

Office of the Inspector General

September 28, 2000

William A. Halter
Deputy Commissioner
of Social Security

Inspector General

Performance Measure Review: Reliability of the Data Used to Measure Social Security Administration Employee Satisfaction with the Level of Security at Their Facility (A-13-00-10025)

Attached is a copy of our final report. Our objective was to determine the reliability of the data reported in the Fiscal Year 2000 Performance Plan by the Social Security Administration to measure employee satisfaction with security at their work facility.

Please comment within 60 days from the date of this memorandum on corrective action taken or planned on each recommendation. If you wish to discuss the final report, please call me or have your staff contact Steven L. Schaeffer, Assistant Inspector General for Audit, at (410) 965-9700.

James G. Huse, Jr.

Attachment

**OFFICE OF
THE INSPECTOR GENERAL**

SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

**PERFORMANCE MEASURE REVIEW:
RELIABILITY OF THE DATA USED
TO MEASURE SOCIAL SECURITY
ADMINISTRATION EMPLOYEE
SATISFACTION WITH THE LEVEL
OF SECURITY AT THEIR FACILITY**

September 2000

A-13-00-10025

AUDIT REPORT



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The Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (GPRA), Public Law 103-62, requires Federal agencies to develop and institutionalize processes to plan for and measure mission performance. Each agency must develop goals and objectives as well as specific performance indicators to measure the relevant outputs, service levels, and outcomes of each program activity. GPRA also requires each agency to describe how it will verify the data used to report on program performance. For the Social Security Administration (SSA), the Office of the Inspector General will conduct reviews to determine the reliability of SSA's reported performance data.

The objective of this audit was to determine the reliability of the data SSA reported for the following GPRA performance indicator:

Percent of Employees Reporting They Are Satisfied with the Level of Security at Their Facility

RESULTS OF REVIEW

The data SSA used to report on the percent of employees reporting they were satisfied with the level of security in their work facility were reliable. In determining this, we relied on General Accounting Office (GAO) guidance in defining "data reliability" as well as providing a framework for assessing the reliability of computer processed data.¹ We found the data were sufficiently complete and error free to be convincing for their purpose and context.

However, SSA's presentation of the data would be more informative if SSA disclosed the survey response rate. Also, SSA could derive additional benefit from the data with expanded analysis for management information purposes. In addition, SSA's reporting of the data needs clarification. The number of surveys completed was not presented

¹ GAO, *Assessing The Reliability of Computer-Processed Data*, April 1991.

accurately.² The reporting also did not reveal the original survey was used to produce baseline data and did not have a performance goal.

DATA WERE RELIABLE

The data reported for this performance indicator, which measured the percentage of employees reporting they were satisfied with security in their work facility, were reliable. The data were sufficiently complete and accurate for their purpose.

SSA's Fiscal Year (FY) 1999 goal was to have a 70-percent rate of employee satisfaction with security at their facility. Management decided it was an appropriate goal since the initial survey in 1996 measured the satisfaction rate at 64 percent. Performance data reported in FY 1999 showed 74 percent of employees were satisfied with workplace security. Hence, SSA reported meeting its performance goal.

To obtain its data, in July 1998, SSA sent a survey via postal service and inter-office mail to 6,511 of its 651,000 full-time, permanent employees. SSA received 3,621 responses, of which 2,680 (74 percent) indicated satisfaction with workplace security. To obtain its data, SSA scanned the response sheets and processed the information by computer. Data for the performance measure were predicated on the answer to a single question (out of 26) on the survey that asked about an overall perception of safety/security in the work environment.

We were able to replicate SSA's results by testing the data. We manually reviewed all the survey answer sheets and found that 74 percent of the survey respondents answered they were satisfied with the security in their work facility.³

DATA PRESENTATION AND USE COULD BE IMPROVED

The data could have been presented in a more informative context by disclosing the response rate. Also, the data already gathered could be further analyzed and used for management information and planning.

SSA reported it received 3,621 responses before the cut-off date. This represents a 56-percent response rate.⁴ GAO guidance indicates it can be a serious mistake to assume non-responders would provide similar answers as responders.⁵ To overcome the effects of non-responses, GAO recommends follow up. SSA management advised us some efforts were made to improve the response rate. The non-response data were not presented along with the performance data to let the reader judge its impact. Although 74 percent of the respondents were satisfied with workplace security, this conclusion was based on a 56-percent response rate. Of the population surveyed, 41 percent (74 percent of 56 percent) of employees was known to be satisfied with workplace security. Alternatively expressed, 59 percent of employees surveyed was either not satisfied with security or failed to respond to the survey.

² *Social Security Administration Accountability Report for Fiscal Year 1999 and Performance Plan for Fiscal Year 2000.*

³ We found 24 fewer answer sheets than recorded in SSA's computer-processed data. The discrepancy in the total number of responses is not material.

⁴ SSA reported it obtained a 63-percent response rate for the initial baseline survey done in 1996.

⁵ GAO, *Using Statistical Sampling*, p.112, May 1992.

Although the performance indicator and goal only called for expressing an overall rate, the survey did capture additional information that could be useful for management. For example, the responses could be analyzed by type of work facility. For facility types with employees reporting a satisfaction rate below the stated goal, analysis could indicate the need for improved security measures or the need to make employees more aware of security measures already in place.

DATA PRESENTATION LACKED CLARITY

SSA's reporting of the data needs clarification. The number of surveys already conducted was not presented accurately. SSA presented actual results for three surveys, when only two were done. Results from the initial 1996 survey were reported in *SSA's Accountability Report for Fiscal Year 1999* as actual results for FYs 1997 and 1998. Results from the 1998 survey were reported as actual results in FY 1999. The data presentation also fails to explain that a performance goal was not provided in the initial survey because that survey was used only to provide baseline data. The data were presented similarly in *SSA's Performance Plan for Fiscal Year 2000*.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Our testing of the data led us to conclude they were reliable. However, the reporting of that data could be more informative, its use improved with further analysis, and its presentation clarified. We recommend that SSA take the following actions:

1. For future surveys, if the response rate falls below the current level, perform a non-responder analysis.
2. Supplement the way the performance data are reported by informing the reader of the overall response rate. Also, use the data for expanded management information, such as analyzing the causes of variations in satisfaction levels by type of facility.
3. Clarify the data presentation in future *Accountability Reports* and *Annual Performance Plans* regarding the number of surveys completed and the performance goals and actual results of each.

AGENCY COMMENTS

In response to our draft report, SSA stated Recommendation 1 is moot because SSA plans to discontinue conducting a discrete physical security survey. In the future, SSA will monitor employee satisfaction with security through the Agency's Market Measurement Program.

SSA generally agreed with Recommendations 2 and 3 to report response rates along with performance data and clarify the data presentation in future *Accountability Reports* and *Annual Performance Plans*.

SSA also stated it will consider our recommendation to use the data collected for this performance measure for expanded management information.

OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL RESPONSE

We support SSA's concurrence to report response rates along with performance data and clarify its data presentation in relevant reports. We continue to encourage SSA to use the data already collected for expanded management information.

James G. Huse, Jr.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A - Background

APPENDIX B - Scope and Methodology

APPENDIX C - Agency Comments

APPENDIX D - OIG Contacts and Staff Acknowledgements

APPENDIX E - SSA Organization Chart

BACKGROUND

The Government Performance Results Act requires all Federal agencies to conform to concepts of strategic management. Accordingly, the Social Security Administration (SSA) has issued a strategic plan (Strategic Plan 1997-2002) that sets forth SSA's mission, values, strategic goals and objectives, and target levels of performance. SSA has also issued an annual performance plan to serve as a link between its long-range strategic plan and the annual budget request for the Agency. The annual plan describes levels of performance the Agency is committed to achieve as well as the means and strategies to achieve them.

In its strategic plan, SSA set forth five general goals that encompass all of its program activities. Recognizing its mission and program goals depend on the attitudes and skills of its employees, SSA articulated a distinct strategic goal "...to be an employer that values and invests in each employee." To realize that goal, SSA indicated it will pursue several objectives, one of which is "...to provide a physical environment that promotes the health and well-being of employees." One measure for that objective was to assess employees' satisfaction with the level of security at their facility.

SSA decided to conduct a survey of employee satisfaction in 1996, using a questionnaire directed to a sample of the entire full-time employee population. SSA reported that 64 percent of the respondents was satisfied with the level of security at their work facility. Using this information as baseline data, SSA determined it would strive for a 70-percent rate on its next survey. SSA conducted that survey in 1998 and reported that 74 percent of the respondents answered they were satisfied with workplace security. From these data, SSA concluded it met the performance goal set forth in its annual performance plan.

SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

The objective of this review was to assess the reliability of the Social Security Administration's (SSA) performance data used to measure SSA employee satisfaction with the level of security at their facility. SSA has indicated the Office of the Inspector General will conduct reviews to determine the reliability of reported performance data.

To meet our objective, we interviewed SSA personnel involved in the formation of the performance indicator as well as those involved in collecting, recording, and analyzing the data. We tested the reported data by obtaining the paper survey response sheets and manually comparing the relevant data to SSA's computer processed data.

Our work was conducted at SSA Headquarters in Woodlawn, Maryland. The field work was done from December 1999 to April 2000. Our review was conducted in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

AGENCY COMMENTS

COMMENTS ON THE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL (OIG) DRAFT REPORT,
"PERFORMANCE MEASURE REVIEW: RELIABILITY OF THE DATA USED TO
MEASURE SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION
WITH THE LEVEL OF SECURITY AT THEIR FACILITY" (A-13-00-10025)

Recommendation 1

For future surveys, if the response rate falls below the current level, perform a non-responder analysis.

Comment

This issue is moot because the last discrete physical security survey has already been initiated and the methodology cannot now be changed in order to perform such an analysis. In the future, employee satisfaction in this area will be monitored through the Agency's Market Measurement Program.

Recommendation 2

Supplement the way the performance data are reported by informing the reader of the overall response rate. Also, use the data for expanded management information, such as analyzing the causes of variations in satisfaction levels by type of facility.

Comment

We agree that there is merit to providing response rates to readers and the response rate continues to be openly reported. However, we believe it is misleading to mix non-responders data with data of those who were dissatisfied with the security of the workplace in an overall response rate as recommended. For example, we believe it is much more accurate to report that 15 percent of the population surveyed (26 percent of respondents) were known to be dissatisfied with security and 44 percent of the population surveyed failed to respond; rather than 59 percent of the population surveyed were either dissatisfied with security or failed to respond. We will consider the use of additional survey data to provide expanded management information.

Recommendation 3

Clarify the data presentation in future *Accountability Reports* and *Annual Performance Plans* regarding the number of surveys completed, and the performance goals and actual results of each.

Comment

We agree that every effort must be made to avoid errors in data presentation in these reports. As explained to the audit team during the review, repeating the results from the 1996 survey as an actual number for both 1997 and 1998 in portions of the Accountability Report for FY 1999 and the Social Security Administration's (SSA) Performance Plan for FY 2000 was simply an error. The 1998 figure should have been the target number for the 1998 survey. We will make every effort to ensure that such errors are not repeated in the future.

OIG CONTACTS AND STAFF ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

OIG contacts

Shirley E. Todd, Director, General Management Audit Division, (410) 966-9365

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Acknowledgements

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For additional copies of this report, please contact the Office of the Inspector General's Public Affairs Specialist at (410) 966-5998. Refer to Common Identification Number A-13-00-10025.

SSA ORGANIZATIONAL CHART
