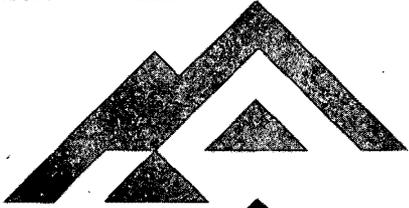


Disability Process Redesign



The Proposal and Background Report
from the SSA Disability Process
Reengineering Team



March 1994



Disability Process Reengineering Team

U. S. Department of Health and Human Services
Social Security Administration
SSA Pub. No. 01-002



Refer to:

Memorandum

Date: MAR 31 1994
From: Director, Process Reengineering Program
Subject: Disability Reengineering Proposal
To: Commissioner of Social Security

This memorandum transmits the proposal prepared by the Disability Process Reengineering Team for a dramatically improved disability claim process. In keeping with the Social Security Administration's commitment to provide the best possible service to our customers, the objectives for the team's proposal were: to make the redesigned process "user friendly" for claimants and those who assist them, to make the right decision the first time, to make the decision and pay claims quickly, to make the process efficient, and to make the work satisfying for employees.

We are anxious to share the proposal widely so that we can hear whether the proposal has the potential, in the views of the readers of this document, to bring about the dramatic improvement in customer service that we seek.

In preparing their proposal, the team took the approach of fundamentally rethinking the entire process within the scope that was set for them by the Executive Steering Committee. Their focus has been entirely on the business process that begins with an individual's interest in filing a claim for benefits and ends with the action to initiate payment or to send a denial notice after final administrative appeal.

The project team invested a great deal of effort in soliciting ideas from a broad cross section of those who work with the process. This included getting input directly from individual members of the public. This outreach proved to be extraordinarily valuable to both understanding the problems with the current process and pointing the way toward improvements.

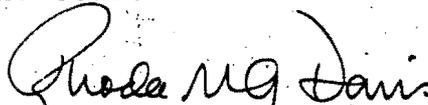
The project team was not asked to address the organizational issues that might arise from their proposal. The most fundamental organizational features of the current process include taking claims in SSA field offices and initial disability decisionmaking by State disability determination services.

The proposal clearly confirms the view of many that our physical accessibility to the public is essential to the needs of the disabled, and that this will continue to be the case for the foreseeable future. The proposed process calls for local availability of personal claims taking as well as pre-denial interviews and pre-hearing activities, relying on the current field office network to do so.

At this time, States employ over 13,000 people in the disability process. These individuals constitute a highly trained and experienced workforce. The use of technology as envisioned by the proposal should be able to overcome most geographic barriers. SSA will need to work more closely than ever with States to develop solutions to the many questions that will arise as we move ahead.

Of critical importance to successful total implementation of a redesigned disability process is the existence of the IWS/LAN architecture that SSA has planned for further modernization of its processing systems (including support for the 800 number service improvements through expert systems). If the full investments are not made in the very near future, the concepts set forth by the team (and already envisioned in part by the planned Modernized Disability System) cannot be put completely in place. This point cannot really be overstated: without the information technology base envisioned in the IWS/LAN strategy, critical aspects of the reengineered disability proposal can not be totally implemented.

In transmitting the team's proposal to you, we collectively wish to thank you for the extraordinary opportunity you have provided for us. The support for our work within the Social Security Administration and the Disability Determination Services has been extremely positive and we appreciate the time so many individuals have given us. Many others were generous with their time as well. A final word of thanks must go to the many people involved with the final production and distribution of the documents prepared by the team.


Rhoda M. G. Davis

Attachment

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Reengineering Team**

March 1994



Disability Process Reengineering Team

**U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Social Security Administration
SSA Pub. No. 01-002**

Abbreviations Used in This Document

AD	area director
ALJ	administrative law judge
DDS	State disability determination service
DI	Disability Insurance (title II of the Act)
DPB	SSA Disability Policy Branch
DQB	SSA Disability Quality Branch
FY	fiscal year
RC	regional commissioner
RCALJ	regional chief administrative law judge
RO	SSA Regional Office
ROMCS	SSA Regional Office Medical Consultant Staff
ROPIR	SSA Regional Office of Program and Integrity Reviews
SSA	Social Security Administration
SSI	Supplemental Security Income (title XVI of the Act)

Contents

	Page
Introduction	1
Current Process	3
Overview	3
Trends	8
Research Summary and Analysis	15
Overview of Methodology and Findings	15
The Case for Change	16
Customer Research and Demographics	19
Customer Research	19
Demographics	20
New Process	23
Overview	23
The New Process — A Brief Description	23
Summary of Differences	27
Detailed Description of New Process	29
Process Entry and Intake	29
Disability Decision Methodology	36
Evidentiary Development	49
Administrative Appeals Process	52
Quality Assurance	56
Measurements	58
New Process Enablers	61
Process Unification	61
Public and Professional Education	62
Claimant Partnership	63
Workforce Maximization	67
Representatives	71
Information Technology	74

Contents

Appendix I	Reengineering Design Partners	81
	Disability Process Reengineering Team	81
	Executive Steering Committee	83
Appendix II	Methodology	85
	Business Process Reengineering	85
	Disability Process Reengineering Project	86
Appendix III	Research	91
	Logistic Accomplishments	91
	Internal Site Visits	92
	Telephone Call Summary — Internals	94
	Central Office Site Visits	96
	External Contacts	97
	Focus Group Sites and Participants	104
	External Benchmarking Sites	105
Appendix IV	Model Assumptions	107
Appendix V	Next Steps	115
	Proposal for an Implementation Blueprint	115
	Summary of Current Statutory and Regulatory Provisions Affected by the New Disability Process	121
Appendix VI	Examples of Forms and Publications	127
	Disability Information Packets	127
	SSA Publications	128
Appendix VII	Process Change Recommendations That Were Outside the Parameters	129

Introduction

A claimant for disability benefits from the Social Security Administration faces a lengthy, bewildering process. An initial decision from SSA will likely take more than three months. Anywhere from 16 to 26 employees will handle the claim before the initial decision is reached. If that decision is a denial, and the request for reconsideration is also denied, chances are the claimant will hire an attorney. It will likely be an additional eight months or more before a response on the hearing is received, and even longer before a check is issued or eligible dependents' benefits are paid. As many as 45 employees could handle the claim.

If the claim for benefits is approved after a hearing, the claimant will view the SSA disability application process as one which requires jumping through lengthy bureaucratic hoops. Dealing in person or on the telephone with SSA field office staff and, possibly, the State disability determination service (DDS) staff at the initial and reconsideration levels, the claimant must appear at a hearing and finally talk to a person in a position to make a decision on the claim. The claimant will rate SSA employees as courteous and knowledgeable, but the disability determination process as bureaucratic and unresponsive.

We have a responsibility to provide our customers with service that is of the highest quality possible—not just 'good' service, but 'world-class' service.

Shirley Chater
January 1994
Commissioner's Bulletin,
"The Challenge of Change"

Congress agrees with this assessment; in May 1991, the House Ways and Means Committee cited SSA for an excellent job of delivering retirement benefits, but gave SSA a failing grade for the way it processes applications for disability benefits, with Chairman Dan Rostenkowski stating, "...those who are unfortunate enough to become disabled find their problems compounded by inefficiencies at SSA."

SSA employees reiterate this belief, as illustrated in the following statement by a claims representative, "I wish we could stop shuffling all this stuff back and forth. I don't really know what the DDS is looking for, so I try to do the best generic job I can on these forms."

The report of the National Performance Review reflected Administration concern by directing SSA to "Improve Social Security disability claims processing to better serve people with disabilities..."

SSA has reached a critical juncture; disability claims receipts at the initial claims and appeals levels have reached all time highs—Fiscal Year (FY) 1995 claims requiring a disability determination will increase 69 percent over FY 1990 levels; appeals workloads will increase 75 percent over FY 1990 receipt levels; employees in field offices, DDSs and hearing offices are overburdened despite recent significant increases in productivity. As an agency, SSA must vie for scarce administrative resources in an era of spending limitations and

competing social spending priorities. The ability of SSA to cope with further workload increases is questionable; it is clear that only radical change can address the disability service delivery problems facing the Agency today.

SSA is meeting this challenge with an unprecedented effort to reengineer the entire disability process—from the point a potential claimant first contacts the Agency to file for disability benefits, through the disability allowance or final administrative appeal. Reengineering the disability process involves asking the question, “Given what we know about technology and resources available to us today, how can we best design a disability process for the 1990s and beyond?” This report will answer that question by proposing a radical redesign of disability program policies and procedures, to ensure dramatic improvements in the way the entire process works and is managed to serve the American public.

The report represents the collective efforts and recommendations of the 18-member Disability Reengineering Team, composed of Federal and State DDS employees, operating under the auspices of the Director of the SSA Process Reengineering Program, and the SSA Executive Steering Committee formed to provide advice to the Commissioner on the disability reengineering process change proposal development.

The Executive Steering Committee provided the following parameters for the disability reengineering proposal: “Every aspect of the process except the statutory definition of disability, individual benefit amounts, the use of an administrative law judge as the presiding officer for administrative hearings and vocational rehabilitation for beneficiaries is within the scope of this reengineering effort.”

The recommendations in this report represent the Team proposal to SSA for reengineering the disability process; this is not a final SSA proposal. The Commissioner of SSA asks interested parties to comment on the proposal within the next 60 days. The Team looks forward to receiving comments from the community concerned with the delivery of disability benefits.

When someone asks us for a quick definition of business reengineering, we say that it means 'starting over.' It doesn't mean tinkering with what already exists or making incremental changes that leave basic structures intact. It isn't about making patchwork fixes—jury-rigging systems so that they work better. It does mean abandoning long-established procedures and looking afresh at the work required to create a company's product or service and deliver value to the customer.

Michael Hammer &
James Champy,

“Reengineering the Corporation:
A Manifesto for Business
Revolution”

(New York: HarperCollins
Publishers, Inc., 1993), p.31

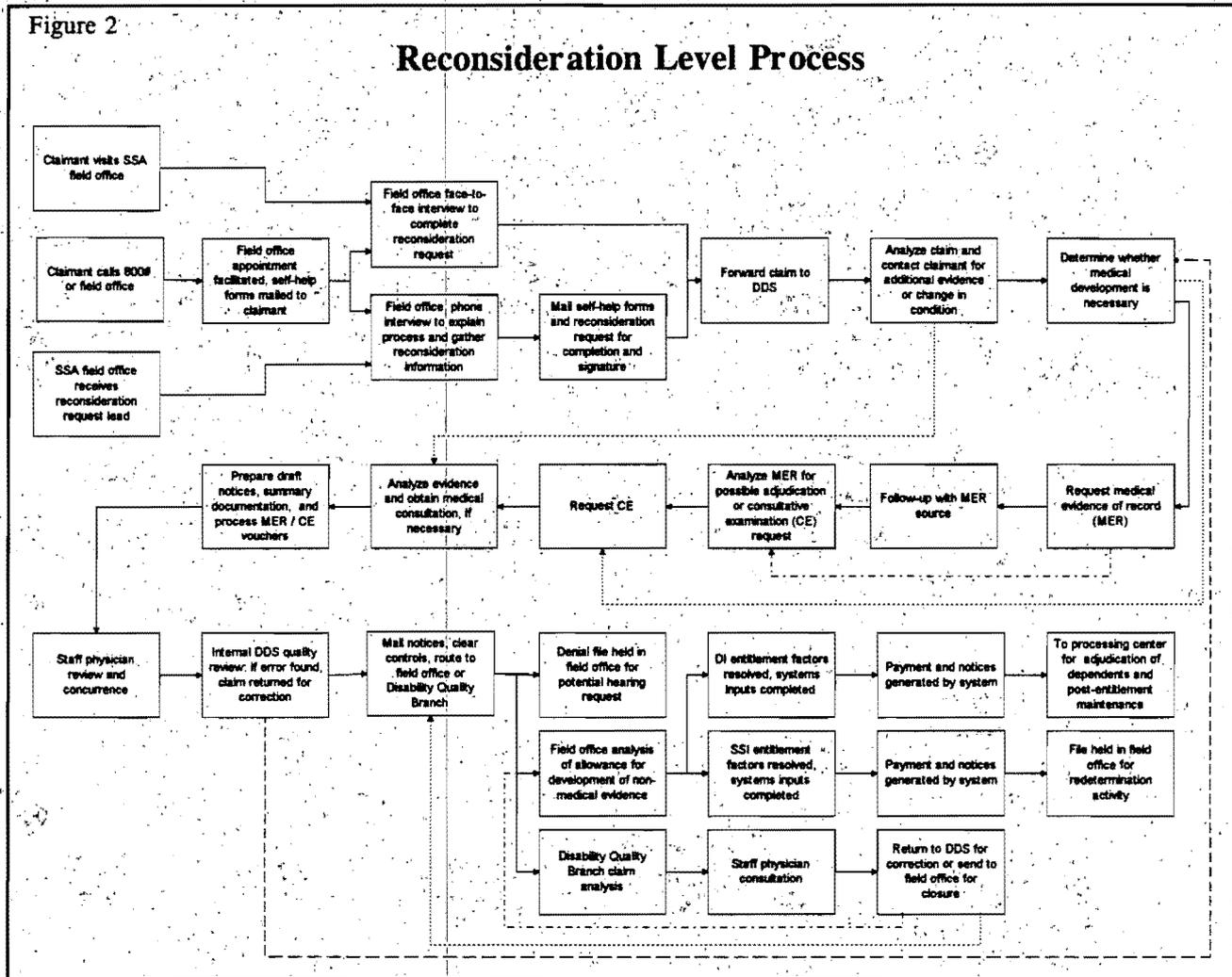
The process starts at the initial level (Fig. 1) when an individual first applies for DI or SSI disability benefits on the basis of a disabling physical or mental condition. An individual calls the national toll-free telephone number and is referred to a local SSA field office or visits or calls one of 1,300 local field offices to apply for benefits. Field office personnel assist with application completion, obtain detailed medical and vocational history and screen nonmedical eligibility factors. Field office personnel forward the claim to 1 of 54 State disability determination services where medical evidence is developed and a final determination is made regarding the existence of a medically determinable impairment which meets the definition of disability.

After possible quality assurance review in the DDS or in the SSA regional Disability Quality Branch, the claim is returned to the field office. Thirty-nine percent of these claims were paid in FY 1993; denials are retained pending possible appeal. Allowed DI claims are sent to one of 7 processing centers (which include the Office of Disability and International Operations and the 6 Program Service Centers) for final processing and storage, as well as adjudication of claims for dependents. Allowed SSI claims remain in the field office for payment and retention.

An initial claim currently takes an average of 100 days to process from the time it is filed until a final decision is made according to SSA's computer-based processing time measurements. However, a better understanding of how long the process takes from the claimant's perspective comes from a 1993 study conducted by SSA's Office of Workforce Analysis, which showed that an average claimant waits up to 155 days from the *initial contact* with SSA until receiving an initial claim *decision notice*. Sixteen to 26 employees will handle the claim during this period.

Figure 2

Reconsideration Level Process

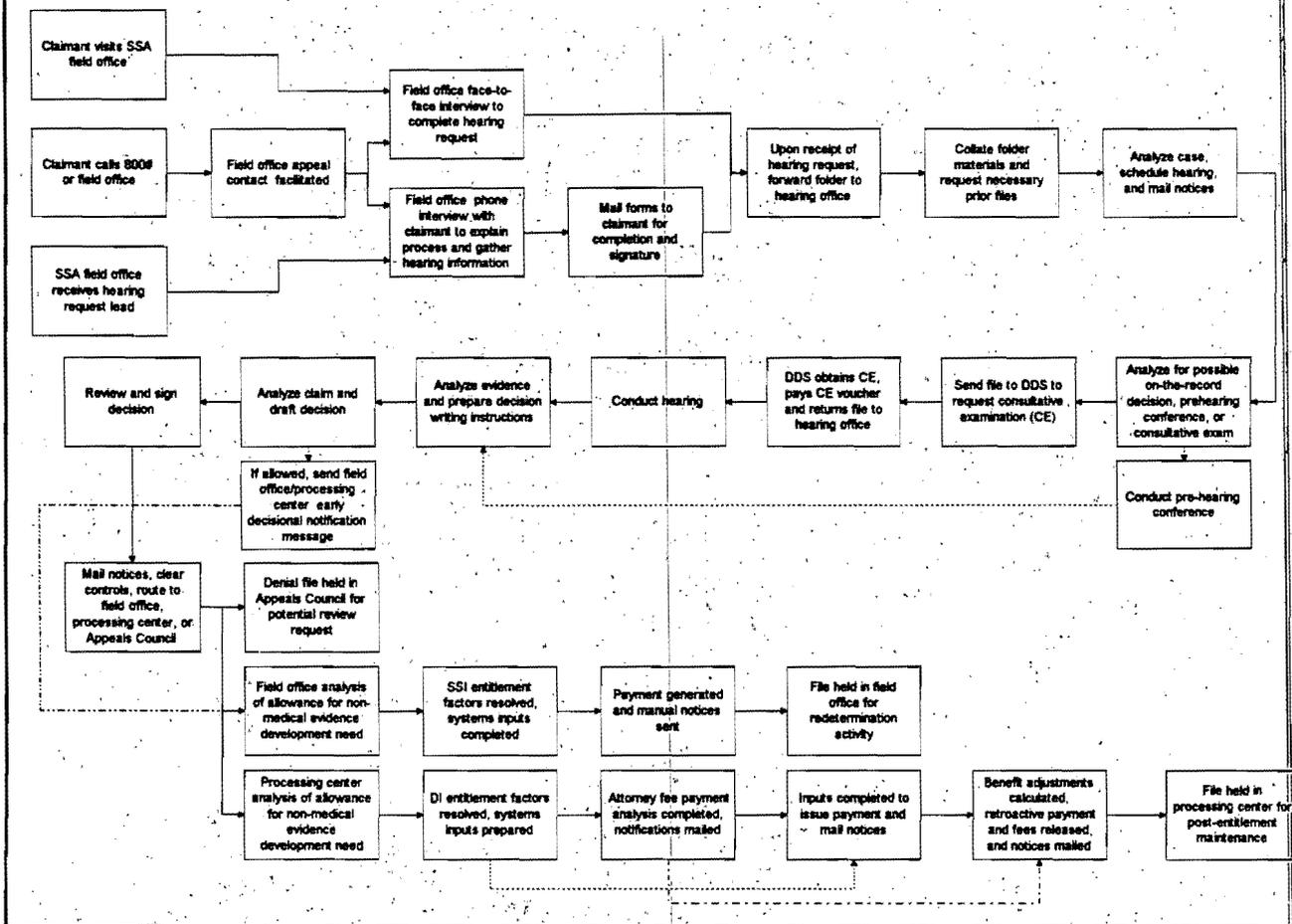


An appeal of the initial decision can be made within 60 days of the denial notice (Fig. 2). Reconsiderations were requested on 48 percent of denied claims in FY 1993. The local field office receives the request, updates the information, and forwards the claim file to the DDS for review, possible medical development, and final medical decision. The determination is made by a different adjudicative team than the one that made the initial determination.

After possible quality assurance review in the DDS or in the regional Disability Quality Branch, about 14 percent of these claims are returned to the field office for payment, and forwarding to the processing centers, while the remaining denials are forwarded to the field office for retention, pending a request for a hearing before an ALJ. The average reconsideration itself takes about 50 days according to SSA's computer-based processing time reports—however, according to the Office of Workforce Analysis study, a claimant has now been involved with the SSA process for roughly 8 months from the point of initially contacting the Agency, and up to 36 different employees could have handled the claim.

Figure 3

Hearing Level Process



Within 60 days of receiving an unfavorable reconsideration decision, a claimant can request a hearing before an ALJ (Fig. 3). In FY 1993, about 75 percent of all reconsideration denials were appealed to ALJs. At this point, a claimant has usually retained an attorney or other representative to assist in pursuing the claim for benefits. About 75 percent of all claimants retain a representative at the hearing. The local field office receives the request for hearing and forwards it with the claim file to one of 132 local SSA hearings offices. Hearing office personnel review the file for possible additional development, conduct a hearing, and render a final decision.

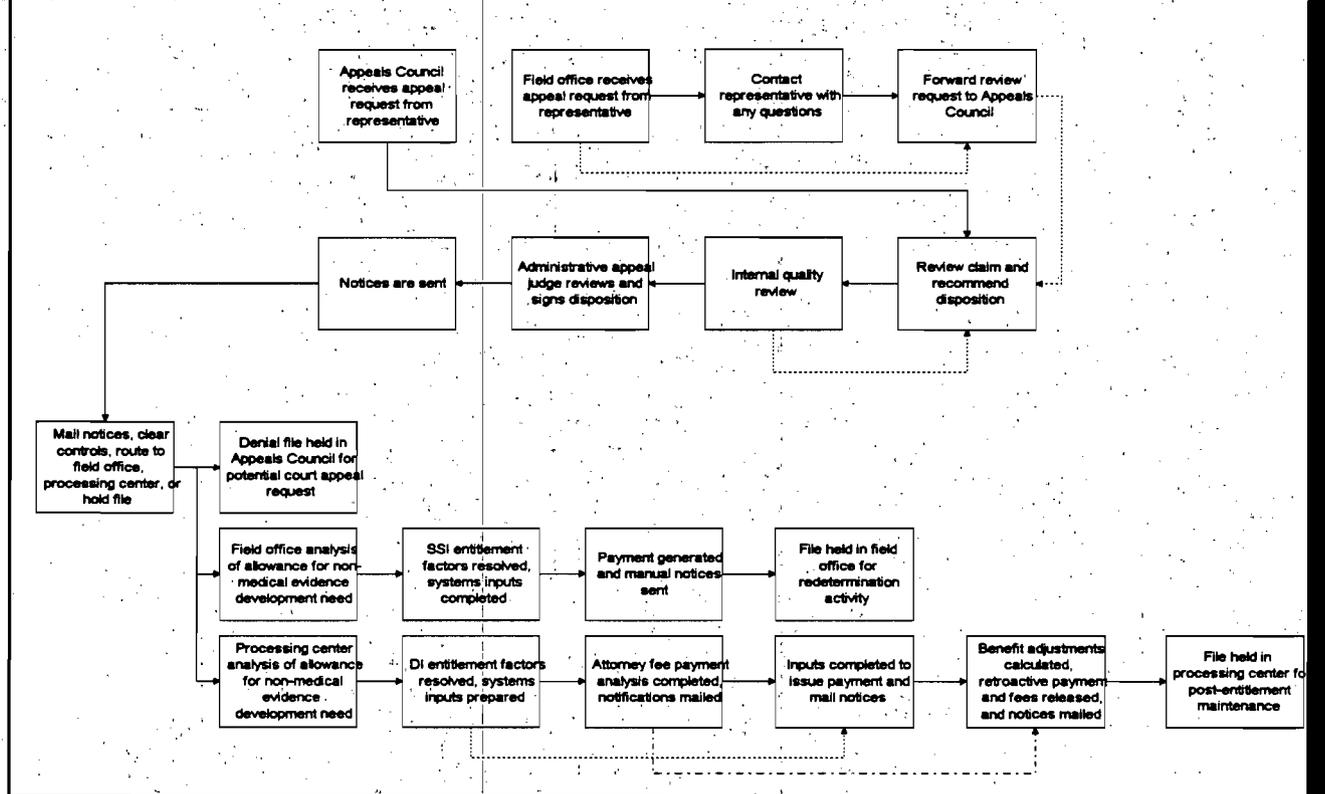
Allowed DI claims are sent to a processing center for final action and storage, as well as adjudication of claims for dependents. Allowed SSI claims are returned to the local field office for income and resource development, and payment. Denied claims are forwarded to the Appeals Council for retention in case a request for review is filed. The hearing process itself takes about 265 days according to computer-based reports. However, according to the Office of Workforce Analysis study, a claimant has been dealing with SSA for over a year and a half at this point in the process.

It is not uncommon for our clients to wait up to 30 months for a decision. They often lose their homes, family possessions, and their emotional stability during this wait.

Disability Program Advocacy
Program employee,
1/94

Figure 4

Appeals Level Process



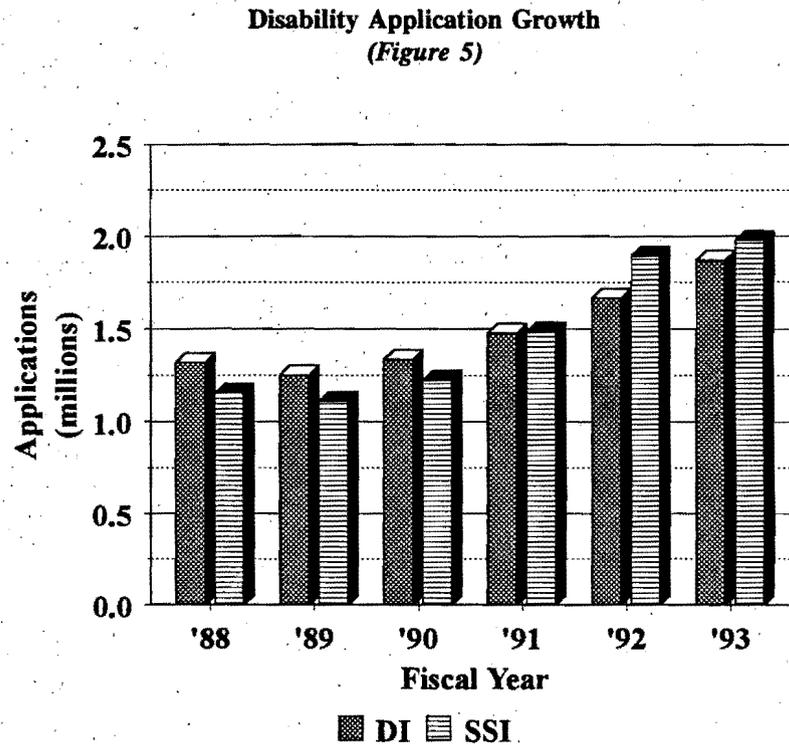
If still dissatisfied with an unfavorable decision, a claimant or representative has 60 days to request a review of the ALJ decision by the Appeals Council (Fig. 4). About 23 percent of hearing decisions are unfavorable and forwarded to the Appeals Council pending possible appeal. The Appeals Council considers about 18 percent of all ALJ dispositions, including cases it reviews on its own motion.

Requests for Appeals Council review are typically received directly from the claimant's representative. The Appeals Council may either deny review, issue a decision, or remand the claim to an ALJ. The Appeals Council remands claims to the ALJ level about 27 percent of the time for subsequent development and decision. Denied claims, representing about 70 percent of the Appeals Council dispositions, are held in the Appeals Council for possible appeal to Federal District court.

Allowed DI claims are sent to a processing center for final action and storage, as well as adjudication of claims for dependents. Allowed SSI claims are returned to the local field office for income and resource development, and payment. According to processing time reports, this part of the process takes on average about 100 days; however, according to the Office of Workforce Analysis study, a claimant has spent almost 2 years dealing with SSA since initially contacting the Agency.

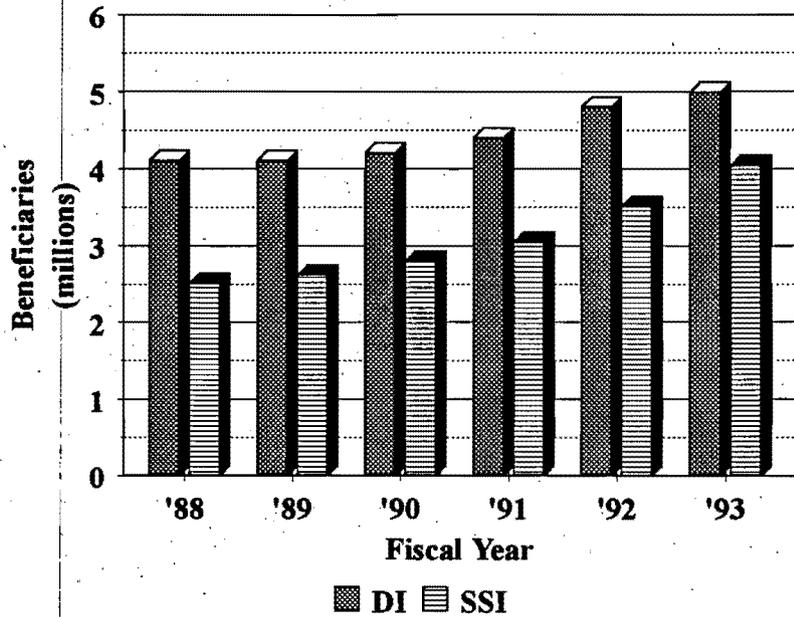
Trends

The current disability process served SSA and the public well for a number of years. However, over the last several years, as workloads have increased dramatically, the current process has been placed under increasing stress. The upward trend in the number of claims for benefits SSA has received is reflected as follows:

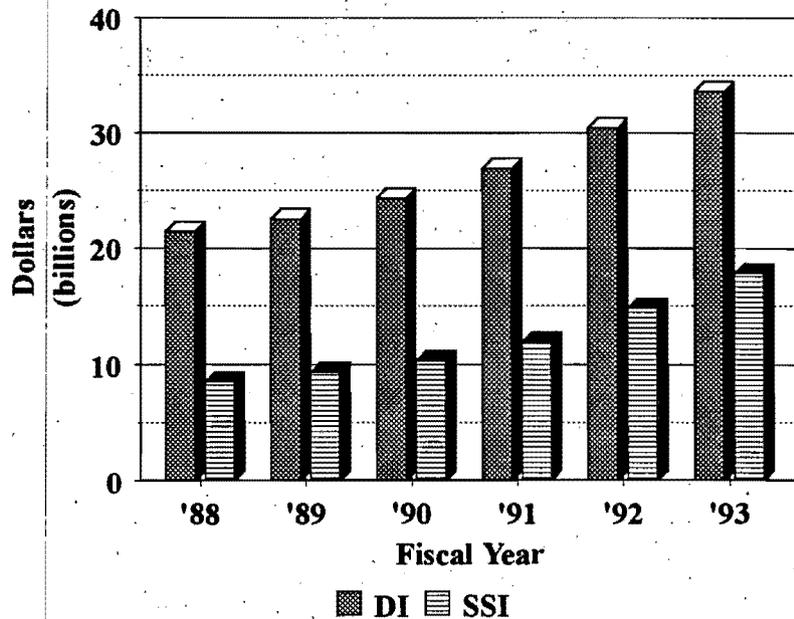


The growth in claims and benefits awarded is reflected in increases in the number of beneficiaries SSA pays and the growth in Federal program outlays over recent years.

Number of Disability Beneficiaries
(Figure 6)

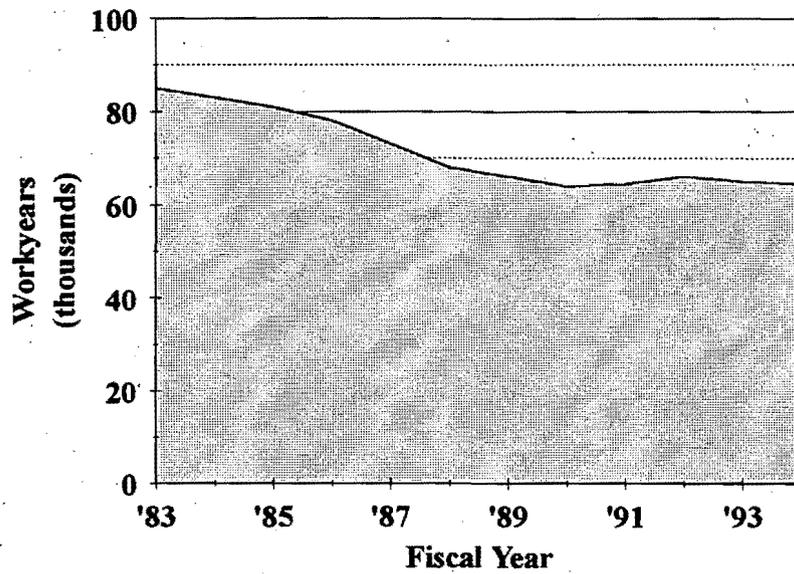


Disability Benefits Paid
(Figure 7)

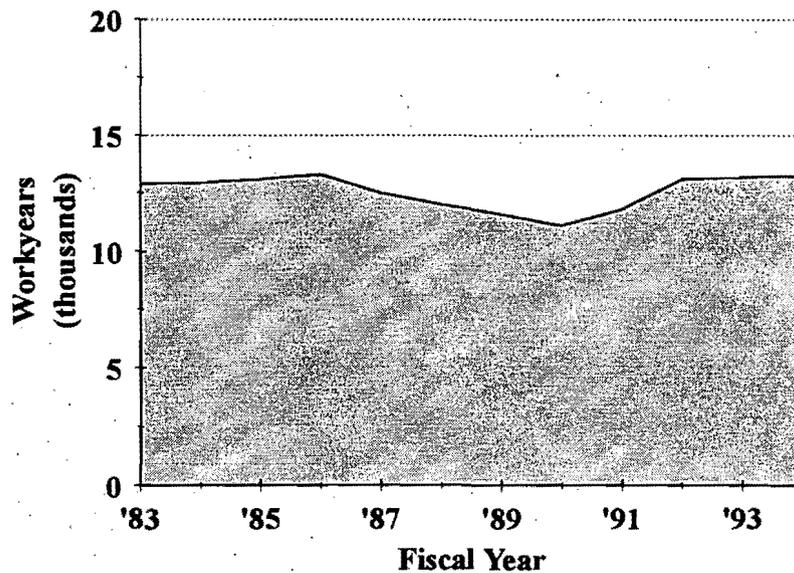


The increase in workload has occurred concurrently with significant downsizing activity in SSA and staffing fluctuations in the State DDSs.

SSA Staffing Levels
(Figure 8)



DDS Staffing Levels
(Figure 9)



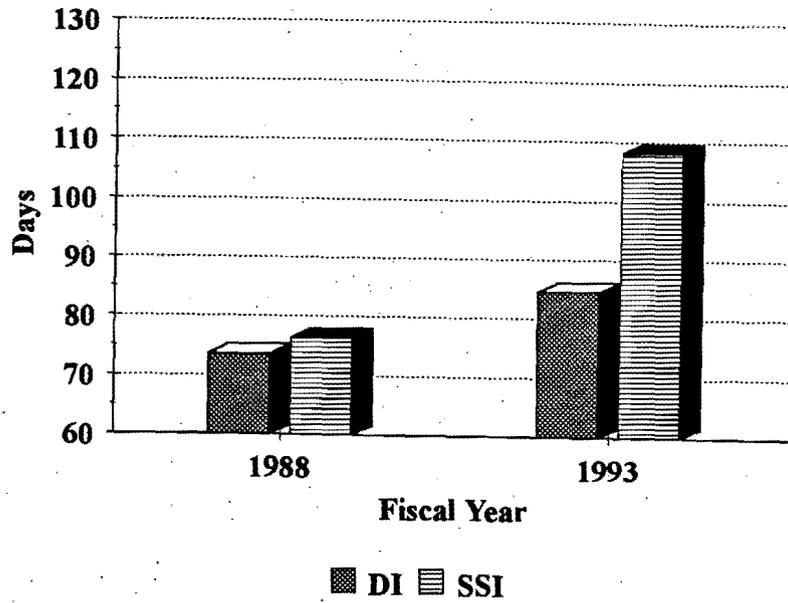
Even with the downsizing, the total costs for processing initial disability and appeals determinations (excluding the costs for processing the *Sullivan v. Zebley* court case) remain enormous — more than half of the total administrative costs (including DDS costs) for SSA in FY 1993 were devoted to this task.

Total Administrative Costs
(Figure 10)

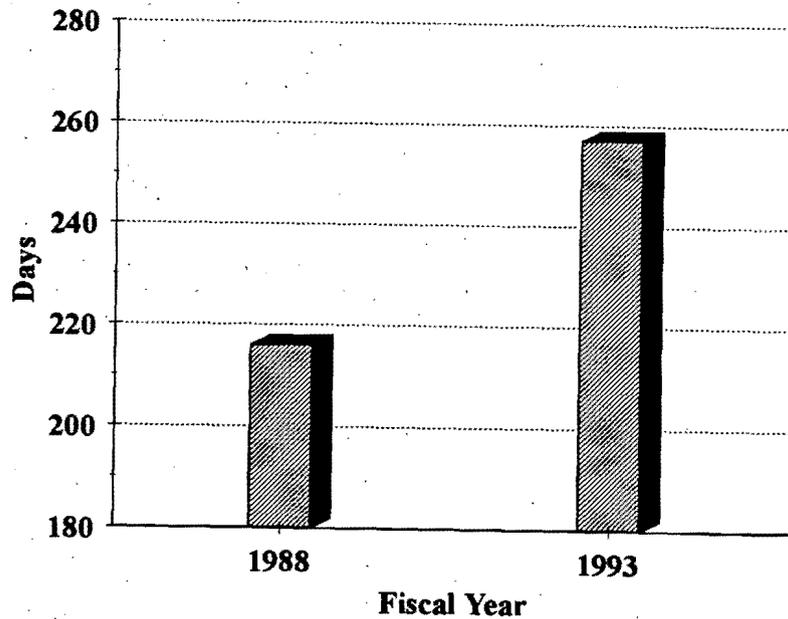


Despite these funds, and despite directing a larger percentage of the SSA resources toward disability initial claims and appeals processing in recent years, average processing times for initial claims, as well as appeals, have escalated dramatically since 1988.

Initial Claims Processing Time
(Figure 11)

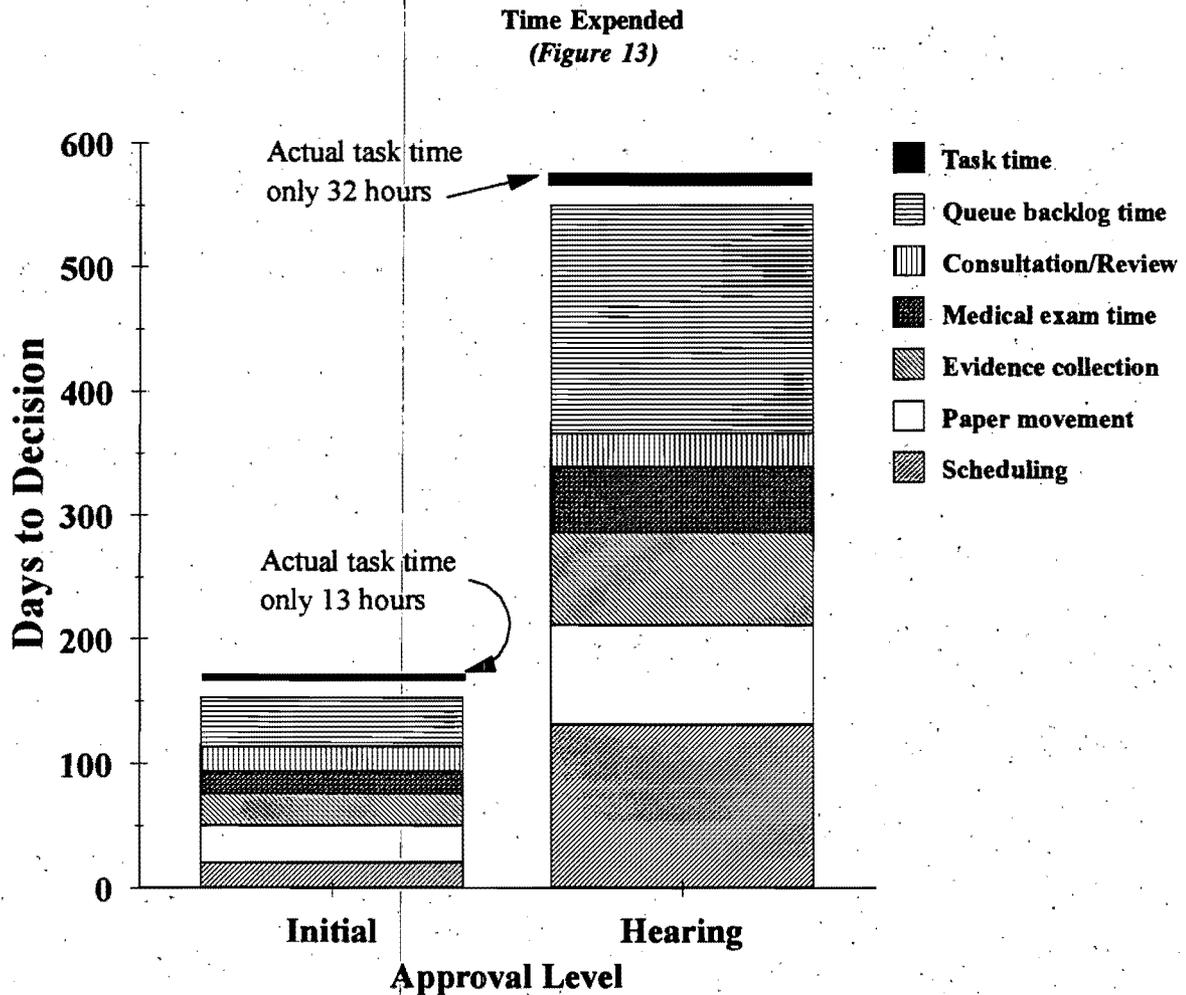


Hearings Level Processing Time
(Figure 12)



At least part of the increase in processing time results from the time added as the claim moves from one employee or facility to another (handoffs), and waits at each employee's workstation to be handled (queues). As workloads increase, the amount of time a claim waits at each processing point grows.

“Task time” is the time employees actually devote to working directly on a claim, rather than the total amount of time it takes for a claimant to receive a final decision. Based on the Office of Workforce Analysis study, a claimant can wait as long as 155 days from the first contact with SSA until receiving an initial claim decision notice—of which only 13 hours of this is actual task time. The same study reveals a claimant can wait as long as 550 days from that initial contact through receipt of the hearing decision notice—of which only 32 hours is actual task time.



The Team’s research revealed that the problems of queues, handoffs, and task time are compounded by problems with the way SSA takes claims, collects evidence, and determines disability. These problems are discussed in the following section.

Research Summary and Analysis

Overview of Methodology and Findings

The Team's methodology called for extensive site visits and interviews with members of the disability community. Team members visited 421 locations in 33 States and conducted over 3,600 interviews. Almost 2,900 of these involved front-line employees, managers and executives. The interviews provided insights into the problems confronting the disability program and recommendations for solving these problems. The Team conducted an additional 111 interviews by telephone.

The Team also interviewed over 750 parties external to SSA—members of the medical, legal, advocate and interest group community—for their views. Finally, the Team has analyzed the results of focus groups involving disability claimants and the general public in order to determine what SSA customers experience and expect from the disability process.

The information collected from these activities resulted in the framework for the analysis and recommendations that follow. At a minimum, the Team was determined to address the most pressing problems identified by SSA employees, claimants, and other interested parties. Not surprisingly, all three groups were in general agreement regarding many of the problems with the SSA disability process. All agreed that the current fragmented process takes too long to provide applicants a decision, and leaves them confused about who has responsibility for their claim, and puzzled about the status of their claim during various points in the process. Additionally, nearly all believe that many claimants can and should assume more responsibility for submitting evidence and pursuing their claim.

The forms and the fighting. And the length of time that it took, and not knowing. And then when you get turned down, you got [sic] to start all over again. And the stress that goes along with that.

Focus Group Participant
Denver, 12/03/93

Most view the reconsideration step as little more than a rubber stamp of the initial determination, creating additional work for employees and yet another bureaucratic obstacle for claimants and their representatives. Some believe a face-to-face interview with the decisionmaker is vital to reaching a fair, accurate determination; others believe just as strongly that the decision should be reached on the basis of a paper review, and that a face-to-face interview can lead to subjective decisions that are not based on objective criteria.

Higher allowance rates at the ALJ level lead to the perception that different adjudicative standards apply at the initial and appeals levels. The public, in particular, believes that it is necessary to hire an attorney to maneuver through this process, and voices resentment at having to do so. Quality reviews and Appeals Council reviews are

often mentioned as areas where opportunities exist for improving current processes.

The Case for Change

The Public and Third Parties Find the Current Process Confusing

First time I saw the attorney, he told me they're going to turn you down. Social Security Administration is not there to give you money. It is their job to turn you down. I have not heard one person say anything different. All the doctors say you are going to wind up having to get a lawyer, and the doctors get irritated at all the paperwork they have to go through.

DI Reconsideration Focus
Group Participant
Philadelphia, 11/30/93

Many applicants enter the SSA disability process uninformed about the process itself and the definition of disability. They are unaware of the criteria for establishing disability and the evidence they will be required to submit. Even third parties and advocate organizations, often more knowledgeable than the general public about SSA procedures, experience difficulty obtaining meaningful information about the status of their clients' claims, finding that they often are transferred from one employee to another.

Disability claimants face a "one size fits all" approach to the intake and processing of their claim, finding themselves answering questions they believe are intrusive and irrelevant to their claim. Front-line employees currently devote hours to completing forms and obtaining information which may not be necessary for a finding of disability. If the claim is approved, whether at the initial or appellate level, claimants and their representatives, as well as front-line employees, are concerned about the complicated procedures and length of time it takes to effectuate payment and entitle eligible dependents.

Evidence Collection and Decision Methodology Pose Problems

The collection of medical evidence presents problems as the case is developed in the DDS. Medical providers who have treated the claimant often do not understand the requirements for establishing disability, and find the forms for the collection of medical evidence confusing. In order to compensate for poor or missing medical evidence, DDSs purchase consultative examinations, devoting substantial resources to scheduling, purchasing, and processing these examinations.

Once the medical evidence has been collected, the methodology used to reach a decision on the case is complex and controversial. Criteria originally developed to identify and evaluate cases simply and rapidly have grown increasingly complex as a result of court decisions and changes in medical technology. Today's 330 different vocational rules, which have been added to SSA's regulations since 1980, can lead to varying interpretations resulting in inconsistent decisions.

Claimants and their representatives have learned their chances for a favorable decision improve if they appeal their claim to an ALJ. A variety of factors may be contributing to this. The facts of many cases change over time as a claimant's condition changes. ALJs often

have access to information not considered at lower levels in the process because earlier decisionmakers are not as likely to have face-to-face interaction with the claimant. Finally, the fragmented nature of SSA's policy making, policy issuance, training and review apparatus all reinforce the differences.

The Fragmented Process Contributes to Difficulties

The fragmented nature of the disability process is driven by and exacerbated by the fragmentation in SSA's policy making and policy issuance mechanisms. Policy making authority rests in several organizations with few effective tools for ensuring consistent guidance to all disability decisionmakers. Different vehicles exist for conveying policy and procedural guidance to decisionmakers at different levels in the process. While the standards for disability decisionmaking are uniform, they are expressed in different wording in the various policy vehicles.

Training on disability is not delivered in a consistent manner, nor is it provided simultaneously to disability decisionmakers across or among levels in the process. Mechanisms for reviewing application of policy among levels of the process are fragmented and inconsistent. Review of DDS decisions is heavily weighted toward allowances; no systematic quality assurance program is in place for hearing decisions although the opportunity for feedback from the appeals council or court cases is heavily weighted toward denials.

The organizational fragmentation of the disability process creates the perception that no one is in charge of it. SSA measures the process from the perspective of the component organizations involved, rather than the perspective of the claimant. Multiple organizations (field offices, DDSs, hearings offices, Appeals Council operations, and processing centers) have jurisdiction over the claim at various points in time, with each line of authority managing toward its own goals without responsibility to the overall outcome of the process. Additionally, the impact of one component's work product on other components is not measured, further contributing to the fragmentation of the process. Each component's narrow responsibilities reinforce a lack of understanding among component employees of the roles and responsibilities of other employees in different components.

Customer Research and Demographics

Customer Research

The National Performance Review report, released in the fall of 1993, calls upon agencies to establish customer service standards *equal to the best in the business* to guide their operations. Federal agencies are encouraged to identify "the customers who are, or should be served by the agency," and survey these customers "to determine the kind and quality of services they want and their level of satisfaction with existing services."

Good service means giving people what they need. To do that, however, one must first find out what they want... In the future, Federal agencies will ask their customers what they want, what problems they have, and how the agencies can improve their services.

"Report of the National Performance Review,"
9/07/93

SSA customers include the individuals who file for social security or supplemental security income disability benefits, or who are potential filers for these benefits. They were surveyed through a series of 12 focus groups conducted throughout the country last fall. Participants represented a demographically diverse cross-section of current claimants, including those who had been initially denied, and who filed for a reconsideration or hearing; new beneficiaries; and the general public. Two focus groups were conducted with non-English speaking participants.

Focus group participants were quick to offer their frank opinions; the general view was that they:

- wait too long for a decision—this is the most common complaint; the claim process is a struggle characterized by stress, fear, and the anger associated with running out of funds;
- do not understand the program or process—what happens to the claim after initial contact with SSA is unclear, they view SSA multiple requests for medical information with skepticism, do not understand their decision and believe it was reached arbitrarily;
- want more information and personal contact—while they would prefer to deal with one person for all claim business, their major preference is to receive accurate, consistent information from all SSA sources and to be provided substantive status reports on their claim;
- view the initial and reconsideration denials as bureaucratic precursors to final approval at the ALJ level—they believe the process is designed "to make you go away";
- resent the need for attorney assistance to obtain benefits—the process should not be so complicated that an attorney is needed; and

- want more active involvement in pursuit of their claim—they want to make their case directly to the decisionmaker, and would personally obtain needed additional evidence to speed the decision on their claim.

Demographics

Changes in demographics of the general population and in SSA's claimant population present challenges as well as opportunities for SSA as it focuses on claimant needs and reengineers its disability determination process.

American society has changed dramatically since the DI program began in the 1950s. This is reflected in an increased demand for SSA's services, changes in the characteristics of claimants seeking benefits, and complexities in claim related workloads and processes.

The demographic character of the SSA disability claimant population has changed as well. The enactment of the SSI program in the 1970's added individuals who have sketchy work histories, increased the number of individuals filing based on disabilities such as mental impairments, and provided for eligibility of disabled children. Additionally, the requirements of the SSI program added complex and time consuming development of non-disability eligibility factors such as income, resources and living arrangements. The 1990 U.S. Supreme Court decision, *Sullivan v. Zebley*, resulted in increased claims for children; children comprised 21 percent of all SSI claims in 1992, up from 11 percent in 1988. Claims for homeless individuals and others with special needs have increased in recent years. These claimants require significant intervention and assistance to navigate the disability claims process.

A trend in the general population which is reflected in SSA's disability claimant population is the increased number of people in the United States for whom English is not the native language. Recent national Census data indicate that 1 in 7 people speak a language other than English in the home; this is an increase of almost 38 percent in the last 10 years. SSA will need to accommodate the special communication needs of these claimants in its ongoing claimant contacts and in public information vehicles.

Forty percent of claimants filing for disability benefits and polled in a recent SSA survey had filed for or received benefits from Aid to Families with Dependent Children, welfare or social services within the past year. Approximately three-fourths of them were awarded this assistance and three-fourths of those awardees were still receiving benefits when they applied for disability benefits. SSA has the opportunity to develop productive relationships with these entities to improve the processing of disability claims for mutual customers.

Technological advances such as personal computers, facsimile machines, electronic mail, and videoconferencing are increasingly available to our claimants, their representatives, medical providers and other third parties involved in the disability process. SSA can take advantage of these capabilities to offer expanded service options and to modernize evidence collection.

New Process

Overview

A claimant for disability benefits under the proposed process will be provided a full explanation of SSA's programs and processes at the initial contact with SSA. The claimant and third parties will be able to assist in the development of the claim, deal with a single contact point in the Agency, and request a personal interview with the decisionmaker at each level of the process. Additionally, if the claimant requests a hearing, the issues and evidence to be addressed at the hearing will be focused, the responsibilities of representatives clarified and, if the claim is approved, the effectuation of payment to the claimant, eligible dependents and the representative streamlined.

The new process will result in a correct decision at the initial level by simplifying the decision methodology, providing consistent direction and training to all decisionmakers, enhancing the collection and development of medical evidence, and employing a single quality review process across all levels.

Putting people first means that the Federal Government provides the highest quality service possible to the American people. Public officials must embark upon a revolution within the Federal Government to change the way it does business. This will require continual reform of the executive branch's management practices and operations to provide service to the public that matches or exceeds the best service available in the private sector.

President Bill Clinton,
Executive Order No. 12882,
September 11, 1993

A single claim manager will handle most aspects of the initial level claim, thus eliminating many steps caused by numerous employees handling discrete parts of the claim (handoffs) and the time lost as the claim waits at each employee's workstation to be handled (queues). This will reduce the time needed to rework files and redevelop information from the same medical sources. Levels of appeal will be combined and improved, reducing the need to redevelop nonmedical eligibility factors after a favorable decision because less time will have elapsed since initial filing.

The proposed process will enable the current work force to handle an increased number of claims, freeing the most highly skilled staff (physicians and ALJs) to work on those cases and tasks that make the best use of their talents, and targeting expenditures for medical evidence to those areas most useful in determining disability.

Employees will perform a wider range of functions, using their skills to their full potential, enabling them to meet the needs of claimants and minimize unnecessary rework. The proposed process will facilitate employees' ability to do the total job by providing technology and the support to use that technology.

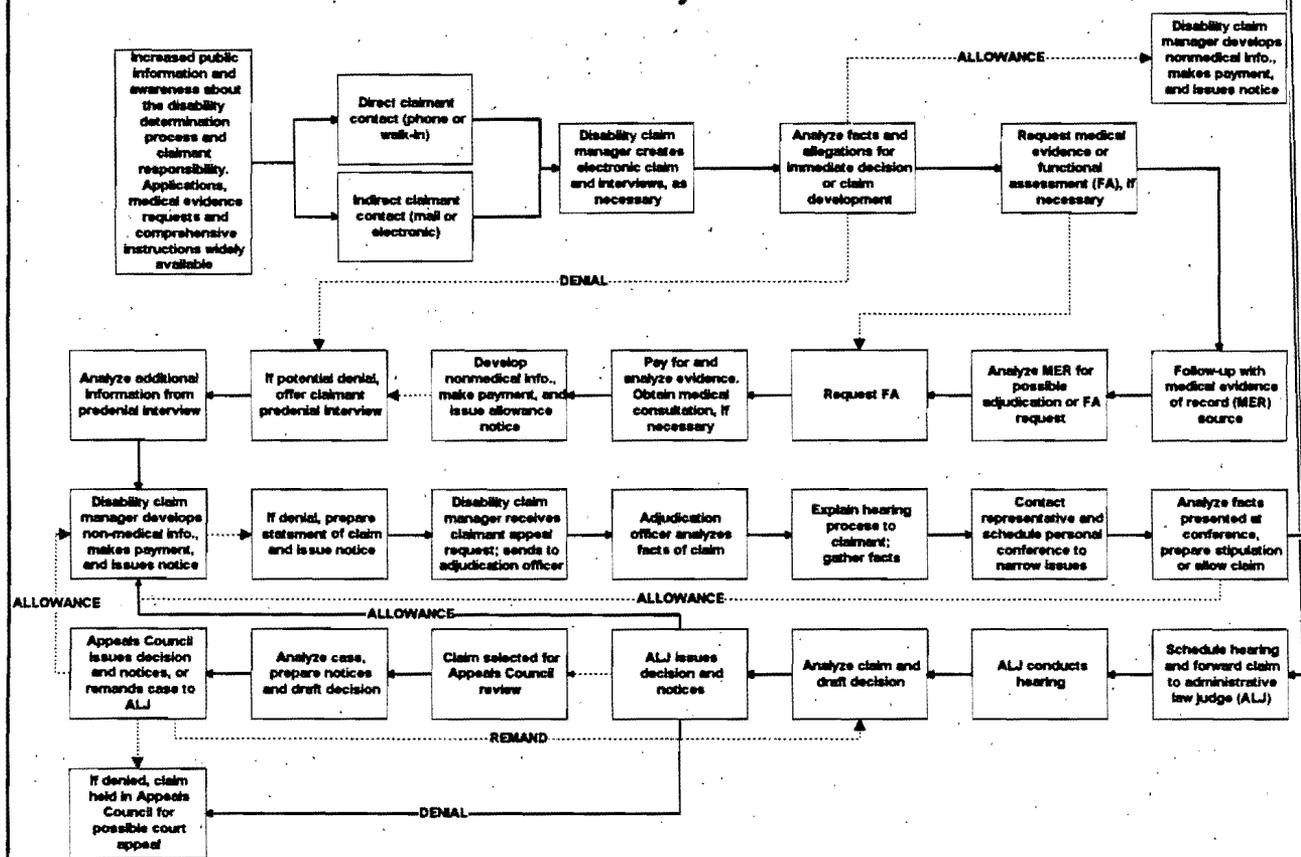
The New Process — A Brief Description

Under the proposed process, the number of appeal steps will be reduced and opportunities for personal interaction with decisionmakers will be increased. At the initial claim level, the

claimant will be offered a range of options for filing a claim, pursuing evidence collection, and conferring with a decisionmaker, using various modes of technology to interact with SSA. At the hearing level, the claimant will have an additional opportunity to participate in a personal conference and meet with a decisionmaker.

Figure 14

The New Disability Claim Process



A Disability Claim Manager Will Handle Initial Disability Claims Processing

Claimants initially will deal almost exclusively with a disability claim manager—a front-line employee knowledgeable about the medical and nonmedical factors of entitlement—responsible for making the initial determination, with technical support if necessary, to allow or deny the claim.

The disability claim manager will determine the level of development needed to make a disability decision using a simplified determination methodology; relying on evidence submitted by or through the efforts of the claimant (whenever the claimant is able to do this); requesting medical evidence or a functional assessment; or referring complex medical questions to a medical consultant for expert advice and opinion, if necessary. The disability claim manager will contact the

Please consider allowing the applicant to have a person-to-person interview after the first denial. If they would visit with Mary Jane in person instead of dwelling on the documents, I am sure the Department would conclude that she is not able to work.

Husband of Claimant
1/94

claimant if the decision on a claim appears to be a denial. The claim manager will explain the situation including the evidence that was considered, and offer the claimant an opportunity to submit additional information as well as an option for an interview in-person or via telephone, before the claim is formally denied.

All initial claims will be subject to a randomly selected postadjudicative national sample review designed to determine whether disability policies are being properly applied. Extensive ongoing training will enable adjudicators to consistently issue correct decisions. By the time the initial decision is issued, the claim will have been handled by seven or eight employees.

An Adjudication Officer Will Prepare the Claim for a Hearing

A claimant wishing to appeal an unfavorable initial decision to an ALJ will continue to have 60 days to file a request for a hearing. The disability claim manager will assist the claimant with the request, and forward the claim to an adjudication officer. The adjudication officer will be responsible for explaining the hearing process to the claimant, as well as conducting personal conferences, preparing claims, and scheduling hearings. The adjudication officer will have the authority to allow the claim at any point prior to the hearing that sufficient evidence becomes available to support a favorable decision.

An ALJ Will Conduct the Hearing

See, it might take a lot of time to have somebody come out to the house to fill out the application, but they sure got enough time to go through three kinds of appeal. Take those manhours used for appeals and use it for the application.

General Public Focus
Group Participant,
Denver, 12/02/93

The ALJ will conduct the hearing and issue the decision. At any point in the process where the claim is approved, it will be returned to the claim manager for payment effectuation, whether the claim is DI, concurrent, or SSI. Denied claims will be forwarded to the Appeals Council, for retention in the event of civil action. At this point, an average claimant will have been dealing with SSA for approximately five months from the first contact with the Agency. A total of up to 14 employees will have been involved with the process during this entire period.

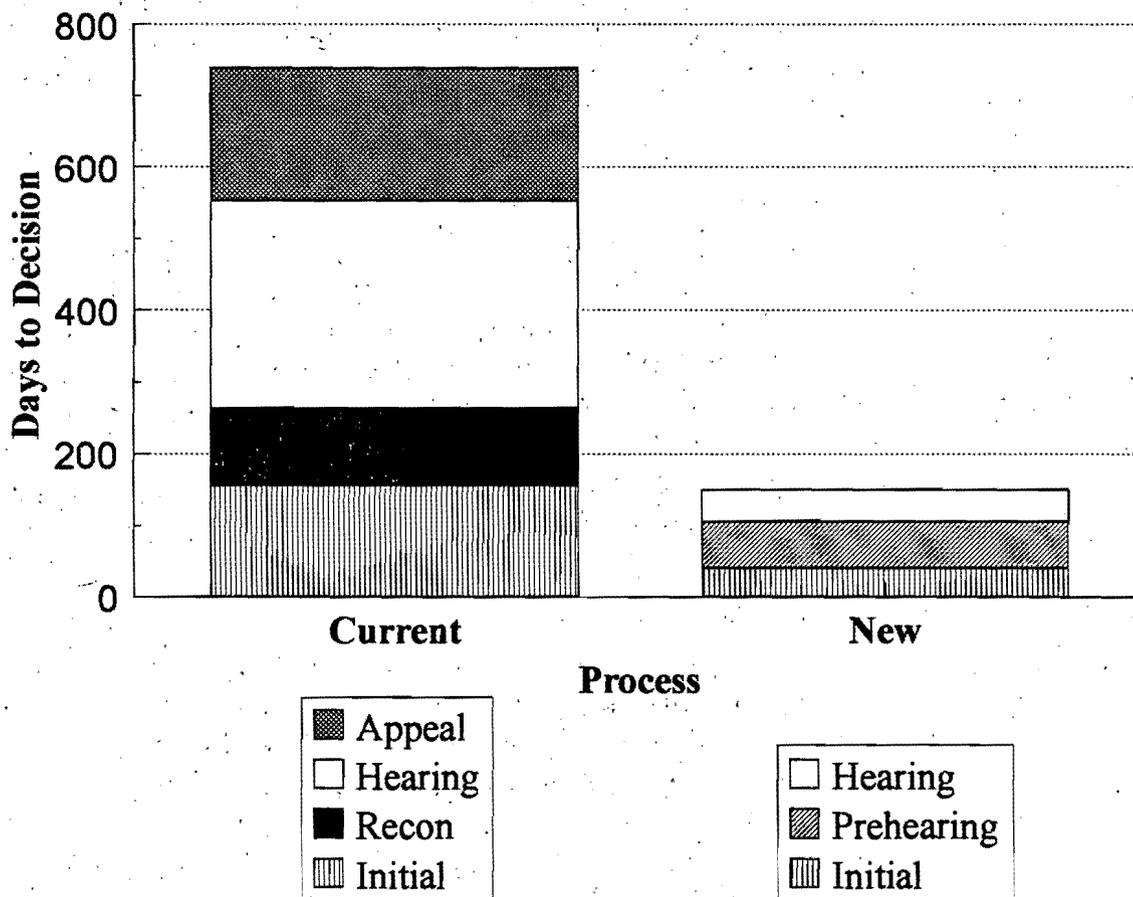
An ALJ decision will be the final decision of the Secretary, subject to judicial review, unless the Appeals Council reviews the ALJ decision on its own motion. The Appeals Council will conduct reviews of ALJ allowances and denials prior to effectuation, at its discretion, and on its own motion. The Appeals Council will also review all claims in which a civil action has been filed, and decide whether the ALJ decision should be defended as the final decision of the Secretary. If a claim is selected for own motion review, a total of 17 employees will have been involved in the process from first claimant contact with SSA through Appeals Council review.

Claimants Will Receive World-Class Service

The time from a claimant's first contact with SSA until issuance of a final initial decision, will be reduced from an average of 155 days (as cited in SSA's Office of Workforce Analysis study) to less than 40 days, enhancing SSA's capacity to provide world-class service. Available employees will be able to process a greater number of claims, and devote more time to each claimant, providing more personalized service.

The time from a claimant's first contact with SSA until issuance of a hearing decision, will be reduced from an average of a year and a half (as cited in SSA's Office of Workforce Analysis study) to approximately 5 months.

Comparison of Decisional Times
(Figure 15)



Summary of Differences

	CURRENT PROCESS	NEW PROCESS
PROCESS ENTRY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Claimant has limited or no program information available prior to entry. ■ Claimant files by mail, telephone, or in-person 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Claimant has program information, starter application and means to gather evidence before entry ■ Claimant files by mail, electronically, telephone or in-person
CLAIMS INTAKE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Interview with claims representative trained only in nondisability aspects of program ■ Multiple contacts with different claims specialists 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Interview with claim manager trained in disability and nondisability aspects of program ■ Single point of contact for all claims processing
DISABILITY DECISION METHODOLOGY (Adult)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 5-step sequential evaluation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Engaging in substantial gainful activity — Severe impairment — Meets or equals the Listings of Impairments — Able to do past relevant work — Able to do other work (using the "Grid") 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 4-step approach: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Engaging in substantial gainful activity — Medically determinable impairment — Impairment is in Index of Disabling Impairments (No medical equivalence or assessing function) — Able to perform substantial gainful activity ("Grid" eliminated)
DISABILITY DECISION METHODOLOGY (Child)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 4-step sequential evaluation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Engaging in substantial gainful activity — Severe impairment — Meets or equals Listings of Impairments — Comparable severity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ 4-step approach: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> — Engaging in substantial gainful activity — Medically determinable impairment — Impairment is in Index of Disabling Impairments (No medical equivalence or assessing function) — Comparable severity
EVIDENTIARY DEVELOPMENT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ SSA takes responsibility for obtaining medical evidence ■ SSA obtains detailed clinical and laboratory findings in all claims ■ SSA uses objective findings, medical opinion, and other evidence to assess a claimant's residual functional capacity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Claimant is a partner in obtaining medical evidence ■ SSA obtains evidence necessary to decide issues in the claim ■ SSA, working with medical experts, develops standardized instruments and criteria for measuring a claimant's functional ability

	CURRENT PROCESS	NEW PROCESS
INITIAL DISABILITY DETERMINATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Disability specialist and physician team decide claim based on paper review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Claim manager decides claim after appropriate consultation with physician ■ Claimant has opportunity for personal predenial interview
RECONSIDERATION	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Paper review by different disability specialist and physician team 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Reconsideration eliminated
ADMINISTRATIVE LAW JUDGE HEARING	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Hearing request must be filed within 60 days of reconsideration ■ ALJ is responsible for overseeing all prehearing development ■ Prehearing conference is held in limited circumstances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Hearing request must be filed within 60 days of initial determination. ■ Adjudication officer oversees prehearing development ■ Personal conference is mandatory if claimant is represented
APPEALS COUNCIL REVIEW	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Claimant requests Appeals Council review and the Appeals Council may consider new evidence ■ Appeals Council action is a prerequisite for judicial review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Appeals Council reviews claim only on its own motion; review is limited to the record before the ALJ ■ Appeals Council action is not a prerequisite for judicial review
QUALITY ASSURANCE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Quality measurements focus primarily on end-of-line disability decision accuracy; quality is not consistently measured at all levels of administrative review 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Quality assurance will address customer satisfaction, employee education/performance, and error prevention; end-of-line reviews will measure quality of the entire adjudicative process
PROCESS INTEGRITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Adjudicative standards and policies are available through a variety of instructional vehicles ■ Consistent training is not provided to disability decisionmakers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ A single policy book will be used by all adjudicators at all levels of administrative review ■ Ongoing training will be provided to all disability decisionmakers and support personnel

Detailed Description of New Process

Process Entry and Intake

SSA Will Customize Its Disability Claims Entry and Intake Processes to Maximize Access, Efficiency, Accuracy, and Personal Service

The disability claims entry and intake processes will reflect the SSA commitment to providing world-class service to the public. The hallmarks of the process will be accessible, personal service that ensures timely and accurate decisions. SSA will work to make potential claimants better informed about the disability process and fully prepare them to participate in it. SSA will also be flexible in providing modes of access to the claims process that best meet the needs of claimants and the third parties who act on their behalf. SSA will provide claimants with a single point of contact for all claims-related business. Finally, SSA will ensure that the disability decisionmaking process promotes timely and accurate decisions.

SSA Will Make Information About Its Disability Programs Available to Potential Claimants Prior to Entry Into the Process

SSA will make available to the general public comprehensive information packets about the Disability Insurance (DI) and Supplemental Security Income (SSI) disability programs. The packets will include information about the purpose of the disability programs; the definition of disability; the basic requirements of the programs; a description of the adjudication process; the types of evidence needed to establish disability; and the claimant's role in pursuing a claim.

SSA will make disability information packets commonly available in the community, both at facilities frequented by the general public (libraries, neighborhood resource centers, post offices, the Department of Veterans Affairs offices, and other Federal government installations) and at facilities frequented by potential claimants (hospitals, clinics, other health care providers, schools, employer personnel offices, State public assistance offices, insurance companies, and advocacy groups or third party organizations that assist individuals in pursuing disability claims). SSA studies have shown that claimants frequently rely on advice from their physicians and from State public assistance personnel in deciding whether to file a claim for disability benefits. Therefore, SSA will make a special effort to target its public information activities at these and other known sources of referrals for claims. SSA will also make the disability information packets available electronically.

In addition to comprehensive program information, the packets will describe the types of information that a claimant will need to have readily available when the individual files a claim. It will also contain two basic forms: the first, designed for completion by the claimant, will include general identifying information and will serve as the claimant's starter application for benefits; the second, designed for completion by the treating source(s), will request specific medical information about a claimant's alleged impairments. SSA will encourage claimants to review the information in the packet and have the basic forms completed prior to telephoning or visiting an SSA office to apply for disability benefits. Claimants filing will be encouraged to immediately submit starter applications to protect the filing dates for benefits. The starter application will serve as a claim for both programs, but it will include a disclaimer should the claimant want to preclude filing for benefits based on need (i.e., SSI).

SSA Will Permit Claimants to Choose the Mode of Entry Into the Process That Best Meets Their Individual Needs

The disability claims entry process will be multi-faceted, allowing claimants the maximum flexibility in deciding how they will participate in the process. Claimants may choose to enter the disability claims process by telephoning the SSA toll-free number, electronically, by mail, or by telephoning or visiting a local office. Claimants may also rely on third parties to provide them assistance in dealing with SSA. Finally, claimants may formally appoint representatives to act on their behalf in dealing with SSA. SSA field managers will also have the flexibility to tailor the various service options to their local conditions, considering the needs of client populations, individual claimants, and the availability of third parties who are capable of contributing to the application process.

If an individual submits a starter application by mail or electronically, SSA will contact the claimant to schedule an appointment for a claims intake interview or, at the claimant's option, conduct an immediate intake interview by telephone.

If an individual telephones SSA to inquire about disability benefits, the SSA contact will explain the requirements of the disability program, including the SSA definition of disability, and provide a general explanation of evidence requirements. The SSA contact will determine whether the individual has the disability information packet, and mail it or advise the claimant regarding possible means of electronic access. If an individual indicates a desire to file a claim at that time, the SSA contact will complete the starter application available on-line as part of the automated claims processing system to protect the claimant's filing date and schedule an appointment for a claims intake interview. The interview may be in person or by telephone at the claimant's option. If the individual has no medical

treating sources, the SSA contact will annotate this information within the on-line claim record.

If a claimant visits an SSA office, the SSA contact will refer the claimant for an immediate claims intake interview or, at the claimant's option, complete the starter application and schedule a future appointment for an intake interview.

In all cases, appointments for claims intake interviews will be made available within a reasonable time period, generally 3 to 5 working days, but no later than two weeks.

Local management will determine how to best accommodate claimants' needs in learning about the disability process and completing a claims intake interview. Depending on an individual's circumstances, such accommodation may involve: referral to the nearest location for obtaining an information packet which can then be mailed in; an immediate telephone or in-person interview; arranging for an on-site visit from an SSA representative; or referral to appropriate third parties who can provide assistance. Additionally, depending on the nature of the individual's disability, SSA may encourage the individual to file in person when it appears that a face-to-face interview will assist in the proper claims intake and development. Face-to-face interviews, when considered necessary by either the claimant or SSA, can also be accomplished via videoconferencing. In any case, SSA will make every reasonable effort to meet the needs of the claimant in completing the application process.

...the AFL-CIO has begun to protest fragmented, user-hostile systems. In a publication called 'Making Government Work,' its Public Employees Department recommended restructuring service delivery systems to create one-stop shopping, single intake systems, case management, and the like.

David Osborne &
Ted Gaebler
"Reinventing Government"
(Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley
Publishing Co., Inc., 1992),
p. 193

Similarly, local managers will modify the claims entry and intake process to provide maximum flexibility for representatives who act on behalf of claimants or third parties who can assist claimants in completing the application process. Such accommodations may include, but are not limited to: 1) using automated means to interact with SSA to protect a claimant's date of filing (e.g., telephone, fax, or E-mail); 2) providing appointment slots for third parties to accompany claimants to interviews or to provide assistance during telephone claims on a claimant's behalf; 3) out-stationing SSA personnel at a third-party location to obtain applications and/or medical evidence, when appropriate; and 4) providing "open appointment" scheduling to permit claimants to contact SSA within a flexible band of time. Interested third parties will be encouraged to participate in the development of claims by becoming certified by SSA to do so.

Local managers will also conduct outreach efforts that are designed to meet the needs of hard-to-reach populations or assist those individuals unable to access the SSA claims process without considerable intervention. As appropriate, outreach efforts may be facilitated through videoconferencing, teleconferencing or other electronic

methods of obtaining and processing claims information to provide timely service despite claimants' geographic or social isolation.

A Disability Claim Manager Will Be Responsible for a Disability Claim from Intake Through Payment

A disability claim manager will have responsibility for the complete processing of an initial disability claim. The disability claim manager will be a highly-trained individual who is well-versed in both the disability and nondisability aspects of the program and has the necessary knowledge, skills, and abilities to conduct personal interviews, develop evidentiary records, and adjudicate disability claims to payment. However, the disability claim manager will also be able to call on other SSA resources such as medical and technical support personnel to provide advice and assistance in the claims process.

The disability claim manager will rely on an automated claims processing system that will permit the disability claim manager to: gather and store claims information; develop both disability and nondisability evidence; share necessary facts in a claim with SSA medical consultants and specialists in nondisability technical issues; analyze evidence and prepare well-rationalized decisions on both disability and nondisability issues; and produce clear and understandable notices that accurately convey all necessary information to claimants.

The disability claim manager will be the focal point for claimant contacts throughout the claim intake and adjudication process. The disability claim manager will explain the disability program to the claimant, including the definition of disability and how SSA determines if a claimant meets the disability requirements. The disability claim manager will also convey what the claimant will be asked to do throughout the process; what the claimant may expect from SSA during this process, including anticipated timeframes for decision; and how the claimant can interact with the disability claim manager to obtain more information or assistance. The disability claim manager will advise the claimant regarding the right to representation and provide the appropriate referral sources for representation. The disability claim manager will also advise the claimant regarding community resources, including the names of organizations that could help the claimant pursue the claim. The goal will be to give claimants access to the decisionmaker and allow for ongoing, meaningful dialogue between the claimant and the disability claim manager.

Claims Intake and Development Will Be Directed at Reaching a Decision in the Most Timely and Accurate Manner

The disability claim manager will conduct a thorough screening of the claimant's disability and nondisability eligibility factors. If the claimant appears ineligible for either disability program based on the claimant's allegations and evidence presented during the claim intake interview, the disability claim manager will explain this to the claimant. If the claimant decides not to file a claim, the disability claim manager will give the claimant an informal denial notice.

If the claimant decides to file, the disability claim manager will complete appropriate application screens from the automated claims processing and decision support system. Impairment-specific questions will assist the claim manager in obtaining information that is relevant and necessary to a disability decision. Based on the claimant's statements and the evidence that is available at that interview, the disability claim manager will determine the most effective way to process the claim. If the evidence is sufficient to decide the claim, the disability claim manager will take necessary action to issue a decision and, if necessary, effectuate payment. The disability claim manager will determine what additional evidence is required to adjudicate the claim and will take steps to obtain that evidence. Such steps may include asking the claimant to obtain further medical or nonmedical evidence where feasible, requesting medical evidence directly from treating sources, or ordering further medical evaluations.

If government is to become customer-oriented, then managers closest to the citizens must be empowered to act quickly. Why must every decision be signed-off on by so many people? If program managers were instead held accountable for the results they achieve, they could be given more authority to be innovative and responsive.

Senator William V. Roth, Jr.
"Congressional Record,"
7/30/93

The disability claim manager will decide whether to defer nondisability development (e.g., requesting SSI income and resource information, or developing DI dependents' claims) or do it simultaneously with development of the disability aspects of the claim. In making this decision, the disability claim manager will take into account the type of disability alleged, evidence and other information presented by the claimant, and other relevant circumstances, e.g., terminal illness, homelessness or difficulty in recontacting the claimant. Because the disability claim manager maintains ownership of the claim throughout the initial decision-making process, the disability claim manager will be in the best position to choose the most efficient and effective manner of providing claimants with timely and accurate decisions while meeting claimants' individual service needs.

Although the disability claim manager will be responsible for the adjudication of an initial claim, the disability claim manager will call in other staff resources, as necessary. With respect to disability decisionmaking, the disability claim manager will, in appropriate circumstances, refer claims to medical consultants to obtain expert advice and opinion. Similarly, other staff resources will be called upon for technical support in terms of certain claimant contacts and status reports; development of nondisability issues including auxiliary

claims or representative payee issues; and payment effectuation. However, the disability claim manager will make final decisions on both the disability and nondisability aspects of the claim.

Claimants Will Be Partners in the Processing of Their Disability Claims

Throughout the disability claims process, SSA will encourage claimants to be full partners in the processing of their claims. To the extent that they are able, claimants and their families and other personal support networks will actively participate in the development of evidence to substantiate their claim for disability benefits. SSA will provide assistance and/or engage third party resources, when necessary and appropriate. SSA will keep claimants informed of the status of their claims, advise claimants regarding what additional evidence may be necessary, and inform claimants what, if anything, they can do to facilitate the process.

At the completion of the claims intake interview, the disability claim manager will issue a receipt to the claimant that will identify what to expect from SSA and the anticipated timeframes. It will also identify what further evidence or information the claimant has agreed to obtain. Finally, it will provide the name and telephone number of the disability claim manager for any questions or comments which the claimant may have.

SSA Will Recognize That Some Third Parties Can Develop Complete Application Packages

Certain third party organizations may be willing to provide a complete disability application package to SSA. Based on local management's assessment of service area needs and the availability of qualified organizations, SSA will certify third party organizations who are capable of providing a complete application package, including appropriate application forms and medical evidence necessary to adjudicate a disability claim. In such claims, SSA will permit the third party to identify potential claimants, screen for disability and nondisability criteria, and contact SSA to protect the filing date. The third party will interview the claimant; complete all applications and related forms; obtain completed treating source statements; and obtain additional medical evaluations, when appropriate. Using procedures agreed on with local management, the third party will submit claims for adjudication by a disability claim manager. The disability claim manager may elect to contact the claimant for the purpose of verifying identity or other claims-related issues, as appropriate. SSA will monitor such third parties to ensure that quality service is provided to claimants and to prevent fraud.

Claimants Will Have the Opportunity for a Personal Interview Before SSA Makes an Initial Disability Denial Decision

You do get to see someone after you're denied twice. That's when you get to see the judge. The third time's a charm. That's when you see the decisionmaker.

General Public Focus
Group Participant
Denver, 12/02/93

When the evidence does not support an allowance, the disability claim manager will provide the claimant an opportunity for a personal interview before issuing the initial denial determination. The interview will be in person, by videoconference, or by telephone, at the claimant's option and as the disability claim manager determines is appropriate under the circumstances. In appropriate circumstances, the pre-denial interview may follow the initial intake interview. The purpose of the pre-denial interview will be to advise the claimant of what evidence has been considered and to identify what further evidence, if any, is available that bears on the issues. If such further evidence exists, the disability claim manager will advise the claimant to obtain the evidence or, as appropriate, assist the claimant in obtaining it.

Initial Disability Decisions Will Use a "Statement of the Claim" Approach

The initial disability determination will use a "statement of the claim" approach. The statement of the claim will set forth the issues in the claim, the relevant facts, the evidence considered, including any evidence or information obtained during the pre-denial interview, and the rationale in support of the determination. The statement of the claim not only reflects the SSA commitment to fully explaining the basis for its action but also recognizes that claimants need clear information about the basis for the determination to make an informed decision regarding further appeal.

Much of the information that will provide the basis for the statement of the claim will be available on-line as part of the automated claims processing and decision support system. Adjudicators will create the statement of the claim and whatever supplementary information is necessary for a legally sufficient notice to the claimant based on the information in the decision support system. For allowance decisions, the statement of the claim will be more abbreviated than for denial decisions; however, it will contain sufficient information to facilitate quality assurance reviews and/or continuing disability reviews. The statement of the claim will be part of the on-line claim record and will be available to other adjudicators as the basis and rationale for the Agency action, if the claimant seeks further administrative review.

Disability Decision Methodology

The Methodology for Deciding Disability Claims Will Promote Consistent, Equitable, and Timely Disability Decisions

SSA must have a structured approach to disability decisionmaking that takes into consideration the large number of claims (2.7 million initial disability decisions in FY 1994) and still provides a basis for consistent, equitable decisionmaking by adjudicators at each level. The approach must be simple to administer, facilitate consistent application of the rules at each level, and provide accurate results. It must also be perceived by the public as straightforward, understandable and fair. Finally, the approach must facilitate the issuance of timely decisions.

The cornerstone of any approach is, of course, the statutory definition of disability. Under the statute, disability (for adults) means the: "...inability to engage in any substantial gainful activity by reason of any medically determinable physical or mental impairment which can be expected to result in death or which has lasted or can be expected to last for a continuous period of not less than 12 months...An individual shall be determined to be under a disability only if his physical or mental impairment or impairments are of such severity that he is not only unable to do his previous work but cannot, considering his age, education, and work experience, engage in any other kind of substantial gainful work which exists in the national economy..." (§ 223(d) of the Social Security Act)

The decision-making approach is the foundation on which SSA will base the claim intake process and evidence collection. The focus will be, first, to establish a solid medical basis for documenting that an individual has a medically determinable physical or mental impairment. Second, once the evidence establishes a medically determinable impairment, SSA will use additional medical findings to provide a solid link between the disease entity and the loss of function caused by the impairment(s).

Disability Decisionmaking for Adult Claims Will Be a Four-Step Evaluation Process

The disability decision methodology will consist of four steps that are based on the statutory definition of disability. They are:

- Step 1— Is the individual engaging in substantial gainful activity?
If yes, deny.
If no, continue to Step 2.

- Step 2 — Does the individual have a medically determinable physical or mental impairment?
If no, deny.
If yes, continue to Step 3*.
- Step 3 — Does the individual have an impairment that is included in the Index of Disabling Impairments?
If yes, allow*.
If no, continue to Step 4.
- Step 4 — Does the individual have the functional ability to perform substantial gainful activity?
If yes, deny.
If no, allow*.

**An impairment must meet the duration requirement of the statute; a denial is appropriate for any impairment that will not be disabling for 12 months.*

Step 1 — Engaging in Substantial Gainful Activity

Any individual who is engaging in substantial gainful activity will not be found disabled regardless of the severity of the individual's physical or mental impairments. If a claimant is performing substantial gainful activity at the time a claim is filed, SSA will determine that the claimant is not disabled based on the demonstrated ability to engage in substantial gainful activity.

Under the current process, in determining whether a claimant is performing or has performed substantial gainful activity, SSA generally considers the amount of the claimant's earnings, less any impairment-related work expenses. However, there are several threshold levels of earnings that need to be considered and, depending on the actual amount earned, SSA evaluates whether a claimant's work is comparable to that of unimpaired individuals in the community who are doing the same or similar occupations, or whether the work is substantial gainful activity based on prevailing pay scales in the community.

Under the new process, SSA will simplify the monetary guidelines for determining whether an individual (except those filing for benefits based on blindness) is engaging in substantial gainful activity. In making this determination, SSA will evaluate the work activity based on the earnings level that is comparable to the upper earnings limit in the current process (i.e., \$500). A single earnings level will simplify the evidentiary development necessary to evaluate work activity and establish the appropriate onset date of disability. SSA will continue to exclude impairment-related work expenses in evaluating whether a claimant's earnings constitute substantial gainful activity. SSA will continue to use separate earnings criteria to evaluate the work activity of blind individuals as in the current process.

Step 2 — Medically Determinable Impairment

Because the statute requires that disability be the result of a medically determinable physical or mental impairment, the absence of a medically determinable impairment will justify a finding that the individual is not disabled.

Under the current regulations, SSA considers, as a threshold matter, whether an individual has a medically determinable impairment or combination of impairments that is "severe." A severe impairment is defined as one that significantly limits the individual's physical or mental abilities to do work activities such as walking, standing, sitting, hearing, seeing, understanding, carrying out, or remembering simple instructions, using judgment, etc.

Under the new approach, SSA will consider whether a claimant has a medically determinable impairment, but will no longer impose a threshold severity requirement. Rather, the threshold inquiry will be whether the claimant has a medically determinable physical or mental impairment. To establish the presence of a medically determinable impairment, evidence must show an impairment that results from anatomical, physiological, or psychological abnormalities which are demonstrable by medically acceptable clinical and laboratory diagnostic techniques.

SSA will continue to evaluate the existence of a medically determinable impairment based on a weighing of all evidence that is collected, recognizing that neither symptoms nor opinions of treating physicians alone will support a finding of disability. There must be medical signs and findings established by medically acceptable clinical or laboratory diagnostic techniques which show the existence of a physical or mental impairment that results from anatomical, physiological, or psychological abnormalities which, *in the opinion of the Secretary*, could reasonably be expected to produce the symptoms or substantiate any opinion evidence provided. Depending on the nature of a claimant's alleged impairments, SSA will consider the extent to which medical personnel other than physicians can provide evidence of a medically determinable impairment.

There will be an exception to the requirement that evidence include medically acceptable clinical and/or laboratory diagnostic techniques. This will occur when, even if SSA accepted all of the claimant's allegations as true, SSA still could not establish a period of disability; under these circumstances, SSA will not require evidence to establish the existence of a medically determinable impairment. For instance, if a claimant describes a condition as one that will clearly not meet the 12-month duration requirement, (e.g., a simple fracture), SSA will deny the claim on the basis that even if the allegations were medically documented, SSA could not establish a period of disability.

Step 3 — Index of Disabling Impairments

If an individual has a medically determinable physical or mental impairment documented by medically acceptable clinical and laboratory techniques, and the impairment will meet the duration requirement, SSA will compare the claimant's impairment(s) against an index of severely disabling impairments. In contrast to the Listing of Impairments in the current regulations, the index will contain fewer impairments and have less detail and complexity. The index will describe impairments that will result in death or impairments that are so debilitating that any individual would be unable to engage in substantial gainful activity regardless of any reasonable accommodations that an employer might make in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act. The index will be designed to be equitable, easy to understand, and consistent with the statutory definition of disability.

The index will function to quickly identify severely disabling impairments; the index will not attempt to describe ideal medical documentation requirements for each and every body system as occurs with the current Listings. The index will consist of descriptions of specific impairments and the medical findings that are used to substantiate the existence and severity of the particular disease entity. The index will not attempt to measure the functional impact of an impairment on the individual; functional impact will be considered at Step 4 in the process. The medical findings in the index will be as nontechnical as possible and will exclude such things as calibration or standardization requirements for specific tests and/or detailed test results (e.g., pulmonary function studies or electrocardiogram tracings). The index will be simple enough so that laypersons will be able to understand what is required to demonstrate a disabling impairment in the index. Additionally, SSA will draw no inferences or conclusions about the effect of a claimant's impairments on his or her ability to function merely because a claimant's impairment(s) does not meet the criteria in the index. Finally, SSA will no longer use the concept of "medical equivalence" in relation to the index, as it now uses in applying the Listing of Impairments.

Step 4 — Ability to Engage in Any Substantial Gainful Activity

In the final step in determining disability, SSA will consider whether an individual has the ability to perform substantial gainful activity despite any functional loss caused by a medically determinable physical or mental impairment. If an individual retains the ability to perform substantial gainful activity, then an individual does not meet the statutory definition of disability.

Presently, there are no generally accepted measurement criteria for determining an individual's ability to function in relation to work-related activities. Currently, SSA assesses residual functional capacity by analyzing the objective medical findings and other available evidence and translating this information into functional loss and residual capacity for work activities.

Additionally, there are also no definitive sources for identifying the physical and mental requirements of "baseline" work functions that are required to engage in substantial gainful activity. SSA currently relies on the Department of Labor definitions regarding the physical and mental demands of work in the national economy, and relies on related reference sources and independent experts regarding the existence of particular occupations and jobs in the national economy.

Under the new process, SSA will define the physical and mental requirements of substantial gainful activity and, will measure as objectively as possible whether an individual meets these requirements. How SSA will achieve this is described in the following sections.

SSA Will Develop Instruments That Provide A Standardized Measure of Functional Ability

Under the current process, SSA relies on available clinical and laboratory findings, treating source opinions, the claimant's description of his or her abilities and limitations, and third party observations of the claimant's limitations in determining the claimant's residual functional capacity. Residual functional capacity is the claimant's remaining capacity for work activities despite the limitations or functional loss caused by his or her impairments.

Under the new process, SSA will develop, with the assistance of the medical community and other outside experts from public and private disability programs, standardized criteria which can be used to measure an individual's functional ability. These standardized measures of functional ability will be linked to clinical and laboratory findings to the extent that SSA needs to document the existence of a medically determinable impairment that results from anatomical, physiological, or psychological abnormalities which could reasonably be expected to produce the functional loss. However, extensive development of all available clinical and laboratory findings is not necessarily effective in evaluating an individual's functional ability to perform basic work activities.

Functional assessment instruments will be designed to measure, as objectively as possible, an individual's abilities to perform a baseline of occupational demands that includes the principal dimensions of work and task performance, including primary physical, neurophysical, psychological, and cognitive processes. Examples of

task performance include, but are not limited to: physical capabilities, such as sitting, standing, walking, lifting, pushing, pulling; mental capabilities, such as understanding, carrying out, and remembering simple instructions; using judgment; responding appropriately to supervisors and co-workers in usual work situations; and responding appropriately to changes in the routine work setting; and postural and environmental limitations. Functional assessment instruments will be designed to realistically assess an individual's abilities to perform a baseline of occupational demands.

SSA will be primarily responsible for documenting functional ability using the standardized measurement criteria. In the near term, SSA will solicit functional information from treating medical sources, other nonmedical sources, and from claimants in a manner that is similar to the current process. In the future, the standardized measurement criteria will be widely available and accepted so that functional assessments may be performed by a variety of medical sources, including treating sources. The SSA goal will be to develop functional assessment instruments that are standardized, that accurately measure an individual's functional abilities and that are universally accepted by the public, the advocacy community, and health care professionals. Ultimately, documenting functional ability will become the routine practice of physicians and other health care professionals, such that a functional assessment with history and descriptive medical findings will become an accepted component of a standard medical report.

We are obtaining consultative exams instead of concentrating our efforts (money) on obtaining the evidence to prove the claimant can function or not.

SSA Disability Quality
Branch Analyst
11/15/93

The prospect of universal health coverage may offer a unique opportunity for SSA to work with the public and private sector to develop standards that both can use. For example, medical insurance payors (whether public or private) may want some way of measuring the effectiveness and necessity of treatment that is prescribed by the individual's treatment source; SSA will want these same types of measures to determine how well an individual is able to function despite his or her impairment(s). Similarly, if all individuals have treating sources under universal health coverage, SSA can expect that complete functional assessment measurements will be readily available from a treating source. Finally, universal health coverage may enable SSA to access medical records from health care providers who may be operating under some contractual or other relationship with Federal agencies and/or a statutory requirement that health care providers cooperate in providing evidence as a condition of receiving Federal funds.

SSA will use the results of the standardized functional measurement in conjunction with a new standard that SSA will develop to describe basic physical and mental demands of a baseline of work that represents substantial gainful activity and that exists in significant numbers in the national economy.

SSA Will Identify Baseline Occupational Demands That Represent Substantial Gainful Activity

Under the current regulations, after assessing a claimant's residual functional capacity, SSA evaluates whether the claimant can meet the physical and mental demands of his or her past relevant work. Past relevant work is usually work that a claimant performed in the last 15 years.

If the claimant is unable to perform his or her past work, SSA then evaluates whether the claimant can perform other work in the national economy. In making this decision, SSA relies on medical-vocational guidelines (the "Grid"). The Grid rules represent major functional and vocational patterns and reflect the analysis of various vocational factors (age, education and work experience) in combination with the claimant's residual functional capacity (which is used to determine the claimant's maximum sustained work capacity for sedentary, light, medium, heavy or very heavy work).

In promulgating the Grid rules, SSA has taken administrative notice of the existence of unskilled jobs that exist in the national economy at the various functional levels. Therefore, when all the findings of fact regarding a claimant's functional ability and vocational factors coincide with the corresponding criterion of a rule, the existence of other work in the national economy is conclusively established. However, if any finding of fact does not coincide with the criterion of a rule, the rules can only provide a framework for decisionmaking. In these situations, adjudicators must consult vocational resources or obtain expert testimony to resolve the question of whether other work exists in the national economy that the claimant can perform.

Under the new approach, SSA will conduct research and, working in conjunction with outside experts, will specifically identify the activities that comprise a baseline of occupational demands needed to perform substantial gainful activity. In the current process, an example of comparable "baseline" criteria are the functional requirements of unskilled, sedentary work. In establishing the functional activities that comprise an appropriate baseline of occupational demands, SSA will ensure that: 1) the functional activities are a realistic reflection of the demands of occupations that exist in significant numbers in the national economy; 2) the occupations are those that can be performed in the absence of prior skills or formal job training; and 3) the baseline of occupational demands that becomes the standard for evaluating the ability to perform substantial gainful activity considers any reasonable accommodations that employers are expected to make under the Americans with Disabilities Act.

The Effect of Age on Ability to Perform Substantial Gainful Activity

The effect of aging on the ability to perform substantial gainful work is very difficult to measure, especially in the context of today's world when individuals are living longer than preceding generations. Despite this change, the demographic characteristics of those preceding generations continue to provide the framework for disability decisionmaking because SSA's approach for deciding disability has changed little since the inception of the DI program.

The statute recognizes that age should be considered in assessing disability on the assumption that the ability to make a vocational adjustment to work other than work an individual has previously done may become more difficult with age. In determining the impact of age, recognition should be given to the changes that occur with each succeeding generation. Accordingly, in the new process, SSA will establish age criterion in relation to the full retirement age. The full retirement age will gradually increase over time, based on the recognition that succeeding generations can expect to remain in the workforce for longer periods than the preceding generation.

In applying age criterion under the new process, an individual who falls within the prescribed number of years preceding the full retirement age will be considered as "nearing full retirement." In establishing what the prescribed number of years should be, SSA will conduct research and consult with outside experts on the relationship between age and an individual's ability to make vocational adjustments to work other than work the individual has done in the recent past.

SSA will rely on the age of the individual in relation to the full retirement age to decide which of two decision paths to follow as described in the next two sections.

Individuals Who Are Not Nearing Full Retirement

For an individual who is not nearing full retirement, SSA will compare the individual's functional abilities against the functional demands of the baseline work. SSA will no longer rely on the medical-vocational guidelines and/or expert testimony to identify whether work exists in the national economy that the claimant can perform. The ability to perform the baseline work will represent a realistic opportunity to perform substantial gainful activity that exists in significant numbers in the national economy and a finding of disability will not be appropriate.

However, anyone, regardless of age, who cannot perform the baseline work will be considered unable to engage in substantial gainful activity, and a finding of disability will be justified. The range of

work represented by less than the baseline will be considered so narrow that despite any other favorable factors, such as young age or higher education or training, an individual would not be expected to have a realistic opportunity to perform substantial gainful work in the national economy.

For individuals who are not nearing full retirement, the ability or inability to perform previous work is not a significant factor. These individuals should be capable of making a vocational adjustment to other work, as long as they are functionally capable of performing the baseline work.

Individuals Who Are Nearing Full Retirement

For individuals who are nearing full retirement, SSA will compare the individual's functional abilities against the functional demands of the individual's previous work. Individuals nearing full retirement age can not be expected to make a vocational adjustment to work other than work they have performed in the recent past. However, consistent with the statute, if an individual, even one nearing full retirement age, is capable of performing his or her previous work, SSA will find that the individual is not disabled.

For those individuals who have no previous work, SSA will compare the individual's functional abilities to the baseline work, and a finding of not disabled will be appropriate if the individual is capable of performing the baseline work. In such claims, the fact that the individual has no previous work is usually not related to the existence of his or her impairment(s), and a finding of disability will not be appropriate for these individuals if they retain the capacity for the baseline work.

The Effect of Education on Ability to Perform Substantial Gainful Activity

The statute also recognizes that education may play a role in an individual's ability to perform substantial gainful activity. Experience demonstrates that educational level alone, i.e., the numerical grade level that an individual has attained may not be a good indicator of ability to function. Education is generally completed in the remote past when compared to the age at which the majority of disability claimants file for benefits. Completion of a certain educational level in the remote past, without any practical application of that education in recent work activity, has no positive effect on an individual's ability to perform substantial gainful activity.

In relying on standardized functional assessments, SSA will be measuring both the individual's physical and mental abilities, and education will be appropriately reflected in the assessment of an individual's cognitive abilities. However, further evaluation of a

claimant's educational level will not be required because, in establishing the functional activities that comprise an appropriate baseline of occupational demands, SSA will not assume that individuals have prior skills or significant formal job training. Thus, additional formal education will have little impact on an individual's ability to perform the baseline of occupational demands.

SSA Will Rely on Medical Consultants to Provide Necessary Expertise in the Decisionmaking Process

SSA will continue to rely on medical consultants to provide expert advice and opinion regarding medical questions and issues that will arise in deciding disability claims. Disability adjudicators at all levels of the administrative review process will call on the services of medical consultants to interpret medical evidence, analyze specific medical questions, and provide expert opinions on existence, severity and functional consequences of medically determinable impairments. If a medical consultant is called on to offer expert advice and opinion, the medical consultant will provide a written analysis of the issues and rationale in support of his or her opinion. The written analysis will be included in the record and will be considered with the other medical evidence of record by disability adjudicators at all levels of administrative review. Additionally, medical consultants will assist in the training of other consultants and disability adjudicators; contact other health care professionals to resolve medical questions on specific claims; perform public relations and training with the medical community; and participate in SSA quality assurance efforts.

Childhood Disability Methodology

As with adults, SSA must have a structured approach to disability decisionmaking in childhood claims that takes into consideration the relatively large number of claims and still provides a basis for consistent, equitable decisionmaking by adjudicators at all levels of administrative review. The approach for childhood claims must also derive from the statute. Under the statute,

“An individual will be considered to be disabled for purposes of this title if he is unable to engage in any substantial gainful activity by reason of any medically determinable physical or mental impairment which can be expected to result in death or which has lasted or can be expected to last for a continuous period of not less than 12 months (or in the case of a child under the age of 18, if he suffers from any medically determinable physical or mental impairment of comparable severity).” (§ 1614(a)(3)(A) of the Social Security Act)

Disability Decisionmaking For Childhood Claims Will Be a Four-Step Evaluation Process

The disability decision methodology for childhood claims will consist of four steps that are based on the statutory definition of disability. As with adults, the approach is one that provides accurate decisions that can be achieved efficiently and cost-effectively, primarily by ensuring that documentation requirements are directed toward the ultimate finding of disability. The four steps are:

- Step 1— Is the child engaging in substantial gainful activity?
If yes, deny.
If no, continue to Step 2.
- Step 2 — Does the child have a medically determinable physical or mental impairment?
If no, deny.
If yes, continue to Step 3*.
- Step 3 — Does the child have an impairment that is included in the Index of Disabling Impairments?
If yes, allow*.
If no, continue to Step 4.
- Step 4 — Does the child have the functional ability to perform activities that are comparable to an adult's ability to engage in substantial gainful activity?
If yes, deny.
If no, allow*.

**An impairment must meet the duration requirement of the statute; a denial is appropriate for any impairment that will not be disabling for 12 months.*

Step 1 — Engaging in Substantial Gainful Activity

Any child who is engaging in substantial gainful activity will not be found disabled regardless of the severity of his or her physical or mental impairments. The guidelines for determining whether a child is engaging in substantial gainful activity will be identical to the guidelines for adults. Although the issue of work activity will arise infrequently in childhood claims, the step is warranted for two reasons: 1) the approach for adults and children should be as similar as possible; and 2) as a child approaches age 18, it is increasingly likely that work activity may be an issue.

Step 2 — Medically Determinable Impairment

Because the statute requires that disability be the result of a medically determinable physical or mental impairment, the absence of a medically determinable impairment will justify a finding that a child

is not disabled. To establish the presence of a medically determinable impairment, evidence must show an impairment that results from anatomical, physiological, or psychological abnormalities which are demonstrable by medically acceptable clinical and laboratory diagnostic techniques.

The same guidelines and rules that apply for adults will apply equally for children. SSA will continue to evaluate the existence of a medically determinable impairment based on a weighing of all evidence that is collected, recognizing that neither symptoms nor opinions of treating physicians alone will support a finding of disability. There must be medical signs and findings established by medically acceptable clinical or laboratory diagnostic techniques which show the existence of a physical or mental impairment that results from anatomical, physiological, or psychological abnormalities which, *in the opinion of the Secretary*, could reasonably be expected to produce the symptoms or substantiate any opinion evidence.

SSA will use the same exception for evidence collection in childhood claims that will be applied in adult claims. If a child has a medically determinable physical or mental impairment that is not an exception to further development, SSA will then evaluate whether the impairment(s) is included in the index of disabling impairments.

Step 3 — Index of Disabling Impairments

If a child has a medically determinable physical or mental impairment documented by medically acceptable clinical and laboratory techniques and the impairment will meet the duration requirement, SSA will compare the child's impairment(s) against an index of disabling impairments. As with adults, the index for childhood claims will function to quickly identify severely disabling impairments; the index will not attempt to describe ideal medical documentation requirements for each and every body system.

The index for childhood claims will consist of descriptions of specific impairments and the medical findings that are used to substantiate the existence and severity of the particular disease entity. As with adults, the childhood index will not attempt to measure the functional impact of an impairment on the child; functional impact will be considered at Step 4 in the process. The medical findings in the index will be as nontechnical as possible and will be simple enough so that laypersons will be able to understand what is required to substantiate a disabling impairment in the index. As with adults, SSA will draw no inferences or conclusions about the effect of a child's impairments on his or her ability to function merely because a child's impairment(s) is not included in the index. Additionally, SSA will no longer use the concept of "medical equivalence" or functional equivalence in relation to the childhood Index.

Step 4 — Comparable Severity to Adult Ability to Engage in Substantial Gainful Activity

In evaluating disability in adults, SSA will evaluate an individual's functional ability to perform work-related activities consistent with the ability to engage in any substantial gainful activity. The difficulty with evaluating childhood claims is the standard against which any functional measurement criteria are compared. For older children, it is relatively easy because at some age (somewhere between 14 and 18) the standard approaches the adult standard, i.e., ability to engage in substantial gainful activity. However, for younger children, the standard can be more difficult to describe. Under the current process, SSA uses a standard that measures the degree to which a child engages in age-appropriate activities which corresponds fairly well with developmental milestones for different age categories. However, the difficulty with this approach is that it may not appropriately define how much functional loss or interference with growth and maturity is comparable to inability to perform any substantial gainful activity.

Consistent with the adult approach, SSA will develop baseline criteria for a child's activities that are comparable to an adult's ability to perform substantial gainful activity. In establishing a baseline of functional activities, the functional abilities for a child will represent a realistic comparison to an adult's ability to work.

Functional Assessment Instruments

Consistent with the approach for adult claims, SSA will develop, with the assistance of the medical community and educational experts, standardized criteria which can be used to measure a child's functional ability. These standardized measures of functional ability will be linked to clinical and laboratory findings to the extent that SSA needs to document the existence of a medically determinable impairment that results from anatomical, physiological, or psychological abnormalities which could reasonably be expected to produce the functional loss.

These functional assessment instruments will be designed to measure, as objectively as possible, a child's abilities to perform a baseline of functions that are comparable to the baseline of occupational demands for an adult. SSA will conduct additional research to specifically identify activities that are comparable to those that comprise a baseline of occupational demands needed to perform substantial gainful activity by adults.

SSA will be primarily responsible for documenting functional ability using the standardized measurement criteria. Ultimately, the course of documenting and developing for the functional abilities for childhood claims will mirror the adult approach.

Comparability Standard

SSA will develop realistic standards which represent activities that are comparable to an adult's ability to engage in substantial gainful activity. The standards will focus on a skill acquisition threshold designed to measure broad areas of skill that are required to ultimately develop the ability to engage in substantial gainful activity. If the child is progressing satisfactorily in the development of these skills, then the child will not have an impairment of comparable severity and SSA will not find the child disabled.

Evidentiary Development

SSA's Ability to Issue Timely and Accurate Disability Decisions Depends on the Efficient Collection of Quality Medical Evidence

SSA's ability to provide timely and accurate disability decisions depends to a significant degree on the quality of medical evidence it can obtain and the speed with which it can obtain it. The medical evidence collection process accounts for a considerable portion of the total time involved in processing disability claims.

Traditionally, the procurement of medical evidence has involved multiple, often repetitive, requests for information from a variety of health care providers. Health care providers believe that these requests burden them with far too much paperwork and offer far too little in the way of compensation for the time invested. Conversely, adjudicators often find that this evidence is primarily treatment-oriented and fails to provide the highly specialized clinical information required by the current Listings, or the functional information that is frequently necessary at various points in disability decision-making process. Health care professionals, particularly physicians, readily concede that their training is oriented towards diagnosis and treatment, not the assessment of function. Thus, the timely collection of medical information depends to a significant degree on health care providers who have only a tangential interest and understanding of the disability program, its requirements, and, most importantly, the vital role that health care providers' information has in the disability decision process.

Evidence Collection Will Focus on Core Diagnostic and Functional Information Necessary to a Disability Decision

The goals of the evidence collection process will be to focus requests for evidence on the critical diagnostic and functional assessment information necessary for a disability decision and to form a new partnership with the sources of this information so that it can be obtained in the most efficient, cost-effective manner. Medical evidence development will be driven by the four-step approach SSA

will use to decide disability. Two of the core elements of that approach are: 1) identifying an individual's medically determinable impairments (including those that meet the Index of Disabling Impairments criteria); and 2) assessing the functional consequences of those impairments. SSA will develop medical evidence that is sufficient to satisfy the core elements but target evidentiary development so that SSA obtains only the evidence that is necessary to reach an accurate decision on the ultimate question of disability.

Treating Sources Will Be the Preferred Sources for Medical Evidence

SSA will give primary emphasis to obtaining medical information from treating sources by way of brief, but specific, diagnostic information regarding an individual's medically determinable impairments and the functional consequences of those impairments. Treating source statements will include diagnostic information about a claimant's impairments, the clinical and laboratory findings which provide the basis for the diagnosis, onset and duration, response to treatment, and the functional limitations that can reasonably be linked to the clinical and laboratory findings. SSA will develop, in conjunction with the appropriate health care professionals and other public and private disability programs, standardized criteria which can be used to measure, as accurately and objectively as possible, an individual's functional ability. SSA will also seek health care providers' assistance in educating the medical community on the clinical application of these instruments. Once developed and universally accepted as the appropriate standard by the medical community, the standardized measurement criteria will be widely available. If a standardized functional assessment is available from a treating source, SSA will obtain that information and accept it as probative evidence. SSA may also request that the treating source or another examining source perform the standardized functional assessment at SSA expense.

SSA Will Use a Standardized Form to Request Medical Evidence From Treating Sources

SSA will develop a standardized form which effectively tailors the request for evidence to the specific diagnostic and functional assessment information necessary to make a disability decision. The standard form will also be available in electronic form to permit treating sources to submit evidence electronically. Standardizing requests for evidence in this manner will facilitate the participation of claimants, representatives and third parties in the evidence collection process.

The form will permit treating sources to provide necessary diagnostic and functional assessment information on a single document. In appropriate circumstances, SSA will accept a treating source's

We tend to ask doctors for what they have instead of what we need.

SSA Appeals
Council Analyst
11/30/93

statement on the standardized form as to these issues without resorting to the traditional, wholesale procurement of actual medical records. Depending on the nature and extent of an individual's impairments and treating sources, statements from multiple medical sources may be appropriate. In completing standard forms, treating sources will certify that they have in their possession the medical documentation referred to in the statement and that said documentation will be promptly submitted at the request of SSA. The certification approach is consistent with evidence collection methods used by private disability insurance carriers, which request specific medical records in individual claims, as appropriate to the individual circumstances, or at random as part of a quality assurance program. SSA will monitor treating source completion of the standardized forms and verify evidence when appropriate.

SSA Will Provide Incentives for Treating Sources to Cooperate in the Development of Medical Evidence

SSA will acknowledge the value of treating source information by establishing a national fee reimbursement schedule for medical evidence. Additionally, the fee reimbursement schedule will utilize a sliding-scale mechanism to reward the early submission of medical information. A national, sliding-scale fee schedule will provide incentives for treating sources to cooperate in the evidentiary development process and invest quality time to provide medical certifications on behalf of their patients.

SSA will focus professional educational efforts and medical relations outreach at the local and/or regional level to ensure that treating sources are kept informed of program requirements and made aware of specific evidentiary needs or problems as they arise in the adjudication process.

SSA Will Use Consultative Examinations When There is No Treating Source Able or Willing to Provide Necessary Evidence or There Are Unresolved Conflicts in the Record

If a claimant has no treating source, or a treating source is unable or unwilling to provide the necessary evidence, or there is conflict in the evidence that can not be resolved through evidence from treating sources, SSA will refer the claimant for an appropriate consultative examination. Because the standardized measurement criteria for assessing function will be widely available, consulting sources will be able to perform functional assessments that, in the absence of adequate treating source information or where there are unresolved conflicts in the evidence, will be considered probative evidence. Depending on the service area, SSA will consider contracting with large health care providers to furnish consultative examinations for a specified geographic location.

As part of an ongoing training and medical relations program, SSA will ensure that providers of consultative examinations are provided adequate training on disability requirements, both initially and as program changes occur.

Administrative Appeals Process

The Administrative Appeals Process Will Be Simple and Accessible and Maintain Public Confidence in the Integrity of the Process

The administrative appeals process will be simplified to increase the accessibility of the process. The public perceives multiple, mandatory appeal steps as obstacles to receiving timely, fair, and accurate decisions. SSA will reduce the number of mandatory appeals steps in the administrative process. Streamlining the appeals process in this manner will not only promote more timely decisions but also ensure that claimants do not inappropriately withdraw from the claims process based on a perception that it is too difficult or time-consuming to pursue their appeal rights.

Claimants will be able to fully participate in the administrative appeals process with or without a representative. SSA will ensure that claimants are fully advised of their right to representation and SSA will routinely provide the appropriate referral sources for representation. SSA will also encourage the early participation of a representative when the claimant has appointed one and will give the representative responsibility for developing evidence necessary to decide a claim. However, the decision whether to appoint a representative must remain with the claimant and SSA will neither encourage nor discourage claimants in seeking representation.

The administrative appeals process will function so that it maintains the public's confidence in the integrity of the system. To instill such confidence, SSA will provide an initial decisionmaking process that is thorough and results in fully developed records with fair and accurate decisions. Additionally, SSA will explain the basis of a decision in clear and understandable language. Finally, SSA will ensure that disability claims are decided on the merits of the evidence and that SSA regulations and policies have been consistently applied at all levels of administrative review.

As noted previously, the initial disability determination will use a "statement of the claim" approach which will set forth the issues in the claim, the relevant facts, the evidence considered, including any evidence or information obtained during the predenial interview, and the rationale in support of the determination. The statement of the claim will be part of the on-line claim record and will stand as the basis and rationale for the Agency action, if the claimant seeks further administrative review. SSA will standardize claim file

preparation and assembly, including the use of appropriate electronic records, at all levels of administrative process until such time as the claims record is fully electronic.

The Next Level of Administrative Appeal Will Be An Administrative Law Judge Hearing

Because the initial determination will be the result of a process that ensures fully developed evidentiary records and ample opportunity for the claimant to personally present additional evidence prior to an adverse determination, there will be no need for any intermediate appeal (e.g., reconsideration) prior to the administrative law judge (ALJ) hearing. If the claimant disagrees with the initial determination, the claimant may, within 60 days of receiving notice, request an ALJ hearing.

An Adjudication Officer Will Conduct All Prehearing Proceedings

If a claimant decides to request an ALJ hearing, an adjudication officer will conduct an interview in person, by telephone, or by videoconference, and become the primary point of contact for the claimant. The adjudication officer will have the same knowledge, skills and abilities as the adjudicators who decide claims initially. The adjudication officer will also have specialized knowledge regarding hearings and appeals procedures. The adjudication officer will be the focal point for all prehearing activities but will be expected to work closely with the ALJ, medical consultants and the disability claim manager, when appropriate.

The adjudication officer will explain the hearing process; advise the claimant regarding the right to representation; provide the appropriate referral sources for representation; give the claimant, where appropriate, copies of necessary claim file documents to facilitate the appointment of a representative; and encourage the claimant to decide about the need for and choice of a representative as soon as is practical.

The adjudication officer will also identify the issues in dispute and whether there is a need for additional evidence. If the claimant has a representative, the representative will have the responsibility to develop evidence. The adjudication officer will also conduct informal conferences with the representative, in person or by telephone, to identify the issues in dispute and prepare written stipulations as to those issues not in dispute. If the claimant submits additional evidence, the adjudication officer may refer the claim for further medical consultation, as appropriate. The adjudication officer will have full authority to issue a revised favorable decision if the evidence so warrants. If the adjudication officer issues a favorable decision, the adjudication officer will refer the claim back to the disability claim manager to effectuate payment.

The adjudication officer will consult with the ALJ during the course of prehearing activities, as necessary and appropriate to the circumstances in the claim. As a preliminary matter, the adjudication officer will also set a date for the hearing that is 45 days after the hearing request. The adjudication officer may exercise discretion in establishing an earlier or later hearing date depending on the individual circumstances. Electronic access to ALJs' calendars will facilitate timely scheduling of hearings. The adjudication officer will refer the prepared record to an ALJ only after all evidentiary development is complete and the claimant or a representative agrees that the claim is ready to be heard.

The ALJ will retain the authority and ability to develop the record. However, use of an adjudication officer realigns most, if not all, prehearing activities so that the burden of ensuring their completion rests with other members of the adjudicative team. ALJs' primary function will be hearing and deciding claims.

The Administrative Law Judge Hearing Will Be a De Novo, Nonadversarial Proceeding

The ALJ hearing will be a de novo proceeding in which the ALJ considers and weighs the evidence and reaches a new decision. A de novo hearing is consistent with the role of an ALJ envisioned under the Administrative Procedure Act. Under that scheme, the ALJ is an independent decisionmaker who must apply an agency's governing statute, regulations and policies, but who is not subject to direction and control by the agency with respect to the decisional outcome in any individual claim. ALJs are independent triers of fact who perform their evidentiary factfinding function free from agency influence. At the same time, the Administrative Procedure Act ensures that an ALJ's decision is subject to review by the agency, thus giving the agency full power over policy. Policy responsibility remains exclusively with the agency while the public has assurance that the facts are found by an official who is not subject to agency influence.

A hearing before an ALJ will remain an informal adjudicatory proceeding as it is under the current process. The claimant will have the right to be represented by an attorney or a non-attorney with the decision regarding representation made by the claimant alone. An informal, nonadversarial proceeding is consistent with the public's strong preference for a simple, accessible hearing process that permits, but does not require, an attorney. An informal process facilitates the earlier and faster resolution of the issues in dispute, thus promoting more timely decisions.

As an independent factfinder in a nonadversarial proceeding, the ALJ will still have a role in protecting both SSA interests and the claimant's interests, particularly when the claimant is unrepresented.

However, an improved initial determination process with its focus on early and comprehensive evidentiary development, predenial personal conferences, fully rationalized initial decisions, and prehearing analysis of contested issues should ensure that the Agency position is fully explored and presented to the ALJ. Moreover, the primary burden of compiling an evidentiary record will be shifted to the representative—if one is appointed—or to the claimant (when able to do so), with assistance (when appropriate), from SSA personnel.

Adjudication officers and other decision writers will assist ALJs in preparing hearing decisions, using the same decision support system that supports the preparation of initial disability determinations. A simplified disability decisional methodology, in conjunction with the use of prehearing stipulations that frame the issues in dispute, will result in shorter, more focused hearing decisions. If the ALJ issues a favorable decision, he or she will refer the claim back to the disability claim manager to effectuate payment.

The Administrative Law Judge Decision Will be the Final Decision of the Secretary Subject to Judicial Review Unless the Appeals Council Reviews the Administrative Law Judge Decision On Its Own Motion

Under the new process, if a claimant is dissatisfied with the ALJ's decision, the claimant's next level of appeal will be to Federal district court. A claimant's request for Appeals Council review will no longer be a prerequisite to seeking judicial review.

As under the current process, the Appeals Council will continue to have a role in ensuring that claims subject to judicial review have properly prepared records and that the Federal courts only consider claims where appellate review is warranted. Accordingly, the Appeals Council, working with Agency counsel, will evaluate all claims in which a civil action has been filed and decide, within a fixed time limit whether it wishes to defend the ALJ's decision as the final decision of the Secretary. If the Appeals Council decides to review a claim on its own motion, it will seek voluntary remand from the court for the purpose of affirming, reversing or remanding the ALJ's decision. Favorable Appeals Council decisions will be returned to the disability claim manager to effectuate payment.

Additionally, the Appeals Council will have a role in a comprehensive quality assurance system. As part of this system which is described in greater detail below, the Appeals Council will also conduct own motion reviews of ALJ decisions (both allowances and denials) prior to effectuation. If the Appeals Council decides to review a claim on its own motion, the Appeals Council may affirm, reverse or remand the ALJ's decision. The Appeals Council's review will be limited to the record that was before the ALJ.

Quality Assurance

Quality Assurance Will be a System of Agency Accountability

SSA will be accountable to the public, the ultimate judge of the quality of SSA service, and SSA will strive to consistently meet or exceed the public's expectations. SSA will have a comprehensive quality assurance program that defines its quality standards, continually communicates them to employees in a clear and consistent manner, and provides employees with the means to achieve them. SSA will devote resources to building quality into the system of adjudication to ensure that the right decision is made the first time. SSA will also systematically review the quality of the overall system of adjudication to ensure the integrity of the administrative process and promote uniform application of agencies policies nationally. Finally, SSA will measure customer satisfaction against the SSA standards for service.

Ensuring That The Right Decision Is Made The First Time Requires An Investment in Employees

SSA's ability to ensure that the right decision is made the first time depends on a well-trained, competent, and highly motivated workforce that has the program tools and technological support to issue quality decisions.

SSA will make an investment in comprehensive employee training to ensure that employees have the necessary knowledge and skills to perform the duties of their positions. SSA will develop national training programs for initial job training and orientation as well as continuing education to maintain job knowledge and skills. Such training will include general communication skills and how to deal effectively with the public generally, and disability claimants in particular. National training programs will also address changes to program policy.

In addition to initial program training, continuing education opportunities will be made available to employees to enhance current performance or career development. These opportunities may be in the form of self-help instruction packages, videotapes, satellite broadcasts, or non-SSA training or educational opportunities. SSA will ensure that employees are given sufficient time and opportunity to complete the required continuing education. Employees will be encouraged to provide feedback on the value of these continuing education opportunities, including the quality of training materials, methods, and instructors.

Employees, other than ALJs (because of Administrative Procedure Act limitations), who complete initial training and pass a set of

Our task is not to fix blame for the past but to fix the course for the future.

President John F. Kennedy

performance evaluations based on national quality standards will receive a certificate of competence. This certificate will attest that the employee has successfully completed both initial training and a probationary period on the job. Certification will be renewed yearly upon successfully completing required training and having no less than a fully satisfactory performance rating. Those employees not certified initially or renewed will be provided an improvement plan with goals and time targets for improved performance.

In addition to formal program training, SSA will rely on a streamlined and targeted system of in-line quality reviews and monitoring of adjudicative practices. The elements include a mentoring process for new employees and peer review for experienced employees. SSA will encourage peers to discuss difficult claims or issues and resolve them informally whenever possible. Peer reviews and mentoring will not only promote timely and accurate development of disability claims, but will also foster a spirit of teamwork. They will also promote earlier identification and resolution of problems with policy or procedures. As part of this process, managers will be expected to oversee the adjudication process. They will conduct spot checks at key points in the adjudication process or perform special reviews based on profiles of error-prone claims. The goal of these reviews is to provide immediate, constructive feedback on identified errors to reduce or eliminate their possible recurrence.

To ensure that adjudicators have the necessary program tools to issue accurate decisions, SSA will use a single mechanism for the presentation of all substantive policies used in determining eligibility for benefits. Additionally, an integrated claims processing system will provide the necessary technological support for adjudicators at all levels of the administrative process. Among other things, the claim processing system will facilitate the preparation of accurate decisions by providing on-line editing capacity to identify errors in advance and decision support software to assist in analysis and decisionmaking.

Although comprehensive employee education and an in-line review system will build quality into the system of adjudication with the goal of error prevention, SSA must still monitor quality on a systematic, national basis. Accordingly, all employees will be subject to and receive continuous feedback from comprehensive end-of-line reviews as described in the following section.

Quality Measurement Will Focus On Comprehensive End-of-Line Reviews

Another component of quality assurance is an integrated system of national postadjudicative monitoring to ensure the integrity of the administrative process and to promote national uniformity in the adjudication of disability claims. This system will include comprehensive review of the whole adjudicatory process including

both disability and nondisability issues, allowances and denials, and at all levels of decisionmaking. The review will focus on whether accurate decisions were made at the first possible step in the process. This type of review will not be aimed at correcting errors in individual claims but, rather, will be the means to oversee, monitor and provide feedback on the application of agency policies at all levels of decisionmaking. Reliance on an integrated claim processing system will facilitate the selection of a statistically valid sample of claims for this review.

SSA will use the results from these end-of-line reviews to identify areas for improvement in policies, processes or employee education and training. SSA will also use the results to profile error-prone claims with the goal of preventing errors at the front end.

SSA Will Conduct Surveys to Measure Customer Satisfaction

To measure whether SSA has met or exceeded the public's service expectations, SSA must measure their level of satisfaction with the level of service SSA provides. Customer surveys and periodic focus groups will be the most frequently used methods of determining the public's views on the quality of SSA service. SSA will also survey representatives and third parties who provide assistance or act on claimants' behalf in dealing with SSA. Survey results will be communicated to staff on a timely basis, both as Agency feedback and individual feedback, along with any plans to address identified problems.

SSA will also seek employee feedback on how well SSA has met their expectations. Employee feedback will be sought on a wide array of issues including Agency goals and performance indicators, training and mentoring needs, and the quality of operating instructions. Although formal mechanisms will be used to obtain feedback periodically, each employee will be encouraged to provide continuous feedback on how to make improvements in the process.

Measurements

SSA Will Measure Disability Service From the Perspective of the Claimant

SSA's management information will be revised to assess the performance of the Agency as a whole in providing service to claimants for disability benefits. Management information regarding the contributions at each step in the process to the final product, as well as to the work product passed on to other steps will be available. For example, current component processing time measures will be replaced by a measure of time from the first point of contact with SSA until final claimant notification. Meaningful, timely management

information will be facilitated by a seamless claim processing system with a common database that is used by all individuals who contribute to each step in the process.

Other measures, such as cost, productivity, pending workload, and accuracy will be developed or revised to assess the performance of the Agency as a whole and the participants in the process who contribute to this performance. Measurements for public awareness, as well as claimant and employee satisfaction will add to this assessment.

New Process Enablers

Reengineering is dependent upon a number of key factors that provide the framework for the new process design. Each of these "enablers" is an essential element in the new disability determination process.

Process Unification

Under the Social Security Act, the Secretary has been granted broad authority to promulgate regulations to govern the disability determination process. In addition to the regulations, SSA publishes Social Security Rulings and Acquiescence Rulings. Social Security Rulings are precedential court decisions, policy statements, and policy interpretations that SSA has adopted as binding policy. Acquiescence Rulings explain how a decision by a U.S. Court of Appeals will be applied when the court's holding is at variance with the Agency's interpretation of a provision of the statute or regulations.

These source documents provide the basic framework for the policies that regulate eligibility for benefits. Administrative law judges (ALJ) and the Appeals Council use these source documents in making disability decisions. However, they are not directly used by decisionmakers at the first two levels of the process, i.e., initial and reconsideration determinations. Guidance for these decisionmakers is provided in a series of administrative publications specifically designed for and aimed at the audiences responsible for adjudicating these claims.

"The Secretary shall have full power and authority to make rules and regulations and to establish procedures, not inconsistent with the provisions of this title, which are necessary or appropriate to carry out such provisions, and shall adopt reasonable and proper rules and regulations to regulate and provide for the nature and extent of the proofs and evidence and the method of taking and furnishing the same in order to establish the rights to benefits hereunder."

Section 205(a),
Social Security Act

The Program Operations Manual System instructions provide the substance of law, regulations, and rulings for adjudication issues in a structure format that does not necessarily repeat the wording of the source documents for field offices, State disability determination services (DDS), the processing centers, and quality assurance reviewers. The Program Operations Manual System is supplemented by other administrative issuances to clarify or elaborate specific policy issues. The Program Operations Manual System also provides basic operating instructions to the initial, reconsideration and quality components responsible for processing claims. The Hearings, Appeals, and Litigation Law Manual provides operating instructions and summaries of court decisions to hearing offices and the Appeals Council.

Neither the Program Operations Manual System or the Hearings, Appeals, and Litigation Law Manual is binding on ALJ decisionmaking because this material is not considered Agency policy under the Administrative Procedures Act. Only those regulations and interpretative rulings published in the Federal Register, in accordance with the Administrative Procedures Act guidelines, can be binding on

ALJs. Other decisionmakers are bound by interpretative guidance in the Program Operations Manual System and supplemental issuances. This situation fosters the perception that different policy standards are used at different levels of decisionmaking in the claims process.

SSA will develop a single presentation of all substantive policies used in the determination of eligibility for benefits. All decisionmakers will be bound by these same policies. These policies will be published in accordance with the Administrative Procedures Act. In addition, to facilitate the flow of work in the new process, a single operating manual will be developed.

Public and Professional Education

Public and professional education is essential for the proper understanding of and participation in the disability claims process. The goal is to ensure that those individuals and groups involved in the disability process have a better understanding of SSA disability programs, their medical and nonmedical requirements, and the nature of the decisionmaking process.

SSA will make information widely available for the general population. Pamphlets, factsheets, posters, videos, information on diskettes and on computer bulletin board systems will be developed. This information will be written in a simple, straight forward and understandable manner. It will be available in many languages and dialects and will accommodate vision and hearing impaired individuals. Videotapes will be available to show in SSA offices, welfare offices and in places where medical care is provided. It will explain the definition of disability, stressing the durational and level-of-severity requirements while giving real life examples. Insured status requirements for SSA disability insurance (DI) and income and resource limitations for supplemental security income (SSI) will be explained in general terms.

This same information will be distributed to third parties who may be referral sources for disability claims. It will serve to provide them with basic information about medical and nonmedical eligibility criteria and the options available for filing claims.

SSA will work with nationally and locally interested and involved groups to develop direct lines of communications about the disability process and program. These efforts will not be limited to providing information, but will include opening and maintaining a dialogue about the disability process as part of an ongoing organizational relationship.

Professionals who work with the disabled population will require more detail. The current "Understanding SSI" booklet will be

enhanced to include more information on the disability aspects of the SSI program—including the requirements and process, as well as the options available to claimants or interested third parties to speed up the process. A similar booklet for the DI program will be developed. These booklets will serve as training manuals and reference tools, and will include information and examples about providing functional assessments. Special efforts will be made to have coverage of these booklets included in courses which are part of a social service delivery curriculum at the post-secondary and graduate levels.

SSA will conduct outreach efforts with the legal community, to ensure that information about the disability programs is widely available to the organized bar and the Federal judiciary. Policy documents, regularly updated electronically, and rules of representation will be available at forums sponsored by the organized bar and in initial orientation and continuing legal education programs designed for Federal judges.

Treating physicians, medical providers and other treating professionals need up-to-date information on medical evidence requirements. SSA will conduct educational outreach with the medical community to provide them with a better understanding of the SSA disability programs, the medical and functional requirements for eligibility, and the best ways to provide medical information needed for decisionmaking. In addition to the use of printed materials, SSA will arrange briefings and training sessions in association with medical organizations and societies at the local, State and national levels, as well as through hospital staff meetings.

Those medical providers who conduct consultative examinations for SSA will need ongoing training regarding changes in the disability program. SSA will prepare training programs for this audience which will utilize written, audiotape, videotape, and computerized training methods.

Claimant Partnership

As part of their partnership with SSA, claimants will be encouraged to actively participate at all levels of the adjudication process and will be fully informed of their rights and responsibilities. SSA's interaction with claimants will facilitate claimant responsibility and active participation in the processing of their claims. The resources of interested and capable third parties will be garnered to assist claimants and SSA in fulfilling their partnership responsibilities.

The majority of claimants are able to complete simple forms, attend appointments, and obtain medical and nonmedical documentation, either on their own or with the assistance of third parties. Other claimants are unable to accomplish some of these tasks, even with the

assistance of third parties. Still others have substantial difficulty fulfilling any of these tasks, and may have no third party to assist them. Given the range of claimant capabilities, SSA will retain ultimate responsibility for development of claims when claimants are not formally represented.

What SSA Will Do

SSA's interaction with claimants will focus on enabling their participation in the process. Understandable public information materials and application packets will be widely available. Explanations of the program, the process, and claimant responsibilities will be furnished at the point individuals first make contact with SSA. SSA will also work with third parties, such as family members and community-based organizations, to provide additional claimant support.

In addition, SSA will provide ongoing assistance and appropriate status information throughout the process. The opportunity for personal contact with the disability claim manager will be afforded to each claimant prior to the issuance of an initially unfavorable decision. A claimant will be advised of evidence that has been considered in making the disability determination and provided an opportunity to present additional evidence for consideration.

Claimants will be provided the opportunity to fully participate in the appeals process. Decision rationales, appeal rights, and representation rights will be explained in clear, understandable language.

What Claimants Will Do

Early, ongoing dialogue between claimants and SSA will ensure that claimants have access to information and resources they need to actively pursue their claims and make informed choices.

Claimants will be asked to do more to facilitate development of supporting information when they are able, particularly with respect to medical evidence. When they file for disability benefits, claimants having had medical treatment will be asked to request that their treating sources complete standardized forms. Information about this requirement will be publicized in the general community and given to claimants and third parties when they first contact SSA. Third parties will be encouraged to assist claimants who are unable to fulfill this obligation on their own. However, when necessary, a disability claim manager will assist claimants in obtaining evidence.

To encourage the release of evidence by treating medical sources, SSA will network with the treating source community to overcome the lack of understanding and possible resistance to providing patient

information. SSA will develop fax, E-mail, and other electronic means for physicians to provide direct certification information.

There will be situations where claimants have no treating sources, or where treating sources provide insufficient medical evidence to make a disability determination. SSA will work with willing treating sources and other medical providers to assist in developing medical evidence (including testing and examination) in these circumstances.

SSA will encourage private insurers and public agencies that refer claimants to SSA as a condition of receiving other benefits to provide medical evidence for these individuals.

Claimants will be able to fully participate in the appeals process with or without a representative. During the appeal process, claimants and/or their representatives will have primary responsibility for compiling an evidentiary record. SSA will provide appropriate assistance for unrepresented claimants.

Assistance to Claimants

I think we should do more to encourage people to take personal responsibility, to make things happen, or to move things forward. I think the government is already too much in the business of holding people's hands.

General Public Focus
Group Participant
Denver, 12/02/93

Many claimants today rely on other individuals; private and public organizations; and for-profit and nonprofit organizations to pursue their claims. Although they assist claimants, these individuals and organizations do not serve as official representatives. In most instances, those who assist in the process have the best interests of the claimant in mind. However, some individuals and organizations have been instrumental in attempts to defraud programs or take unfair advantage of claimants. In the future, SSA will develop ongoing relationships with community organizations to ensure that competent third-party resources are available to assist the claimants..

Examples of resources that SSA will help develop include:

- Transportation and escort services for indigent claimants and those who experience difficulty in getting to consultative examinations. This would include a combination of volunteer services and reimbursement for transportation on a contract basis. These services will be immediately available as the need dictates.
- Enhancement of medical provider capacity to identify potentially eligible patients, secure claims and provide medical evidence. This type of activity has been successfully demonstrated through the use of seed monies from SSA in the SSI outreach program. An additional financial benefit to the providers will be realized through concurrent Medicaid eligibility for patients.
- Software with compatible format design which will allow direct input of claims-related information to SSA. This will be available

to claimant advocates and medical providers ensuring the rapid and accurate transmission of information. After a certification process, eligible users will be kept apprised of software, procedural, and policy changes. SSA will perform ongoing document verification to ensure the integrity of claims submitted by such users.

SSA will have an ongoing demonstration program that provides funds for truly innovative projects that test models for national implementation.

In order to expedite the referral of potentially eligible individuals, SSA will develop productive working relationships with Federal, State and local programs that serve individuals with disabilities. While eligibility requirements vary significantly for programs such as Food Stamps, Aid to Families with Dependent Children, General Assistance, foster care and adoption assistance, and Veterans Benefits, effective working relationships can be built around agreements that expand sharing of authorized information and awareness of program requirements.

Other programs will be able to use SSA-developed decisional support systems to evaluate potentially eligible persons prior to referral. This information will be transferred to SSA through compatible databases. To further enhance these relationships, disability claim managers will be available in remote locations, such as Department of Veterans Affairs homeless program sites, where the workload warrants their presence. With appropriate information available at these sites, the on-site disability claim manager will be able to complete the entire initial application process, with access to other program experts through information systems. Local managers will be encouraged to develop and maintain appropriate working relationships with local Federal, State and third-party resources.

The Payoff will be Greater Customer Satisfaction

Active participation by claimants, supported by SSA's efforts and the contributions of third parties will result in a fundamental shift in claimant expectations and satisfaction with the SSA disability process. From the SSA perspective, the results will be better service to customers through timely, fully supported decisions rendered at all decisional levels; better use of SSA resources focused on helping those who need assistance; and greater public confidence in the disability adjudication process.

Workforce Maximization

Teamwork

The teamwork concept is a fundamental ingredient in the new process. The disability claim manager will be the focal point at the initial claim level, assisted by technical and medical support staff. The adjudication officer will be the focal point at the prehearing level, relying on technical and medical support staff, as well as interacting with the disability claim manager and the administrative law judge (ALJ), as necessary. The ALJ will be the focal point at the hearing level, receiving support from technical and medical support staff, and also interacting with the adjudication officer and disability claim manager, as necessary.

Each team member will have at least a basic familiarity with all the steps in the process and an understanding of how he/she complements another's efforts. Everyone will achieve a greater sense of participation, closure, and accomplishment because of shared responsibility for performing the whole process. Team members will maintain ownership of the process and the outcomes. The teams will function effectively and efficiently because:

- All members will have electronic access to the claim throughout the process and thus be better able to engage in meaningful discussions with the claimant.
- Handoffs, rework, and non-value steps will be significantly reduced and fewer employees will be involved in shepherding each claim through the process. This will enhance SSA's capacity to provide world-class service by allowing employees to devote more time to each claimant, providing more personalized service.
- Team members will be knowledgeable but will also be able to draw upon each other's expertise on complex issues.
- Improved automated systems will enable members of the team to work together using a shared data base even when they are not co-located.
- Communication between team members and other disability claim managers will encourage consistent application of disability policy.
- Customer service is the primary focus at all steps of the process and an integral part of the teams' goals. This focus and commitment will increase claimant satisfaction.

- Team members will work closely with social service and medical/professional agencies and advocacy groups in the service area to improve their ability to obtain the necessary medical and functional information to appropriately evaluate disabling conditions.
- Varying levels of job complexity will provide the opportunity for personal development, growth, and learning.

Disability Claim Managers

Disability claim managers will be responsible for intake of DI and SSI disability/blindness benefit claims, development of all evidence (medical and nonmedical) required to adjudicate those claims, final adjudication of claims, ongoing communication with claimants, and issuance of notices and/or payment actions. In carrying out these responsibilities, disability claim managers will work in a team environment with medical and nonmedical experts who provide advice and assistance with complex case adjudication, as well as support personnel who handle more routine aspects of case development and payment effectuation. Tasks will be facilitated by a fully automated intake process, developmental and decisional expert system applications, personalized automated notices, and automated payment computations.

*We want to be full partners.
We want to work. We want
government to work better.*

*We want to be there in the
partnership to help identify the
problems. We want to be there
in partnership to help craft the
solution. We want to be there in
partnership to help implement
together the solution that this
government needs.*

*And we're prepared to work in
partnership to make some bold
leaps to turn this government
around and make it work the
way it should.*

John Sturdivant, President
American Federation of
Government Employees
Reinventing Government Summit,
Philadelphia, 6/25/93

Disability claim managers will be able to:

- Provide claimants with current and accurate information about their claims;
- Anticipate documentation needs and eliminate development that is not necessary in favorable determinations;
- Eliminate time lost and rework caused by frequent handoffs and queues;
- Access expert advice through shared databases, thus eliminating the need to transfer files;
- Provide claimants with complete information if their claims are proposed for denial and enhance claimants' ability to rebut such outcomes easily and early in the process; and
- Effectuate payment quickly, thus avoiding the need for recontacts and verification of nondisability factors of eligibility.

Adjudication Officers

Adjudication officers will be responsible for claims from the point of receiving hearing requests until they are ready to be heard by ALJs.

In carrying out their responsibilities, adjudication officers will work in a team environment with medical and nonmedical experts, requesting advice and counsel from ALJs as necessary.

Adjudication officers will be able to:

- Address the claimants' questions and concerns regarding their claims;
- Identify and discuss issues in dispute with claimants and determine the need for additional evidence. If the claimant is represented, conduct personal conferences with the representative and prepare written stipulations as to those issues not in dispute;
- Review claim records prior to hearings and issue revised decisions if additional information or evidence so warrants or refer claims for medical consultation; and
- Take responsibility for all evidentiary development and refer prepared records to the ALJs.

Administrative Law Judges

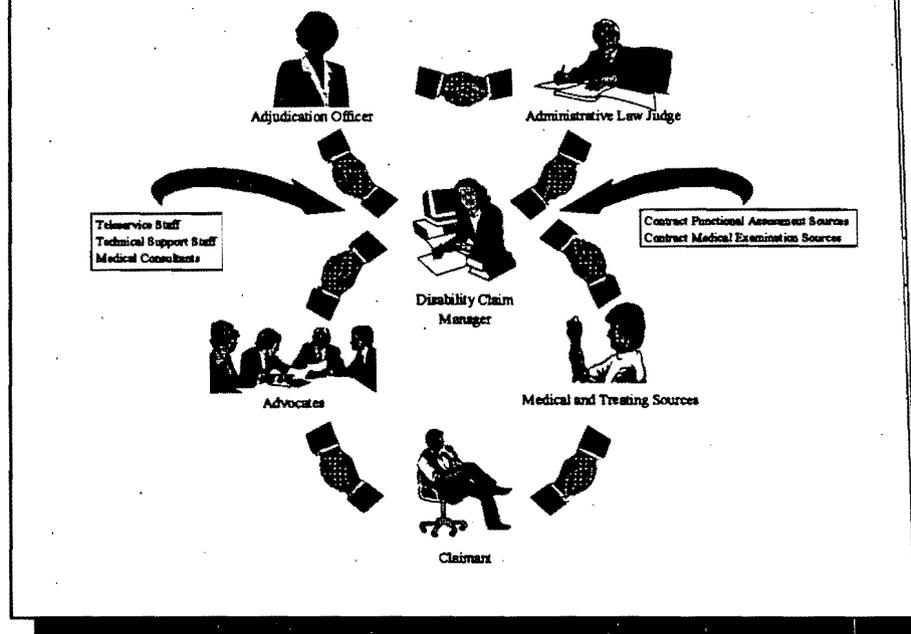
Administrative law judges (ALJ) will be responsible for hearing and deciding appeals. ALJs will receive support from technical and medical personnel, including decision writers. ALJs will also work with adjudication officers and disability claim managers as necessary.

ALJs will be able to:

- Review and focus on fully developed claims records prior to hearings;
- Deal with claimants who have already made informed decisions regarding representation before they appear at hearings; and
- In most circumstances, close the record at the conclusion of hearings, deliberate on issues and render prompt decisions.

Figure 16

Dynamics of the New Process



Workforce Enrichment/Empowerment

The work in the new process will raise job satisfaction and increase employee skills in the following way:

There has to be a clear shared sense of mission. There have to be clearly understood goals. There has to be trust placed in the employees who actually do the work, so that they will feel free to make decisions.

They cannot be treated like automatons or children bound up in straightjackets and rules and regulations and told to do the same thing over and over and over again.

Vice President Al Gore
August 4, 1993

Employees involved with the initial level of claims will perform multiple tasks instead of singular activities, thus their roles will expand to encompass more of the "whole" job. This increases the sense of accomplishment as employees experience the direct relationship between their actions and the final product. Those at the prehearing step will also be able to do more of the "whole" job, including taking action to allow claims much earlier in the process. For medical consultants and ALJs, tasks will be eliminated that are not commensurate with professional skill levels. Employees will feel more of a sense of ownership for the services they perform as a member of a team focused on serving claimants.

Entry level positions will be developed in which employees work as part of the team while gaining experience and qualifying for greater responsibility. Adequate resources and sufficient training and mentoring will allow them to acquire the skills they need to process the claim from intake through adjudication rather than guessing what someone else needs or using the current all-encompassing approach to information gathering.

The new process will rely heavily on increased employee empowerment applying information technology and professional judgment to complete tasks more effectively and efficiently without

constant checking, direction and micro-management. Recognition and reward processes will be revised to emphasize contributions to team outcomes and acquisition of knowledge bases. Continuous quality improvement activities will foster ongoing incremental process change.

Representatives: Fees, New Rules and Standards of Conduct

The Social Security Act and implementing regulations have long recognized the representational rights of claimants and have provided an administrative framework designed to ensure that claimants will have access to the legal community in the pursuit of their claims. Since the inception of the disability program, representatives have played a significant role in the disability process. The rate of representation in SSA disability claims has risen from approximately 55% in fiscal year (FY) 1982 to 75% in FY 1993. Focus groups of claimants and the general public have indicated that the disability program is too complex to understand and the process too fragmented and difficult for them to navigate alone. While many claimants resent having to pay a representative to establish entitlement to government-sponsored benefits, they feel that they have no choice if they want to be successful in this pursuit. While the rate of representation has risen, so too has the average fee for representation. The average fee received by representatives has jumped from approximately \$1,500 in FY 1987 to \$2,500 in FY 1993, further adding to the dismay of claimants. As more claimants seek representation and fees continue to climb, SSA has a heightened responsibility to monitor representational activity and to safeguard the interests of claimants. The proposed process will utilize new rules of representation and standards of conduct to ensure that representatives, as key players in the disability process, fulfill their responsibilities and adequately serve the needs of the claimants they represent.

Under the present statutory and regulatory scheme, representatives are not permitted to charge and collect a fee in any case without first obtaining the approval of the Secretary. There are two distinct procedures available to representatives for obtaining fee approval. The "fee petition" method requires the representative to itemize the services rendered and the time expended. The Secretary must evaluate each individual petition and determine the reasonable fee, considering such factors as case complexity, time expended, skills needed, and the results obtained. There is *no maximum fee* set by law for this procedure.

The second method, commonly referred to as the "fee agreement procedure", involves an agreement between the claimant and the representative whereby the fee is agreed to be no more than 25% of the retroactive benefits due, or \$4,000, whichever is less. The

agreement must be executed and submitted to the Secretary prior to the determination of the claim. While there is a maximum fee under this procedure, the Secretary does not have to conduct an individual evaluation of the reasonableness of the fee unless either the claimant, the representative, or the administrative law judge (ALJ) files a protest of the fee. The fee may be reduced by the Secretary *only* on the basis of evidence of the failure of the representative to adequately represent the interests of the claimant or on the basis of evidence that the fee is clearly excessive for the services rendered. Under limited circumstances, the representative may ask the Secretary to increase the fee.

In addition to approving all fees under both DI and SSI of the Social Security Act, there are withholding and direct payment of fee provisions that apply only to DI claims where an attorney is involved. Specifically, the Secretary must withhold and pay to the attorney the lesser of (1) 25% of the retroactive benefits due the claimant, or (2) the fee approved by the Secretary under either the fee petition or fee agreement procedures. The intent of this procedure is to provide an incentive for attorneys to accept Social Security claims work in order to increase claimant access to attorneys. In FY 1993, SSA paid nearly \$300 million in fees to attorneys out of claimants' retroactive DI benefits. This withholding and payment provision does not apply to SSI claims because Congress did not find it appropriate to reduce a claimant's benefits in order to pay an attorney in a means-test program. However, even though SSA does not withhold and pay attorneys fees in these cases, it is estimated that SSI claimants paid over \$133 million in fees to their representatives in FY 1992. Thus, the total cost to claimants for representation in 1993 approached the \$500 million mark.

Since the inception of the fee agreement procedure in 1991, fee agreements have been rapidly replacing fee petitions as the vehicle for procuring agency approval of fees. SSA received 52,297 fee agreements in FY 1992, representing 39% of all fee approval requests. In FY 1993, fee agreements jumped to 87,395, accounting for 63% of all fee approval requests. Fees are generally higher under the fee agreement procedure, averaging \$2,800 in FY 1993 as compared to an average fee of \$2,200 for fee petitions. One of the factors causing higher fees under the fee agreement procedure is the lengthy processing time for disability claims; the longer it takes to issue a decision, the greater the retroactive benefits due the claimant. Under the fee agreement procedure, the fee is based on the amount of retroactive benefits due, and there may be little or no correlation to the time expended by the representative or the skills involved in rendering representational services. By eliminating fragmentation and handoffs, the proposed process will significantly reduce processing time. SSA will issue decisions faster, the amount of resulting retroactive benefits will be reduced, and resulting fees will likewise be reduced.

However, as the fee agreement procedure continues to claim an ever-increasing share of the total number of fee requests filed each year, more and more fees will be based upon a predetermined, mathematical formula rather than by an independent evaluation of the quality of services rendered. In order to maintain the emphasis on quality in representational matters, the proposed process will adopt new representation rules and standards of conduct to effectively safeguard the rights and interests of claimants. These new regulations will:

- establish qualifications for representatives, attorneys and non-attorneys, to ensure that claimants receive competent representation;
- define the duties and responsibilities of representatives, including the duty to fully develop the record in a timely manner and to respond to requests to submit evidence;
- establish a code of professional conduct for representatives in all matters before SSA, including conduct at prehearing conferences, hearings, and interaction with SSA employees and claimants generally;
- provide a forum for claimants to air their grievances and file charges against representatives for failure to provide adequate representation or otherwise violating the rules of representation and standards of conduct;
- provide meaningful sanctions against representatives, including suspension and disqualification from appearing before the agency in a representative capacity, for violating any of the provisions contained in the rules of representation and standards of conduct.

Without disturbing the statutory intent of facilitating claimant access to representatives, the simplified and user-friendly new process may well result in more claimants pursuing their claims without representation. However, the issue of representation will remain a matter of personal choice. In addition, the proposed process will reduce the trend of inflationary fees by eliminating the artificially high retroactive benefits that result from excessively long processing times. Finally, while current statutes and regulations attempt to protect claimants from fee abuses, they fall short of extending to claimants the assurances which they need most: that the representatives they retain will be qualified, will have the obligation to fully develop the record on their behalf, will adequately represent their interests, and will be accountable for misconduct or dereliction of duty. The new rules and standards of conduct provide the framework for these assurances.

Information Technology

Information technology will be a vital element in the redesign of the disability claim process. To the fullest extent possible, SSA will take advantage of the "Information Highway" and those technological advances that can improve the disability process and help provide world-class service. Existing Agency design plans for Intelligent Workstation/Local Area Network (IWS/LAN) and a Modernized Disability System are critical enablers for successful implementation of the proposed process redesign. Reengineering of the disability process is on the critical path of the design and development of the Modernized Disability System and implementation of IWS/LAN.

The Modernized Disability System and IWS/LAN will provide an integrated system to support the entire reengineered disability process. This system will provide electronic connectivity throughout the process. Current SSA systems that support disability processing operate independently of each other. Field offices, DDSs and hearing offices all have their own systems. The DDSs have their own baseline automation systems, but for the most part can only use the systems within the particular State on that State's machines. Likewise, hearing offices have a disability processing system that applies only to claim processing inside the hearings and appeals organization. Each organization independently inputs claim information into their systems and no automated information can be passed outside the organization for subsequent, much less parallel, claim processing.

The reengineered process relies on the ability to build a single electronic claim record as it goes from point to point in the disability process. This includes the ability for any facility to process the medical and nonmedical segments of claims for another facility. This is the primary benefit of the IWS/LAN and Modernized Disability System architectures. Both architectures are a prerequisite for enabling reengineering of the entire disability process.

The Enabling Platform

The IWS/LAN architecture and Modernized Disability System design will support a major objective of the redesigned disability process—seamless, reengineered electronic processing of disability claims from the first contact with the claimant to the final decision, including all levels of administrative appeal. All employees will use the same hardware, the same claim assignment and scheduling software, the same claim processing software, the same case control system, the same fiscal and accounting software, the same integrated quality assurance functionality, and the same management information system throughout all stages of the process. Therefore, data will need to be input and validated one time only, leading to more consistent decisions in establishing both the medical and nonmedical aspects of DI and SSI claims. All employees will also have access to decision

Often, it is possible to anticipate early in a reengineering project (or even before it gets underway) what kind of information systems the organization will need to support the reengineered process. Installing the hardware and supporting software—the platforms—for these systems early will make implementation go much faster.

Michael Hammer &
James Champy,
"Reengineering the Corporation:
A Manifesto for Business Revolution"
(New York: HarperCollins
Publishers, Inc., 1993), p.116

support systems for those complex entitlement decisions. Since all facilities will be able to access the same record, all SSA representatives will be able to respond to inquiries from the same base of information. This will produce more consistent and accurate Agency responses to inquiries.

SSA will continue to move aggressively towards the goal for complete electronic, paperless processing with all aspects of the claims process. Key tenants of reengineered electronic, paperless processing will be encouraging electronic information exchanges with medical evidence providers—and then keeping information received electronically in that same (or a similar) digitized format for claim processing, use of cost effective scanning/imaging of decision supporting paper records, abstraction and/or summarization of key, paper-based information by employees via direct keying, and finally, direct keying of information into the claim processing system by employees, third parties, and/or claimants. Direct keying of information into the electronic file will be minimized whenever possible by reliance on data propagation from other SSA files and comprehensive database support throughout the claims processing systems.

Although full realization of a completely automated system will be a long-term initiative, a number of aspects of the redesigned process will be quickly realized and made possible by IWS/LAN and Modernized Disability System support in the very near future.

Redesign of Access to Services

Information technology will be applied in several ways to enhance the claimants' and representatives' access to services and information under the new process. Through reengineering, claimants will be able to conduct business with SSA via telephone, self-help workstations, kiosks, videoconferencing, and electronic data transfer at SSA facilities and other satellite locations. SSA will provide TV/VCRs and/or kiosks in SSA facilities and public places where there is a high concentration of potential customers to dispense information about SSA programs, the requirements for eligibility, and the information requirements for filing an application. The better informed the customers, the better prepared they are at the time of the interview. This reduces recontacts and allows the customer to more fully participate in the timely pursuit of their claim.

Waiting rooms will be equipped with self-help workstations housed in private cubicles. They will help to pre-screen program eligibility and furnish application requirement information for walk-in claimants. These workstations can also be used as front-end interviewing devices that collect preliminary application information from claimants. The preliminary information will be used to access SSA databases to gather all known information on the claimant, including earnings history and any prior filings.

Application information will include the telephone numbers from which claimants or representatives will make telephone inquiries. SSA office telephone systems will be equipped with automatic number identification technology (also known as "caller ID"). Using this technology, SSA will be able to provide improved service by responding to telephone inquiries with increased assurance that the caller is the claimant or representative.

Customer Self-Help Redesign

An efficient paper application form designed to be easily read and indexed by scanning equipment will be widely available as part of a comprehensive consumer information publication about the disability program that will be stocked in SSA facilities and other appropriate community-based locales. Self-help instructional material will also be mailed to some applicants who inquire about disability benefits by calling SSA. Up-front completion of the form will not be a requirement of filing, but will enhance the intake process for applicants. The Modernized Disability System will have the capability to accept scanned information from the application form and integrate all relevant information into the electronic file.

In addition, an electronic application form will be made available to claimants with access to a personal computer and modem using an SSA bulletin board service or through other publicly available bulletin board services. The information will be completed and returned electronically to SSA via an agreed upon electronic filing method.

Finally, as previously mentioned, some claimants will begin the application process by completing a brief electronic application form using SSA self-help workstations in SSA offices and other community-based locations.

Enhanced Third Party Support

SSA will conduct forums and produce video and computer-based training materials for third parties who wish to participate in assisting customers to file applications and gather medical evidence. Wherever possible, physicians and health care organizations, advocates, community counseling services, and other professionals who regularly provide assistance to SSA claimants will be supplied with SSA software to electronically complete Agency forms. The data will be transferred to SSA using agreed upon methods. As long as these parties comply with certain stipulations, SSA will supply updates to software and procedures, and/or establish an SSA bulletin board from which these third parties can download current software.

SSA will allow representatives access to electronic claim folders. This access will be limited to the authorized representative (attorney or non-attorney) of the claimant and will be allowed from self-help

The role of the federal government is to promote universal service so that all citizens have equal access to information regardless of where they live or their educational or economic status. The information superhighway is explicitly an investment in people necessary to achieve our educational and health care goals and to develop the skilled and flexible workforce of the 21st century.

Vice President Al Gore
Washington Post,
March 22, 1994

workstations at an SSA facility, or via an agreed upon electronic data transfer method.

Evidence Collection Redesign

Medical Evidence of Record is to the disability process what the earnings record is to the Retirement and Survivors' Insurance program. SSA will marshal its resources for an "Evidence Modernization Project" as was successfully done for the Earnings Modernization Project. The success of Earnings Modernization was due, in no small part, to the partnership SSA established with the employer community to streamline and focus the wage reporting requirements. The redesigned disability process approach provides for similar partnership with medical providers and the necessary streamlining of evidence collection requirements.

SSA will expand its acceptance of interpretive data from the medical community. Instead of relying solely on actual medical records, SSA will focus on obtaining certifications of the diagnostic and functional information needed to make disability determinations. These standardized certifications will be designed to solicit from the treating source the specific information needed and enable SSA to process the information in a timely and accurate manner.

Electronic standardized treating source information will be transmitted from physicians to SSA and associated with the appropriate electronic record. If additional medical evidence is needed and it is not already electronic, it will be scanned and stored digitally, or it may be abstracted and stored electronically. "Fax ID" and "caller ID" will be established with all parties submitting evidence or who have rights to legitimately request evidence. As was done during Earnings Modernization with the employer community, SSA will take advantage of the expanding use of computer applications by medical providers by working with software vendors that currently service the medical community to include an application for treating source reporting in office automation software.

The paper version of the standardized treating source form will be designed so that the data can be read by scanning equipment into SSA claims processing systems. The form will be designed to support the structure of the Modernized Disability System.

A single vendor payment system utilized by all appropriate employees will be used to pay certain evidence providers for information which they provide SSA to aid in making a disability determination. To further paperless processing, SSA will adopt a "signature on file" policy for the claimant's evidence release authorization to eliminate routing of paper medical release forms.

SSA will also set up information exchanges with other Federal and State agencies and major medical providers using pin/password access to data stores as well as caller/fax ID to conduct information exchange over the telephone.

Reengineered Tools For Decisionmakers

The ability of decisionmakers to conduct thorough interviews and evidence evaluation, and timely and accurate claims adjudication is predicated on the implementation of the functionality provided by the IWS/LAN hardware and software components, and the decision support features of the Modernized Disability System. The IWS/LAN environment provides access from the decisionmakers' desktop to electronic policy and procedures, multiple/simultaneous information processing and retrieval sessions with SSA claims processing systems, simultaneous access to both intelligent workstation-based office automation software and SSA claims processing systems, and access to modern information-handling and transfer technologies such as fax. With all of the tools at the decisionmakers' fingertips, time is not wasted in logging on and off claim processing systems to get to other claim processing systems or office automation applications, nor is time lost by having to log off the system in order to leave the workstation to research manual reference materials.

A good index and retrieval system on our computers would save both money and time while allowing the specialist a chance to perform his/her major function in a more effective manner. Expert systems to facilitate all staff in the steps it takes to complete case processing from start to finish should be included.

DDS Administrator
3/10/94

Expert system software will be included in SSA claims processing systems to assist disability decisionmakers in the analysis and evaluation of complex eligibility factors, and to ensure that the correct procedures for disability evaluation are followed. While conducting interviews, disability decisionmakers will use the decision support features of the Modernized Disability System which ask specific questions based on claimants' alleged impairments. This will provide more personalized service for claimants since the decision support questions will be tailored to their particular impairments. The decision support system will use the accumulated data of the electronic record to automatically produce "statement of the claim" summaries and decision rationales used throughout the determination process.

Where disability decision team members cannot be physically co-located, they can remain in communication by using two-way TV and other videoconferencing technologies. Handoffs, and the queues associated with each handoff, can also be minimized by the use of expert systems because much of the specialized knowledge that a task requires will be electronically stored in the knowledgebase of the expert system and immediately available. Therefore, the number of situations where employees will have to handoff claims to other employees having more technical expertise will be reduced.

Expert systems will also be developed to improve the delivery of disability policy. Disability policy will be developed and stored in a

format that can be integrated into computer systems as the source of context-sensitive help screens and decision-support messages. SSA components responsible for disability policy will be responsible for updating the system with policy language revisions that do not require programming changes.

Quality Assurance and Management Information Redesign

Quality assurance features fully supported by the Modernized Disability System will be integrated throughout the new process. For example, the national end-of-line quality review sample will be electronically selected and automatically routed to appropriate staff. In-line programmatic quality assurance, enhanced by the use of decision support systems, will be programmed into the computer applications and will help to identify errors of both oversight and substance, and also support routine analysis to aid in avoiding future similar errors. An on-line technical review will occur each time information is added to the electronic record.

Quality assurance and productivity measures will be incorporated in a new, total-process management information system. Meaningful, timely management information for the disability process is dependent on a seamless data processing system used by all components which affords a common case control system and a common data base. SSA's claim processing systems integrated on an Agency-wide IWS/LAN platform will provide this seamless environment.

The Modernized Disability System management information design supports the new process goal of providing access from a desktop computer to total-process management information data no more than 24 hours old. In addition to the routine, published national reports generated from the management information system, other reports needed by national or local entities, or individual employees will be preformatted and system-generated on demand. Managers and empowered employees will have the flexibility to change parameters and to access the full data base, permitting comparison of peer performance and trend analysis. The system would also permit custom, ad hoc reports for special studies or immediate special purpose activities with access to the full data base. Tools including user-friendly report generator software and statistical forecasting and modeling applications will be available on the intelligent workstation to assist users in the data analysis.

Appendix I

Reengineering Design Partners

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Lawrence Thompson	Principal Deputy Commissioner, SSA
Rhoda Davis	Director, Process Reengineering Program, SSA
Dennis Brown	Moderator, Association of OHA Analysts
Bruce Bucklinger	President, OHA Managers' Association
Robert Burgess	President, National Association of Disability Examiners
Mary Chatel	President, National Council of Social Security Management Associations, Inc.
Herbert Collender	President, SSA/AFGE National Council of Payment Center Locals (Council 109)
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Arthur Johnson	Chief Spokesperson, SSA/AFGE General Committee
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Janice Warden	Deputy Commissioner for Operations, SSA
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Business Process Reengineering

The Process Reengineering Program is the culmination of a rigorous SSA investigation of the reengineering efforts and methodologies of those companies, public organizations, academic institutions, and consulting firms with the most "hands on" experience in this field. The positive findings from this detailed review, combined with concerns about existing business processes within SSA and the quality of SSA service to the public, led management to the conclusion that a process reengineering effort was critical to the SSA objective of providing "world-class" administration and service.

Based largely on analysis of what has worked best in the private and public sectors, a customized reengineering methodology was developed within SSA. It uses a reengineering team approach that combines a strong "customer" focus with classic management analysis techniques, and computer modeling and simulation, to intensely review a single business process. The objective is not to make small, incremental improvements in the various pieces of the process, but to redesign it as a whole, from start to finish, so that it becomes many times more efficient and, in so doing, significantly improves SSA service to the public.

A senior SSA manager was selected to serve as Director of the Process Reengineering Program. The Director leads all SSA process reengineering efforts, is the primary liaison with the Commissioner and Executive Staff, nominates topics for examination, chairs project steering committees, and directs a small professional staff and revolving group of managers/consultants.

SSA uses special, multi-disciplinary teams of individuals to conduct reengineering analyses and identify the best ways to redesign and significantly improve processes. Teams are comprised of outstanding employees, all of whom are subject matter experts in operational, programmatic, policy, systems, administrative, and other areas relevant to the business process.

Reengineering teams focus on identifying those procedural and policy changes to the process that will: make it more claimant and service oriented; greatly increase productivity and process speed; take advantage of opportunities offered by new technology; and improve the empowerment and professional enrichment of the employees who are part of the process. Although teams follow the same basic reengineering protocol, continual customization is both expected and encouraged.

Disability Process Reengineering Project

Employees within SSA and DDS at all levels recognize that there are significant problems with the disability claims process. They are dissatisfied with the long processing times and high backlogs which result in less than satisfactory service to claimants. The disability process reengineering project has allowed those who have long worked in the process, and with claimants and their representatives, to investigate the causes of current problems. With considerable input from other employees and those outside the process, they have developed the proposal for solving those problems.

The Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, Donna Shalala, and the Commissioner of Social Security, Shirley Sears Chater, have placed improvements in the disability process as critical to the delivery of world-class service by SSA. They have strongly supported the work of the project team. Their adoption of the proposal will depend on the response of the employees and the public to it.

An Executive Steering Committee was formed to meet on a regular basis to provide advice to the Commissioner on development of the disability reengineering process change proposal, and to ensure that support occurred at the highest levels of the Agency. The Executive Steering Committee established the parameters and expectations for the project. The expectation goals were driven by targets set forth in the Agency Strategic Plan and are based on percentages of service and/or productivity:

Parameters and Expectations for Reengineering the Disability Determination Process (9/15/93)

Definition of Process

The "process" to be reengineered is the initial and administrative appeals system for determining an individual's entitlement to Social Security and Supplemental Security Income disability payments. It includes all actions from an individual's initial contact with SSA through payment effectuation or final administrative denial. The system for determining whether an individual continues to be entitled to receive disability payments is not part of this "process."

Rationale: The process to be reengineered must be defined broadly to increase the opportunity for improvement. The continuing disability review system is not included because it is conceptually and practically distinct from the initial disability determination process.

Parameters

Every aspect of the process except the statutory definition of disability, individual benefit amounts, the use of an administrative law judge as the presiding officer for administrative hearings, and vocational rehabilitation for beneficiaries, is within the scope of this reengineering effort. However, analysis and ideas for change should proceed and be

presented on two tracks: improvements achievable without changes in statute or regulations and innovations that may require such change.

Rationale: The timing of legislative or regulatory change is beyond SSA's control. Such change could not reasonably be expected to be implemented in less than 2 years. However, limiting the reengineering effort to aspects of the process not requiring change in statute or regulations was rejected as limiting too greatly the possibility of major improvement/innovation in the process. The two-track approach provides for both shorter term incremental improvements and longer term, more radical change.

Expectations

1. Unless otherwise specified here, the recommendations for change should be consistent with the goals and objectives set forth in the Agency Strategic Plan.
2. Recommendations for change, taken as a whole, should not cause changes in benefit outlays unless as a necessary result of improvements in service, such as more timely processing and payment of claims.
3. Process changes should improve service and/or productivity, on a combined basis, by at least 25 percent by the end of FY 1997 over levels projected in the FY 1994 budget (it would require about an additional \$500 million currently to realize such improvement) and decisional accuracy should not decrease. By FY 2000 additional actions, including any necessary statutory and regulatory changes, should provide a further 25 percent improvement.

The Executive Steering Committee facilitated good ongoing communications between components and the Team, and communicated the need and reason for reengineering the disability process. They were familiar with the current process problems and were kept apprised of research completed by the Team. In February, the Executive Steering Committee was expanded to include the Presidents of the American Federation of Government Employees, the National Federation of Federal Employees, and the National Treasury Employees Union locals, councils and chapters representing SSA employees; and the Presidents of the SSA/DDS professional and management associations recognized by SSA as having an interest in disability issues.

Upon receipt of this proposal, the Executive Steering Committee will make an impact assessment, cognizant of competing pressures and implementation challenges. During the dialogue period, the Executive Steering Committee will share and discuss the proposal, provide feedback, and identify implementation questions. Based on the comments received and issues identified, they will provide advice on the next steps.

The 18 members of the Disability Reengineering Team, all of whom are SSA or State DDS employees, have varied and extensive backgrounds in all aspects of the disability program. Team members

attended a high quality, intensive 3-day SSA reengineering methodology training session, and completed extensive reading assignments on reengineering. Some Team members visited organizations who had reengineered their business processes to learn about successes as well as opportunities for improvement.

The Team used the following methods to obtain the information necessary to develop a redesigned disability process.

Briefings

Members of the Team received extensive briefings from:

- all SSA components that work with any aspect of the disability process; and
- Dr. Frank S. Bloch, Professor of Law and Director of the Clinical Education Center at Vanderbilt, who discussed the results of his study comparing disability programs and processes of the United States, Canada, and Western Europe. His work encompasses eligibility requirements and program goals, benefit award structure and short-term benefits, administrative organization, and procedures for claim processing and appeals.

Scan Visits

The Team made fact-finding visits to numerous SSA and DDS offices, and to other public and private organizations throughout the country who have an interest in working with SSA to improve the disability process. Team members conducted numerous telephone interviews with representatives of offices/groups whom they could not personally visit. They also publicized surface/electronic mail addresses and fax and voice telephone numbers for those who were not contacted or had additional information to provide.

Prior to site visits/contacts, Team members provided those organizations and individuals with general information about the reengineering effort, key research areas, and some unconventional ideas about the disability process so that the interviewees would have an opportunity to think about process issues. The Team encouraged interviewees to provide open and honest opinions, suggestions, and ideas.

Appendix III contains a list of the sites visited and telephone interviews conducted.

Focus Groups

A series of 12 focus groups were held throughout the country to obtain input from members of our claimant population and the general

public regarding their experiences with and expectations of the SSA disability process. The focus groups provided the Team valuable information about claimants' expectations and preferences, as well as concerns about the current process. Appendix III contains a list of the focus group sites and composition.

Benchmarking

"Internal benchmarking" refers to the identification and understanding of site-specific best practices that currently exist within the Agency and is focused on the improvement and standardization of internal operations. The Team completed this phase of benchmarking by reviewing lists of sites engaging in "best practices" which were submitted by various SSA components, and visiting or telephoning as many of these SSA and DDS offices as possible.

"External benchmarking" is essentially the same, except the hunt for best practices and proven process innovations is expanded to comparable companies and organizations outside of SSA. It is focused outside the organization and is concerned with the relative performance of one specific function or process. Appendix III contains the companies/organizations the Team used as benchmarking partners.

A valuable part of the benchmarking exercise was the opportunity to validate assumptions related to the disability process, note issues that required further investigation, and identify potential improvement opportunities.

Process Analysis

The Team utilized a document prepared by the SSA Office of Workforce Analysis in April 1993 which outlines the "as-is" disability claim and appeal processes of SSA. The document contains a description of claim processing tasks performed by line-employees in the seven operational components that deal with the disability claim process.

Team members conducted studies on issues such as claimant burden time, gap analysis, and administrative costs. They also collected, reviewed, and researched an extensive amount of existing procedural guides, laws/regulations, studies conducted by internal and external components, processing time and quality management information, workflows, cost data, etc.

Intensive deliberations, concept debates, and analysis on ideas for change were instrumental in the creation of the redesigned process.

Computer Modeling

Computer models are close representations of work processes that, if properly constructed, allow for better understanding, testing or forecasting, and study. Team members worked with modeling professionals in SSA and the private sector to build the models used to develop assumptions about a redesigned process. The assumptions used for the proposal are shown in Appendix IV.

Models were built to represent both the current and proposed processes. These models helped the Team predict the best features and performance of the new disability process; to better judge the magnitude of change from one process to another; and to do some "what-if-nothing-changes" analysis to get a feel for the impact of inactivity.

Proposal

The dominant product of the entire effort—this proposal—outlines the best process improvement and process innovation ideas from the Team. The proposal as written by the Team, will be presented to the Executive Steering Committee, and will be made widely available within SSA and the DDS community, as well as to the broadest possible public for comment.

Logistic Accomplishments

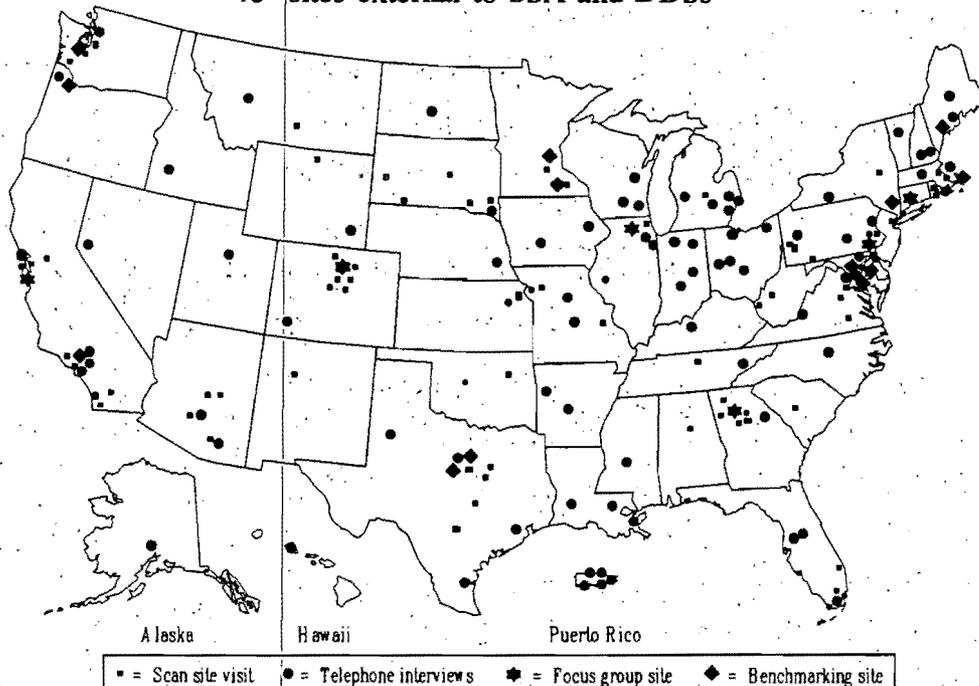
Sites Visited: 421
States Visited: 33
Individual Interviews: 3,600+

Specific Sites

- 35 SSA central office components
- 10 regional offices, OHA ROs and ROPIRS
- 7 DHHS regional OGC offices
- 37 State DDSs
- 64 field offices
- 28 hearing offices
- 9 processing centers and other large installations
- 10 teleservice centers
- 14 area director offices
- 181 sites "external" to SSA and DDSs
- 6 union/management associations

Telephone Interviews

- 31 field offices
- 1 teleservice center
- 3 area director offices
- 4 hearing offices
- 26 DDSs
- 46 sites external to SSA and DDSs



Internal Site Visits

REGION	RO	FO	OTHER	HO	DDS
Boston	RC Exec. Staff, RCALJ Exec. Staff, ADs, DPB	W. Warwick, RI Providence, RI Boston, MA Dorchester, MA Roxbury, MA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ ROPIR Director ■ DQB ■ Boston, MA TSC 	Boston, MA Providence, RI	Boston, MA Providence, RI
New York	RC Exec. Staff, RCALJ Exec. Staff, DPB, ADs	Jamaica, NY Boro Hall, NY Albany, NY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ ROPIR Mgmt Staff ■ Jamaica, NY TSC ■ NEPSC 	New York City, NY Albany, NY	Brooklyn, NY Newark, NJ Manhattan, NY Albany, NY New York Administrator
Philadelphia	RC Exec. Staff, RCALJ Exec. Staff, PSC (DRS) ROMCS, ADs	Wilmington, DE Philadelphia NE, PA Richmond, VA Washington "M" St., DC Uniontown, PA Pittsburgh, Penn AV, PA Huntington, WV Charleston, WV	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ ROPIR Director ■ DQB ■ MATPSC ■ Baltimore, MD TSC 	Jenkintown, PA Richmond, VA Washington, D.C. Pittsburgh, PA Huntington, WV Charleston, WV	Wilmington, DE Richmond, VA Fairfax, VA Charleston, WV Baltimore, MD
Atlanta	RC Exec. Staff, RCALJ Exec. Staff, PSC, DPB, ADs	Birmingham, AL Columbia, SC Tucker, GA Little Havana, FL Nashville, TN Rome, GA Cedartown, GA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ DQB ■ SEPSC ■ Birmingham, AL TSC ■ Ft. Lauderdale, FL TSC ■ ROPIR Director 	Atlanta, GA Birmingham, AL Columbia SC Chamblee, GA Ft Lauderdale, FL Nashville, TN	Decatur, GA Birmingham, AL Columbia, SC Miami, FL Nashville, TN
Chicago	RC Exec. Staff, RCALJ Exec. Staff, DPB, ROMCS, PSC (DRS), Illinois ADs	Springfield, IL Lansing, MI Chicago NSW, IL Rochester, MN St. Paul, MN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ ROPIR Director ■ DQB ■ Chicago, IL TSC ■ GLPSC 	Chicago, IL	Springfield, IL Lansing, MI St. Paul, MN
Kansas City	RC Exec. Staff, RCALJ Exec. Staff, PSC (DRS), DPB, ROMCS Iowa AD	Kansas City, KS Topeka, KS Independence, MO Gladstone, MO St. Louis, Southside, MO	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ ROPIR Director ■ DQB ■ MAMPSC 	Kansas City, MO	Topeka, KS Kansas City, MO St. Louis, MO
Dallas	RC Exec. Staff, RCALJ Exec. Staff DPB	Dallas, TX Tulsa, OK Waco, TX Oak Cliffe, TX Albuquerque, NM Huron, SD, DM only	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ ROPIR Director ■ DQB ■ Albuquerque, NM DOC ■ Grand Prairie, TX TSC ■ Albuquerque, NM TSC 	Dallas North, TX Albuquerque, NM Oklahoma City, OK	Albuquerque, NM Oklahoma City, OK Arlington, TX DHU Austin, TX

REGION	RO	FO	OTHER	HO	DDS
Denver	RC Exec. Staff, RCALJ Exec. Staff, DPB, ROMCS, ADs	Greeley, CO Ft. Collins, CO Denver Dntn, CO Englewood, CO Lakewood, CO Billings, MT Sheridan, WY Rapid City, SD Yankton, SD Sioux Falls, SD Pine Ridge, SD— Outstationed CR	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ DQB ■ Golden, Co TSC ■ ROPIR Director 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Denver, CO ■ Billings, MT ■ Processing Center, Billings MT ■ Sioux Falls, SD 	Denver, CO Sioux Falls, SD
San Francisco	RC Exec. Staff, RCALJ Exec. Staff, Chief Medical Officer, ADs, DPB, PSC	SF,Civic Center, CA Sacramento, CA Tucson, AZ Phoenix, AZ Chula Vista, CA El Cajon, CA, DM only San Diego, CA, DM only Linda Vista, CA, BM only Miracle Mile, CA	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ ROPIR Director ■ DQB ■ WNPSC 	Oakland, CA Los Angeles W, CA	Oakland, CA Sacramento, CA Tucson, AZ Phoenix, AZ San Diego, CA
Seattle	RC Exec. Staff, RCALJ Exec. Staff, DPB, ADs, ROMCS	Renton, WA Olympia, WA Seattle North, WA Tacoma, WA Anchorage, AK, State Mgr. only	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ ROPIR Director ■ DQB ■ Auburn, WA TSC 	Seattle, WA	Renton, WA Olympia, WA Portland, OR, DDS Administrator only
National			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ AFGE ■ NCSSMA ■ NFFE ■ NTEU ■ Assoc. of Administrative Law Judges, Inc. ■ NADE 		

Telephone Call Summary — Internals

REGION	FO	OTHER	HO	DDS
Boston	Worcester, MA Fall River, MA			Windsor, CT Augusta, ME Concord, NH Waterbury, VT
New York	Elmira, NY Fajardo, PR Hato Tejas, PR San Juan, PR Cayey, PR Bayamo, PR			San Juan, PR
Philadelphia	Covington, VA Welch, WV	Pittsburgh, PA AD		Washington, D.C. Harrisburg, PA
Atlanta	Augusta, GA	Tampa, FL AD Miami, FL AD	Miami, FL	Frankfort, KY Jackson, MS Raleigh, NC
Chicago	Indianapolis, IN Valparaiso, IN Pontiac, MI Madison, WI Elkhart, IN Racine, WI Detroit East, MI Detroit Conner, MI Toledo, OH Springfield, OH Oshkosh, WI Chicago South, IL Muncie, IN Chicago East, IL Highland Park, MI Grand Rapids, MI	Cleveland, OH TSC	Oak Park, MI	Indianapolis, IN Columbus, OH Madison, WI
Kansas City	Dubuque, IA Columbia, MO			Lincoln, NE Des Moines, IA
Dallas	Gretna, LA Pasadena, TX			Baton Rouge, LA Little Rock, AK
Denver				Bismarck, ND Helena, MT Sioux Falls, SD Salt Lake City, UT Cheyenne, WY
San Francisco			Phoenix, AZ Santa Barbara, CA	Honolulu, HA Carson City, NV
Seattle				Boise, ID Anchorage, AK

REGION	FO	OTHER	HO	DDS
National		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Black Affairs Advisory Council ■ Pacific Asian American Advisory Committee ■ National Association of Senior Social Security Attorneys ■ Hispanic Affairs Advisory Council 		

Central Office Site Visits

COMMISSIONER	HUMAN RESOURCES	FINANCE ASSESSMENT AND MANAGEMENT	OPERATIONS	POLICY AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS	PROGRAMS	SYSTEMS
Office of Information Resource Management Office of Strategic Planning	Office of Workforce Analysis	Office of Financial Policy Operations Office of Program and Integrity Review Office of Budget	Office of Operations Management and Program Integration Office of Public and Employee Service Office of Automation Support Office of Disability and International Operations Office of Central Records Operations	Office of Legislation and Congressional Affairs Office of Public Affairs Office of Research and Statistics	Office of Disability Office of Supplemental Security Income Office of Hearings and Appeals Office of Retirement and Survivors Insurance Litigation Staff Office of the Actuary	Deputy Commissioner for Systems Disability Systems Modernization Staff Office of Information Management Office of Telecommunications Office of Systems Design and Development Office of Systems Requirement

External Contacts

REGION	ADVOCACY GROUPS	LEGAL/ REPRESENTATIVE COMMUNITY	CLINICS/ HOSPITALS	MISCELLANEOUS
Boston		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Brock Hornby, US District Judge, District of Maine, Portland, ME—telephone ■ Disability Law Center, Boston, MA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Chrmn., Childhood Disabilities Comm., Amer. Academy of Pediatrics, Boston, MA—telephone ■ Dr. Winkler, Neurologist, Boston, MA—telephone ■ Pres., Amer. Academy of Disability Examining Physicians, Manchester, NH—telephone ■ Dr. P. Alden, Internist, Burlington, VT—telephone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Office of General Counsel, Boston, MA
New York	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Fountain House, New York, NY ■ Brooklyn Center for the Independence for the Disabled, New York, NY ■ Gay Men's Health Crisis, New York, NY ■ Hyacinth House, New York, NY ■ Coalition for the Homeless, New York, NY ■ New York City Department for Homeless Services, New York, NY ■ Access Development Corporation, New York, NY ■ Lighthouse for the Blind, New York, NY ■ VISIONS, Blind Services, New York, NY ■ Venture House, New York, NY ■ Queens Independent Living Center, New York, NY ■ New York State Advocate for the Disabled, New York, NY ■ International Center for the Disabled, New York, NY ■ Jewish Guild for the Blind, New York, NY ■ Brookdale Center for Aging, New York, NY ■ Bronx Independent Living Center, New York, NY 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Legal Services for the Elderly, New York, New York ■ MFY Legal Services, New York, New York ■ South Brooklyn Legal Service, Brooklyn, New York ■ Barbara Samuels, Brooklyn, New York ■ Greater New York State Law Project, New York, NY ■ Legal Services, New York, NY ■ Fordham Law School, New York, NY ■ HIV Law Project, New York, NY 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Long Island Association for AIDS Care, New York, NY ■ Cabrini Medical Center, New York, NY ■ Dr. D. DeGuzman, Internist, Newark, NJ—telephone ■ Dr. A. Goravedes, Internist, New York, NY—telephone ■ Dr. A. Marxuach, Internist, Carolina, PR—telephone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ New York State Department of Social Services, Albany, NY ■ VA Homeless Project, New York, NY ■ New York State Workers Compensation, New York, NY ■ New York City Human Resources Admin., New York, NY ■ Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities, New York, NY ■ Vocational and Educational Services of New York, NY ■ Department of Education, Rehabilitation Services Administration, New York, NY ■ Manhattan Borough President's Office, Manhattan, NY ■ New York Commission for the Blind, New York, NY ■ New Jersey Commission for the Blind, Newark, NJ

REGION	ADVOCACY GROUPS	LEGAL/ REPRESENTATIVE COMMUNITY	CLINICS/ HOSPITALS	MISCELLANEOUS
Philadelphia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Whitman-Walker Clinic, Wash., DC—HIV Claims ■ ABA Legal Counsel for the Elderly, Washington, DC ■ Goodwill Industries, Pittsburgh, PA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Jess Leventhal, ESQ, Philadelphia, PA ■ Jenkins, Block & Mering, Richmond, VA ■ Legal Aid Bureau, Inc., Baltimore, MD ■ Allegheny County Bar Association, Pittsburgh, PA ■ Community Legal Services, Philadelphia, PA ■ Faith Angell, US Magistrate Judge, Eastern District of PA, Philadelphia, PA—telephone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Dr. H. Goldman, Psychiatrist, Univ. of Md., Baltimore, MD—telephone ■ Dr. S. Whitman, Psychiatrist, Hahnemann Univ. Med. School, Philadelphia, PA—telephone ■ Dr. P. McHugh, Psychiatrist, Johns Hopkins Medical Center, Baltimore, MD—telephone ■ Dr. F. Wigley, Rheumatologist, Johns Hopkins Medical Center; Frances Scott Key Medical Center, Baltimore, MD—telephone ■ Dr. C. Kennedy, Psychologist, Nat. Institute of Mental Health, Rockville, MD—telephone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Office of General Counsel, Philadelphia, PA ■ Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, Wilmington, DE ■ Senator Rockefeller's Office, Huntington, WV ■ Bernard Popick, former BDI Director, Baltimore, MD—telephone ■ Art Simermeyer, former BDI Director, Baltimore, MD—telephone ■ Jean Hinckley, Former Litigation Staff Director, Baltimore, MD—telephone
Atlanta	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Camillus House, Miami, FL—Homeless ■ Salvation Army, Ft Lauderdale, FL ■ Health Crisis Network, Miami, FL—Aids ■ AID Atlanta, Inc., Atlanta, GA ■ Retarded Citizens of Atlanta, Atlanta, GA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Lyle Lieberman, Esq, Miami, FL ■ Legal Services of Greater Miami, Miami, FL ■ Rudolph Patterson, Esq., Macon, GA ■ Mary Ann Lubinski, Atlanta Legal Aid, Atlanta, GA ■ Legal Services of Middle Tennessee, Nashville, TN 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Miami Jackson Memorial Hospital, Miami, FL ■ Henderson Clinic, Ft. Lauderdale, FL ■ Dr. Azen, Internist, Miami, FL ■ Dr. Hudgins, Internist, Atlanta, GA ■ Grady Memorial Hospital, Atlanta, GA ■ Dr. Bruce Davis, CE Provider, Nashville, TN ■ Dr. David Gaw, CE Provider, Nashville, TN ■ Vanderbilt Medical Center, Nashville, TN ■ Vanderbilt Child Development Center, Nashville, TN ■ Meharry Medical School, Hubbard Gen. Hosp., Nashville, TN ■ Dr. S. Schams, Pediatrician, Chmn, Govt. Affairs Comm., TN Chap., Amer. Academy of Pediatrics, Greenville, TN—telephone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Office of General Counsel, Atlanta, GA ■ HRS, Broward Co., Ft. Lauderdale, FL ■ Dade County Public Schools, Special Ed. Programs, Miami, FL ■ State of Florida Public Defender's Office, Miami, FL ■ Veterans Administration RO, Atlanta, GA ■ Workers' Comp. Dept. State of GA, Atlanta, GA ■ Congressional Staffers representing Senator Nunn and Coverdell and Representatives Linder, Gingrich, Darden, Collins, Deal, and Rowland, Atlanta, GA ■ Vanderbilt Employee Benefits Center, Nashville, TN ■ Ken Dowd, former BDI specialist, Altamonte Springs, FL—telephone

REGION	ADVOCACY GROUPS	LEGAL/ REPRESENTATIVE COMMUNITY	CLINICS/ HOSPITALS	MISCELLANEOUS
Chicago		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Nancy Katz, Chicago Legal Aid Foundation, Chicago, IL ■ Southern Minnesota Legal Services, Minneapolis, MN 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Phil Bradley, HMO, SHARE, Chicago, IL ■ Dr. S. A. Berendi, Psychiatrist, Consultative Examinations, Inc., and Assistant Professor of Psychiatry, Rush School of Medicine, Chicago, IL—telephone ■ Dr. C. Cass, Family Physician, Springfield, OH—telephone ■ Dr. J. Rünke, Internist, Dir., Amer. Academy of Disability Examining Physicians, Chicago, IL—telephone ■ Dr. L. Miller, Dir., Employee Health Programs, Mayo Clinic, Rochester, MN—telephone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Railroad Retirement Board, Chicago, IL—telephone
Kansas City	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Coalition for Independence, Kansas City, MO—handicap facilitator 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Benefit Team Services, Kansas City, MO ■ Occudata Inc., Kansas City, MO ■ Wayne Radford, Topeka, KS ■ John Stevens, Topeka, KS ■ Allsup, Inc., St Louis, MO 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Dr. J. Hart, Physical Medicine & Rehabilitation, Jefferson City, MO—telephone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ HHS Regional Director, Kansas City, MO ■ Office of General Counsel, Kansas City, MO

REGION	ADVOCACY GROUPS	LEGAL/ REPRESENTATIVE COMMUNITY	CLINICS/ HOSPITALS	MISCELLANEOUS
Dallas		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Carl Weisbrod, Dallas, TX 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ T. Jackson, Medical Records Supervisor, Baptist Medical Center, Little Rock, AR—telephone ■ M. Maldonado, Release of Information Supervisor, Memorial Medical Center, Corpus Christi, TX—telephone ■ J. Hrachovy, Supervisor for Release of Information, Texas Tech Health Center, Lubbock, TX—telephone ■ M. Twiggs, Medical Records Supervisor, Acadiana Abstracting Consultants, Acadia, LA—telephone ■ P. Gregory, Medical Records Supervisor, Holt-Crock Clinic, Fort Smith, AR—telephone ■ Dr. R. Washington, Internist, Dallas, TX—telephone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Office of General Counsel, Dallas, TX
Denver	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Stout St. Clinic, Denver, CO—homeless ■ Ctr. for Independent Living, Denver, CO—handicap facilitator ■ The Gathering Place, Denver, CO—homeless, abused women ■ Sioux Tribal Leaders, Rapid City, SD ■ Rosebud Indian Reservation, Rosebud, SD ■ Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, Pine Ridge, SD ■ Yankton Sioux Tribe, Wagner, SD ■ Parents Let's Unite for Kids (PLUK), Billings, MT 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Dr. Ilke, Neo-natologist, Univ. of Colorado, Denver, CO ■ Dr. E. Alvarez, Indian Health Services, Kyle, SD ■ Dr. J. Hutchinson, Psychiatrist, Southwest Colorado Mental Health Center, Durango, CO—telephone ■ Dr. D. Hubbard, Medical Director, Valley Gardens Health Center, Renton, WA—telephone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Rural Social Services Office, Sheridan, WY ■ BIA Social Services, Pine Ridge, SD ■ Office of General Counsel, Denver, CO

REGION	ADVOCACY GROUPS	LEGAL/ REPRESENTATIVE COMMUNITY	CLINICS/ HOSPITALS	MISCELLANEOUS
San Francisco	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Walden House, Inc., S.F., CA—DA&A ■ Chinatown North Beach Mental Health Services, S.F., CA—treat mentally ill ■ Asian-Pacific Community Counseling, Sacramento, CA—treat mentally ill ■ Transitional Living and Support Group, Sacramento, CA—treat mentally ill ■ Advocates for the Disabled, Inc., Phoenix, AZ ■ Union of Pan Asian Communities, San Diego, CA ■ Chicano Federation of San Diego, CA ■ Project Home, Tucson, AZ ■ Tohono O'Odham Nation, Tucson, AZ—Indian Tribe ■ Superstition Mountain Mental Health, Apache Junction, AZ ■ Com-Care, Phoenix, AZ—mentally ill ■ Alpha Project, El Cajon, CA—homeless ■ Bayside Settlement House, San Diego, CA—Vietnamese, Cambodian, Laotian communities ■ San Diego AIDS Foundation, San Diego, CA ■ Advocates for the Disabled, Phoenix, AZ ■ Skid Row Mental Health, Los Angeles, CA ■ Para Los Ninos, Los Angeles, CA ■ Jorge Chuc, Community Rehab. Services, Los Angeles, CA ■ CARE Program, Long Beach, CA ■ AIDS Project Los Angeles, Hollywood, CA ■ Mental Health Assoc. & Mental Health Advocacy Services, Los Angeles, CA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Legal Services of Northern CA, Oakland, CA ■ Tretshock, McNamara & Clymer, Tucson, AZ ■ Phil Way, International Institute, Los Angeles, CA ■ N. T. Lieu, Legal Services, Pomona, CA ■ Louise A. Monaco, Los Angeles, CA ■ Joel Leidner, Los Angeles, CA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ La Frontera Center, Tucson, AZ ■ Dr. E. Randolph Soo Hoo, Western Occupational Health Centers, Tucson, AZ ■ George Delong, PhD., Behavioral Health System, Inc., Phoenix, AZ ■ Veterans Admin. Medical Center, Long Beach, CA ■ Dr. David Smith, Professor of Rehabilitation, Chief of Rheumatology Rehabilitation Section, University of Arizona, Tucson, AZ—telephone ■ Dr. Mary Susan Hansen, Psychiatrist, Medical Director of the Citywide Case Management Program, Tenderloin Clinic, San Francisco, CA—telephone ■ Dr. Richard Shadoan, Psychiatrist, San Francisco, CA—telephone ■ Dr. R. Grossman, Family Practice/Neurologist, Tucson, AZ—telephone ■ Dr. R. P. Liberman, Psychiatrist, West LA VA Medical Center, Los Angeles, CA—telephone ■ Dr. D. Atkin, Orthopedist, San Diego, CA—telephone ■ Dr. D. Kelsay, Internist, Loma Linda, CA—telephone ■ Dr. C. Libanati, Internist, Loma Linda School of Medicine, Loma Linda, CA—telephone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ California State Vocational Rehab., Sacramento, CA ■ Arizona Department of Economic Security, Phoenix, AZ ■ Private Secretary, Chandler, AZ—transcription service ■ North Communications, Santa Monica, CA

REGION	ADVOCACY GROUPS	LEGAL/ REPRESENTATIVE COMMUNITY	CLINICS/ HOSPITALS	MISCELLANEOUS
Seattle:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Seattle Indian Center, Seattle, WA—Indian facilitator ■ Downtown Emergency Service Center, Seattle, WA—homeless 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ NOSSCR, Seattle, WA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ MDSI Physician Group, Seattle, WA ■ Dr. James Read, Psychologist, Boise, ID—telephone ■ Dr. D. D. Smith, Internist/Pulmonologist, Everett, WA—telephone 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Office of General Counsel, Seattle, WA ■ Resource Center for the Handicapped, Seattle, WA ■ Belltown DSHS, Seattle, WA ■ Congressional Staffers representing Senator Murray and Representatives McDermott, Dunn, and Kreadler, Seattle, WA ■ Division of Alcohol & Abuse, State of WA, Seattle, WA ■ Burk Johnson, former BDI Reg. Rep., Russellville, Oregon—telephone
National	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Save Our Security (SOS) ■ Association of Retarded Citizens (ARC) ■ National Mental Health Association ■ AARP ■ National Alliance for Mentally Ill ■ United Cerebral Palsy Assn. ■ Older Women's League ■ Center for Health Policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ National Senior Citizens Law Center ■ NOSSCR, Washington, DC ■ Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, Washington, DC ■ George Washington Center for Health Policy, Washington, DC 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ HHS, Office of the Secretary ■ Administrative Conference of the US ■ Milton Carrow, Professor of Law, George Washington University, Washington, DC ■ Eileen Bradley, Business and Administration Law Division, OGC, HHS, Washington, DC ■ Peter Spencer, National Performance Review, Washington, DC ■ Patents & Trademarks, Wash., DC ■ Office of Technology Assessments, Wash., DC ■ General Accounting Office, Wash., DC ■ Office of Inspector General, Wash., DC ■ National Academy of Social Insurance Disability Project Panel, Wash., DC ■ Department of Justice, Washington, DC—telephone

REGION	ADVOCACY GROUPS	LEGAL/ REPRESENTATIVE COMMUNITY	CLINICS/ HOSPITALS	MISCELLANEOUS
Outreach Letters and Telephone Calls		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Judge Elizabeth Price, U.S. Attorney, Sacramento, CA ■ Jeanette Plant, U.S. Attorney, Baltimore, MD ■ Ami Hay, U.S. Attorney, Pittsburgh, PA ■ John Weinberg, U.S. District Court Judge, Seattle, WA ■ Eugene Smith, ABA, Senior Lawyers Division, Baltimore, MD ■ Clara Dworsky, ABA, Senior Lawyers Division, Houston, TX ■ Richard Wiley, ABA, Section of Administration Law and Regulations, Washington, D.C. ■ Charles Sabatino, ABA, Comm. on Legal Problems for the Elderly, Washington, D.C. ■ Nancy Coleman, ABA, Comm. on Legal Problems for the Elderly, Washington, D.C. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ American Hospital Assoc., Wash., DC ■ American Nurses Assoc., Wash., DC ■ National Medical Assoc., Wash., DC ■ American Psychiatric Assoc., Wash., DC ■ American Psychological Assoc., Wash., DC ■ National Assoc. of Social Workers, Wash., DC ■ Child Welfare League, Wash., DC ■ American Medical Assoc., Chicago, IL ■ Society for Hospital Social Work Administrators and Directors in Health Care, Chicago, IL ■ American Academy of Disability Examining Physicians, Chicago, IL ■ 36 Additional contacts made but not listed—can be furnished upon request 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Contacts were made with each of the 52 DDS parent agencies ■ Letters were sent to 84 professional associations and advisory groups

Focus Group Sites and Participants

SITE	DATE	GROUP COMPOSITION
Philadelphia, PA	11/30/93	DI Reconsideration SSI Initial Awards
Atlanta, GA	12/01/93	SSI Reconsideration DI Initial Awards
Denver, CO	12/02/93	SSI Claimants General Public
Bridgeport, CT	12/07/93	SSI Hearing DI Claimants
Chicago, IL	12/08/93	Spanish-Speaking Initial Awards General Public
San Jose, CA	12/09/93	DI Hearing Vietnamese-Speaking Applicants and Initial Awards

External Benchmarking Sites

ORGANIZATION	LOCATION
Health & Welfare Canada Income Security Programs	Ottawa, Canada
Anne Arundel Medical Center, Pathways Program	Annapolis, MD
Mayo Clinic Disability Program	Rochester, MN
Minneapolis Children's Hospital	Minneapolis, MN
Blue Cross of California	Los Angeles, CA
Liberty Mutual Insurance	Boston, MA
Standard Insurance Company	Portland, OR
UNUM Corporation	Portland, ME
Department of Labor and Industries, Workers' Compensation	Olympia, WA
Immigration and Naturalization, Board of Immigration Appeals	Arlington, VA
Veterans Administration, Regional Office	New York City, New York
Federal Express Corporation	Columbia, MD
Southwest Airlines	Dallas, TX
Texas Instruments	Plano, TX

Appendix IV

Model Assumptions

Computer software packages were used to model and simulate the effects the changes in this proposal will have at both the micro (local office) and macro (national) level. Some of the general guidelines and assumptions used for the proposed process are listed below.

- Due to increased public information programs, claimants will be better prepared with respect to information and documentation needs prior to filing their claim.
- The time that disability claim managers spend interviewing will be reduced as a decision support system will assist them in asking the claimant impairment-specific medical and nonmedical questions. Based on triage decisions they make throughout the interview, the disability claim managers will ask the claimant only the questions that are pertinent to the decisionmaking process.
- The application and medical certification forms will be scanned or electronically transferred and associated with the electronic record. A disability claim manager will only key identifying information from the application form into the electronic record.
- Claim files will be much smaller in size as SSA accepts medical certification statements in lieu of extensive medical documentation.
- Time to obtain medical evidence will decrease as collection focuses on core diagnostic and functional information needed to make a decision and uses a standardized form.
- Changes to the current process, such as the disability claim manager concept, the predenial interview, and fully rationalized disability decisions, will increase claimant satisfaction with SSA's decisional process and ultimately decrease the appeal rate and number of refilings.
- A decision support system and an electronic record will assist adjudicators to prepare notices of decision.
- The percentage of claimants represented will decrease as the processing time decreases, claimant participation increases, and increased customer service leads to a higher level of claimant satisfaction and understanding of the process.

Guidelines and assumptions used for the proposed process include those listed below.

A brief description of each task is provided. The task time, shown in minutes, is the estimated time it will take employees to complete the described work. The lapse time, shown in work days, represents the amount of time between actions. Three numbers are provided: the middle number represents the most common task or lapse time, while the first and third numbers represent the low and high extremes. The task and lapse times shown represent times likely when the proposed process is fully up and running.

Percentages are shown to represent frequency of occurrences.

Task Description	Task or Lapse Time or Frequency of Occurrence
Preliminary inquiry interviewing time	10-15-20 minutes
Lapse time between inquiry interview and scheduled appointment	3-4-5 days
Percentage of cases on which nonmedical development is deferred	50%
Application interview time	30-45-50 minutes
Preliminary nonmedical development and review time	20-40-60 minutes
Medical evidence request times: Medical evidence of record Consultative examination Functional assessment	10-15-20 minutes 10-15-20 minutes 10-15-20 minutes
Medical evidence analysis time: Medical evidence of record Consultative examination Functional assessment	10-15-20 minutes 10-15-20 minutes 20-25-30 minutes
Percentage of cases requiring medical consultation: Medical evidence of record Consultative examination Functional assessment	25% 25% 40%
Medical consultation time	25-30-45 minutes
Lapse time between request for medical consultation and completion of task	1-3-5 days

Task Description	Task or Lapse Time or Frequency of Occurrence
<p>Medical evidence receipt lapse time:</p> <p>Medical evidence of record Consultative examination Functional assessment</p>	<p>4-10-20 days 6-10-14 days 6-10-14 days</p>
<p>Predenial interviews:</p> <p>Preliminary telephone contact time</p> <p>Percentage of cases requesting face-to-face interview</p> <p>Lapse time between telephone contact and face-to-face interview</p> <p>Predenial interview time</p> <p>Percentage of cases where additional documentation submitted after predenial interview</p> <p>Lapse time between interview and submission of evidence</p> <p>Analysis time</p>	<p>5-10-20 minutes</p> <p>50%</p> <p>1-2-4 days</p> <p>30-45-60 minutes</p> <p>50%</p> <p>6-10-14 days</p> <p>10-30-45 minutes</p>
<p>Nonmedical Development and Payment Effectuation</p> <p>Lapse time between claimant contact and pre-effectuation interview</p> <p>Interview and review of evidence</p> <p>Percentage of cases where documentation submitted after pre-effectuation interview</p> <p>Lapse time between interview and submission of evidence</p>	<p>3-4-5 days</p> <p>60-140-180 minutes</p> <p>75%</p> <p>2-10-18 days</p>
<p>Preparation of notices</p>	<p>20-30-40 minutes</p>
<p>Percentage of claimants filing a request for hearing</p>	<p>50%</p>
<p>Lapse time between claimant receiving denial notice and filing an appeal</p>	<p>1-30-60 days</p>
<p>Appeal request interview time</p>	<p>20-25-30 minutes</p>
<p>Initial appeal file review time</p>	<p>10-15-30 minutes</p>

Task Description	Task or Lapse Time or Frequency of Occurrence
Lapse time between adjudication officer receiving case and telephone contact(s)	7-9-10 days
Preliminary telephone contact time with claimant and/or representative	20-30-45 minutes
Percentage of claimants represented	50%
Personal Conference: Percentage of cases where a personal conference is requested Lapse time between requesting and holding the personal conference Personal conference time Percentage of cases requiring time for submission of additional evidence after personal conference Lapse time between personal conference and submission of evidence Analysis time of evidence Analysis and preparation of allowance Analysis and preparation of stipulations for administrative law judge (ALJ) Lapse time between decision and issuance of stipulations	50% 5-10-15 days 30-45-60 minutes 30% 10-20-30 days 10-20-30 minutes 30-45-60 minutes 45-60-75 minutes 2 days
Scheduling of hearing	45 days after first adjudication officer-level contact
Time for ALJ prehearing review	20-40-60 minutes

Task Description	Task or Lapse Time or Frequency of Occurrence
Hearing:	
Length of hearing	20-40-60 minutes
Percentage of cases where ALJ grants time after the hearing for submission of evidence	10%
Lapse time between hearing and submission of evidence	10-20-30 days
Lapse time between receipt of evidence and ALJ review	1-3-5 days
Analysis of additional evidence time	20-30-40 minutes
Analysis and preparation of allowance	30-45-60 minutes
Instructions for preparation of denial decision	10-15-20 minutes
Analysis and preparation of denial decision	60-90-120 minutes
Final review and sign-off time	10-15-20 minutes
Percentage of indirect time (i.e., leave, training, etc.)	40%
Percentage of employee direct time spent on disability tasks	50%
Percentage of cases selected for own motion review	5%
Time lapse for review	8-10-12 days
Time spent on own motion review	120-180-240 minutes
Percentage of cases selected for post-effectuation quality review	5%
Time lapse for review	n/a

Task Description	Task or Lapse Time or Frequency of Occurrence
Miscellaneous assumptions:	
Percentage of claimants bringing evidence to the interview	70%
Sufficient to decide the case	25%
Percentage allowed	80%
Percentage denied	20%
Not sufficient to decide case	75%
Medical evidence of record obtained	10%
Functional assessment obtained	90%
Percentage of claimants not bringing evidence to the interview	30%
Percentage of claimants with medical sources	75%
Medical evidence of record obtained	10%
Functional assessment obtained	90%
Percentage of claimants with no medical sources	25%
Consultative examination obtained	100%
Overall percentage of cases allowed	60%

The following table provides a comparison of the number of different employees that are likely to make some work investment in an individual claim at each decisional level in the current and proposed processes.

Type of Claim	Current Process	Proposed Process
Initial Allowance:		
DI	26	8
SSI	19	7
Initial Denial	16	7
Recon Allowance:		
DI	36	n/a
SSI	29	n/a
Recon Denial	24	n/a
Prehearing Allowance:		
DI	n/a	11
SSI	n/a	10
Hearing Allowance:		
DI	45	14
SSI	33	13
Hearing Denial	34	12
Appeals Council Own Motion Review	43	16-17

Proposal for an Implementation Blueprint

Building a redesigned disability claim process will not be an easy task—impacts will be felt by almost everyone internal and external to SSA who is involved in the disability claim process. Claimants, their representatives, disability advocate organizations, professional associations, SSA and DDS employees and employee representatives will feel the effects of the transition to a new way of doing business.

There will be a vast number of decisions to be made about the way the new process will be built and its infrastructure designed. Timing of the myriad decisions is crucial to ensure that required organizational, budgetary, human resource, technological, logistical, and regulatory changes occur in the proper sequence.

The Team has developed a proposal that outlines the most significant redesign implementation steps. The steps are grouped according to areas of impact. Some of the steps will be sequential while others will be simultaneous.

I. Organization

SSA will develop an organizational structure that ensures coordination and effective support of the entire disability claim process. An implementation team will be established to plan and coordinate the general aspects of the redesign changes with existing SSA components, States, unions, and professional associations.

In addition to implementing the proposed process, the implementation team will be responsible for determining the impacts on other business processes. Some of these impacts may require changes in other processes.

The following steps will be completed in order to achieve these goals:

- Obtain executive approval to proceed with implementation
- Develop disability process management structure/organization/ownership
- Build implementation team
- Develop plan for change management
- Develop method for processing current work while implementation takes place
- Outline interdependent steps of implementation
- Analyze risk factors to be encountered in meeting timeframes
- Create clear objectives to provide rapid recognition of improvement/success

- Establish tangible success scorecard
- Establish major milestones and managerial checkpoints for implementation
- Monitor progress and adjust implementation schedules accordingly for future sites
- Complete first implementation phase
- Analyze success of first phase, make necessary implementation changes and prepare for additional implementation sites
- Complete full implementation

II. Communications

SSA will develop a comprehensive communications plan that systematically and logically addresses the needs of everyone associated with the disability claim process and enhances the implementation of the redesigned process. The following steps will be completed in order to achieve this goal:

- Determine who will need to be notified of the new process and at what intervals
- Develop models needed to assist staff, claimants and stakeholders to visualize the new organization, new roles, new responsibilities
- Select communications media, including new methods or modes
- Determine communications tools to be used in providing continuing updates throughout the implementation process
- Design communications plan
- Schedule communications releases
- Begin media campaign to describe new process
- Begin media campaign to describe interim measures to get to new process
- Notify stakeholders, employees, and other interested parties of initial sites selected and implementation schedule
- Announce achievement of successfully completed milestones

III. Program Management

A. Costs

SSA will determine the full cost of the redesigned disability claim process, its implementation and its related impact. The following steps will be completed in order to achieve this goal:

- Estimate cost of new process operation
- Obtain necessary funding for first-phase operating expenses
- Estimate initial implementation costs
- Obtain necessary funding for first-phase implementation costs
- Determine impact of new process on current DDS budgets and indirect costs to the States and take necessary resulting actions
- Develop method for tracking and monitoring implementation costs

- Monitor process and implementation costs, making adjustments as necessary

B. Management Information

SSA will develop the means to gather, analyze and report the information required to operate the redesigned disability claim process. The following steps will be completed in order to achieve this goal:

- Establish management information needs for oversight agencies
- Establish management information needs for SSA
- Establish management information needs for implementation site employees
- Design and test validity of new management information reporting mechanisms
- Institute new management information system

C. Quality

As an important element in the redesigned process, SSA will develop new methods for assuring the delivery of world-class service. The new methods will be integrated with training, policy, and management information facets of the redesigned process. The following steps will be completed in order to achieve this goal:

- Design quality control process
- Test and validate quality control process
- Establish quality feedback mechanisms
- Institute new quality control process

D. State Roles

SSA will analyze comments received during the 60-day dialogue period and make determinations regarding State roles. The following steps will be completed in order to achieve this goal:

- Identify where DDS employees fit in the new process
- Determine regulatory and statutory changes needed
- Negotiate changes under current statute and regulations for implementation sites

IV. Human Resources

A. Training

Major changes arising out of the new way of doing business mandate that employees be fully trained to meet the needs of the new process. Much training will be done on a large scale in short periods of time. Alternate training media, e.g., satellite training, self-paced computer-based training, videotape training, etc. will be used to reach large audiences effectively. The following steps will be completed in order to achieve this goal:

- Assign lead for developing, organizing and managing the training program
- Determine national and site-specific training needs
- Determine what instructions need to be written
- Ascertain format for training materials
- Develop means to ensure current work is completed while training takes place
- Establish training timetable
- Determine teaching resource needs and source of those resources
- Obtain instructor resources
- Obtain training supplies
- Secure necessary training facilities
- Plan and coordinate training sessions
- Begin training
- Monitor training results and make adjustments as necessary
- Complete all initial training activities

B. Personnel

SSA will effectively prepare for and, to the extent possible, minimize negative effects of the transition to the redesigned process on employees. Plans will consider the effect on the work environment, career enhancements, job responsibilities, possible workforce shifts, and performance evaluation. The following steps will be completed:

- Determine volume and qualifications of staff needed to perform new process
- Create, modify, or eliminate job types for the new process
- Develop change management assistance for employees
- Develop performance monitoring systems and incentives
- Determine tools employees need to perform new process
- Develop position descriptions and performance plans
- Establish long-term plan to ensure national availability of qualified staff
- Analyze staff availability at implementation sites for new process and old process
- Determine anticipated costs of moving personnel to work sites, temporarily and/or permanently
- Determine staffing needs
- Obtain necessary funding to move staff
- Obtain tools for employees
- Establish local management and key staff teams
- Select remaining staff
- Move staff as necessary
- Begin new process

V. Statutory/Regulatory/Policy

A. Policy

Extensive policy changes will take place prior to and during process implementation. As regulatory and statutory modifications occur, procedural re-writes will address their impact on SSA claim processing policy. New, more effective means of organizing and issuing Agency policy will be used to accomplish these tasks. The following steps will be completed in order to achieve these goals:

- Ascertain what procedures and workflows need to be modified, eliminated, or established
- Determine appropriate policy and procedure format(s)
- Develop screens and forms to be incorporated in new process
- Determine methods for policy and procedure dissemination
- Develop method for monitoring policy implementation
- Design new workflow
- Write procedures needed to nationally implement immediate changes
- Issue new procedures
- Monitor, analyze and re-write procedures as necessary
- Write procedures to support regulatory and statutory changes
- Issue long-term procedures
- Monitor, analyze, and re-write procedures as necessary

B. Statutory/Regulatory

A large number of regulations and statutory sections will need to be modified to support the implementation of the redesigned process. SSA will develop faster, more effective means for gaining the necessary changes. The following steps will be completed in order to achieve this goal:

- Write necessary regulations to support new process
- Propose elimination of unnecessary regulations
- Obtain final approval for regulatory changes
- Seek changes to necessary statutes to support new process
- Congressional approval of statutory changes
- Establish methods for statutory and regulatory change dissemination
- Disseminate statutory and regulatory changes to all necessary parties

VI. Logistics

A. Implementation sites

Implementation will impact the physical work environment. Decisions on number, location, size, and layout of offices will be designed into the implementation plan. The following steps will be taken:

- Ascertain type of sites needed
- Analyze demographic, geographic, and fiscal considerations for site selection
- Select site management team to orchestrate site preparation
- Determine number of first-implementation sites
- Recommend implementation sites
- Receive implementation site approval
- Evaluate implementation facilities for necessary space and layout modifications
- Determine new or additional equipment and furniture needs at implementation sites
- Evaluate supplies and forms needed for new process
- Obtain funding for site work, supplies and equipment
- Prepare site and equipment leases
- Order supplies and forms needed for new process
- Order new equipment
- Complete site preparation work at implementation facilities
- Install equipment
- Deliver supplies and forms to sites
- Deliver new employees' possessions

B. Technology

Increased use of automated processes; decisional support software; electronic claimant records; electronic interaction between SSA, claimants, and the medical community; and telecommunications in the redesigned process dictates that SSA expand and accelerate the current comprehensive technology design plan. The following steps will be completed to achieve these goals:

- Review and modify pertinent Agency tactical plans
- Analyze impact of change on computer programs currently being used or planned in SSA
- Reevaluate hardware and software needs
- Modify existing SSA software to support the new process
- Develop and validate new software
- Procure hardware
- Install necessary hardware
- Install software
- Test hardware and software, making necessary adjustments
- Implement new systems

Summary of Current Statutory and Regulatory Provisions Affected by the New Disability Process

Title II of the Social Security Act

- Disability Determinations: § 221(a) through (j)
- Disability Insurance Benefit Payments (Definition of Disability): § 223(d)(5)(B)

Title XVI of the Social Security Act

- Meaning of Terms (Aged, Blind, or Disabled Individual): § 1614(a)(3)(G)
- Administration: § 1633

Regulations (Parts 404, 416 and 422)

The following sections of Subpart G of Reg. No. 4 and Subpart C of Reg. No. 16:

- | | |
|--------------------|---|
| §§ 404.610/416.310 | What makes an application a claim for benefits |
| § 404.614 | When an application or other form is considered filed |
| § 416.325 | When an application is considered filed |

The following sections of Subpart J of Reg. No. 4 and Subpart N of Reg. No. 16:

- | | |
|---------------------|--|
| §§ 404.900/416.1400 | Introduction |
| §§ 404.902/416.1402 | Administrative actions that are initial determinations |
| §§ 404.904/416.1404 | Notice of the initial determination |
| §§ 404.905/416.1405 | Effect of an initial determination |
| §§ 404.907/416.1407 | Reconsideration—general |
| §§ 404.908/416.1408 | Parties to a reconsideration |
| §§ 404.909/416.1409 | How to request reconsideration |
| §§ 404.913/416.1413 | Reconsideration procedures |
| § 416.1413a | Reconsiderations of initial determinations on applications |
| §§ 404.929/416.1429 | Hearing before an administrative law judge—general |
| §§ 404.930/416.1430 | Availability of a hearing before an administrative law judge |
| §§ 404.932/416.1432 | Parties to a hearing before an administrative law judge |
| §§ 404.933/416.1433 | How to request a hearing before an administrative law judge |

§§ 404.935/416.1435	Submitting evidence prior to a hearing before an administrative law judge
§§ 404.936/416.1436	Time and place for a hearing before an administrative law judge
§§ 404.938/416.1438	Notice of a hearing before an administrative law judge
§§ 404.939/416.1439	Objections to the issues
§§ 404.940/416.1440	Disqualification of the administrative law judge
§§ 404.941/416.1441	Prehearing case review
§§ 404.944/416.1444	Administrative law judge hearing procedures—general
§§ 404.946/416.1446	Issues before an administrative law judge
§§ 404.948/416.1448	Deciding a case without an oral hearing before an administrative law judge
§§ 404.955/416.1455	The effect of an administrative law judge's decision
§§ 404.960/416.1460	Vacating a dismissal of a request for a hearing before an administrative law judge
§§ 404.961/416.1461	Prehearing and posthearing conferences
§§ 404.967/416.1467	Appeals Council review—general
§§ 404.968/416.1468	How to request Appeals Council review
§§ 404.969/416.1469	Appeals Council initiates review
§§ 404.970/416.1470	Cases the Appeals Council will review
§§ 404.971/416/1471	Dismissal by the Appeals Council
§§ 404.972/416.1472	Effect of dismissal of request for Appeals Council review
§§ 404.973/416.1473	Notice of Appeals Council review
§§ 404.976/416.1476	Procedures before Appeals Council on review
§§ 404.977/416.1477	Case remanded by the Appeals Council
§§ 404.979/416.1479	Decision of Appeals Council
§§ 404.981/416.1481	Effect of Appeals Council's decision or denial of review
§§ 404.982/416.1482	Extension of time to file action in Federal district court
§§ 404.992/416.1492	Notice of a revised determination or decision
§§ 404.993/416.1493	Effect of revised determination or decision

The following sections of Subpart P of Reg. No. 4 and Subpart I of Reg. No. 16:

§§ 404.1501/416.901	Scope of subpart
§§ 404.1502/416.902	General definitions and terms for this subpart
§§ 404.1503/416/903	Who makes disability and blindness determinations

§§ 404.1505/416.905	Basic definition of disability
§§ 404.1511/416.911	Definition of a disabling impairment
§§ 404.1512/416.912	Evidence of your impairment
§§ 404.1513/416.913	Medical evidence of your impairment
§§ 404.1515/416.915	Where and how to submit evidence
§§ 404.1517/416.917	Consultative examination at our expense
§§ 404.1519/416.919	The consultative examination
§§ 404.1519a/416.919a	When we will purchase a consultative examination and how we will use it
§§ 404.1519k/416.919k	Purchase of medical examinations, laboratory tests, and other services
§§ 404.1519m/416.919m	Diagnostic tests or procedures
§§ 404.1519n/416.919n	Informing the examining physician or psychologist of examination scheduling, report content, and signature requirements
§§ 404.1519q/416.919q	Conflict of interest
§§ 404.1519s/416.919s	Authorizing and monitoring the consultative examination
§§ 404.1519t/416.919t	Consultative examination oversight
§§ 404.1520/416.920	Evaluation of disability in general
§§ 404.1520a/416.920a	Evaluation of mental impairments
§§ 404.1521/416.921	What we mean by an impairment(s) that is not severe
§§ 404.1522/416.922	When you have two or more unrelated impairments—initial claims
§§ 404.1523/416.923	Multiple impairments
§ 416.924	How we determine disability for children
§ 416.924a	Age as a factor of evaluation in childhood disability
§ 416.924b	Functioning in children
§ 416.924c	Other factors we will consider
§ 416.924d	Individualized functional assessment for children
§ 416.924e	Guidelines for determining disability using the individualized functional assessment
§ 404.1525/416.925	Listing of impairments in Appendix 1
§§ 404.1526/416.926	Medical equivalence
§ 416.926a	Equivalence for children
§§ 404.1527/416.927	Evaluating medical opinions about your impairment(s) or disability
§§ 404.1529/416.929	How we evaluate symptoms, including pain
§ 416.931	The meaning of presumptive disability or presumptive blindness
§ 416.932	When presumptive payments begin and end
§ 416.933	How we make a finding of presumptive disability or presumptive blindness

§ 416.934	Impairments which may warrant a finding of presumptive disability or presumptive blindness
§§ 404.1545/416.945	Your residual functional capacity
§§ 404.1546/416.946	Responsibility for assessing and determining residual functional capacity
§§ 404.1560/416.960	When your vocational background will be considered
§§ 404.1561/416.961	Your ability to do work depends upon your residual functional capacity
§§ 404.1562/416.962	If you have done only arduous unskilled physical labor
§§ 404.1563/416.963	Your age as a vocational factor
§§ 404.1564/416.964	Your education as a vocational factor
§§ 404.1565/416.965	Your work experience as a vocational factor
§§ 404.1566/416.966	Work which exists in the national economy
§§ 404.1567/416.967	Physical exertion requirements
§§ 404.1568/416.968	Skill requirements
§§ 404.1569/416.969	Listing of Medical-Vocational Guidelines in Appendix 2
§§ 404.1569a/416.969a	Exertional and nonexertional limitations
§§ 404.1574/416.974	Evaluation guides if you are an employee
§§ 404.1575/416.975	Evaluation guides if you are self-employed
§§ 404.1584/416.984	Evaluation of work activity of blind people
Appendix 1	Listing of Impairments
Appendix 2	Medical-Vocational Guidelines

The entire Subpart Q of Reg. No.4 and the entire Subpart J of Reg. No. 16

The following sections of Subpart R of Reg. No.4 and Subpart O of Reg. No. 16:

§§ 404.1700/416.1500	Introduction
§§ 404.1703/416.1503	Definitions
§§ 404.1705/416.1505	Who may be your representative
§§ 404.1707/416.1507	Appointing a representative
§§ 404.1710/416.1510	Authority of a representative
§§ 404.1715/416.1515	Notice or request to a representative
§§ 404.1720/416.1520	Fee for a representative's services
§§ 404.1725/416.1525	Request for approval of a fee
§§ 404.1728/416.1528	Proceedings before a State or Federal court
§§ 404.1730/416.1530	Payment of fees
§§ 404.1735/416.1535	Services in a proceeding under title II of the Act

§§ 404.1740/416.1540 Rules governing representatives
§§ 404.1745/416.1545 What happens to a representative who
breaks the rules

The following sections of Subpart B of Reg. No. 22:

§ 422.130 Claim Procedure
§ 422.140 Reconsideration of initial determination

The following sections of Subpart C of Reg. No. 22:

§ 422.203 Hearings
§ 422.205 Review by Appeals Council
§ 422.210 Court review

The following sections of Subpart F of Reg. No. 22:

§ 422.505 Applications and related forms for
retirement, survivors, and disability
insurance benefit programs.
§ 422.525 Where applications and other forms are
available
§ 422.527 Private printing and modification of
prescribed applications and other forms

Disability Information Packets

All forms that a claimant will need to file an application for benefits will be contained in the disability information packet which SSA will make available to the public. Claimants may obtain these packets by visiting or calling any local SSA office or calling the toll-free 800 telephone number. SSA will also make these packets available at other public locations such as post offices, public libraries, and local, State and Federal offices. Bulk supplies of the packets will also be available to third parties who play a role in the intake process. The information packet will contain two forms—an application and a medical certification form. During the Team's research, which included benchmarking activities, it was discovered that other government agencies and private organizations successfully utilize this approach.

—Application Form

This is a “starter” form that serves the purpose of initiating the application process. It will solicit basic identification data regarding the claimant as well as information concerning the nature of the benefits sought (i.e., DI, SSI, children's, widow's, etc.). The application form will ask for minimal information, will be easily understood, and will require little or no assistance. The claimant's signature will be required on the form to meet the legal requirements of a formal “application.”

—Medical Certification Form

This form is for completion by the claimant's primary treating source. Rather than systematically collecting all medical evidence of record, SSA will use this form to solicit core diagnostic and functional information from the treating source. The form will use both narrative and “check box” formats to elicit identification of each of the claimant's medically determinable impairments; the objective data (signs, symptoms, clinical and laboratory findings) supporting the diagnoses; the treatment prescribed and response; the onset and expected duration of the impairments; and an assessment of the claimant's ability to perform work-related activities. The treating source signature certifies that the information is accurate and based upon records within their possession, which they agree to promptly furnish if requested.

The medical certification concept is similar to that used by many private disability insurance carriers, workers' compensation programs throughout the country, and the Canadian Government. The SSA medical report builds upon the concept of the forms used by other organizations to target the specific information called for in the new process.

SSA Publications

SSA rules, pamphlets, factsheets, flyers, posters, and other materials, will be printed and available for distribution throughout the country at designated public places accessible to claimants, representatives, the medical community, public and private social service agencies, third parties, and advocacy groups. This will ensure that these partners in the new process can be well informed and will allow SSA to achieve its goal of providing world-class service to its customers.

Appendix VII Process Change Recommendations That Were Outside the Parameters

In conducting the internal and external scans, the Reengineering Team received many ideas and suggestions for change. The ideas that follow are recurring suggestions for change that the Reengineering Team did not consider because they exceeded the scope of the Team's mission or the parameters established by the Executive Steering Committee. They may be considered for further study or action by SSA or Congress, as appropriate. Inclusion here does not constitute endorsement by the Reengineering Team.

Time-Limited Benefits

Consider time-limited benefits which would subject individuals, whose impairments are expected to improve or where medical improvement is possible, to automatic benefit termination after a specified time. Duration of entitlement would depend on the nature of the impairment, i.e., the timeframe could vary according to the impairment the same way the current continuing disability review diary duration does. Individuals would be notified at the time their claims are allowed how long they will receive benefits. Before the automatic termination of benefits, SSA would notify individuals when benefits would end, and explain that they must refile or submit new medical information that confirms they continue to meet the definition of disability. Time-limited benefits would counteract the mindset that disability benefits are permanent. To be successful, time-limited benefits would have to be linked to a return to work program or participation in vocational rehabilitation services.

Integration of Mandatory Vocational Rehabilitation Services for Claimants

Consider focusing more resources on enforcing vocational rehabilitation participation, and discussing rehabilitation and return to work earlier in the application process. At the time of an initial determination, a vocational rehabilitation program should be prescribed and required for the claimant to follow during the period of entitlement. Special efforts should be made so that rehabilitation agencies would work with disabled children, drug addicts, and alcoholics. If SSA determines that the rehabilitation program is not proceeding as scheduled, a new decision, based on current information, would be made regarding the claimant's ability to successfully continue and complete the rehabilitation program.

Changes in Payment of Benefits to Certain SSI Claimants

Consider providing benefits to some SSI claimants in the form of program support rather than cash. For example, some children might benefit from a system for vouchering or crediting funds for medical or therapeutic treatment, remedial education, and/or job training. This would present an opportunity for disabled children to get additional assistance with education, learn job skills and maximize their potential. Disabled child recipients should be required to stay in school, or if homebound, continue in an educational program as a requirement to continue receiving benefits. Similarly, for adults receiving disability based on substance addiction, a system could be established for vouchering or crediting funds for medical or therapeutic treatment, education, job training, and for food, clothing, and lodging.

Incentives for the Medical Community to Provide Evidence on Their Patients or to be Consultative Examination Providers

To enhance SSA's ability to obtain needed medical evidence, consider enacting legislation to require release of medical information to SSA without the need for a signed consent form or based on signature in file and to require timely release of any physician or hospital records produced or maintained by a Medicare/Medicaid provider. Legislation should also be enacted to allow physicians to repay their federally funded medical school loans by working as consultative examination providers or SSA medical consultants. SSA should also consider seeking a special tax credit system for reimbursement to medical providers for evidence of record on their patients. Physicians who opt for this new tax credit would be required to participate in training on completion of forms and to submit timely and accurate information.

Establish One Court to Handle All SSA Disability Cases

Consider supporting the establishment of a new Federal court of appeals with sole jurisdiction for reviewing the final decision of the Secretary in disability cases. District courts would no longer have jurisdiction in disability cases.

Eliminate SSA's Involvement With Representative Payees

Consider providing direct payment to all adult claimants unless they have a legal representative or have been found legally incompetent. SSA would no longer develop for capability or make determinations as to whether benefits are being used in an individual's best interests.

Change the Administrative Law Judge Position to a Hearings Officer Position

There are a number of Federal agencies whose administrative appeals processes use hearing officers or administrative judges who are not

appointed as administrative law judges pursuant to the Administrative Procedure Act. Because the SSA hearing process is nonadversarial and informal, it was suggested that there is no need for an Administrative Procedure Act-protected administrative law judge.

Eliminate the Two-Year Waiting Period for Medicare

DI claimants must be eligible for disability benefits for two years before they can qualify for Medicare, while in most States SSI claimants receive Medicaid concurrently with the SSI award. Claimants who file for both DI and SSI may receive Medicaid coverage with SSI, but may lose it when DI payments begin after the end of the 5-month waiting period. In many cases, the claimant's primary concern is for medical care; enabling access to appropriate medical care could lead to or speed up medical recovery.

Require Claimants to Establish That Employers Have Made all the Accommodations Required Under the Americans With Disabilities Act

The Americans with Disabilities Act defines an individual with a disability as someone who has, or is perceived to have, or who has a history of a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities. Any employer with 25 or more employees (15 or more employees as of June 26, 1994) is prohibited from discriminating against qualified job applicants and employees with disabilities. Qualified individuals are those who can perform the essential functions of the job they hold or desire, with or without reasonable accommodations. Consider requiring individuals who are qualified under the Americans with Disabilities Act to have a signed statement from their former employer which outlines the steps that have been taken to make reasonable accommodations for the disability.

Provide Presumptive Disability Payments in DI Claims

Consider providing presumptive disability benefits to DI claimants. Presumptive disability benefits are now provided prior to final decision to SSI claimants who are likely to be allowances. These payments can be given for up to six months and, if the claimant is denied, no repayment of the benefit is required. There is a growing number of DI claimants with the same financial needs as SSI claimants.

Establish a Family Maximum for SSI Benefits

Consider establishing a family maximum for SSI benefits as exists in DI. With the increasing number of children receiving SSI disability benefits, consideration should be given to equalizing Federal cash support to DI and SSI families.

Eliminate the Waiting Period for DI Benefits

Consider eliminating the five-month waiting period. The same definition of disability is used for both DI and SSI claimants, yet DI claimants must serve a five-month waiting period before they are eligible for DI disability benefits.

Limit Payment of Disability Benefits to Residents of the United States

Consider ceasing the payment of disability benefits to people who reside outside the United States. The vocational factors that are considered in determining ability to work are based on the United States national job economy and it should not be assumed that an individual would meet the SSA definition of disability in another labor market.

Change the Earnings Amounts for Determining Trial Work Period Months

Consider setting more reasonable levels for determining trial work period months to encourage claimants to attempt returning to work.

Use a Single Earnings Test for All Claimants

Consider standardizing the annual work test for all claimants under age 65. This would serve as an incentive for claimants to return to work and reduce the number of work issue continuing disability reviews that need to be developed.

Reduce the Number of Actions Required to Process Multiple Benefit Payments on One Social Security Number

Issuance of multiple payments on one social security number is very labor intensive. To simplify the process, consider adopting one of the following options: Issue a single check for all benefits due on the beneficiary's account number to the beneficiary and require him/her to disburse monies to the auxiliaries; pay total family benefits to the head of the household (if other than the beneficiary) which would eliminate multiple checks, multiple letters, and multiple payment actions dealing with the family unit; or pay a flat rate for each auxiliary. This would eliminate the need to calculate auxiliary benefits on each account.

Change the Definition of Disability to Eliminate the Consideration of Age, Education, and Previous Work in Determining Disability

Reconsider the definition of disability so that only medical factors are considered. With the enactment of the ADA, the number of job opportunities and the availability of services to people with disabilities has been greatly enhanced and determining disability should be based on a strict medical test.