customer satisfaction with the 800 number network.

The Agency embraced the National Performance Review’s recommendation to expand electronic commerce for Federal acquisition by conducting an electronic commerce pilot in 1997. Use of the Internet and electronic commerce was expanded in each subsequent year. The Agency posts all of its acquisition notices and solicitations on its Internet home page, allowing interested vendors to read and download them. In FY 1999, the Agency discontinued the old practice of mailing paper copies of these documents to vendors. Contracting opportunities are announced exclusively by electronic means. All of the requirements are posted with the Electronic Posting Service,²⁶ which will, in the near future, be the one place a vendor needs to go to see all Government requirements. These electronic commerce methods are faster and more economical (i.e., saving the cost of printing paper copies of solicitation, labeling and mailing them, and maintaining a bidders mailing list), and benefit vendors who register with the Electronic Posting Service, including automatic email notification of Federal business opportunities of interest to them.

Technology infrastructure will continue to evolve at a brisk pace. It will become faster, better, and cheaper. While advancing technology offers tremendous opportunities to increase access to and improve the accuracy, timeliness, and convenience of its service to the public, it also presents challenges. The Agency has begun to restructure business processes to make

²⁶ The Internet address of the Agency’s acquisition site is www.ssa.gov/oag/.

effective use of new technologies in order to meet future needs and to give its employees the tools they need to meet the workplace demands. To support employees and enable them to meet customer needs, the Agency will continue to evaluate and keep pace with emerging technologies.

SUCCESSION PLANNING & TRAINING

The legacy of downsizing in the 1980s and the considerable changes in the workplace environment has had a tremendous impact upon the workforce of the Social Security Administration. Agency growth in the 1960s and 1970s was followed by years of tight staffing in the 1980s and 1990s;²⁷ the reduction in workforce numbers coupled with increased workload and the significant technological changes in how the Agency performs its business has forced its employees to wear multiple hats at the same time as well as learning to wear new ones. By the mid 1990s, the Agency's workforce was "mature" with 57 percent of employees over the age of 45, with predictions that 40 percent of the Agency's existing 1998 workforce would be retired by 2009. This imminent "retirement wave" of significant portions of the Agency's workforce, in particular in the upper management levels, will result in a serious continuity and succession problem for the Agency if left un-addressed. These forces buffeting Agency employees have increased the need for constant training to prepare them for the new challenges of the future.

Moreover, the REGO initiatives initiated by the Clinton Administration, under the leadership of Vice President Al Gore, reemphasized the importance of focusing on the needs of Federal Government employees. Reinvention and streamlining by definition and necessity requires government employees to do more with less personnel resources, hopefully with better infrastructure/technology resources and better work processes. Under these initiatives, agencies were encouraged to invest a substantial portion of savings realized from reinvention activities to finance employee training and development.

The Agency is committed to providing the training and development necessary to ensure that its workforce possesses the knowledge, skills, and abilities required to meet and handle increasing responsibilities and workloads. The Office of Training (OT) helped prepare the Agency's streamlined workforce for their new missions, has begun a number of new initiatives and programs to better serve its customers – Agency employees. The drive to provide more training, to make it continuous, and to provide it "just-in-time" has become paramount.

With such a large percentage of the workforce eligible to retire, the significant loss of knowledge and experience to the Agency was apparent. In addition, a very high percentage of those eligible were in the management ranks. Thus succession planning and leadership development became a key element in the Agency's Strategic Plan. In the spring of 1997, the Agency developed a plan to revitalize management training and career development.

²⁷ In 1980, the Agency had over 84,000 employees, but this number has decreased over 17,000 (over 20 percent) during the following two decades to its FY 2000 level of a little below 63,000 employees.

Implementation of the leadership development strategy began in 1998 leading to the revitalization of many career developmental programs.

A key part of the Agency's training program is recognition of the importance of life-long learning and the importance of self-development in attaining both personal and Agency goals. The various initiatives are linked to leadership competencies that help to broaden employee's perspectives and experiences.

SUCCESSION PLANNING:

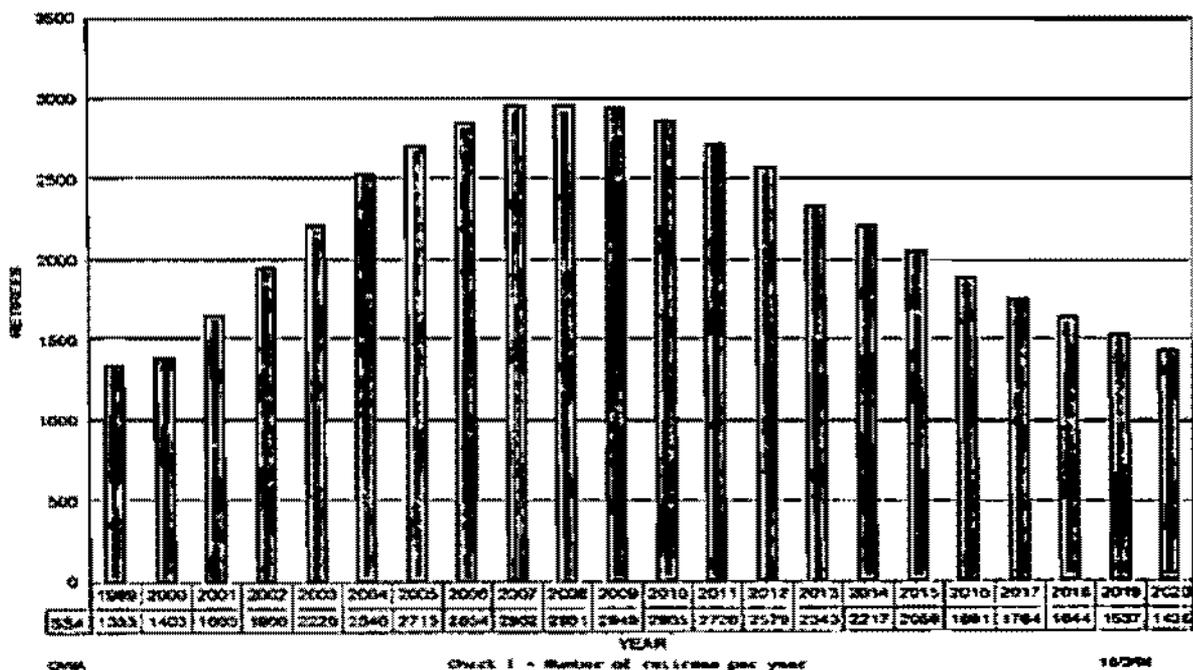
"We need to double all existing career developmental programs to help prepare for the future. There's no reason why we can not double the numbers of SES candidates, Advanced Leadership Developmental people, Leadership Developmental people, and Presidential Management Interns."

- Deputy Commissioner William A. Halter

In 1997, the Agency began to analyze the upcoming retirement wave by looking at potential retirements in the next five years. It soon discovered that a large percentage of employees would be eligible to retire by the year 2002, especially at the higher grade levels. But it was not enough to only examine how many employees would be eligible to retire; the Agency needed to determine how many employees actually expected to retire. By examining the number of eligible employees who actually left the Agency on regular retirement over the past ten years, it found that the average employee retiring on regular retirement was 61 years of age. Based on this historical pattern, a model for projecting how many employees would retire in future years was developed.

In 1998, the Agency prepared a more comprehensive study of the retirement wave attrition, focusing on predicting the who, where, and when of retirement losses. Agency-wide projections through the year 2020 showed the peak of the retirement wave occurring in the years 2007-2009, when it was expected that approximately 3,000 employees will retire each year compared to an average of 851 retirements per year from 1990 through 1999.

PREDICTED SSA RETIREES



The data analysis for the period 1999 through 2010 projected an increase in the retirements of many key positions. For example, about 66 percent of supervisors, 45 percent of claims representatives, and 48 percent of computer specialists were projected to retire within this time period.²⁸

The Agency later validated the model by comparing the actual number of retirements with the number projected, and the model was found to be a good predictor. The Agency also projected the succession flow of new hires into key positions and the movement of employees between those positions. This assumes maintaining current staffing levels and the ability to backfill positions as employees left.

A key concern was training these new employees, especially if they came on board after experienced workers retire. If there was no period of overlap, it will be difficult to ensure that new employees were adequately mentored and trained in the program complexities and the methods of providing high-quality customer service.

In March 2000, the Agency completed a study addressing the issue of succession planning.²⁹ This report identified four areas where the Agency should focus to address the problems associated with accelerated retirement of the Agency's workforce:

²⁸ Predicting Retirement Attrition for a Maturing Workforce: October 1998, Office of Workforce Analysis, October, 1998.

²⁹ Workforce Planning at the SSA, Office of Workforce Analysis, March, 2000.

- “Flattening the Wave”
- Career Development Programs (CDPs)
- Diversity
- Training

The Agency needed to “flatten the retirement wave” so that the impact of leaving employees and the loss of institutional knowledge can be spread out over a longer space of time. In addition, the Agency needed to provide appropriate and effective career development programs to further invest in the remaining workforce, take advantage of the synergies offered by this new opportunity to increase and improve the Agency’s diversity, and give its workforce the needed tools to handle this new situation through more efficient and effective training.

“FLATTENING THE WAVE”

The peak of the Agency’s retirements is set to occur from 2007-2009, coinciding with the retirement of the baby-boom generation, resulting in an increase of workload right when the Agency’s workforce begins losing its most experienced employees. In order to avoid a crisis situation, the Agency needs to spread out the retirements over more years (to minimize the impact of retirements on any particular year) and increase its recruitment and retention practices.

From 1996 through 2000, the Agency offered early retirement to its employees, and about 5 percent of those eligible for early retirement took it.³⁰ This had the dual effect of increasing the normal retirements for each year since 1996 and thus decreasing the potential retirement crunch in 2007-2009. With each passing year, the percentage of early retirements out of total retirements has been steadily increasing (e.g., in 1999, early retirements accounted for 50.5 percent of all retirements). These early retirements allowed the Agency to hire 4,000 new employees from 1997-1999 as replacements for these early retirees. By 2007-2009, these new recruits will be experienced employees,³¹ thereby avoiding the feared experience loss and its loss on productivity. In addition to allowing the Agency to replace employees who would have retired during the peak retirement years, the early retirements brings in new workers, with appropriate and up-to-date technological skills.

This solution was not an easy choice for the Agency to take; the exodus of present staff meant that existing workloads were that much more difficult for the remaining staff. However, the alternative was felt to be worse; if no efforts were made to flatten the retirement wave, approximately 30 percent of Agency employees would be in trainee status during the 2007-2009

³⁰ 524 in 1996, 825 in 1997/98, and 1,381 in 1999. Workforce Planning at the SSA, Office of Workforce Analysis, March, 2000, pg 4.

³¹ Experienced employees are defined as having worked in their capacity for at least 3 years.

peak retirement years.³² Another important benefit of the presence of experienced workers was not just to process increasing workloads, but also in the training and mentoring of new recruits.

The Agency used formal training to convey the technical programmatic knowledge necessary for a new hire to perform their job, but this formal training was coupled with on-the-job mentoring which is crucial for new hires to see and apply their newly gained knowledge in practice. Mentoring was also a manner in which institutional knowledge was "passed on". Moreover, while resource intensive (forcing the Agency's most experienced and productive employees to spend precious time mentoring new hires), it was an investment in the future that produced more knowledgeable and productive employees for the Agency.

The success of this effort was based on the ability of the Agency to replace current retirement losses with new hires, and thus the importance of hiring and retention. In FY 2000, the administrative budget request was not fully funded, resulting in the inability of the Agency to hire as many new people as it needs to fully replace all the losses due to attrition and retirement. The Commissioner's response to Congress was to reduce the Agency's service goals, and the Agency attempted to do as much as possible with the reduced resources. For FY 2000, the Agency hired approximately 2,000 new employees.

CAREER DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS (CDPs)

One important element in preparing for the imminent wave of retirements has been the acceleration of career developmental programs (CDPs). Under the downsizing of the 1980s, previously existing CDPs were suspended due to the hiring and job freeze. However, as the issue of succession planning began to take on added urgency, the pressing need for CDPs became obvious. They became recognized as an important component to help prepare for the future of the Agency.

By March 2000, the average age of a typical Social Security employee was 46.7 years of age.³³ Urgency to develop employee skills for the future began to build, especially for management positions where expected losses were predicted to be very high (the average age being even higher than for the Agency as a whole). The Agency responded by reestablishing development programs at the national, component, and regional levels. From 1997 through 2000, over 1,200 people³⁴ were selected for participation in these development programs (the first four being national in scope):

- Senior Executive Service (SES) Candidate Development Program
- Advanced Leadership Program (ALP)
- Leadership Development Program (LDP)

³² Workforce Planning at the SSA, Office of Workforce Analysis, March, 2000, pg 5.

³³ Workforce Planning at the SSA, Office of Workforce Analysis, March, 2000, pg 1.

³⁴ Workforce Planning at the SSA, Office of Workforce Analysis, March, 2000, pg 5.

- Presidential Management Interns (PMIs)
- Component-level and Regional Development Programs
- Regional Job Enrichment Programs
- Leadership Seminars

The national CDPs complemented developmental and rotational programs sponsored by various Agency components. The success of Agency CDPs attracted attention both within and outside the public sector; the Agency was benchmarked by numerous organizations (e.g., U.S. Department of Agriculture, Central Intelligence Agency, Pension Benefit Guaranty Corporation, and U.S. Navy). The Commissioner was invited to speak at the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA) Conference in September 1999 to discuss how the Agency's strategic plan serves as the foundation for its leadership development activities. These events demonstrated recognition of both the quality and effectiveness of the Agency's succession planning activities and of the Agency's investment in the workforce.

Senior Executive Service (SES) Candidate Program:

Initiated in June 1998, this national program for selected grade 15 employees is a two-year program developing the competencies needed for SES positions. It also seeks to broaden their experiences and leadership abilities through training and assignments.³⁵ Selected potential candidates had to undergo a rigorous competitive assessment process, and in FY 1998 the first cohort of 36 employees was selected by the Commissioner.

Advanced Leadership Program (ALP):

Initiated in October 1998, this national program for selected employees in grades 13 and 14 is a two-year program consisting of training and assignments designed to help participants develop the competencies required by mid-level leaders. The candidates received temporary promotions during their participation in the program. In FY 1998, 35 employees were selected.

Leadership Development Program (LDP):

Initiated in March 2000, this national program for employees in grades 9-12 is also a two-year program featuring training and assignments to develop the competencies required by first line leaders and supervisors. In FY 2000, the first cohort of 61 employees was selected to participate in this program. The candidates received temporary promotions during their participation in the program.

³⁵ A rotational assignment outside the Agency is required for SES candidates to further broaden their experiences.

Presidential Management Intern (PMI) Program:

In 1977, President Carter issued an Executive Order 12008³⁶ establishing the Presidential Management Intern (PMI) Program. It is designed to attract to the federal service outstanding graduate students (Master's and Doctoral-level) from a wide variety of academic disciplines who have an interest in, and commitment to, a career in the analysis and management of public policies and programs. The two-year internship program enables graduate degree students to be appointed to federal positions as PMIs and to have the opportunity to convert to a permanent federal civil service position. All cabinet departments and more than 50 federal agencies have hired Presidential Management Interns.

Since 1997, the Agency has increased its participation with the PMI program (run by the Office of Personnel Management [OPM]), and over 129 PMIs have been selected as of 2000, making the Agency one of the leaders in this national program.

Component-level and Regional Development Programs:

Agency components and regions were given the mandate to establish their own CDPs. From 1997 through 2000, hundreds of employees have been selected to participate in these programs. A good example of a regional program was the Chicago Upwards Bound (CUB) Program in Region V for grades nine through twelve employees. This one-year competitive CDP was designed to enhance the careers of journeyman personnel in the region who have demonstrated leadership potential. An example of a component led CDP was the Operations Leadership Developmental Program (OLDP) that was run by the Office of Operations. This CDP was similar to the national Leadership Development Program.

Regional Job Enrichment Programs:

Several regions have established programs to broaden the experience of their employees. For example, in the Seattle Region from 1997 thru 2000, 379 employees have been selected for its Job Enrichment Program, where employees from grades 1-14 participate by gaining experience in another job for a period of 120 days. The Chicago Region also runs two similar programs; the Chicago Employee Exchange and Rotation Program (CHEER)³⁷ and the Chicago Managers Exchange Program³⁸. Both of these programs seek to give employees and managers, respectively, the opportunity to request a temporary work assignment in another office or component for five to 30 working days.

³⁶ Signed August 25, 1977.

³⁷ Initiated in 1998.

³⁸ Initiated on October 8, 1997.

TRAINING

Historically, training was conducted within the framework of the traditional classroom. However, with approximately 63,000 employees scattered in over 1,600 sites nationwide plus training responsibilities for the state disability examiners (who adjudicate disability claims for the Agency), issues such as timeliness, consistency, and funding for travel became increasingly problematic by the early 1990s. The same technology that enabled the steady evolution from paper-based processes to one relying increasingly on computer technology, coupled with the ongoing need to incorporate legislative-mandated changes, required the constant training and retraining of the workforce. The Agency was thus faced with a training dilemma common to large organizations: how to effectively and efficiently provide frequent training to a large, geographically dispersed employee population.

Solving this dilemma presented the Agency with a challenge common to corporate and government trainers – how to provide effective training at the least cost at the right time. While classroom training remained a vital part of training strategy, the Agency recognized the limitations of a strict reliance on classroom training. Traveling to a centralized location for training was not always possible, and cost and timeliness become factors when many employees must be trained quickly. Technological advances provided new tools to the trainer, offering a diversity of methodologies from which to choose. Determining which technologies to implement, the Agency considered cost, subject matter, time constraints, and the fact that people have different learning styles and do not respond equally to the same approach.

The search for solutions to the training delivery dilemma had been ongoing for years. During that time, training materials were redesigned and various approaches using computer-based training implemented. The focus on technology-based solutions began in 1993, and to identify what the Agency needed to accomplish, almost two years of contacts and visits were completed with private industry and other government agencies (including the Ford Motor Company, the Federal Aviation Administration, the Xerox Corporation, the United States Post Office, and AT&T). Eventually, it was identified that these factors would be important for the Agency to focus on:

- Allow for more economical and efficient training;
- Improve timeliness and consistency; and,
- Maintain or even improve training quality and effectiveness.

Simultaneously, the Agency was embarking on the IWS/LAN installation initiative to provide networked computers in lieu of the mainframe-linked “dumb” terminals that were then standard. The combination of extensive benchmarking, advent of the IWS/LAN rollout, and the continued demands for training helped spur a rethinking and reengineering of training delivery methodologies. The result was a hybrid approach using a variety of emerging technologies, each of which was used to address different training needs.

TERMINAL-BASED TRAINING: PHOENIX LESSONS

An early and primitive form of computer-based training which had been a mainstay in training for years, it was used especially for portions of entry-level and system enhancement training. Since personal computers were not even a consideration when the original program was acquired, these computer-based training had to be resident on a mainframe computer and accessed via "dumb" terminals by employees. While available to all employees at most locations, the 200 or so lessons eventually developed for use on the system were simplistic and highly text oriented with very limited interactivity.

This technologically archaic system has been superseded with the advent of personal computers and the IWS/LAN rollout, but was still in use in a few locations as late as early 2000. With newer technology, OT began to convert all of the old Phoenix Lessons to newer formats, and by mid 2000 this conversion was completed.

PERSONAL COMPUTER-BASED TRAINING: MULTIMEDIA/CD-ROM

The proliferation of personal computers (PCs) in the 1990s and advances made in multimedia and CD-ROM technology made essential their consideration as a potential training tool. While a technological advance over the old terminals, the stand-alone non-networked PC was ultimately only a super-charged terminal; CD-ROMs offered the individual employee more information than ever before and a spruced up interface, but still had the fundamental limitation of little true interactivity. It did a lot more (e.g., multi-media capability), but possessed the same limitations of being applicable primarily to training projects with a reasonably stable subject matter, large audiences, and common training needs. However, even with these limitations, it did have its successes.

For example, the roughly 10,000 employees whose duties include responding to some 58 million or more calls every year to the national 800 number required a large amount of training, on the same subject matter, with the vast majority of them working in large, centralized PSCs or TSCs. Multimedia capable PCs were provided to several sites, and a customer service program was piloted with some 4,000 students. Post training evaluations of these employees yielded an over 95 percent acceptance rate of the content and delivery mode. Based on the results of this pilot, the Agency acquired over 4,000 additional multimedia capable PCs.

The Agency subsequently developed a number of other customized multimedia programs including lessons on the Privacy Act and disclosure requirements, stress management, disability entitlement factors, Social Security program orientation and solvency, and additional training in customer service. This internal development of software was in addition to the many existing off-the-shelf software packages already used, thus allowing for a greater scope of materials available to the Agency for training purposes. These packages included portions of a management curriculum, general and basic skills lessons, and other lessons applicable to disability/medical examining personnel such as courseware on anatomy and physiology.

As improvements to the IT systems architecture progressed, multimedia/CD-ROM technology has now been relegated as an alternate delivery method when slow response times, poor Internet performance, or other problems made the use of online training methods less desirable. It has been superseded with the advent of the networked environment. The amount of information now available has exploded exponentially, and interactivity, the main limitation of both terminal and PC based training, was now made possible.

NETWORK-BASED TRAINING: INTRANET/INTERNET

The advent of PCs, LANs, and the Intranet made network-based training a reality. New net-based tools were selected to meet current and future requirements for the Agency's training environment and technological infrastructure. Staff was trained in new authoring tools and converted old mainframe-based lessons to the new Web-based delivery platform. Additional net-based "off-the-shelf" lessons were also purchased and piloted before being made widely accessible to employees.

As an interim step while the national Intranet infrastructure was being developed, OT leased commercial off-the-shelf courses for local access networks (LANs).³⁹ The courseware was loaded on local servers and made available to employees' workstations. The preparation for making this training available to field office locations involved coordination between various components in the Agency to integrate the courseware into the IWS/LAN configuration and to assess the impact on the Agency's infrastructure. The courseware was approved for use on the national IWS/LAN platform beginning with the March 1998 installations.

In 1994, the Office of Systems began the Independent Workstation Learning (IWL) initiative to provide computer-based training to its employees at their workstations through the use of their LAN. The initiative promoted continuous learning at the desktop and embodies the concept of just-in-time training. Beginning in early 1997, renamed the e-Learning initiative, it was extended throughout the Agency through the establishment of the national Intranet. All employees in offices with the IWS/LAN installation completed have access to e-Learning.

In recognition of the success of the e-Learning initiative, it received the 1997 National Performance Review's Hammer Award and the 1998 Government Computer News Award. These awards were received for the development of the online training system and giving employees control and responsibility for their own training and development by promoting continuous education opportunities.

With the continual development of the Intranet infrastructure, as part of the Intranet training delivery initiative, the Agency purchased and installed a web-based training server that provided interactive training courseware and materials over the Intranet. Courseware included office automation training as well as in-house developed programmatic-specific courses for claims representatives, teleservice representatives, and other front line employees.

³⁹ These early off-the-shelf courses were primarily on Microsoft Office 95 and 97 and Internet Explorer.

The Agency developed a simple but comprehensive approach to employee training for non-supervisory personnel. Designed to help employees gain the tools they need to enrich their development and improve the operation of the organization, it included competency-based training models and self-assessment tools.⁴⁰ They were supported by the Individual Learning Account concept, wherein employees were given eight hours of duty time from which to draw in order to take the training they feel they need for competency reinforcement based on the results of their self-assessment. This new approach has not yet been adopted by the Agency, and a recent pilot will help determine the effectiveness of this new methodology.⁴¹

Another significant initiative taking advantage of the Intranet and the Internet was the SSA Online University. This allowed employees to access a large number of web-based training courses at their own time, covering a wide range of topics from information technology to management skills to personal development. Employees can access the university from any place with Internet access (home, work, and library), or from their own workstations through the Intranet. This initiative enhanced ongoing training and development opportunities for employees by improving the accessibility of quality training resources for their use.

And lastly, as a backdrop to these training initiatives, the Agency continued to make progress in making all class offerings accessible to employees with disabilities. OT developed templates to convert all courses into a format accessible by software such as JAWS. In addition, the OT web site was redesigned to be accessible to employees with disabilities.

INTERACTIVE VIDEO TELETRAINING (IVT)

Designed as a distance-learning network using an interactive one-way digital satellite technology with a viewer response system, the IVT system was a one-way video, two-way audio system using compressed digital satellite technology. The system used keypads with built in microphones to allow instructors and students to communicate on a real-time basis with few of the limitations normally imposed by geographical separation. It was used for in-service, managerial, and entry-level training on a daily basis. By overcoming the barrier of geographical separation, the IVT program provided consistency in training (reducing duplicative efforts), significant monetary savings (no travel necessary), and helped reduce the glass ceiling effect for individuals who can not travel due to personal/family situations (allowing career advancement without requiring long trips away from home).

IVT was the first major acquisition, and became arguably the Agency's centerpiece, in its diverse approach to delivering training. As a result of the benchmarking undertaken in 1993 and 1994, a proposal was made in early 1995 for a small pilot of 30 downlink sites to test IVT's effectiveness and determine how the technology could best be used. The pilot was successful, and a demonstration for the Executive Staff in June 1995 resulted their support to proceed with limited implementation in a three-phased approach:

⁴⁰ The models addressed the training aspects of job performance and career development. The self-assessment tools were designed to help employees assess their skill and knowledge levels anonymously.

⁴¹ Pilot was scheduled from FY 2000 through FY 2001 in the Denver Region.

- Phase I: Install a broadcast studio in Baltimore and 220 downlink (receiver) sites;
- Phase II: Install IVT in all remaining Agency sites; and,
- Phase III: Make IVT accessible at the desktop.

Initially designed as a limited pilot, IVT quickly mushroomed into a fully functional system. Phase I ran from late 1995 through 1996; a broadcast studio was constructed in Baltimore along with 220 downlink sites (scattered throughout the country, including Puerto Rico, Alaska, and Hawaii). Studio 1 presented its first broadcast in March 1996 to approximately 150 downlink sites. At that time, the broadcast signal was sent via a terrestrial line to the Federal Aviation Administration's uplink in Oklahoma City for transmission through an AT&T satellite.

From 1996 until mid-2000, Phase II progressed and the IVT network grew into a nationwide system with five studios and almost 830 operational downlink sites. Already the largest IVT system in the Federal Government when it was only 220 sites, the Agency expanded still further. In accordance with the original plan, the long-term goal was to provide IVT directly to each individual PC workstation. With the inexorable progress of technology, implementation was put on hold pending planned improvements to the system infrastructure that will supply sufficient bandwidth to permit the sending of full motion, full screen video to individual PCs.

Utilization of IVT has been widespread and significant. While most systems restrict audience size to 30 to 60 participants, the Agency routinely served audiences of 300 to 500 viewers with no known detriment to the learning process. On many occasions there were in excess of 1,000 viewers for a single training program. In addition, while teletraining programs in other organizations consisted of standard courses broadcast repeatedly (e.g., entry-level training falls largely in this category), much of the Agency's programming resulted from an emphasis on training that is timely and meaningful, with new training courses continually being developed and broadcast to coincide with changing workloads and procedures. Programs were repeated only as needed to accommodate different time zones. Great emphasis was also placed upon the use of interaction as a key to providing a quality training experience. Most courses were internally developed, but the Agency had partnered with outside vendors and groups such as Harvard University's Schools of Government and Business.

During its first two years, over 1,750 hours of training representing an estimated 73,000 training instances for Agency and state disability determination service employees were broadcast. Because of the initial successes with the training, it quickly led to the construction of a second broadcast studio in 1997; it was soon apparent that IVT was a valuable training tool. But it was also apparent that its effectiveness was not maximized because it reached too few of the primary customers for whom it was intended – field office employees.

By 1997, three separate analysis (the last done by an independent third party) of IVT's cost and business effectiveness was confirmed; they found no significant difference in learning between IVT and classroom training and documented that there would be significant cost benefits in expanding IVT. Approval and funding was secured in 1997 to expand the system by

an additional 610 downlink sites and to add three additional broadcast studios. This expansion included the construction of an uplink facility in Baltimore so that the connection through the Federal Aviation Administration was no longer needed. Additionally, it included the change to a different satellite, yet to be launched.

The new downlink sites were selected with the goal of making IVT accessible to the largest number of employees possible. Installations began in late 1997 and were virtually completed as of August 2000.⁴² Part of the delay can be attributed to problems with the original satellite; it fell victim to a solar flare in early 1997 requiring the re-pointing of the satellite dishes at every downlink site and limiting transponder availability. In addition, technology upgrades and the transition to a new satellite resulted in delays in launching the new satellite. When it was finally launched in August 1998, the rocket malfunctioned and was destroyed, prompting yet another round of dish re-pointing and delays.

As part of the upgrade process, each of the original 220 sites received new equipment, and all sites (new and old) were equipped with a second receiver. Having five studios meant that simultaneous broadcasts became a possibility, and a second receiver would allow downlink sites to receive two different programs at the same time.

The new broadcast studios, located in Kansas City (Studio 3), Atlanta (Studio 4), and Dallas (Studio 5), were designed with Studio 1 as the model, but incorporated technological advancements since the first studio in equipment. Each of the new studios agreed to take the lead in piloting one of the major entry-level courses for SSA field employees. Atlanta became responsible for Title XVI Claims Representative training, and Dallas and Kansas City for Title II Claims Representative training.

These entry-level classes were traditionally done in classroom sessions averaging 12-15 students each, and they required participants to travel to a central location for the duration of the 7-12 week classes. The pilot IVT classes of 30 students each began in the fall of 1998 and were completed by January 1999. Although all three studios limited daily instruction via IVT to four hours or less, each initially used a different approach in integrating IVT instruction with regular classroom instruction. Subsequent offerings have homogenized the process so that while class length still varies, all three classes are now completely done via IVT. Entry-level classes over IVT now have up to 200 or more students, representing a significant savings in both travel costs and instructor salaries.

Once the regional studios became operational and more downlink sites were installed, the value of IVT for training grew with its own momentum. By FY 1999, IVT was used to present over 2,000 hours of training to a total documented audience of over 119,000.⁴³ The total amount of training presented in FY 2000 was projected to be over 3,200 hours with a documented audience of about 161,000. In addition to the growth in usage, studies showed that training presented via IVT was effective. But, as was the case when the 1997 expansion began, a critical

⁴² As of August 2000. 11 sites remain to be installed due to their individual situations.

⁴³ Documented audience numbers were the number of employees who log in on the viewer response system. A subsequent study suggested that many employees did not actually log in, suggesting that the actual total audience could be up to double the documented audience numbers.

problem was that IVT still did not reach everyone. In specific, only about 50 percent of Agency field offices were equipped with IVT infrastructure. Those without were still relying on in-office ad hoc instruction or video tapes of the IVT programs supplied by other offices.

During 1999 and early 2000, cost benefit analyses supported proposals to complete the original goal of bringing IVT to every Agency site. Approval was given for this full expansion, but budget limitations meant that only part of it could be funded as of October 2000. Accordingly, plans were underway to add another 135 downlink sites to the system as well as a sixth regional studio to be located in Auburn, Washington. The expectation was that most of these new downlink sites will be installed by the end of 2000, eventually leaving approximately 535 Agency sites without direct IVT access.

In spite of years of studies documenting the effectiveness of video training in the private and academic sectors, the Agency commissioned its own studies from an independent consultant. These studies, on-going experience, and third-party evaluations showed these benefits resulting from IVT:

- Reduction in total training time by as much as 28 percent for individual courses;
- Reduction in the costs for travel and salaries;
- Trainees learned in their offices, making them more productive earlier;
- Significant reduction in costs in priority and labor-intensive training;
- More expeditious and consistent dissemination of new laws, regulations, and procedures; and
- No difference in the level of learning achieved.

This last finding was most significant; direct comparisons between IVT and classroom sessions of the same training showed there was no statistically significant difference in trainee performance and learning. In addition, employee reaction to IVT has been favorable.

In only a few years, the Agency has moved from concept to operation the largest and most dynamic IVT system in the Federal Government. However, the real achievement lied in the programming, its acceptance by the SSA community, and the substantial cost savings. IVT has enabled timely responses to a number of high level and potentially labor-intensive training efforts with significant reductions in monetary and human resource costs. The learning paradigm of training “whenever we can get it” has changed to “delivery as we need it.” Three examples illustrate this significant change:

- The Agency needed to train 500 new Hearing Officers within a short period, and the usual two-week classroom course with 25 students at a time would have been too costly and cumbersome to put together on short notice. By using IVT, all 500 were trained at one time with little to no costs in travel or lodging. Subsequent evaluations

showed no reduction in the training's effectiveness; IVT had changed the old concepts of having to travel to a central site and needing long blocks of time for large training efforts.

- As part of its efforts to reengineer the disability process, the Agency presented a 16-hour training session to over 15,000 Federal and state employees. Using IVT, the Agency presented the training in 35 sessions, saving time and money while obtaining a higher degree of consistency in the message. In addition, for the first time ever state, regional offices, PSCs, and hearings employees were trained together, offering opportunities to learn from each other and gain an appreciation of each other's roles.
- In spring 2000, President Clinton signed new legislation that had an extremely short period for implementation concerning the annual earnings test for beneficiaries. Using IVT, training was conducted nationally for field employees within one week after the legislation was signed.

While technology and IVT will never totally replace traditional classroom training, there will always be a need for a variety of training delivery methods. The use of technology has clearly becoming a dominant factor in training delivery within the Agency as its advantages become apparent to more and more of its managers and employees.

PHYSICAL INFRASTRUCTURE & SECURITY

The Social Security Administration (SSA) operates over 1,300 field offices in all 50 states plus Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and other American territories. In addition, there are another ten regional offices, six processing centers, 36 teleservice centers, and a large headquarters complex in Baltimore, and it is clear that the Agency occupies and manages a large amount of real estate. But physical infrastructure is more than just the number of buildings managed; it also includes the actual physical work environment, including furniture, hardware, and security. From the earliest strategic plan through the current plan, the Agency has focused on employee satisfaction, and has defined one of its goals to "Create a Nurturing Environment for SSA Employees." In line with this focus on employee well being, the Agency engaged in a number of initiatives from 1993 to 2000 to improve infrastructure and physical security.

The Office of Facilities Management (OFM) manages the Agency's facilities programs. The OFM directs the Agency's real property program, including short- and long-range facilities planning; design, construction, and leasing of the headquarters facilities, facilities maintenance, repair and construction projects, and policy development related to these operations. It works closely with the General Services Administration (GSA) to help administer offices in the field.

UPGRADE OF THE HEADQUARTERS COMPLEX

In 1993, the Agency and GSA jointly developed a long-range strategy to upgrade the Agency's headquarters complex buildings in the Woodlawn area of Baltimore, Maryland. The 280-acre, ten government-owned buildings⁴⁴ were beginning to show their age; most of the buildings were built in the early 1960s to 1970. Major renovations were needed, and when construction began on a new facility to consolidate the Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA) to another site, the moving of HCFA employees out of the east campus buildings⁴⁵ gave the Agency the window of opportunity to initiate these major renovations.

In 1995, the Woodlawn Master Plan was published, and it established short- and long-term goals to deal with issues such as a theme for the complex, building facades, pedestrian and vehicular circulation, site entry and identification, internal organization and circulation, and solar/day lighting issues. This document became the Agency and GSA's vision for the future of the Woodlawn Complex, and it served as the basis from which designs for campus-wide renovations were developed. Headquarters' building redesign and renovation were scheduled as follows:

Headquarters Building	Contract Awarded	Design (Completed)	Construction	Estimated Cost
Security West Building ⁴⁶	1994		Completed in 1997	\$30 million
East High & Low Rise ⁴⁷	1995	1996	1996-1999	\$21 million
Annex ⁴⁸	1995	1997	1999-2001 (to begin after East buildings)	\$38 million
Operations & new Child Care Center ⁴⁹	1996	1999	2002-2005	\$126 million

⁴⁴ Consisting of approximately 2,243,000 square feet of usable space.

⁴⁵ Approximately 6,100 employees work at this facility performing a variety of tasks for the Agency (e.g., systems administration, long-range and strategic planning, claims processing and administrative activities).

⁴⁶ The Security West building has 800,000 square feet of usable space, and a major focus of this project was to improve the working conditions of its 3,500 employees.

⁴⁷ The East High Rise has eight stories and 130,200 square feet of usable space, and the East Low Rise has three stories and 111,605 square feet of usable space.

⁴⁸ The Annex has four stories and 311,171 square feet of usable space.

⁴⁹ The Operations Building has four and one half stories and 800,053 square feet of usable space. Its renovation will include a complete renovation of the main cafeteria, and the Child Care Center will be relocated to a new, stand-alone facility (a separate study determined that the most cost-effective way to keep the Center in operation during and after the renovations was to relocate it).

Renovations included heating, ventilation, and air conditioning (HVAC) retrofits; replacement of the brick façade, roof, windows, electrical distribution equipment; removal of all known hazardous materials (e.g., asbestos, lead paint); installation of fire sprinkler systems, energy efficient lights, skylights, motors, and pumps; and, other repairs necessary to bring the buildings into compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

These state of the art renovations will provide a modern, safe, and healthy work environment. Specialized spaces were designed into the buildings (e.g., conference centers; training centers and training rooms; appliance centers; and audio-visual studios), and employees were provided with new, improved workstation systems furniture. Equally important, these renovations installed and supported the technological infrastructure necessary for the IWS/LAN rollout.

Renovations for the remaining buildings of the headquarters complex are anticipated to follow after the completion of the renovation of the Operations building. These remaining buildings include the West High Rise, West Low Rise, and Altmeyer Buildings. The completion of these renovations will result in a state of the art workplace environment that Agency employees can be proud of, and confident of their health and safety. In addition to the actual physical environment, the Agency also implemented other safety initiatives such as in the area of fire protection.

FIRE PROTECTION INITIATIVES

Two events in the 1990s significantly changed the way the Agency's fire protection activities were conducted: the delegation of authority for control of buildings from GSA to the Agency and significant reduction in the GSA fire protection staff.⁵⁰ The Agency became responsible for operating large buildings nationwide, and had to quickly develop the staff and skills necessary to do so effectively. While the Agency did have experience managing real estate in the headquarters complex, the regions were not as well prepared.

In 1993, Agency staff completed the design and installation of a new fire alarm system throughout the entire headquarters complex; the new system significantly enhanced the Agency's ability to provide fire alarm coverage throughout the headquarters complex buildings. In addition, the Agency undertook various other initiatives to ensure that fire protection in its buildings nationwide complied with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1999 standards and fire alarm systems.

⁵⁰ Another consequence of streamlining government, GSA began to delegate the daily management of buildings to the agencies they held the buildings for.

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH PROGRAMS

In an attempt to provide a physical environment that promoted the health and well being of its employees, the Agency began to assess how the work environment affected the health of its employees. The Agency established the Environmental Protection Program in 1996; it was designed to ensure that all employees were housed in a safe, healthy work environment. The program expanded on existing environmental health and safety (EHS) programs by obtaining information about building systems and employee concerns, and to identify and resolve existing and potential problems. These initiatives impacted core business processes and customer interfaces in beneficial ways that were not originally foreseen.

Many of the initiatives were designed to enhance the physical environment and educate employees so that they could better understand and respond to arising EHS issues. While targeted towards employees, building improvements often benefited the American public who came and visited any of the Agency's 1,300 plus facilities by eliminating or reducing the risks of hazardous situations. The heightened awareness and state of readiness fostered by employees regarding EHS issues allowed the effective and timely resolution of any rising EHS problems. Employee satisfaction, and hence productivity, increased with the reduction to the risks of employee injuries and property loss.

The initiatives focused on areas like: (1) Industrial hygiene (identification, remediation, prevention, and management for air quality, water quality, and asbestos management); (2) Comprehensive assessments of EHS programs in field offices (designed to provide initial baseline data on EHS performance, identification of EHS non-compliance, and implementation of interim/long-term corrective action); (3) Headquarters preventive maintenance program (preventive maintenance assessments initially focus on headquarters buildings, with long-range plans to expand to delegated facilities nationwide); and, (4) Education and awareness initiatives (e.g., hazard communication training; cardiopulmonary resuscitation training; user friendly furniture training; communication awareness). Many of the initiatives led to significant gains in safety and satisfaction in many field offices.

RECYCLING AND ENERGY EFFICIENCY

Throughout the 1990s, the Agency has remained at the forefront of the Federal Government's recycling program, consistently exceeding the goals set forth by the Clinton Administration.⁵¹ In 1997, the Deputy Commissioner for Finance, Assessment, and Management (DCFAM) was named the Agency Environmental Executive (AEE), responsible for sponsoring and chairing events that provide educational opportunities for Federal employees and awareness of environmental issues for the public. In conjunction with

⁵¹ Attached (APPENDIX VIIA - DCFAM) are summaries of the Agency's recycling efforts for FY 1997-1999, listing materials and amounts the Agency recycled at HQ buildings (including revenue generated through recycling).

the White House Task Force on Recycling, the Agency developed a strategic plan to implement the Clinton Administration's recycling goals.

From November 1997 through 1999, the AEE chaired the Federal "America Recycles Day," held annually on November 15. A joint effort of by White House Task Force members, the Agency organized, monitored, and administered the activity, soliciting participation from both Federal agencies and the private sector.

In April 2000, the Agency sponsored a recycling awareness and energy conservation exhibit on the Mall in Washington, D.C. Agency employees and its recycling mascot, "Recycle Billy," provided information on the Agency's recycling programs, and distributed mini-recycling bins, recycling pins, and a wide variety of recycling and energy conservation literature. The exhibit was one of the most popular attractions of the over 50 booths sponsored by other Federal agencies and private sector groups.

President Clinton has released various Presidential Executive Orders (EOs) involving recycling and environmental issues, and various initiatives within the Agency were implemented because of these EOs. In 1998, EO 13101⁵² resulted in the implementation of awareness training in teleservice centers (TSCs) and program service centers (PSCs), bringing about the appointment of recycling coordinators at each of these locations. In 2000, EO 13148⁵³ resulted in the Agency reviewing its existing environmental management systems and auditing programs purporting to promote pollution prevention.

As a consequence of the training and awareness fostered by these and other initiatives, Agency facilities were well equipped to recycle. For example, the headquarters complex has the capability to recycle aluminum cans, plastic bottles, glass bottles, white paper, mixed paper, magazines, newspaper, phone books, cardboard, styrofoam, wood pallets and scraps, fluorescent lamps, electronic ballasts, printer toner cartridges, and batteries. The Agency also promoted recycling with its outside contractors; stringent recycling requirements were built into contracts for services at Agency facilities.

In addition to recycling, the Agency has been proactive in meeting the goals established by the Clinton Administration in regards to energy efficiency. The Energy Policy Act of 1992 and EO 13123⁵⁴ set the goals, and the Agency strategies for meeting these goals were carried out through a combination of energy audits, energy conservation projects, and prospectus level projects throughout its facilities management.

The Agency designated a Senior Energy Manager who met regularly with Department of Energy representatives and participated on the Interagency Energy Management Task Force. In recognition for its progress, the SSA Senior Energy Manager received the "1999 Federal Energy and Water Management Award" from the Federal Interagency Energy Policy Committee for exceptional accomplishments in the efficient use of energy in the Federal sector. Institutionally,

⁵² Greening the Government through Waste Prevention, Recycling, and Federal Acquisition, signed September 14, 1998.

⁵³ Greening the Government through Leadership in Environmental Management, signed April 21, 2000.

⁵⁴ Greening the Government through Efficient Energy Management, signed June 3, 1999.

building/facilities managers were established at every Agency delegated facility, and they were responsible for understanding energy regulations and guidelines and for implementing energy conservation measures, monitoring energy consumption, and evaluating costs and savings.

ENVIRONMENTAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Agency accomplishments in environmental issues included:

- Installed motion sensors in the headquarters complex, Metro West, Northeast PSC, Mid-Atlantic PSC, Great Lakes PSC, Western PSC, and Wilkes-Barre Data Operations Center to save lighting costs;
- Installed energy efficient motors in mechanical space of delegated buildings;
- Installed energy efficient lighting, including compact fluorescent lamps in place of incandescent lamps, at all delegated space;
- Completed the "Campus Cross-Tie" project, providing emergency power to the headquarters complex with the generators from the National Computer Center;
- Retired and replaced old, inefficient central plants and equipment with new energy efficient, environmentally friendly equipment with installed energy management systems;⁵⁵
- Installed lighting controls;⁵⁶
- Installed variable speed drives for pumps, cooling tower fans, and air handlers;⁵⁷
- Replaced automatic sliding doors with revolving doors at the Mid-Atlantic PSC and headquarters complex (revolving doors provide a positive seal at all exterior entrances and energy savings by preventing the loss of conditioned air);
- Installed water conservation equipment in the form of low flow aerators (all delegated buildings), and low flow toilets (headquarters and Mid-Atlantic PSC); and
- Performed energy audits at all delegated buildings to assist in identifying and prioritizing energy conservation projects.

⁵⁵ Plants completed: Western PSC, Great Lakes PSC, Mid-Atlantic PSC, headquarters, National Computer Center, and the Supply Building.

⁵⁶ Plants completed: Western PSC, Great Lakes PSC, Mid-Atlantic PSC, headquarters, National Computer Center, and the Supply Building

⁵⁷ Plants completed: Western PSC, Great Lakes PSC, Mid-Atlantic PSC, headquarters, National Computer Center, and the Supply Building

In FY 1999, six comprehensive energy and water audits were completed at delegated facilities. Most of these audits were accomplished using utility energy service contracts, and from these audits, the Agency initiated numerous projects in 2000 in the headquarters complex and at the Great Lakes and Mid-Atlantic PSCs. These projects included new lighting, heating, ventilation, air conditioning, lighting controls, and variable speed drives; completion of these projects was projected to be FY 2001.

In addition, sustainable building designing was in progress in several large Agency buildings. In conjunction with GSA, the Agency completed renovations in its delegated buildings with values in excess of \$30 million. The vast majority of these renovations are GSA-funded prospectus level projects, and while not exclusively energy projects, they significantly affect the energy baseline by installing: 1) Energy efficient central heating and air conditioning plants; 2) Energy efficient windows and doors; 3) New computer-based central energy management systems; and 4) Natural day lighting and lighting controls.

The Agency also renovated existing buildings with energy efficient technologies such as thermal storage, efficient lighting, co-generation, and passive solar technology. GSA submitted and received approval for a prospectus project to build a new, standalone childcare facility at the Woodlawn, Maryland, complex; it will be designated the Agency's showcase facility. Renewable technologies will be incorporated into the design of this facility, including ground source heat pumps, natural day lighting, and passive solar design.

ENERGY TRAINING ACCOMPLISHMENTS

The Agency took very seriously its investment in its facilities staff on issues of energy efficiency, and thus sent its building managers and staff to attend various training classes and conferences on such topics as life cycle cost analysis, alternative fuels, lighting controls, and demand side management practices. Agency employees also attended GSA regional conferences to become familiar with current strategies in GSA's program for reducing energy consumption.

The Agency has participated in Department of Energy (DOE) interactive training programs to ensure the presence of a trained energy manager in every Agency delegated facility. The Agency scheduled additional training designed to help energy managers track energy usage and cost.

Agency employees nationwide were educated on the need for and benefits of energy conservation through an awareness program via e-mail, newsletters, and the Agency print magazine, OASIS.

EMPLOYEE WORKSTATION IMPROVEMENTS

As early as 1983, the growing emphasis on automation began raising safety issues for employees. Accelerated dependence on computers to process workloads resulted in a labor arbitrator's ruling mandating the Agency to install user friendly workstations in all field and teleservice offices where video display monitors were used.

Throughout 1993 and 1994, extensive studies and negotiations with AFGE resulted in 13 new workstation designs based on employee functions. These designs incorporated a number of user friendly features, such as electrically adjustable tables to alleviate health problems associated with extensive use of data processing equipment. In May 1994, the Agency began installing the new systems furniture workstations in field offices using furniture procured from the Federal Prison Industries (FPI), the Agency's mandated furniture source.

Because the original arbitration mandate declared that the furniture be installed in all field offices within five years, the project required expeditious handling. Discussions with FPI revealed that they would be unable to supply the furniture in the quantities within the timeframes required. As a result, FPI granted a waiver for the Agency to contract with private sector vendors to supply some of the furniture to the Agency's field offices.

On September 20, 1995, Herman Miller, a furniture store, was awarded a 4-year contract for installation of user friendly furniture in field offices throughout the nation. This contract, the largest of its kind awarded by any Federal agency as of 1995, was managed within the Agency from initiation (development of requirements) to evaluation of bids to final award. A team was established to develop the work plans and to implement the contract. The team, assembled from diverse components within the Agency, worked swiftly to develop and implement processes, procedures, guidelines, case controls, and budget mechanisms for using the new contract to install ergonomic furniture.

Eventually, it was decided that FPI would concentrate on providing and installing furniture at the large sites (e.g., PSCs and headquarters) and providing this service in a few field offices. Herman Miller was used to provide furniture for most field offices, hearings offices, TSCs, and other smaller offices. Though Herman Miller's contract was ending in 1999, many field offices had not yet resolved pressing space and lease issues and were unable to receive and install the new furniture. Since FPI was still fully engaged with the larger sites, the initial waiver was extended for 2 years, and this new contract included streamlined procedures to shorten timeframes for furniture design while reducing the Agency's procurement-related workload.

Using the two furniture sources, FPI and Herman Miller, the Agency installed 46,946 workstations in 1,436 field office sites (96 percent of the workforce) with user friendly furniture.⁵⁸ In addition, 8,751 workstations have been installed in the PSCs; 95 percent of PSC employees enjoy user friendly furniture workstations as of FY 2000.

⁵⁸ As of when?

Installation of the user friendly furniture in headquarters components continues, linked to the master housing plan and renovations of the various buildings and properties housing headquarters components. Over 6,500 workstations have been installed, and this portion of the project is expected to extend over an additional five years.

MODERN WORKSTATION TRAINING

The objective of modern workstation training was to educate Agency employees in the proper use and adjustment of workstations to provide greater comfort and reduce the number of physical injuries. The training initiative is the result of recommendations from a job safety analysis conducted in 1995, recommendations later confirmed through feedback from employee focus groups.

In 1998, there was a pilot study during which the Public Health Service conducted several forms of ergonomic workstation training at the Agency's field offices. An independent contractor evaluated results, and based on results of the pilot study the contractor recommended that the Agency's approach be a cost-effective combination of train-the-trainer and self-instructional pamphlets. In April 1999, the DCFAM and the Office of Operations Management, along with the Technological Environment Advisory Committee⁵⁹ agreed to this approach.

MODULAR FURNITURE RETROFIT PROJECT

Prior to development of the fully adjustable systems workstations, the Agency installed modular furniture workstations in field offices as well as first generation (not electrically adjustable) systems furniture. Although state-of-the-art at the time of installation, it lacked the level of adjustment the current workstations contain.

Funding for continuation of modular furniture retrofits beyond the pilot sites was limited. Careful analysis was made of risk exposure, minimizing expenditures for the project while maximizing benefits to the Agency. As a result, retrofits were generally done during an office relocation since this eliminates duplicative site preparation costs and minimizes disruption of an office by furniture reconfiguration. This approach kept costs low and within budget.

⁵⁹ Which includes both management and the American Federation of Government Employee (AFGE) members.

PHYSICAL SECURITY

As a direct result of the Oklahoma City Bombing and a perceived increase in violence in the Agency's field operations, physical security became a salient issue for many employees. The relative safety of the work environment was no longer taken for granted, and perhaps the greatest stride in employee security was the raising of awareness fostered by both tragedy and Agency educational programs. Since 1996, the Agency has had a well-developed, nationwide physical security program.

In 1995, the Agency employed a security-consulting firm to conduct physical security surveys of its regional offices, PSCs, field offices, TSCs, and Office of Hearings and Appeals (OHA) hearings offices. From the firm's findings and recommendations, a matrix of the top ten security improvements most frequently recommended in the reports were developed and used as a guide to direct, develop, and fund improvements to field office security.

In addition, the National Health and Safety Partnership Committee for Security (NHSPCS) sponsored the first SSA/AFGE Physical Security Conference in 1995 featuring speakers, panels, and breakout sessions under the guidance of union and management facilitators. The conference allowed managers, union officials, members of other federal agencies, and local law enforcement participants to voice their concerns about security issues. They identified training/informational needs and shared ideas on solutions on such issues as employee and customer/client safety and security, both inside and outside the office. The goal of the conference was to produce a realistic set of recommendations for improving security. Attendees identified major physical security concerns and issues facing employees and proposed solutions that became the focus of subsequent NHSPCS activity.

A second security-consulting firm hired in 1996 conducted further physical security surveys at sites not covered by the first survey (e.g., Agency resident stations, contact stations, and OHA satellite offices). Based on this firm's findings and recommendations, the Agency identified further areas of improvement for employee safety and provided additional funding to improve security at these facilities.

In 1998, the Agency established a security tactical plan and provided funding of \$15.2 million to its field offices, PSCs, TSCs, OHA offices, regional offices, and the data operations center for additional guards, physical security upgrades, and enhancements professional security services nationwide. Physical security upgrades included such things as plastic windows and emergency alarm buttons in interviewing booths.

In addition, the Agency contracted with another security-consulting firm in 1999 to conduct physical security surveys of 154 field offices that had relocated since August 1997. Using this firm's recommendations, funding was provided to enhance the security at these relocated offices. All of these surveys gave the Agency a large amount of data and information to base future improvements. The Agency developed a database to capture information on the status of the over 14,000 recommendations made by the security-consulting firms for increasing security nationwide.

As a further service to its employees, the Agency used the Security Information Bulletins via the Intranet and the OASIS magazine to communicate safety findings and suggestions. The Agency also issued annual reminders to its managers to update and discuss Security Action Plans and Occupant Emergency Plans with their office staffs and the union.⁶⁰ The plans help in these ways:

- Direct employees' actions in emergency situations;
- Prompt coordinated steps to be taken to obtain assistance when needed; and,
- Ensure that employees were aware of proper protective and emergency procedures including anticipating, controlling, and reporting demonstrations, sit-ins, and civil disorders that may occur in or near the office/facility.

Plans were tailored specifically to each facility's unique situation and security needs, and were annually updated and reviewed with the staff.

The Agency worked with the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Defense Security Service to shorten the time needed to complete suitability checks on contract employees. These actions permit electronic checks to be conducted within hours rather than months, and the Agency implemented electronic screening of contract employees and child care providers through the use of the National Crime Information Center, Integrated Automatic Fingerprint Identification System, the Defense Security Service, the Agency database, and the Immigration and Naturalization Service.

All of these measures to foster employee confidence and security were undertaken by the Agency to protect its most important asset, its employees. While Oklahoma City cast a shadow over all Federal agencies and removed the innocence of Federal employees in regards to their own personal safety, some positive actions did result from this terrible tragedy. Increased physical security initiatives and awareness education programs have been instrumental in creating a protected work environment and the safer employee.

INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

During the 1993-2000 period, the Agency restructured and refocused its management-employee communications program. A new emphasis was placed on providing more timely communications with employees and on opening more direct communications channels between the Commissioner of Social Security and the Agency's workforce.

⁶⁰ Security Action Plans and Occupant Emergency Plans provide security policy and procedures for people, records, equipment, and the office/facility.

Moreover, advances in technology presented new information vehicles for the Agency's communicators to use. The mass utilization of e-mail and the eventual networking of the vast majority of the Agency into the IWS/LAN national network created instantaneous connections. Communications that once took weeks at great cost were disseminated in minutes for next to nothing. More importantly, issues that were formerly deemed unimportant to employees (in part because of the costs associated with mass communication) were now addressed freely with the national audience of all SSA employees. They felt a connection with the entire organization, and had a sense of investment with the Agency.

Aside from this global view of communication, individual components within the Agency also took advantage of the new communication avenues open to them. Each component set up its own internal communication/e-mail networks to spread news and information to their own employees, and often times developed issue/component specific e-newsletters for wider audiences.

Examples of information vehicles used by the Agency included:

OASIS: *the Agency's magazine* – Published quarterly, OASIS was the primary direct informational vehicle used by the Agency to convey to its widespread employees important actions, issues, and initiatives. Before the advent of e-mail and the IWS/LAN rollout, OASIS was almost the only national vehicle of information to communicate from headquarters to the rest of the Agency.

Commissioner's Broadcasts – In 1995, in response to the tragic bombing of the Federal building in Oklahoma City that claimed the lives of more than 100 people (including 16 Agency employees) the Commissioner of Social Security issued a nationwide e-mail broadcast to share breaking news with our workforce. Updates on the recovery efforts in the aftermath of the bombing were issued in the succeeding week.

Deputy Commissioner's Broadcasts – The Deputy Commissioner has also institutionalized the email vehicle for broadly communicating with employees on a myriad of topics and concerns.

Employee response to the communication and to e-mails, then a relatively new tool, was positive due to appreciation of the speed with which employees across the nation could be informed. As a result, the Commissioner decided to make regular use, on an as needed basis, of e-mail to inform employees about pressing issues and events. These e-mails became institutionalized as the Commissioner's Broadcasts.

News Bytes – Approximately 10 months after the first Commissioner's Broadcast, the agency inaugurated the use of News Bytes, a free subscription e-mail newsletter for any Agency employee with an e-mail address. These provided brief synopses of general interest news that were not generally pressing.

Headquarters Happenings (formerly the *Central Office Bulletin*) – Aimed specifically at the Agency's Baltimore Woodlawn headquarters complex, this e-mail instrument was used to disseminate all types of information relevant to the headquarters.

Disability Notes – This regular email communicates important information of interest to the disability community about recent developments. It was distributed freely to those interested in the disability program both within the Agency and in external agencies and organizations. It was intended to be informational and not an official expression of policy. It is available by hard copy, email, and on the Internet.⁶¹

Security Information Bulletins – SSA published and distributed advice to Agency employees on matters affecting their safety by means of these Security Information Bulletins. They covered various security and safety issues, and offered suggested actions and initiatives that offices could take to prepare for and respond to disruptive customers; itemized reminders for parking lot security, office access controls, and security in restrooms; and, providing instructions for handling bomb threats or suspicious items.

In addition to these employee communication initiatives, individual components also began to further communication with other components. For instance in April 1998, the Office of the General Counsel (OGC) and the Office of Hearings (OHA), in an effort to improve effective communication between the two components, formed the Program Adjudication & Litigation Workgroup (PALs). The mission of this group was to coordinate the adjudication and litigation functions involving Social Security programs, to improve communication and understanding by developing a shared concept of defensibility, and to enhance the Agency's litigation position by improving the quality of decisions, ensuring the integrity of the adjudication process, and avoiding damaging court precedents.

The PALs continued to work on other initiatives in an effort to improve the Agency's success in litigating transcript litigation.

The Agency is committed to providing information to its own employees. By involving them in the dialogue of Social Security issues, employees will feel a greater sense of investment and involvement in their work, increasing both job satisfaction and a sense of belonging. The Agency is using all available communications outlets, both old and new media, to reach its employees.

⁶¹ www.ssa.gov/odhome/

2000 SSA/AFGE Ratification Agreement

Partnerships

Section 1. Introduction

The parties recognize that a new relationship between labor and management as partners is essential for transforming the Social Security Administration into an agency that works more efficiently and effectively and better serves customer needs. This partnership involves the sharing of information at the earliest pre-decisional stage, thereby engendering mutual trust and respect to better serve the agency's mission.

Section 2. Principles

Administration and Union representatives will bargain in good faith, including bargaining on issues which may fall under 7106 (b)(1), using interest-based bargaining (IBB) with the objective of reaching agreement. Every effort shall be made to reach agreements that address the interests of both parties. The procedures for implementing IBB, including providing necessary training and facilitation, and use of alternate dispute resolution procedures, will be developed by the National Partnership Council.

Section 3. Partnership Councils

- A. The parties have established a Partnership Council at the Agency level. The existence of an Agency level council will not preclude the establishment of lower level councils where mutually agreed to by the parties.
- B. Partnership Councils shall include an equal number of Administration and Union appointed members. The membership of the National Partnership Council has previously been determined by the parties.
- C. Councils shall abide by the general principles set forth above.
- D. The Councils shall meet on a regular basis, normally at least monthly.
- E. The Councils shall develop a written agenda with topics being submitted by either party.
- F. Council meetings will always be attended by the principals or their designees only.
- G. All official time utilized by Union representatives under Partnership shall not be charged to any bank or cap.
- H. Travel and per diem for partnership activities shall be paid by the Administration in accord with Federal Travel Regulations.

Section 4. Other

To the extent that no conflict exists, this article does not supersede the SSA/AFGE Memorandum of Understanding of June 22, 1994.

CONCLUSION

The retrospective information in this Administrative History demonstrates SSA's success in administering its programs and managing the resources entrusted to it. This narrative provides a snapshot of the Agency's performance during the past eight years. However, the status of SSA would not be complete without providing a sense of the challenges the future may bring. These challenges include long-term solvency of the Social Security program and commitment to world-class service as well as issues that have a more immediate impact on Agency operations, including SSI and DI management improvement and fraud prevention and detection. While these issues are challenging, the Agency has the policies and plans in place to ensure they will be adequately addressed.

To help address these challenges, SSA released its 2010 Vision document. It provides a view of SSA's service in the 21st century and a strategy to align the Agency's budget, human resources and technology to accomplish the significant workload growth expected over the next decade. As SSA enters the new millennium, it is mindful of the purpose of the Social Security program as an "American Cornerstone" which has served the nation in providing economic security to the American public for 65 years. SSA is committed to meeting its stewardship responsibilities while providing the best quality service to its customers.

GLOSSARY

-A-

AC	-	Appeals Council
ACCESS	-	Accessible Computer Configured Employee Support System
ACPI	-	Appeals Council Process Improvement
ADA	-	Americans with Disabilities Act
ADR	-	Alternative Dispute Resolution
ADRA	-	Administrative Dispute Resolution Act
AEE	-	Agency Environmental Executive
AEP	-	Affirmative Employment Program
AFGE	-	American Federation of Government Employees
AIAN	-	American Indian Alaska Native Advisory Council
ALJ	-	Administrative Law Judge
ALP	-	Advanced Leadership Program
APP	-	Annual Performance Plan
ASP	-	Agency Strategic Plan
ASPE	-	Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation

-B-

BAAC	-	Black Affairs Advisory Council
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-C-

CBO	-	Congressional Budget Office
CDI	-	Cooperative Disability Investigations
CDPs	-	Career Development Programs
CDR	-	Continuing Disability Review
CFO	-	Chief Financial Officers Act of 1990
CLF	-	Civilian Labor Force
COLA	-	Cost of Living Adjustment
CR	-	Claims Representative
CWHS	-	Continuous Work History Sample

-D-

DA&A	-	Drug Addiction & Alcoholism
DCM	-	Disability Claim Manager
DDS	-	Disability Determination Services
DHEW	-	Department of Health, Education and Welfare
DHHS	-	Department of Health and Human Services
DI	-	Disability Insurance
DM	-	District Manager
DO	-	District Office
DOC	-	Data Operations Center
DPRT	-	Disability Process Redesign Team
DRC	-	Delayed Retirement Credits
DRI	-	Disability Research Institute

-E-

ECHO	-	Every Contact Has Opportunity
EEO	-	Equal Employment Opportunity
EFT	-	Electronic Funds Transfer
EHS	-	Environmental Health and Safety
EITA	-	Enterprise-wide Information Technology Architecture
EWD	-	Employees with Disabilities

-F-

FMCS	-	Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service
FO	-	Field Office
FR	-	Field Representative
FRSC	-	Federal Records Service Corporation
FSA	-	Federal Security Agency
FSP	-	Foreign Service Programs
FTE	-	Full-time Equivalent

-G-

GAO	-	General Accounting Office
GBP	-	General Business Plan
GMRA	-	Government Management Reform Act of 1994
GPRA	-	Government Performance and Results Act
GSA	-	General Services Administration

-H-

HAAC	-	Hispanic Affairs Advisory Council
HCFA	-	Health Care Financing Administration
HEW	-	Health, Education and Welfare
HHS	-	Health and Human Services
HIA	-	High Impact Agencies
HIPAA	-	Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996
HPI	-	Hearings Process Improvement
HR	-	Human Resources
HRS	-	Health and Retirement Study

-I-

IBB	-	Interest-Based Bargaining
ICT	-	Immediate Claim Taking
IFA	-	Individualized Functional Assessment
IG	-	Inspector General
INS	-	Immigration and Naturalization Service
IPMOU	-	Incentive Payment Memorandum of Understanding
IRS	-	Internal Revenue Service
IT	-	Information Technology
IVT	-	Interactive Video Teletraining
IWS/LAN	-	Intelligent Workstation/Local Area Network

-L-

LAPR	-	Lawfully Admitted for Permanent Residence
LDP	-	Leadership Development Program
LEP	-	Limited English Proficient

-M-

MBR	-	Master Beneficiary Record
MEF	-	Master Earnings File
MINT	-	Modeling Income in the Near Term
MMP	-	Market Measurement Plan

-N-

NACED	-	National Advisory Council for Employees with Disabilities
NAPA	-	National Academy of Public Administration
NASI	-	National Academy of Social Insurance
NBDS	-	New Beneficiary Data System
NBS	-	New Beneficiary Follow-up
NES	-	Non-English Speaking
NLSMW	-	National Longitudinal Survey of Mature Women
NPC	-	National Partnership Council
NPR	-	National Performance Review
NRA	-	Normal Retirement Age
NSHA	-	National Study on Health and Activity

-O-

OASDI	-	Old Age, Survivors and Disability Insurance
OASI	-	Old Age and Survivors Insurance
Oact	-	Office of the Actuary
OCIG	-	Office of the Counsel to the Inspector General
OCOMM	-	Office of Communications
OCSE	-	Office of Child Support Enforcement
OCSI	-	Office of Customer Service Integration
ODIAP	-	Office of Disability and Income Assistance Policy
ODISP	-	Office of Disability and Income Security Programs
OEO	-	Office of Earnings Operations
OFAM	-	Office of Finance, Assessment and Management
OFM	-	Office of Facilities Management
OGC	-	Office of General Counsel
OHA	-	Office of Hearings and Appeals
OHR	-	Office of Human Resources
OIG	-	Office of the Inspector General
OLCA	-	Office of Legislation and Congressional Affairs
OMB	-	Office of Management and Budget
OO	-	Office of Operations
OP	-	Office of Policy
OPEA	-	Office of Policy and External Affairs
OPM	-	Office of Personnel Management
OQA	-	Office of Quality Assurance and Performance Assessment
ORES	-	Office of Research, Evaluation, and Statistics
ORP	-	Office of Retirement Policy
ORS	-	Office of Research and Statistics
OS	-	Office of Systems
OSM	-	Office of Strategic Management

- OT - Office of Training
- OWA - Office of Workforce Analysis

-P-

- PAAAC - Pacific Asian American Advisory Council
- PAS - Public Affairs Specialist
- PASS - Plan for Achieving Self-Support
- PET - Partnership Evaluation Team
- POA - Program for Objective Achievement
- PBS - Planning and Budgeting System
- PEBES - Personal Earnings and Benefit Estimate Statement
- PMI - Presidential Management Intern
- PRUCOL - Permanent Resident under Color of Law
- PRWORA - Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996
- PSC - Program Service Center
- PUMS - Public Understanding Measurement System
- PWD - Persons with Disabilities

-Q-

- QA - Quality Assurance

-R-

- RET - Retirement Earnings Test
- RRC - Retirement Research Consortium
- RRE - Request for Review

-S-

- SES - Senior Executive Service
- SMI - Supplementary Medical Insurance
- SR - Service Representative
- SSA - Social Security Administration
- SSB - Social Security Board
- SSDI - Social Security Disability Insurance
- SSI - Supplemental Security Income
- SSN - Social Security Number

- SSR - Supplemental Security Record
- SVB - Special Veterans Benefits

-T-

- TLC - Talking and Listening to Customers
- TSC - Teleservice Center
- TSR - Teleservice Representative
- TWWIIA - Ticket to Work and Work Incentive Improvements Act of 1999

-U-

- UPS - Unified Planning System

-W-

- WAAC - Women's Affairs Advisory Committee

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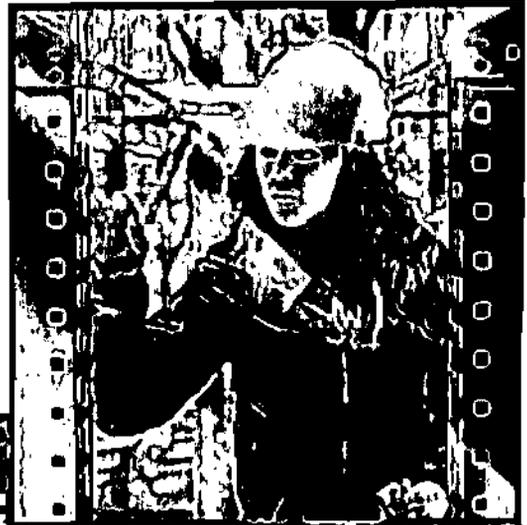
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Survivors Benefits



Disability Benefits



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