

# Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 Fiscal Year 2023 Evaluation Plan



Securing today  
and tomorrow



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## Selected Abbreviations

<b>DDS</b>	Disability Determination Services
<b>DI</b>	Disability Insurance
<b>FY</b>	Fiscal Year
<b>OASDI</b>	Old-Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance
<b>OASI</b>	Old-Age and Survivors Insurance
<b>OACT</b>	Office of the Chief Actuary
<b>OMB</b>	Office of Management and Budget
<b>RDRC</b>	Retirement and Disability Research Consortium
<b>SSA</b>	Social Security Administration
<b>SSAB</b>	Social Security Advisory Board
<b>SSI</b>	Supplemental Security Income

# INTRODUCTION

The *Fiscal Year (FY) 2023 Annual Evaluation Plan* describes our most significant evaluation and evidence-building activities planned for FY 2023. We define significant activities as those required by law, address the President's priorities, or support the goals in our FYs 2022–2026 Agency Strategic Plan. We identified 16 activities for this Evaluation Plan.

In addition to this Evaluation Plan, we will continue to describe our evaluation and evidence-building activities in three separate documents. In the *Supplemental Security Income (SSI) Program Technical Materials Supporting Our Annual Budget*, the section *Extramural Research, Demonstrations, and Outreach* describes many of our activities. Our *FY 2021 Annual Performance Report* includes an appendix titled *Program Assessments* that describes our ongoing studies and surveys designed to assess our programs. The *Pilot Program Metrics* section of the *Limitations on Administrative Expenses* section of our annual budget describes our pilot program evaluations. This *FY 2023 Evaluation Plan* identifies the most significant activities from these three documents, and it includes the additional information required by the *Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018*.

When we develop our evaluation and evidence-building activities, we consult with internal and external stakeholders. For example, our Associate Commissioner for the Office of Research, Evaluation, and Statistics sends out an annual memo to the Deputy Commissioners from all our major offices to obtain information on their research and evaluation needs. Our Associate Commissioner for the Office of Research, Demonstration, and Employment Support holds regular meetings with representatives from all of our major offices to provide updates and obtain information on our demonstration projects. The external stakeholders that provide us with information on our research and evaluation activities include the Social Security Advisory Board (SSAB), the Congress, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB), and academics and practitioners who serve on the Technical Evaluation Panels we use to develop our research and demonstration projects.

For each significant activity, we provide the information required in the Evidence Act and in the OMB guidance described in memorandum M-19-23. More specifically, we include:

- A title;
- A description of the key questions to be addressed by the evaluation activity or evidence-building activity;
- The information needed for the evaluation or study;
- The methods to be used;
- The anticipated challenges; and
- The dissemination strategy.

# EVALUATIONS AND EVIDENCE-BUILDING ACTIVITIES

## Project 1 — Retirement and Disability Research Consortium Service Delivery Focal Area

### EVIDENCE-BUILDING QUESTION

Our Service Delivery Focal Area for the [Retirement and Disability Research Consortium \(RDRC\)](#) identifies our interest in studies that help us identify and implement advancements in how we deliver quality, accurate, equitable, and timely service to our customers. Possible evaluation questions include:

1. How do the various modes of Social Security service delivery affect customer satisfaction? Do they affect different socio-economic groups differently?
2. How would simplifying administrative rules and requirements affect the Social Security Administration's (SSA) ability to offer accurate, efficient, equitable, and appropriate services to the public and the ability of program participants to make decisions in their best interest?
3. What is the impact of the numerous financial exploitation schemes that target Social Security beneficiaries, and what approaches could be considered to prevent or halt them?
4. Examine how other countries handle their Social Security claiming/service provision. In other words, what is their service model (field offices, websites, home visits, staffing, etc.)?
5. How do other countries address improper payments, including any tolerances or minimum thresholds used, methods used for identifying improper payments, and steps to correct them?

**Context for the Evidence-Building Question:** The RDRC is an interdisciplinary extramural research program that we fund through cooperative agreements with centers at [Boston College](#), [University of Michigan](#), [University of Wisconsin-Madison](#), and the [National Bureau of Economic Research](#).

The RDRC has three main goals:

1. Research and evaluate a wide array of topics related to Social Security's Old-Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance (OASDI) and SSI programs and related federal policies;
2. Disseminate information on these topics to policymakers, researchers, stakeholder organizations, and the public; and
3. Provide training and education to scholars and practitioners in research areas relevant to these topics.

All RDRC research and activities must be relevant to one of SSA's program areas or populations. We emphasize to the centers that we would like them to consider equity in all their research. In addition, each year we provide the centers with [research focal areas](#). In addition to the focal area on service delivery, we included a focal area on "Disparities by Race and Ethnicity" in FY 2022 and we expect to include a focal area on equity in FY 2023. The current agreements run from FY2019 through FY2023. The centers' websites include completed research and other information.

**Information Needed for the Study:** The RDRC centers identify the information that they need for their proposed evaluation or study in their grant proposal. As part of our technical review of each grant proposal, we assess whether the proposed information necessary for the evaluation or study is available and is appropriate for the proposed evaluation.

**Methods:** We encourage research employing a variety of approaches (e.g., descriptive and causal studies, simulations), utilizing innovative methods, and drawing from new data sources (e.g., Occupational Requirements Survey data, data collected for demonstration projects).

**Anticipated Challenges:** The “improving service delivery” focal area is relatively new to the RDRRC, and it might take RDRRC researchers time to establish a research agenda on the new focal area. In addition, research on this topic often requires using SSA administrative data, which external researchers are typically unable to access. In the past, SSA researchers have collaborated with RDRRC researchers to get around these data access issues and conduct studies on new priority areas. The collaboration has been successful in that it combines the program and data expertise from our research staff with the methods expertise from the RDRRC research team. Although this collaboration model may be a way to promote service delivery research among the RDRRC researchers, heavy workloads, and a declining number of possible SSA researchers may make it difficult to identify collaborators.

**Dissemination:** One of the RDRRC centers’ main goals is to disseminate information on their research to policymakers, researchers, stakeholder organizations, and the public. The RDRRC holds an annual meeting where researchers share findings with key stakeholders and receive feedback on their research. Each RDRRC center has a website that contains policy briefs, working papers, and other information on their research. The RDRRC centers publish their findings in professional journals and other outlets. We will use the RDRRC research on the service delivery focal area to inform our efforts to deliver quality, accurate, equitable, and timely service to our customers.

## Project 2 — Racial Equity: Enhancing Existing Program Data on Race and Ethnicity

### EVIDENCE-BUILDING QUESTION

*To what extent can we effectively enhance existing program data on race and ethnicity through statistical techniques to be more reliable and higher quality?*

**Context for the Evidence-Building Question:** On January 20, 2021, the President signed Executive Order 13985 officially titled *Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities*. The Executive Order directs agencies to examine barriers and disparities by race and ethnicity in their programs and to begin taking actions to eliminate them. However, it also recognizes: (1) that many Federal datasets are not disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, disability, income, veteran status, or other key demographic variables, (2) that this lack of data has cascading effects and impedes efforts to measure and advance equity, and (3) gathering the data needed to advance equity is a necessary first step. We have initiated an agency-wide effort to enhance our existing program data on race and ethnicity that is necessary to examine where disparities and barriers exist in our programs and services. This information will be critical in our efforts to remove those barriers.

Currently, we are working to improve our existing race and ethnicity data. This work is part of our *Equity Action Plan*, and it includes developing metrics for assessing the reliability and quality of that data, as well as using statistical methods for imputing race and ethnicity where needed.

In FY 2022, we expect to begin developing techniques for enhancing the program data and metrics to measure the reliability and quality of that data.

In FY 2023, we expect to use the enhanced data (either improved survey-matched, or statistically enhanced program data, or both) to quantify disparities and barriers and to expand publication of statistics and research that uses the program data on race and ethnicity. This work is part of a broader

effort described in our *Equity Action Plan* to improve the collection of race and ethnicity data. In addition to our efforts to enhance existing data, we plan to explore options for collecting race and ethnicity data when people seek a new or replacement SSN card online, and we will determine whether we can expand our data exchange efforts to obtain and share race and ethnicity data for research and statistical purposes within our existing legal framework.

**Information Needed for the Study:** We will use survey data and program data, including Census Bureau surveys and program data on disability applicants. We will also use research on statistical methods, algorithms, and techniques to impute race and ethnicity.

**Methods:** We will identify metrics for determining the reliability and quality of race and ethnicity data based on the rate of missing values, conflicting values, and categories lost due to lack of data or sample size. We will use appropriate imputation procedures for addressing the completeness and quality of race and ethnicity data in our program data, including using personal characteristics and geographical area from surveys. We will compare imputations of race and ethnicity to the self-reported race and ethnicity in a pre-selected validation sample to assess the imputation method. Another validation approach may include conducting a survey of those where we impute race and ethnicity, and to compare their self-reported race and ethnicity to the imputation.<sup>1</sup>

**Anticipated Challenges:** To varying extents, SSA program data on race and ethnicity are missing for relevant program populations (e.g., applicants, beneficiaries, Federal Insurance Contributions Act - covered workers), especially for younger populations. Matching race and ethnicity data from surveys (e.g., Survey of Income and Program Participation (SIPP), Current Population Survey (CPS), Health and Retirement Study) to SSA program data may fill in some of these gaps; however, these surveys have relatively small sample sizes that limit their utility for certain program populations. We hope that work on enhancing race and ethnicity data in SSA program data and adding the American Community Survey (ACS) data linked to SSA program data might help resolve some of these challenges.

**Dissemination:** We will publish our research on our [Research, Statistics & Policy Analysis public-facing website](#).

### Project 3 — Racial Equity: Disparities in Disability Programs

#### EVIDENCE-BUILDING QUESTION

*What disparities and barriers to benefits exist under current SSA disability programs by race, ethnicity, sex, and other communities facing barriers?*

**Context for the Evidence-Building Question:** On January 20, 2021, the President signed Executive Order 13985 officially titled *Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities*. The Executive Order directs agencies to examine barriers and disparities by race and ethnicity in their programs and to begin taking actions to eliminate them. We began an agency-wide effort to examine where disparities and barriers exist in our programs and services, and this effort is an important component of our *Equity Action Plan*. This information will be critical in efforts to remove those barriers.

In FY 2021, we began publishing statistics by race and ethnicity on disability beneficiaries using the CPS Annual Social and Economic Supplement data. We started exploring how to analyze our disability program data and surveys for disparities by race and ethnicity in three phases of disability: the decision

<sup>1</sup> Baumeister, L., K. Marchi, M. Pearl, R. Williams, and P. Braveman. 2000. The validity of information on “race” and “Hispanic ethnicity” in California birth certificate data. *Health Services Research* 35(4):869-883.

to apply for benefits, the award or denial decision, and post-entitlement actions such as continuing disability reviews.

In FY 2022, we expect to produce preliminary analyses on race and ethnicity disparities in the disability programs. These analyses may only provide breakouts of each race and ethnicity group by sex and age, depending on the data source. We expect to work on how to add further breakouts or controls for factors such as impairment, lifetime earnings, geography, and other characteristics to estimate more precisely disparities and barriers by race and ethnicity.

In FY 2023, we expect to produce more precise estimates of disparities by race and ethnicity in the disability programs. We expect to have enhanced data (either improved survey-matched data, or statistically enhanced program data, or both) to develop these more precise estimates, with disparities isolated at each step from application through to post-entitlement actions. If work proceeds quickly, we would like to document any disparities and barriers over time to gauge if they are changing and why.

**Information Needed for the Study:** We need Census Bureau surveys (SIPP, CPS, and ACS), other survey data, and our own program data on applicants and beneficiaries. We need to ensure we have legal authority to use the data for research and statistics purposes, and to exchange it with Federal partners and other stakeholders to increase our capacity to use the data.

**Methods:** We plan to use standard statistical methods for quantifying disparities and barriers by race and ethnicity, and metrics to determine whether disparities have changed over time. We also plan to conduct qualitative research with our program beneficiaries to shed light on barriers we are not aware of, deepen understanding of those we do, and to answer questions that quantitative analysis cannot address.

**Anticipated Challenges:** Disability program data has a unique set of challenges when it comes to research and statistics because of missing data on some characteristics, in addition to missing data on race and ethnicity status. We hope that work on enhancing the program data on race and ethnicity, ongoing efforts to produce analytical disability program data, and adding the much larger American Community Survey data linked to our program data might help resolve those challenges by FY 2023.

**Dissemination:** We will publish our research on our [Research, Statistics & Policy Analysis public facing website](#).

## Project 4 — Customer Knowledge and Preferences

### EVIDENCE-BUILDING QUESTION

*How effective are our efforts to improve public knowledge of our programs and to meet the public's preferences for how they want to engage with us?*

**Context for the Evidence-Building Question:** We have made a concerted effort to understand our customers, inform and assist them in navigating our programs, and adjust to their preferences for delivering services. The redesign of the *Social Security Statement* and the expansion of services available in *my Social Security* are all a part of this larger agenda, as well as the inclusion of a priority question related to this effort in our FYs 2022 – 2026 Learning Agenda.

We support surveys on program knowledge and customers' preferences for communications with us through the Understanding America Study (UAS). The main SSA surveys in the UAS include the 1) *Social Security Retirement Program Knowledge* survey, 2) *Social Security Channels Preferences*

survey, and 3) *Social Security Disability Program Knowledge* survey. The *Social Security Retirement Program Knowledge* survey (also referred to as “What do People Know about Social Security”) asks respondents questions that assess their knowledge of the Social Security retirement program and retirement planning more generally. The *Social Security Channels Preferences* survey asks respondents how they receive and/or would prefer to receive information on retirement planning from Social Security and other sources, including use of our online services. The *Social Security Disability Program Knowledge* survey, which was initially fielded in FY 2021, asks respondents about their views and knowledge of the Social Security disability program (and for those who ever applied for benefits, the survey asks about experiences with the program).

UAS surveys are fielded on a regular basis following a rolling two-year cycle for the three surveys (retirement knowledge, channels preferences, and disability knowledge). The surveys help us track changes in program knowledge and communication preferences as respondents grow older and as we implement improvements to online services and communications. We will field the fourth *Social Security Retirement Program Knowledge* survey and the fourth Social Security Channels Preferences survey in FY 2022. We will field the second Disability Program Knowledge survey in FY 2023.

With over 400 surveys completed on an internet panel that is approaching 10,000 respondents, the UAS allows us to study the public from several different angles. Surveys on health, retirement, employment, cognitive abilities, personality, financial literacy, consumer behavior, and other salient factors can be matched to a wealth of information about how people engage with our programs.

In FY 2023, there will be an extensive set of responses, some longitudinal, on the Social Security questions that will be available for study. The respondents’ personal characteristics from several other surveys will allow us to study differences in the Social Security findings from several different facets typically unavailable to other agency instruments.

Below are some examples of our papers using UAS.

- Alattar, Laith, Matt Messel, and David Rogofsky. 2018. “An Introduction to the Understanding America Study Internet Panel,” *Social Security Bulletin*, 78(2):13-28.
- Rogofsky, David, Richard E. Chard, and Joanne Yoong. 2018. “Insight into the Earned Income Tax Credit and Tax-Advantaged Retirement Savings,” *Social Security Bulletin*, 78(2):1-11.
- Alattar, Laith, Matt Messel, David Rogofsky, and Mark A. Sarney. 2019. “The Use of Longitudinal Data on Social Security Program Knowledge,” *Social Security Bulletin*, 79(4):1-9.

**Information Needed for the Study:** We will use the UAS survey responses in the “comprehensive file” that matches respondents across several UAS surveys. UAS data is publicly available.

**Methods:** We will analyze results from UAS surveys on Social Security knowledge and communication preferences by race and ethnicity, with additional analysis of the economic, educational, health, and other characteristics of each race and ethnicity group. We expect to present both descriptive statistics as well as multivariate statistical analyses, including regressions, with careful attention to choosing appropriate controls.

**Anticipated Challenges:** We expect the sample size to continue growing to 10,000 but it may be slower than anticipated. Some of the smaller race and ethnicity categories may need to be aggregated into an ‘other’ category if their sample size is too small for questions asked of subsets of the population, like people who have read the *Statement*.

**Dissemination:** We will publish our research on our [Research, Statistics & Policy Analysis public-facing website](#).

## Project 5 —Ticket To Work Optimization

### EVALUATION QUESTION

*What is the impact of improved communications with disability beneficiaries who are eligible to participate in the Ticket to Work (TTW) program on program participation?*

**Context for the Evaluation Question:** The Ticket to Work (TTW) program provides Social Security Disability Insurance (DI) beneficiaries and SSI recipients with access to employment-related services from agency-approved service providers and vocational rehabilitation agencies. We reimburse approved service providers and vocational rehabilitation agencies when their TTW clients meet specified employment-related outcomes. For DI beneficiaries and SSI recipients, the TTW program is a free and voluntary program that can help individuals obtain and maintain employment, if that is their desire, as well as participate in job training and workforce development opportunities.

Prior to June 2011, we sent a “good news letter” plus a hard cardstock “Ticket” as part of our TTW outreach efforts to all newly awarded SSI recipients and DI beneficiaries with disabilities (with only minor exceptions). We suspended these TTW mailings abruptly in June 2011 and we did not restart them until March 2015 as an administrative cost savings measure. Using a regression-discontinuity research design, we found that stopping the mailer nearly halved TTW participation, dropping it from about 2.6 percent to 1.4 percent of Ticket-eligible beneficiaries and recipients when the mailers ceased. This evidence indicates that there is significant potential for TTW outreach materials, including the content and timing of TTW outreach materials, to increase TTW participation.

The TTW Notice Optimization project will develop an evidence-based approach to targeting outreach to beneficiaries who are eligible to participate in the TTW program. The project seeks to increase participation in the TTW program; in it, we test changes to Ticket notices, including the types of notices we send, the language we use, and the timing of our notices. We worked closely with the General Service Administration (GSA), Office of Evaluation Sciences to develop the outreach and evaluation plans.

The primary outcome of interest is Ticket assignment defined as signing up with a Ticket to Work service provider (Employment Network, Workforce Employment Network or Vocational Rehabilitation Agency) to develop a work plan and receive job support services to achieve that plan. The secondary outcomes of interest is employment above the substantial gainful activity level and Ticket payments.

**Information Needed for the Study:** The information needed for the study comes from the data we use to administer our programs, including data on individuals who are sent TTW information, who assign Tickets, and who call the TTW Helpline. We store these data in the Disability Control File, the internet Ticket Operations Provider Support System, and contractor records.

**Methods:** The TTW Optimization project uses a randomized controlled trial design that incorporates three separate tests—an initial notice test, a one-year notice test, and a two-year notice test. We use random assignment to allocate study participants into a treatment group that will receive the new TTW outreach materials or into a control arm. The current selection criteria exclude beneficiaries over age 62 and those with diaries with medical conditions that are not expected to improve (except blind and deaf individuals). For each individual, we observe Ticket assignments at nine months after we send the respective notice (i.e., nine months post-intervention).

**Anticipated Challenges:** The COVID-19 pandemic has led to a major disruption in the labor market. This will likely affect the results from our evaluation. We are implementing the project as planned, but we will need to consider and document the labor market environment as a factor potentially affecting

our results. We extended the project for an additional nine months (for a total of 18 months of mailings) to increase the likelihood of identifying the impact of the mailings in a post-pandemic environment. We may also consider whether we can use geographic variation in the response to COVID-19 as a means to identify how COVID-19 affects our findings.

**Dissemination:** GSA will publish an abstract on their [website](#) at the conclusion of the study. GSA will also write a paper about the project for publication in an academic journal. Additionally, we will use the results to improve Ticket outreach and share the findings with TTW stakeholders as appropriate.

## Project 6 — Interventional Cooperative Agreement Program

### EVALUATION QUESTION

*What are the impacts of interventional programs initiated in collaboration with states, private foundations, and other entities on the labor market, program participation, and economic outcomes of DI beneficiaries or SSI recipients?*

**Context for the Evaluation Question:** In May 2021, we announced the Interventional Cooperative Agreement Program (ICAP). In FY 2021, we plan to award three cooperative agreements. The cooperative agreements have a five-year project period with a base year and the four years for implementation and evaluation activities. In FY 2022, we will conduct startup activities with the initial awardees, including finalizing data agreements between the awardees and SSA, as well as receiving approval from OMB for their data collection packages. The projects will then proceed with implementation and evaluation plans for the remaining project period.

The purpose of this new program is to allow us to enter into cooperative agreements to collaborate with States, private foundations, and other non-Federal groups and organizations who have the interest and ability to identify, operate, and partially fund interventional research, including interventions targeting or otherwise including underserved populations.

ICAP will provide a process through which we can systematically review proposals from outside organizations (including States, private foundations, and other non-Federal groups and organizations) and enter into cooperative agreements with them for collaboration on interventional research. We plan to solicit new projects on a recurring basis (e.g., we plan to solicit and award three additional cooperative agreements in FY 2022). We hope to tap local, external knowledge about potential interventions relevant to beneficiaries who receive Social Security Disability Insurance (DI) benefits or SSI.

ICAP research topics are as follows:

- Examining the structural barriers in the labor market, including for racial, ethnic, or other underserved communities, including people with disabilities, that increase the likelihood of people receiving or applying for SSDI or SSI benefits;
- Promoting self-sufficiency by helping people enter, stay in, or return to the labor force, including children and youth;
- Coordinating planning between private and human services agencies to improve the administration and effectiveness of the DI, SSI, and related programs;
- Assisting claimants in underserved communities apply for or appeal determinations or decisions on claims for DI and SSI benefits; and

- Conducting outreach to children with disabilities who are potentially eligible to receive SSI, and conducting outreach to their parents and guardians.

**Information Needed for the Study:** The information collected will depend on the individual grant awardees project needs. We will finalize data sharing agreements and data collection instruments, as needed, during the first year of the project.

**Methods:** The grant awardees will recommend specific research and evaluation methods. To improve participation of marginalized groups, ICAP will encourage applicants to include people of color, people from underserved communities, and people with lived experiences, as appropriate.

**Anticipated Challenges:** We may face challenges finalizing data agreements, which may cause delays with starting activities for some grantees.

**Dissemination:** We will post all reports from the projects on our public-facing [website](#) and provide information to committees and workgroups. We are developing a broader dissemination plan.

## Project 7 — Beyond Benefits Study

### EVALUATION QUESTION

*What services and supports help people exiting the DI or SSI programs maintain or achieve self-sufficiency without a need to return to receiving DI or SSI benefits?*

**Context for the Evaluation Question:** Based on medical improvement, we terminate the benefits of thousands of DI beneficiaries and SSI recipients each year. However, many individuals whose benefits are terminated later return to the disability rolls. About 30 percent of adult SSI-only recipients and 20 percent of DI-only beneficiaries who stop receiving benefits because of medical improvement return to these programs within eight years. Among the DI beneficiaries whose benefits stop, few maintain employment or work above common thresholds of self-sufficiency.

In FY 2019, we conducted a Technical Expert Panel (TEP) to discuss options for a demonstration to support individuals exiting DI due to medical improvement. The TEP recommended we study the services this population needs to support continued or improved self-sufficiency.

We initiated the study based on the TEP’s recommendation. We will gather evidence through surveys and focus groups. We will also use motivational interviewing to identify the duration and intensity of supports that are necessary for an intervention. The information gathered during the interviews will provide additional context on the needs of this population and how to motivate individuals who have been removed from the program to remain employed and self-sufficient.

In FY 2021, we awarded a contract to conduct a study of the types of services and supports that individuals exiting the DI or SSI programs need to maintain or achieve self-sufficiency.

In FY 2022, we will clear all data collection activities, per the Paperwork Reduction Act, and begin quantitative data collection and motivational interviewing pilot activities. We will set up interviewing activities and finalize the schedule with the contractor. We expect to complete all activities by the end of FY 2023 and receive a final report by FY 2024.

**Information Needed for the Study:** We will gather information needed on the barriers to employment and other needs of this population using surveys, focus groups, and motivational interviewing. We will use SSA program data to construct the sampling frame and update data used in final analyses about

the benefit status of participants. Final analyses will include scrutiny of SSA program data to provide summary work histories and earnings summaries. How administrative data will bear on research questions and what kind of analyses will be pursued will become more defined after the contract is awarded.

**Methods:** We will conduct a small, non-random pilot of motivational interviewing to accomplish two goals. First, it will provide a sense of the duration and intensity of supports that are necessary for such an intervention. Second, it will assist data-gathering efforts by providing additional context to the needs of this population. We will also use appropriate statistical methods to summarize results from surveys, and we will develop and follow protocols for conducting focus group interviews.

**Anticipated Challenges:** We do not anticipate any significant challenges with this project.

**Dissemination:** We will post all reports from the project on our public-facing website. We will provide information to external stakeholders, including the SSAB, the Congress, and other interested stakeholders. We are developing a broader dissemination plan.

## Project 8 — Promoting Work through Early Interventions

### EVALUATION QUESTION

*Are early intervention programs successful at improving labor force participation and reducing the need for SSI program assistance for the populations targeted by each program?*

**Context for the Evaluation Question:** The Promoting Work through Early Interventions Project (PWEIP) is a joint undertaking of SSA and the Administration for Children and Families (ACF) within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The project will identify, select, and evaluate programs likely to improve the employment and economic outcomes of individuals who have not yet applied for SSI and have little or no work history, current or foreseeable disabilities, but who do have ties to U.S. safety net programs (e.g., receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families or Supplemental Nutritional Assistance Program benefits). Evaluations of programs include impact assessments and implementation research. A select number of evaluations will also include a cost analysis.

In FY 2019, we developed and entered a jointly financed cooperative arrangement with ACF and transferred \$25 million to support the evaluation and/or service provisions of selected intervention programs. In FY 2020, we worked with ACF to identify and select programs to participate in an evaluation under ACF's Building Evidence on Employment Strategies (BEES) and Next Generation of Enhanced Employment Strategies (NextGen) projects. As of December 2021, we have selected six BEES programs and five NextGen programs.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, ACF anticipates PWEIP contract activities will conclude in 2026 rather than 2023. By the conclusion of the PWEIP in 2026, we aim to generate findings that will inform both agencies and contribute meaningfully to the broader field of disability and self-sufficiency research.

**Information Needed for the Study:** We are collecting data at each project monitoring outcomes of the participants. We will provide ACF with de-identified individual-level disability data, analyze earnings data, and generate summary statistics about participants of SSA-funded programs. These data activities began in Fall 2021.

**Methods:** We will support rigorous evaluation of existing employment support and training programs informed by evidence and shown to be promising for the population of interest. \*The selected BEES and NextGen projects target a variety of populations who may be at-risk of receiving SSI, including individuals with mental health impairments, substance use disorders, recipients of Temporary Assistance for Needy Families and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, and justice-involved individuals. Interventions will provide employment, training, and mental health services, including testing the Individualized Placement and Support (IPS) model in multiple settings. The evaluation will randomly assign participants of BEES/NextGen programs to a treatment or to a control group. The control group will receive the services and interventions normally offered by a given program. The treatment group will receive services offered as a part of early intervention(s) and work model(s) tested under a specific PWEIP program. Evaluations of each program will include impact evaluation and implementation research. A select number of evaluations will also include cost analysis. ACF contractors will conduct baseline, interim, and final surveys of participants at the time of enrollment, 12 months later, and at the conclusion of the testing period, respectively. ACF will implement the PWEIP across various states and regions.

All the PWEIP projects are serving people facing barriers.

**Anticipated Challenges:** Recruitment and enrollment has been a challenge for some of the PWEIP projects because of COVID-19. Some programs have extended the enrollment period and others have made progress in enrollment, but it remains below expectations. We expect these challenges to continue and are planning to meet with ACF to discuss potential options. We will continue to monitor and document such challenges during the project.

**Dissemination:** We will post all reports from the project on our public-facing website. We will provide information to external stakeholders, including the SSAB, the Congress, and other interested stakeholders. We will work with our Office of Communications to formalize a broader dissemination plan.

## Project 9 — Work Disability: Functional Assessment Battery Research Study

### EVIDENCE-BUILDING QUESTION

*To what extent does the Work Disability Functional Assessment Battery (WD-FAB) improve our ability to identify who to select for a continuing disability review (CDR) full medical review?*

**Context for the Evidence-Building Question:** The WD-FAB is a self-reported assessment of whole person function developed through a collaborative effort among SSA, the National Institutes of Health (NIH), and Boston University. The WD-FAB uses Item Response Theory and Computer Adaptive Testing to select the most relevant set of questions from an item bank covering eight components of function in the domains of Physical Function and Mental Health Function. We completed a prototype in 2016 and version 3.1 of the tool in 2019.

Through the WD-FAB study, we will test the use of the instrument in our medical CDR process. The primary objectives of the pilot study are to assess feasibility of integrating the WD-FAB into the CDR business process, examine relationships between single administrations of the WD-FAB and the CDR process, and explore relationships between a change in WD-FAB data and the CDR process. More specifically, we will compare WD-FAB data to CDR predictive model scores, responses to the CDR Mailer (Form SSA-455) questions, and CDR full medical review outcomes for participating

beneficiaries. Since this is the first time we will administer the WD-FAB in the beneficiary population, the pilot study includes a secondary aim to understand how beneficiaries endorse symptoms related to whole person function.

**Information Needed for the Study:** We will collect beneficiaries' responses to the WD-FAB to determine their correspondence with existing SSA medical CDR measures. In September 2020, we awarded a contract to gather the necessary data for the study. The contractor will initiate the first wave of data collection in Fall 2021 and the second wave of data collection in Spring 2022. We should complete data collection by August 2022.

**Methods:** This pilot study is a descriptive, longitudinal study of a targeted sample of DI and SSI beneficiaries that will assess change in function by administering the WD-FAB to the same beneficiaries at two time points roughly 6 months apart. Information obtained during this evaluation of the WD-FAB in our CDR process will give us an initial evidence base to evaluate if the instrument can add value and supplement SSA's existing CDR business process activities (e.g., CDR predictive model, CDR Mailer – Form SSA-455, etc.) in identifying which beneficiaries should be selected for a CDR full medical review.

We will select a stratified random sample from cases with medical CDR diaries that have come due in quarter 1 of FY 2022 (i.e., October 1, 2021-December 31, 2021) to identify the participant pool for the study. We will stratify the participant pool by predictive model score, diary type, and age. The contractor will then recruit study participants from the participant pool of 5,334 adult beneficiaries that we identify for them.

We implemented procedures to obtain adequate response rates from beneficiaries who need to opt-in to participate in the study. Working with the NIH, we developed a power analysis to identify the appropriate number of beneficiaries to include in our participant pool to help address this challenge and ensure an adequate response from beneficiaries.

To assess whether the WD-FAB improves our ability to identify who to select for a medical CDR, we will use linear regression models with the predictive model scores or responses to the CDR Mailer as the response variable and WD-FAB data as the predictor variables. The regression coefficients and their p-values will be used for exploratory analysis regarding the correlation between WD-FAB and predictive model scores or responses to CDR mailers. In addition, a linear regression will be fit using CDR full medical review decisions as the outcome measure and the changes in the WD-FAB data and the baseline WD-FAB scores as the predictor variables to provide preliminary results on how the WD-FAB score changes relate to initial CDR full medical review decisions.

**Anticipated Challenges:** We might face challenges in obtaining final medical CDR outcomes within the study's timeframe – FY 2022. If enough final medical CDR determinations do not take place in FY 2022, completion of the study analysis report will be delayed.

**Dissemination:** We expect to receive an analysis report from NIH in FY 2023, and we will disseminate the report to internal and external stakeholders. We will post the report on our public-facing website. We will work with NIH and BU to disseminate the findings through conferences and other professional outlets.

## Project 10 — Annual Report of the Board of Trustees of the Federal Old-Age and Survivors Insurance and Federal Disability Insurance Trust Funds

### EVIDENCE-BUILDING QUESTION

*Do the Old-Age and Survivors Insurance (OASI) program and the Disability Insurance (DI) program have sufficient trust fund reserves and projected income to pay scheduled benefits over a prospective 75-year period?*

**Context for the Evidence-Building Question:** The Social Security Act (the Act) established the Board of Trustees to oversee the financial operations of the OASI and DI Trust Funds. The Act requires that the Board of Trustees, among other duties, report annually to Congress on the actuarial status and financial operations of the OASI and DI Trust Funds. This report provides a vast amount of descriptive data and analysis on the financial status of the OASI and DI Trust Funds. It also includes an assessment using systematic data collection and analysis of the program's capacity to pay scheduled benefits over the course of a prospective 75-year period. While the assessment includes information on several outcomes, two key outcomes of interest to policymakers are:

1. The estimated date that each trust fund's reserves will be depleted, and
2. The estimated percentage of scheduled benefits that the program would be able to support when the trust fund reserves are depleted.

The report includes a description of the uncertainty in the outcomes using:

1. Alternative deterministic scenarios (i.e., high-cost and low-cost scenarios);
2. A stochastic model; and
3. Sensitivity analysis on key assumptions.

Our Office of the Chief Actuary (OCACT) conducts the vast majority of the research and analysis that support this annual report to Congress. OCACT uses the results of this annual assessment as a basis for evaluating legislative proposals that affect the trust funds. The Office of Retirement and Disability Policy uses the results of this assessment to develop our Modelling Income in the Near Term (MINT) microsimulation model that we use to evaluate the distributional effects of proposed changes to the programs. Policymakers rely on this information when considering changes to the program to improve program solvency or for other purposes. Thus, the assessment is foundational for other important evaluation activities that we perform on a regular basis.

The assessment described in the annual report is among the most important activities that we support and disseminate, policymakers rely on this report to make important decisions on the future of the OASI and DI programs.

**Information Needed for the Study:** The information needed for the assessment comes from a variety of sources. OCACT works closely with representatives for each Trustee to develop the demographic, economic, and program benefit assumptions that the Trustees use for the annual report. The information used to develop the assumptions comes from a variety of sources, including:

1. Analyses of historical data and relationships related to each assumption from various sources, including other government agencies and private forecasters;
2. SSAB Technical Panel on Methods and Assumptions Reports;
3. RDRC research; and

#### 4. Other research relevant to the assumption.

The report uses information from a variety of Social Security program data sources, program and survey data from other federal agencies, and data from other sources. OCACT identifies the information needed for the evaluation in their documentation on the assumptions and methods used for the short-range evaluation and for the long-range evaluation.

**Methods:** The report includes both a descriptive study of the current trust fund status and an assessment that addresses the question, “Are program finances sufficient to pay scheduled benefits over a prospective 75-year period?” OCACT provides a detailed description of the methods used in each report in the following two documents available on our [public-facing website](#).

1. Long-Range OASDI Projection Methodology; and
2. Short-Range Actuarial Projections of the OASDI Program, 2010.

**Anticipated Challenges:** We do not anticipate significant challenges completing this assessment.

**Dissemination:** We use a variety of dissemination methods. The report is available on our [public-facing website](#). We send an electronic copy of the report to the President of the Senate, the Speaker of the House, and to the Congressional committees of jurisdiction. The day the Trustees release the report to the public, we issue a press release that describes the key findings and a link to the report on our website. Our Chief Actuary participates in a discussion with members of the press to provide information on the content within the report and to respond to their questions on the report. Our Chief Actuary also meets with external stakeholders to present the findings, including, members of the Congress and their staff, the SSAB, the Bipartisan Policy Center, the National Academy of Social Insurance, and various actuarial professional organizations. In recent years, our Chief Actuary has used social media (e.g., Facebook live) to disseminate the findings and to respond to questions from the public on the financial status of the program.

## Project 11 — Annual Report of the Supplemental Security Income Program

### EVIDENCE-BUILDING QUESTION

*What is the current status of the SSI program and what are the estimated number of SSI recipients and SSI program costs associated with administering the program over a prospective 25-year period?*

**Context for the Evidence-Building Question:** The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996 (Public Law 104-193) directs the SSA Commissioner to report annually to the President and to the Congress on the status of the SSI program. The report includes an assessment of the status of the SSI program using systematic data collection and analysis. The report must include estimates of two important SSI program outcomes: (1) the estimated number of SSI recipients over a prospective period of at least 25 years, and (2) the estimated SSI program costs through a prospective period of at least 25 years. The report must also include a comprehensive description of the SSI program; a historical summary of statutory changes to the SSI program; and summaries of any relevant research on the SSI program by SSA or others. Other requirements of the report include historical and current data relating to:

1. Claims intake and dispositions at all levels of decision making;
2. Demographic information about recipients, including program cost and prior enrollment in other

public benefit programs;

3. Redeterminations, medical continuing disability reviews, and utilization of work incentives;
4. Administrative costs; and
5. State supplementation program operations.

This assessment of the status of the SSI program, the estimated number of recipients over a prospective 25-year period, and the estimated program costs of the SSI program over a prospective 25-year period provides policymakers with extensive information that they can use when considering legislative changes, regulatory changes, or policy changes to the SSI program.

**Information Needed for the Study:** The information needed for the assessment is described in the 2020 annual report. The demographic and economic assumptions used in projections are based on the intermediate set of assumptions of the *Annual Report of the Board of Trustees of the Federal OASI and Federal DI Trust Funds (Trustees Report)* issued in that year. In addition, the projections are developed to be consistent with the projections in such *Trustees Report*. Beyond that, there are four main inputs to the current projection model for SSI recipients:

1. Historical and projected estimates of the Social Security area population by single year of age and gender;
2. Historical tabulations of the numbers of recipients in current-payment status and suspense status by whether the recipient is receiving payments based solely on age or due to disability, single year of age, and gender;
3. Historical tabulations of the numbers of recipients transitioning into and out of SSI payment status by the same characteristics as in (2) above; and
4. Historical tabulations of the total amount of federal SSI payments by the same characteristics mentioned in (2) above.

**Methods:** The methods for conducting the projections are described in the 2020 annual report. Using the inputs for the projection of SSI recipients described in the information needed for the evaluation or study section, transitions into SSI payment status are projected separately for: (1) new recipients resulting from an application for program payments; and (2) returns to payment status from suspended status. Movements out of payment status are projected separately for: (1) terminations due to death; (2) suspensions due to excess income; and (3) suspensions of payment for all other reasons. The programmatic assumptions and methods are reexamined each year and, if warranted, revised considering recent experience and new information about future conditions. We also consider analyses of historical data and relationships related to each assumption from various sources, including other government agencies and private forecasters, as well as other research relevant to the assumption or set of assumptions.

**Anticipated Challenges:** We do not anticipate significant challenges completing this assessment.

**Dissemination:** We use a variety of dissemination methods. The report is available on our [public-facing website](#). We send electronic copies of the report to the President, the Vice-President, and the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives. We also send electronic copies to the Congressional committees of jurisdiction and other interested Congressional members and staff.

## Project 12 — Pre-Effectuation Review of Disability Determinations

### EVIDENCE-BUILDING QUESTIONS

*What is the return rate of state disability determination services (DDS) initial and reconsideration allowances of disability program applications? What is the estimated federal benefit savings attributable to the pre-effectuation review?*

**Context for the Evidence-Building Questions:** Title II of the Social Security Act (the Act) requires the review of at least 50 percent of all DI initial and reconsideration allowances made by state DDSs. We consider a disability allowance policy compliant when the evidence in the file is sufficient to determine disability and when the determination is consistent with the evidence, federal regulations, and operating policies and procedures.

Section 221(c)(3)(C) of the Act requires us to report to the Committee on Ways and Means of the House of Representatives and to the Committee on Finance of the Senate on the pre-effectuation reviews of state DDS disability determinations conducted during the previous fiscal year. The legislative mandate specifies that the report include information on: (1) the numbers of such reviews; and (2) our findings based on such reviews of the accuracy of the state DDS determinations.

In addition, Public Law 109-171, the Deficit Reduction Act of 2005, added section 1633(e) to Title XVI of the Act, requiring similar pre-effectuation reviews of specified levels of DDS allowances of applications by persons aged 18 or older for SSI benefits based on blindness or disability. Since FY 2008, the required level of our SSI reviews is also at least 50 percent of initial and reconsideration allowances.

In FY 2021, we established new pre-effectuation reviews of Federal Disability Processing Branch favorable initial and reconsideration determinations. Although the reviews of these branches mirror pre-effectuation reviews of DDSs, the above-mentioned statutes do not include cases adjudicated by the federal branches. We use the same predictive models based on data captured in our quality assurance samples and we use that data to score each case upon clearance to identify cases with a high probability of reversal.

We use the findings from our assessment using systematic data collection and methods to identify areas where additional training or policy guidance is needed.

**Information Needed for the Study:** Disability claim folders contain the evidence used to make decisions on claims, and we review this evidence during pre-effectuation reviews. We use data from our program data to estimate the program cost effects that result from the reviews of cases from the DDSs.

**Methods:** We select cases for pre-effectuation review from the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and DI cases from the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico using a statistical model to identify allowances with a high probability of containing substantive errors (i.e., potential to reverse the determination from allowance to denial). For newly established pre-effectuation reviews, we select cases from eight Federal Disability Processing Branches.

Quality reviewers within our disability quality review branches (DQB) review the cases to determine whether the evidence documented in the files is sufficient to determine disability and whether that determination made is consistent with the evidence and with federal regulations and operating policies and procedures.

We record data on:

- The total number of cases reviewed;
- The number of decisional returns (i.e., the number of cases in which the quality review performed by the DQB did not agree with the outcome determined by the DDS);
- The number of documentation returns (i.e., the number of cases in which the quality review performed by the DQB revealed the evidence upon which the DDS based its decision was insufficient); and
- The total number of returns (decisional returns plus documentation returns).

We compute the return rate as the total number of cases returned divided by the total number of cases reviewed, multiplied by 100.

We use this data, combined with other data described in Table 2 in our *Annual Report on Social Security Pre-effectuation Reviews of Favorable State Disability Determinations*, to estimate the program cost effects attributable to the pre-effectuation review.

**Anticipated Challenges:** We do not anticipate significant challenges completing this assessment.

**Dissemination:** We send this annual pre-effectuation review report to Congress. The public may obtain this report on our [public-facing website](#) and data from our [open data website](#).

## Project 13 — Targeted Denial Review

### EVIDENCE-BUILDING QUESTION

*What is the return rate of state DDS initial and reconsideration denials of disability program applications?*

**Context for the Evidence-Building Question:** The targeted denial review complements the pre-effectuation review. It examines the return rate of all state DDS and Federal Disability Processing Branch denials of applications for disability benefits. We draw the sample using a predictive model based on data captured in our quality assurance samples. We use that data to score each case upon DDS clearance to identify cases with a high probability of reversal.

We review disability determinations made by the DDSs and Federal Disability Processing Branches in our 11 disability quality branches (DQB) in the Office of Quality Review field sites throughout the nation. Our central office gathers the data from these reviews to produce monthly targeted denial review reports for us at the national, regional, and state levels.

During our review, we identify cases that are not compliant with national disability policy. When we find the disability determination does not comply with our policy and procedure, we cite a deficiency to the DDS. We use the findings from our assessment, using systematic data collection and methods, to identify areas where additional training or policy guidance is needed.

**Information Needed for the Study:** Disability claim folders contain the evidence used to make determinations on claims. We review the evidence while conducting targeted denial reviews.

**Methods:** We select cases for targeted denial reviews from the DDSs in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, 8 Federal Disability Processing Branches, and DI cases from the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico using a statistical model to identify allowances with a high probability of containing substantive

errors (i.e., potential to reverse the determination from denial to allowance). Quality reviewers within our DQB's review the cases to determine whether the evidence documented in the file is sufficient to support the denial determination and whether the denial determination is consistent with Federal Regulations and operating policies and procedures.

We record data on:

- The total number of cases reviewed;
- The number of decisional deficiencies (i.e., the number of cases in which the DQB's quality review performed did not agree with the outcome determined by the DDS);
- The number of documentation deficiencies (i.e., the number of cases in which the quality review performed by the DQB revealed the evidence upon which the DDS based its decision was insufficient); and
- The total number of deficiencies (decisional deficiencies plus documentation deficiencies) cited.

We compute the return rate as the total number of cases returned divided by the total number of cases reviewed, multiplied by 100.

**Anticipated Challenges:** We do not anticipate significant challenges completing this assessment.

**Dissemination:** We make the data from targeted denial reviews available to the public on our [public-facing open data website](#).

## Project 14 — Old-Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance Stewardship Review

### EVIDENCE-BUILDING QUESTION

*What is the payment accuracy rate related to the non-medical aspects of the Old-Age, Survivors and Disability Insurance (OASDI) payments?*

**Context for the Evidence-Building Question:** The OASDI stewardship review provides an accuracy measurement of the non-medical aspects of OASI payments and DI payments. The non-medical aspects of OASI payments and DI payments include changes in payment amounts due to work activity (e.g., the annual earnings test for OASI, or the performance of substantial gainful activity for DI) or changes in payment due to application of a provision in the law (e.g., Windfall Elimination Provision, Government Pension Offset, Workers Compensation Offset). Payment errors include both underpayments (payments issued are less than what is due to beneficiaries) and overpayments (payments issued are more than what is due to beneficiaries).

The OASI and DI stewardship review findings provide the basis for reports to monitoring authorities and meet the reporting requirements of the Improper Payments Information Act of 2019. Additionally, we use these findings to establish the OASDI payment accuracy performance measure in the *Annual Performance Report*.

The OASDI stewardship review is an assessment using systematic data collection and analysis of our program and policies. The results are used to identify: (1) areas where additional training for our employees is needed; (2) whether we need to develop legislative proposals to address issues with administering the program (e.g., obtaining data on wage amounts from a payroll information provider); or (3) whether we need to pursue program changes or pilot projects to test alternatives to the current process and how we should design those changes.

**Information Needed for the Study:** The information for this study is derived by quality reviewers interviewing a sample of OASI and DI beneficiaries, or their representative payees, and redeveloping all non-medical factors of eligibility to determine if the payment issued was correct according to the applicable statutes and/or regulations. We also use data from our program data, such as the Master Beneficiary Record, which includes the data related to the OASI or DI payment computations for beneficiaries.

For each case in the sample with a payment error, the reviewers record a specific deficiency code that represents the error associated with the improper payment, the dollar amount of the payment error, and the specific cause of the error. There may be multiple deficiencies associated with a payment amount. We construct separate aggregate overpayment or underpayment amounts for these cases when we report our stewardship review findings.

**Methods:** We base the stewardship review on a monthly sample of Title II beneficiaries in current payment status. Each month, we selected approximately 88 OASI cases and 46 DI cases of beneficiaries residing in the United States. Annually, we also select 160 cases of beneficiaries who live outside of the 50 states or U.S. territories or receive U.S. totalization benefits. We interview the beneficiary or his or her representative payee, make collateral contacts as needed, and redevelop all non-medical factors of eligibility as of the sample month. The objective of the stewardship review is to identify improper payments and not to assess our compliance with policy and procedures or predict the impact of proposed changes to policies and procedures. Therefore, we assess payment accuracy based on all the developed factors of entitlement that have any potential to affect the payment issued in the sample month.

**Anticipated Challenges:** We do not anticipate significant challenges completing this assessment.

**Dissemination:** We report the findings from the OASDI stewardship review to OMB, provide a summary of the findings in the Annual Performance Report, and post the report on our [public-facing website](#).

## Project 15 — Supplemental Security Income Stewardship Review

### EVIDENCE-BUILDING QUESTION

*What is the payment accuracy rate related to the non-medical aspects of SSI payments?*

**Context for the Evidence-Building Question:** Our SSI stewardship review provides estimates of payment accuracy related to the non-medical aspects of SSI payments. SSI is a means-tested program, and non-medical aspects of SSI payments may include living arrangements, resources, wages, and other eligibility factors. Payment errors include both underpayments (payments issued are less than what is owed to the recipient) and overpayments (payments issued are more than what is owed to the recipient).

The stewardship review is a significant assessment tool for us. Its findings serve as the basis for reports to monitor authorities and satisfy the reporting requirements of the Payment Integrity Information Act of 2019. We use the stewardship data to identify error-prone areas and formulate initiatives to reduce improper payments.

The SSI stewardship review is an assessment using systematic data collection and analysis of our program and policies. The results are used to identify: (1) areas where additional training is needed for our employees; (2) whether we need to develop legislative proposals to address issues with

administering the program (e.g., obtaining data on wage amounts from a payroll information provider); or (3) whether we need to pursue program changes or pilot projects to test alternatives to the current process and how we should design those changes.

**Information Needed for the Study:** The information for this study is derived by quality reviewers interviewing a sample of SSI recipients or their representative payees, and redeveloping all non-medical factors of eligibility to determine if the payments issued were correct according to applicable statutes and regulations. We compare the quality review findings with our program data, such as the Supplemental Security Record (SSR), which includes the data related to SSI payment computations for recipients.

For each case in the sample with a payment error, the quality reviewer records the specific deficiency that caused the improper payment, and the dollar amount of the payment error associated with the specific deficiency. There may be multiple deficiencies associated with an SSI payment, and we construct separate aggregate overpayment or underpayment amounts for these cases when we report our stewardship review findings.

**Methods:** We derive accuracy rates using data collected from the review of a national sample of SSI cases. For a case to be included in our sample, we must have issued a payment in at least 1 month of the fiscal year under review. Historically, the sample has included about 4,000 cases.

The objective of the stewardship review is to identify and quantify improper payments. It involves interviewing SSI recipients, or their representative payee, and redeveloping all non-medical factors of eligibility to determine if the payments issued were correct according to the applicable statutes and regulations. We use the resources necessary to obtain all relevant evidence needed to assess payment accuracy for every case we review. Any difference between what was actually paid and what the reviewer determines should have been paid is expressed as an overpayment or underpayment error. It is not feasible operationally for us to conduct this review for all cases in the SSI universe on an ongoing basis. For this reason, the review is not ideally suited to predict or assess the impact of initiatives to reduce improper payments. The overpayment and underpayment accuracy rates are the percentage of all dollars paid that are free of overpayments or underpayments. We calculate and report overpayment and underpayment accuracy rates separately. The data presented in the annual stewardship report is weighted, enabling us to project the findings to the entire population of SSI recipients.

Annually, we reevaluate our study methodology and the data elements we capture, based upon audit findings and information needs identified throughout the year.

**Anticipated Challenges:** We do not anticipate significant challenges completing this assessment.

**Dissemination:** We report the findings from the SSI stewardship review to OMB, provide a summary of the findings in the Annual Performance Report, and post the report on [our public-facing website](#).

## Project 16 — Barriers Analysis

### EVIDENCE-BUILDING QUESTION

To what extent are our policies, procedures, and practices effective in promoting equal employment opportunities and creating greater diversity in our workforce?

**Context for the Evidence-Building Question:** Our Office of Civil Rights and Equal Opportunity created a barrier analysis program that complies with Equal Employment Opportunity Commission guidelines. This program helps us create a barrier-free workplace and enable equal employment opportunities and a diverse workforce. We define a *barrier* as an agency policy, procedure, or practice that limits or tends to limit employment opportunities for members of a particular equal employment opportunity group such as groups based on sex, race, ethnic background, or disability status.

The barrier analysis process is an investigation of *triggers*. We define triggers as any information that alerts the agency of the need for additional scrutiny to determine if a barrier truly exists. To identify triggers, we compare workforce data snapshots to benchmarks, and we note irregularities that may point to potential barriers. Some barriers are perceptual and based on employees' opinions as revealed in surveys such as the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey administered by the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, and our exit surveys optionally completed by employees who separate from the agency.

The goal of our investigation is to identify the root causes of barriers and develop plans to eliminate those barriers at all levels of the workplace. We will conduct a new barrier analysis in FY 2023 and use the information to develop a new action plan to eliminate barriers and help build an inclusive, engaged, and empowered workforce.

**Information Needed for the Study:** We need data on the characteristics of our workforce employees, job applicants, and people selected for employment, promotion, and developmental opportunities such as our career development programs. We need data about equal employment opportunity complaints and labor union grievances, which may be obtained from the Office of Labor-Management and Employee Relations. We need to review Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey results and exit survey results, which our Office of Strategy, Learning, and Workforce Development collects.

**Methods:** We use our administrative data to compare characteristics of job applicants and our workforce within specific job positions, grade levels (including the Senior Executive Service), offices, and career development programs to benchmarks that include the characteristics of our overall workforce. When we identify discrepancies between the characteristics within a specific group (e.g., lower percentage of our Senior Executive Service members who have a disability compared to our benchmark), we conduct a root cause analysis that includes interviews with key stakeholders to identify whether our policies, procedures, and practices are barriers to equal employment opportunities. We then develop an action plan to eradicate the barriers. We also analyze data from the Federal Employee Viewpoint Survey and exit survey results, along with other data, to help us determine what factors contribute to identified triggers.

**Anticipated Challenges:** Our ability to collect and analyze data through a variety of methods is limited to available data; and we are committed to fulfilling any labor negotiations required.

**Dissemination:** We will disseminate the results of this evaluation project, as part of the Management Directive 715 (MD-715) Report to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission as required. The report is made available to agency employees.



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February 2022

Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 Documentation  
Produced and published at U.S. taxpayer expense