
**OFFICE OF
THE INSPECTOR GENERAL**

SOCIAL SECURITY ADMINISTRATION

**MISSION-CRITICAL OCCUPATION
CORE COMPETENCIES**

May 2010

A-13-08-28099

**EVALUATION
REPORT**



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- Conduct and supervise independent and objective audits and investigations relating to agency programs and operations.
- Promote economy, effectiveness, and efficiency within the agency.
- Prevent and detect fraud, waste, and abuse in agency programs and operations.
- Review and make recommendations regarding existing and proposed legislation and regulations relating to agency programs and operations.
- Keep the agency head and the Congress fully and currently informed of problems in agency programs and operations.

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SOCIAL SECURITY

MEMORANDUM

Date: May 26, 2010

Refer To:

To: The Commissioner

From: Inspector General

Subject: Mission-Critical Occupation Core Competencies (A-13-08-28099)

OBJECTIVE

Our objective was to assess the Social Security Administration's (SSA) efforts to identify and address competency gaps for select mission-critical occupations (MCO).¹ Specifically, we reviewed the Social Insurance Specialist, Contact Representative, Legal Administrative Specialist, and Legal Assistant occupations.

BACKGROUND

SSA, like many other Federal agencies, is being challenged to address its human capital shortfalls. SSA expects many of its key workloads will increase significantly as baby boomers reach retirement age and their most disability-prone years. For example, SSA estimates its retirement, survivor, and Medicare applications will increase 28 percent by Fiscal Year (FY) 2013. Further, the Agency projects 50 percent of its employees, including 66 percent of supervisors, will be eligible to retire by FY 2018.² The growing workload and retirement wave is expected to significantly impact SSA's ability to deliver quality service to the public.

To continue providing quality service to its customers, it is imperative that SSA staff in MCOs possess certain competencies. A competency is defined as a characteristic and measurable pattern of behaviors, skills, knowledge, beliefs, values, traits, or motives that cause superior performance and results within a defined job context. When there

¹ The Office of Personnel Management (OPM) defines MCOs as those occupations agencies consider core to carrying out their missions. Such occupations usually reflect the organization's primary mission. Without these occupations, mission-critical work cannot be completed.

² *SSA Retirement Wave Report: Component/Regional Analysis Fiscal Years 2009-2018*. In addition, SSA projects approximately 51 percent of Social Insurance Specialists, 41 percent of Legal Administrative Specialists, 39 percent of Contact Representatives, and 51 percent of Legal Assistants will be eligible to retire by FY 2017. (SSA, *2008 Retirement Wave Mission Critical Occupations, FY 2007 – FY 2016*.)

is a difference between the competencies needed and the competencies possessed, a gap exists. Gaps are an indication of the risks associated with not being able to accomplish mission objectives.

Both the Government Accountability Office³ and Congress⁴ have emphasized the importance of hiring, retaining, and developing employees according to competencies. Further, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and OPM asked agencies to analyze segments of their workforces, identify competency gaps, and develop plans for closing those gaps.⁵ See Appendix B for more details regarding MCO guidance.

According to SSA's 2008 Human Capital Management Report, some of the Agency's goals related to competencies were to

- recruit and retain a diverse workforce with the critical competencies necessary to provide high quality, public-centered service;
- develop competency standards for all MCOs; and
- assess and identify competency/skill gaps for all MCOs and implement plans to close competency gaps among the workforce.

As of FY 2009, SSA had identified 15 MCOs (see Table 1).⁶ Fourteen were job-specific series, and 1 (leadership) appeared in several of the other 14 MCOs. Of the 15 MCOs, 4 were Government-wide,⁷ and 11 were Agency-specific.⁸

³ GAO, *Human Capital: Federal Workforce Challenges in the 21st Century*, Testimony before the Subcommittee on Financial Services and General Government, Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives GAO-07-556T, March 6, 2007.

⁴ *Report to the President: The Crisis in Human Capital*. Report prepared by Senator George V. Voinovich, Chairman, U.S. Senate, Committee on Governmental Affairs, Subcommittee on Oversight of Government Management, Restructuring, and the District of Columbia, December 2000.

⁵ OMB Memorandum for Chief Acquisition Officers, *The 2007 Federal Contracting Workforce Competencies Survey*, October 17, 2007. OMB Memorandum for the President's Management Council, *Human Capital Planning for the IT Workforce*, April 15, 2005. OPM Memorandum for Human Resource Directors, *Human Resources Management Competency Assessment*, April 10, 2007.

⁶ In FY 2001, SSA identified 14 occupational series as mission critical. In FY 2006, the Agency added the Human Resource Specialist to its list of MCOs. In FY 2007, SSA removed the Telecommunications (General Schedule [GS]-0391) and General Telecommunications (GS-0392) positions and added the Contract Specialist (GS-1102).

⁷ GS-0201, 1102, 2210, and leadership.

⁸ GS-0101, 0105, 0110, 0901, 0905, 0935, 0950, 0962, 0986, 0998, and 1510.

Table 1: SSA's MCOs			
MCO	GS Series	Number of Employees as of June 30, 2009	Percent
Social Science Research	0101	42	0.1
Social Insurance Specialist	0105	28,006	48.3
Economist	0110	36	0.1
Human Resource Specialist	0201	659	1.1
Legal Administrative Specialist	0901	3,559	6.1
General Attorney	0905	2,131	3.7
Administrative Law Judge	0935	1,171	2.0
Paralegal Specialist	0950	1,439	2.5
Contact Representative	0962	11,933	20.6
Legal Assistant	0986	3,451	6.0
Claims Assistance and Examining	0998	1,709	2.9
Contract Specialist	1102	90	0.2
Actuary	1510	44	0.1
Information Technology Specialist	2210	3,721	6.4
TOTAL		57,991	100

As of June 30, 2009, 57,991 (89 percent) of SSA's 65,034 employees were serving in MCOs. The remaining 11 percent encompassed about 100 job series that included such positions as Management Analysts (GS-0343), Benefits and Records Technicians (GS-0303), and Criminal Investigators (GS-1811). For our review, we selected the four MCOs with the highest number of employees—which accounted for approximately 81 percent of the employees working in MCOs (as shown in Table 2).⁹ During our review, we did not question SSA's classification of these occupations as mission-critical nor did we determine the number of employees in each occupational series was the appropriate number.

⁹ The Information Technology Specialist, General Schedule (GS) 2210, was the third largest MCO with approximately 3,700 employees. However, this MCO was excluded from our analysis because it was the subject of a separate review, *The Social Security Administration's Hiring and Training of Information Technology Specialists* (A-13-09-19082).

Table 2: Selected MCOs		
MCO	Series	Number of Employees As of June 30, 2009
Social Insurance Specialist ¹⁰	0105	28,006
Legal Administrative Specialist ¹¹	0901	3,559
Contact Representative ¹²	0962	11,933
Legal Assistant ¹³	0986	3,451
Total		46,949¹⁴

The selected MCOs consist of positions that are crucial to providing service to the public, such as Claims Representatives, Benefit Authorizers, Service Representatives, and Case Technicians. (See Appendix C for position descriptions of the selected MCOs.) Approximately 96 percent of the employees serving in these MCOs worked under the Deputy Commissioners for Operations (DCO) and Disability Adjudication and Review (DCDAR). See Appendix D for more information on the scope and methodology of this review.

RESULTS OF REVIEW

SSA has taken actions to identify and address competency gaps in MCOs. However, additional efforts are needed. We found the Agency identified competencies for a segment of the selected MCOs—rather than the entire series. For example, competencies for the Social Insurance Specialist series (GS-0105) were identified for employees in grade levels 5 and 7. However, competencies were not identified for employees in grade levels 9 through 13.¹⁵ Further, SSA did not perform gap analyses or develop improvement plans for all MCOs. Without identifying the competencies needed for each position and the type or amount of gaps that exist, we believe the Agency cannot be assured that all competency gaps possessed by the employees

¹⁰ The Social Insurance Specialist comprises various positions including Claims Representatives, Claims Authorizers, Social Insurance Specialists, Technical Experts, District Managers, Management Support Specialists, Operations Supervisors, and Supervisory Social Insurance Specialists. The employees in this MCO primarily work under the DCO.

¹¹ The Legal Administrative Specialist MCO comprises various positions including Benefit Authorizers and Benefit Technical Examiners. The employees in this MCO primarily work under the DCO.

¹² The Contact Representative MCO comprises various positions including Teleservice Representatives, Contact Representatives, Service Representatives, Technical Support Technicians, and Customer Service Technicians. The employees in this MCO primarily work under the DCO.

¹³ The Legal Assistant MCO comprises various positions including Case Technicians, Case Intake Technicians, and Legal Assistants. The employees serving in this MCO primarily work under the DCDAR.

¹⁴ This total includes leadership positions within the selected MCOs.

¹⁵ In the four selected MCOs—GS-0105, 0901, 0962, and 0986 series—the employee grade level ranged from GS-5 to Senior Executive Service (SES), GS-5 to 11, GS-4 to 13, and GS-4 to 10, respectively.

filling these select positions are reduced or closed. Since these MCOs are essential to SSA meeting its mission and goals, and SSA's programs impact the lives of virtually all Americans, it is imperative that the Agency identify competencies and address gaps in these MCOs.

IDENTIFICATION OF COMPETENCIES

According to the Agency's FY 2009-2011 Strategic Human Capital Plan, SSA identified competencies for all 15 MCOs. The Agency uses these competencies to recruit, develop its workforce, and affect its retention strategies. However, based on our review, we determined SSA only identified competencies for a segment of the selected MCOs, rather than the entire position series (see Table 3).

Table 3: Competencies for Selected MCOs			
MCO	Applicable Positions and Grade Level	Competencies	
Social Insurance Specialist (GS-0105) ¹⁶	GS-5 and GS-7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading • Writing • Arithmetic • Mathematical Reasoning • Oral Communication • Decision Making • Reasoning • Problem Solving • Learning • Self-Esteem • Teamwork 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrity/Honesty • Self-Management • Interpersonal Skills • Attention to Detail • Customer Service • Stress Tolerance • Flexibility • Technology Application • Technical Competence • Memory • Leadership¹⁷
Legal Administrative Specialist (GS-0901)	GS-5 and GS-7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading • Writing • Arithmetic • Mathematical Reasoning • Oral Communication • Information Management • Decision Making • Problem Solving • Learning • Self-Esteem • Teamwork 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrity/Honesty • Self-Management • Interpersonal Skills • Planning and Evaluating • Attention to Detail • Customer Service • Stress Tolerance • Flexibility • Technology Application • Technical Competence • Memory

¹⁶ OPM identified the competencies for the Social Insurance Specialist and Legal Administrative Specialist MCOs in March 2006 using focus groups of SSA employees.

¹⁷ Leadership is a critical competency for GS-7s only.

Table 3 (continued): Competencies for Selected MCOs			
MCO	Applicable Positions and Grade Level	Competencies	
Contact Representative (GS-0962)	Teleservice Representative ¹⁸	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Computer Competence • Technical Credibility • Accountability • Business Understanding • Customer Service • Decisiveness • Flexibility • Service Motivation • Conflict Management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integrity/Honesty • Teamwork • Relationship Skills • Resilience • Analytical Skills • Continual Learning • Information Search Skills • Oral Communication • Problem Solving
Legal Assistant (GS-0986) ¹⁹	Senior Case Technician, GS-8, 7, and 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issue Analysis and Summaries • Pre/Post Development • Case Work-up • Computer Operation • Oral and Written Communication 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Processing Representative Fees • Mailing Cases • Training/Technical Assistance

In addition to the positions and grade levels noted above, the Agency identified competencies for the leadership series²⁰ (see Appendix E). In total, these positions only represented about 30 percent of the employees in the selected MCOs. Therefore, the remaining 70 percent of the employees may not have the competencies necessary to complete mission-critical work.

During our review, we requested documentation regarding competencies for the other positions in our selected MCOs.²¹ However, as of December 2009, we had not received adequate supporting documentation. In December 2009, SSA's Human Capital Planning Staff (HCPS) provided documentation containing competencies for the following positions: Claims Representative, Service Representative, Teleservice Representative, Claims Authorizer, Benefit Authorizer, and Technical Support Technician. According to HCPS, these documents were created by a contractor. However, staff acknowledged the documentation was inconclusive as to whether the competencies applied to all employees in these positions, as they were unable to locate

¹⁸ SSA retained a contractor to evaluate training for the Teleservice Representative. As part of this effort, the contractor was asked to identify the competencies for this position. The competencies were developed as a result of an October 2002 workshop as well as other research data.

¹⁹ DCDAR identified the competencies for the Legal Assistant MCO during FYs 2008-2009.

²⁰ According to HCPS, the leadership series includes positions with an "s" in the position description.

²¹ According to SSA's 2006-2007 Human Capital Plan and its January 2008 Mission Critical Skill Gap Improvement Plan, competencies were identified for the Claims Representative, Service Representative and Teleservice Representative in FY 2003 as well as the Claims Authorizer and Technical Support Technician in FY 2005. These competencies were developed as part of the Agency's Training Redesign.

the contractor's entire report. Therefore, we were unable to confirm whether the Agency identified competencies for all the remaining positions in the specific MCOs.

IDENTIFICATION OF COMPETENCY GAPS

SSA developed a Mission Critical Skill Gap Improvement Plan and MCO timeline. Based on these documents, the Agency planned to assess all its MCOs by the end of FY 2009 to ensure every MCO had gone through the entire competency process. (See Appendix F for a description of SSA's competency process.) However, we determined the Agency did not meet its goal.

As of FY 2009, SSA reported competencies had only been assessed for 7 of its 15 MCOs.²² HCPS confirmed the Agency did not conduct gap analyses to identify competency gaps for the four MCOs we examined. In addition, no time frame had been established for assessing these MCOs.

According to HCPS, these MCOs were not assessed because of the Agency's *American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009*²³ activities, backlogged workloads, and political sensitivities attached to the ongoing work related to these four MCOs. The Agency was seeking an agreed-upon methodology for studying the employee proficiency levels that would allow it to obtain necessary information without pulling many management employees off-line to complete the survey.²⁴

According to HCPS, the impact of not assessing the selected MCOs in a formalized process was negligible because the Agency was indirectly addressing competencies through the amount and availability of training provided to employees. However, without knowing the type or amount of gaps that exist, we believe the Agency cannot be assured that all competency gaps possessed by these employees are reduced or closed.

The 4 MCOs selected for our review represented 46,949 (72 percent) of the 65,034 employees in the Agency's workforce and, according to SSA, are considered critical to the Agency achieving its mission. Therefore, SSA needs to perform gap analysis to identify and address any competency gaps possessed by the employees in these select occupations.

²² These seven included (1) Social Science Research Analyst 0101, (2) Economist 0110, (3) Actuary 1510, (4) Contract Specialist 1102, (5) Human Resources Specialist 0201, (6) Information Technology Specialist 2210, and (7) Leadership series.

²³ Pub. L. No. 111-5. OMB, *Updated Implementing Guidance for the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009*, M-09-15, April 3, 2009.

²⁴ HCPS estimates the survey would take about 45 minutes to complete. However, the survey time would vary depending on the number of employees for whom a manager was reporting.

REDUCTION OF COMPETENCY GAPS

SSA acknowledged the development of its employees was critical to the Agency's success, particularly those in MCOs. Although the Agency did not complete a formalized gap analysis or develop an improvement plan, it took various actions to address competencies in its MCOs, such as competency-based training, leadership self-assessment and training, development programs, a competency assessment interview process (CAIP), and an annual employee survey.

Competency-Based Training

When SSA first anticipated the losses due to the retirement wave, it began minimizing the loss of mission-critical skills through training. The Office of Operations works with the Office of Learning to ensure the timing of hiring and entry level training are aligned. SSA provides training to its employees nationwide using various methods, including classroom, on-line, video on demand, interactive video teletraining, and SSA Learn.²⁵ (See Appendix G for additional information on SSA's training methods.)

We determined SSA developed competency-based training for the four MCOs. Specifically, the Agency developed training for the Claims Representative, Claims Authorizer, Claims Technical Examiner, Management Support Specialist, Operations Supervisor, Benefit Authorizer, Service Representative, Teleservice Representative, Teleservice Center Management, Case Technician, and Legal Technician. (See Appendix H for details regarding the competency-based training.)

Leadership Self-Assessment and Training

The Office of Learning maintains an on-line leadership competency tool that enables employees to assess themselves on each of the critical leadership competencies. This provides staff with information regarding their level of proficiency in each competency area. This assessment not only provides feedback regarding competency gaps but identifies related on-line training courses that may assist in addressing any deficiencies.

SSA recognized that its leaders include both new and experienced supervisors/managers. Therefore, SSA uses a blended approach to meet the developmental needs of both groups. New and experienced supervisors receive training under the Transition to Leadership Curriculum. For example, SSA offers Agency-wide leadership training through a monthly Transition to Leadership interactive video teletraining series. The series includes a monthly broadcast featuring a nationally acclaimed presenter on a

²⁵ SSA Learn is an Internet-based e-Learning site that offers over 3,000 on-line courses.

variety of leadership topics related to at least 1 of the 16 critical leadership competencies.²⁶ Further, SSA offers forums and symposiums to address competencies for its mid-level managers.²⁷

Development Programs

SSA also implemented several national programs to develop and enhance leadership competencies. For example, SSA periodically runs an SES Candidate Development Program, an Advanced Leadership Program (ALP), and a Leadership Development Program (LDP).²⁸

- The SES Candidate Development Program is conducted over a period of 18 to 24 months. It is open to GS-15 or equivalent employees and GS-14 and GS-13 employees who have 1 year of experience at the GS-14 level. The program is designed to prepare employees to assume executive responsibilities. Candidates must prepare an Individual Development Plan that identifies work experience and training activities designed to assist them in attaining the goals of improved performance and career development. Candidates who complete all elements of the program may request SES certification from OPM. However, candidates who are approved for certification are not guaranteed placement in an SES position.
- The ALP is an 18-month program that prepares GS-13 and 14 employees to become future Agency leaders by providing them training and higher-level developmental experiences. Participants select a mentor who assists them in creating an Individual Development Plan that identifies a variety of rotational assignments, training courses, and other developmental experiences directed toward developing and enhancing specific leadership competencies. Participants who successfully complete the program receive a 3-year Certification of Eligibility for one noncompetitive promotion to a position at the next higher grade for which they are eligible.
- The LDP is an 18-month program that offers GS-9 through 12 employees a variety of developmental experiences through rotational assignments and training directed toward developing specific leadership competencies. Employees are selected to participate in this program based on a competitive process similar to the procedures used for the SES and ALP programs. Participants who successfully complete this program also receive a Certificate of Eligibility.

²⁶ Examples include Managing, Retaining, and Recruiting Different Generations, Managing and the Art of Coaching, Raising Productivity and Morale to Create an Inclusive Environment, Your Leadership Makes a Difference, and Coaching and Feedback for Impact.

²⁷ SSA offers a 3-day, off-site, Leadership Matters symposium to mid-level managers Agencywide. The Agency reports competencies enhanced are technology, financial, and human resources management, team building, conflict management, and creativity/innovation.

²⁸ SSA reported the LDP that ended in FY 2007 had a 43-percent placement rate for its participants. The ALP that ended in July 2008 graduated 80 participants and had a 58-percent placement rate. The SES Candidate Development Program ended in July 2007 and had a 58-percent placement rate.

Competency Assessment Interview Process

According to HCPS, CAIP is an example of a tool used to control skill gaps. CAIP was developed and piloted in FY 2003 and was used to interview external applicants for the Claims Representative position. CAIP includes questions on each competency, rating scales for each competency, and a composite rating sheet.

During the interviews, specific questions are used to determine how well each candidate demonstrates seven important competencies that effective Claims Representatives generally bring to the job. However, they do not represent all the competencies required in the Claims Representative position. Once hired, candidates are expected to develop other competencies on the job. CAIP includes the competencies of customer service orientation, self management, interpersonal sensitivity, planning and organizing, decisionmaking/judgment, analytical thinking/problem solving, and communications.

Annual Employee Survey

SSA conducts an annual survey of its employees, which serves as a barometer of employee satisfaction and engagement. We obtained and reviewed the survey completed in 2007. The survey was administered to over 1,900 SSA employees and included 40 questions that covered major human capital areas, such as recruitment, development, retention, performance culture, leadership, job satisfaction, and personal work experiences. The survey included items that assessed (1) how well the Agency addressed skills, knowledge, and competency gaps by recruiting people with the right skills; (2) training and development of employees; and (3) retaining a diverse, high-performing workforce through employee engagement and retention-related programs. About 71 percent of those surveyed believed the workforce had the job-relevant knowledge and skills necessary to accomplish organizational goals. Also, over 50 percent of survey participants were satisfied with the training they received for their present job and felt they were given a real opportunity to improve their skills.

The survey reported the Agency's workforce had become increasingly more proficient in the competencies necessary for success. For example, SSA had a 93-percent overall retention rate, which the Agency believes can be attributed to employee engagement in the work they do. SSA reported newly hired employees often leave because of the lack of "fit" of their skills, abilities, and interests with the job. The Agency attempts to address "employee fit" early by finding employees with the right competencies and motivation for the targeted position. From 2006 to 2007, the percentage of people who believed their unit was able to recruit people with the right skills increased by 9.3 percent.

In 2008, OPM administered the survey to about 5,960 SSA employees. It included questions that addressed employee satisfaction and engagement across several different human capital areas. Similar to the prior year, approximately 72 percent of those surveyed believed the workforce had the job-relevant knowledge and skills

necessary to accomplish organizational goals. Also, over 57 percent of survey participants were satisfied with the training they received for their present job and about 62 percent believed they were given a real opportunity to improve their skills.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

SSA continued to be a leader in addressing its human capital challenges and took actions to improve its MCOs. The Agency is committed to meeting its human capital challenges to enable it to keep providing the services its customers deserve. However, given the significance of the selected MCOs, the Agency should increase its efforts to identify competencies and address competency gaps. Specifically, we recommend SSA:

1. Use a risk-based approach to identify competencies for the remaining positions in the GS-0105, 0901, 0962, and 0986 series and develop and implement a strategy to periodically assess the relevancy of the competencies.
2. Conduct analysis to determine whether competency gaps exist in the GS-0105, 0901, 0962, and 0986 series. If appropriate, develop and implement strategies to address any identified competency gaps.

AGENCY COMMENTS

SSA agreed with our recommendations. See Appendix I for the full text of the Agency's comments.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Pat O'Carroll Jr.", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Patrick P. O'Carroll, Jr.

Appendices

[APPENDIX A](#) – Acronyms

[APPENDIX B](#) – Mission-Critical Occupation Guidance

[APPENDIX C](#) – Position Descriptions for Selected Mission-Critical Occupations

[APPENDIX D](#) – Scope and Methodology

[APPENDIX E](#) – Leadership Competencies

[APPENDIX F](#) – The Social Security Administration’s Competency Process

[APPENDIX G](#) – Training Methods

[APPENDIX H](#) – Competency-Based Training for Selected Mission-Critical Occupations

[APPENDIX I](#) – Agency Comments

[APPENDIX J](#) – OIG Contacts and Staff Acknowledgments

Acronyms

ALP	Advanced Leadership Program
BA	Benefit Authorizer
BTE	Benefit Technical Examiner
CA	Claims Authorizer
CAIP	Competency Assessment Interview Process
C.F.R.	Code of Federal Regulations
CHCO	Chief Human Capital Officers
CR	Claims Representative
CTE	Claims Technical Examiner
DCDAR	Deputy Commissioner for Disability Adjudication and Review
DCO	Deputy Commissioner for Operations
FY	Fiscal Year
GS	General Schedule
HCPS	Human Capital Planning Staff
IVT	Interactive Video Teletraining
LDP	Leadership Development Program
MCO	Mission-Critical Occupation
OMB	Office of Management and Budget
OPM	Office of Personnel Management
Pub. L. No.	Public Law Number
SES	Senior Executive Service
SME	Subject Matter Expert
SR	Service Representative
SSA	Social Security Administration
TL	Transition to Leadership
TSR	Teleservice Representative
U.S.C.	United States Code
VOD	Video on Demand

Mission-Critical Occupation Guidance

We identified an array of guidance pertaining to mission-critical occupations (MCO). Specifically, we held discussions with Social Security Administration (SSA) personnel and examined Agency plans and reports that addressed various aspects of MCO activities. In addition, we identified guidance applicable to all Federal agencies—such as information from the Offices of Personnel Management (OPM) and Management and Budget (OMB)—pertaining to MCOs.

According to SSA's Mission Critical Skill Gap Improvement Plan, OPM presented instructions on how to address MCOs during an August 2005 workshop. Specifically, agencies were required to submit a plan for reducing mission-critical skill gaps. This plan, containing the strategy for identifying and closing potential gaps in each MCO, was due to OPM by December 31, 2005. SSA reported it submitted the initial planning document at that time. However, the Agency updated its Mission Critical Skill Gap Improvement Plan in January 2008, which provided the status of the Agency's activities. SSA's Human Capital Planning Staff (HCPS) stated the Agency received concurrence from OPM regarding its timeline.

According to SSA, OPM instructed agencies to close competency gaps in MCOs by 2009. However, OPM did not provide a Government-wide strategy on how agencies must close competency gaps for MCOs. Agencies had to develop their own timeline for addressing MCOs. HCPS explained when they developed SSA's timeline, they considered what was going to work best for the Agency in terms of the impact on its operations. Specifically, SSA considered various items, including the number of employees in each targeted series; the existence of current strategies to minimize gaps; and the need for, and availability of, automated tools to assess skill/competency gaps.

From the Government-wide perspective, OPM was addressing the impending retirement wave by requiring that all agencies reduce skill gaps in specific MCOs. There were only two deadlines required for closing competency gaps. The following target dates were outlined in OPM's Strategic and Operational Plan.

Target Date for Closing Competency Gaps	Affected MCO and Series	OPM Target Language, Goal ID, and Date Requested
October 1, 2006	Human Resources Management Specialist, 0201	Set targets for closing competency gaps in the Human Resources Management Specialist occupation by October 1, 2006 at all Chief Human Capital Officer (CHCO) agencies (Goal ID D5 requested September 14, 2006).
October 1, 2009	Acquisition/Contract Specialist Workforce, 1102	Work with CHCO Council to set targets for closing competency gaps for acquisition workforce by December 1, 2007; close competency gaps in 15 CHCO agencies, including OPM, by October 1, 2008; and all CHCO agencies by October 1, 2009 (Goal ID C-20 requested September 25, 2007).

In addition to OPM's requirements for the 0201 and 1102 series, OMB issued a memorandum requesting agencies to analyze important job activities and develop and submit plans for closing information technology skill gaps. These plans were due to OMB by August 30, 2005. However, there were no specific deadlines for closing competency gaps in the four MCOs we reviewed.

Changes in MCO Deliverable Requirements

HCPS explained that the MCO guidance received from OPM and OMB was primarily verbal. Other than OPM's guidelines for preparing gap closure deliverables,¹ the Agency did not receive any other written guidance. The OPM guidelines provide information on preparing the following documents.

- **Gap Analysis Report.** This Report reflects an agency's analysis of the supply and demand of strategic competencies in its MCOs. The Report is based on the agency's workforce planning results as well as other competency management activities. The Report includes a description of the competencies being targeted for closure in MCOs in the agency. The Report should describe how the competencies targeted for closure align with mission accomplishment and strategic priorities. The Report should also include a competency assessment methodology that documents how competencies are determined and assessed as well as any relevant information to validate the methodology.
- **Improvement Plan.** The Plan describes the organization's strategy and tactics for closing competency gaps. The Plan includes (1) the tactics the agency has chosen to close the targeted competency gaps, such as training, recruitment, and staff redeployment; (2) the rationale for the selection of the tactics; (3) the deliverables, milestones, and timelines; (4) a description of the evidence the agency will provide

¹ OPM, *Proud to be 5, Mission Critical Occupations Guidelines for Preparing the Gap Closure Deliverables, Performance Period July 1, 2007 through June 30, 2008.*

OPM demonstrating that competency gaps are closed; and (5) the person accountable for executing the plan.

- **Progress Report.** This Report is a status check of how well the agency is implementing its strategies for closing competency gaps and achieving its overall objectives. It can also describe any changes, such as budget freezes and strategic plan changes, that necessitate an update to the original gap analysis report and improvement plan. The Report includes (1) deliverable and milestone achievement; (2) progress in closing competency gaps; (3) data collection process for planned program evaluation; and (4) any changes and their impact on the original gap analysis and improvement plan.
- **Measure Results Report.** This Report documents an organization's results in closing competency gaps in MCOs. The bases for this Report are the Gap Analysis Report and Improvement Plan. The Measure Results Report includes a discussion of the extent to which stated goals have been achieved, including gap closure targets, specific milestones, and deliverables. It also includes an assessment of the effectiveness of chosen strategies and tactics for closing competency gaps, including lessons learned and possible new strategies for future competency gap closure efforts. In addition, the report includes an updated Competency Profile² and MCO Resource Table.³

Previously, these reports were due each quarter. However, SSA's efforts pertaining to competencies are now broadly summarized and reported annually as part of its Human Capital Management Report.

OPM adopted a Human Capital Assessment and Accountability Framework and related systems (Human Capital Assessment and Accountability Framework Systems, Standards, and Metrics) to guide agencies in planning, evaluating, and improving the efficiency and effectiveness of agency human capital management with respect to identifying and closing competency/skill gaps in the agency's mission critical occupations. Agencies are required to maintain a current human capital plan and provide OPM an annual Human Capital Management Report. The Human Capital Assessment and Accountability Framework Systems, Standards, and Metrics provides specific information on the coverage and content for the plan and report. For example, the plan must identify potential shortfalls or gaps, describe the occupations most critical to agency performance, and describe mission-critical competencies and key demographics (for example, talent analysis, turnover and retirement eligibility).⁴

² The profile chart contains data on competency gaps and surpluses. It contains information from the beginning of the measurement year and the results achieved by the end of the measurement year.

³ This resource chart contains data on the number of employees and calculations on staffing gaps and surpluses. Agencies are required to provide resource chart data to OPM at the beginning and end of the measurement year.

⁴ 5 C.F.R. §§ 250.202 and 250.203.

HCPS informed us that the Agency had limited deliverable requirements because the MCO deliverables were discontinued. HCPS indicated the Agency only received verbal confirmation of the end, as neither OMB nor OPM supplied written documentation. New MCO guidance has not been issued.

Prioritization of MCOs

According to HCPS, OPM and OMB's requirements dictated the order in which the agencies' MCOs were assessed. Specifically, OPM and OMB required that agencies assess the Information Technology, Human Resources, and Contracting/Acquisition positions.⁵ In addition to these positions, SSA identified competencies and performed gap analysis for other positions. HCPS selected the unique positions to assess first—Actuary and Economist. With these two positions, HCPS only had to coordinate with one component. HCPS indicated they wanted to get more experience with the process before tackling a much larger MCO involving several different components.

For occupational series with employee populations fewer than 100 employees, HCPS stated it used survey software and developed an assessment spreadsheet to assess competencies and identify gaps. However, HCPS reported the Agency was researching options that would allow it to gather data on larger employee populations. All 4 of our selected MCOs contained more than 100 employees, thus falling into this category.

⁵ OMB Memorandum for Chief Acquisition Officers, *The 2007 Federal Contracting Workforce Competencies Survey*, October 17, 2007. OMB Memorandum for the President's Management Council, *Human Capital Planning for the IT Workforce*, April 15, 2005. OPM Memorandum for Human Resource Directors, *Human Resources Management Competency Assessment*, April 10, 2007.

Position Descriptions for Selected Mission-Critical Occupations

The Social Insurance Specialist (GS-0105), Legal Administrative Specialist (GS-0901), Contact Representative (GS-0962), and Legal Assistant (GS-0986) mission-critical occupations (MCO) play a vital role in the Agency providing services to the public. Below is a summary of the position descriptions for each of the selected MCOs.

MCO	Position Description
Social Insurance Specialist ¹	<p>This series consists of positions that involve managing, supervising, or performing work concerned with the administration and operation of national social insurance and need-based benefit programs. This includes adjudicating, authorizing, or reconsidering claims for benefits.²</p> <p>Positions included in this series primarily require knowledge of the laws, regulations, principles, and operating requirements of the interrelationships among Federal and State programs, analytical and technical skills, and abilities used in planning, developing, evaluating, or carrying out the operation and delivery of these programs to the public.</p>
Legal Administrative Specialist ³	<p>This series covers administrative positions that supervise, lead, or perform work involving two or more series in the Legal and Kindred Group.⁴ These positions require legal and kindred administrative knowledge but are not covered by an existing administrative series within the group. This work involves (1) supervising or performing administrative work concerning benefits and services available to the public, (2) claims and claims examining, and (3) entitlement to Federal retirement benefits, including adjudication and reconsideration of entitlement decisions.</p>

¹ The Social Insurance Specialist MCO consists of various positions including Claims Representatives, Claims Authorizers, Social Insurance Specialists, Technical Experts, District Managers, Management Support Specialists, Operations Supervisors, and Supervisory Social Insurance Specialists. The employees serving in this MCO primarily work under the Deputy Commissioner for Operations (DCO).

² Adjudicating the claim refers to the process of determining whether the claimant is eligible and entitled to benefits for which he/she filed the claim. Authorizing the claim refers to exercising the Agency's authority to allow or disallow the claim. Reconsidering the claim refers to a thorough and independent reexamination of the claim.

³ The Legal Administrative Specialist MCO consists of various positions including Benefit Authorizers and Benefit Technical Examiners. The employees serving in this MCO primarily work under DCO.

⁴ The occupational series covered by the Office of Personnel Management's Job Family Position Classification Standard for Assistance Work in the Legal and Kindred Group (GS-0900) includes the following: Contact Representative (GS-0962), Legal Instruments Examining (GS-0963), Legal Assistance (GS-0986), and Claims Assistance and Examining (GS-0998).

MCO	Position Description
Contact Representative ⁵	This series covers administrative support positions that (1) supervise, lead or perform support and related work in connection with dispersing information to the public on rights, benefits, privileges, or obligations under a body of law; (2) explaining pertinent legal provisions, regulations and related administrative practices as they apply to specific cases; and (3) assisting individuals in developing evidence and preparing required documents or in resolving errors, delays or other problems in obtaining benefits or fulfilling obligations.
Legal Assistant ⁶	This series covers administrative support positions that supervise, lead, or perform legal assistance work not classifiable in any other series in the Legal and Kindred Group, GS-0900. The work requires specialized knowledge of processes, procedures, and practices to support legal activities. This series also covers administrative support positions that perform various legal assistant support functions, including assistance in conducting hearings or judicial proceedings, case management, litigation, debt collection, and other similar types of activities.

⁵ The Contact Representative MCO consists of various positions including Teleservice Representatives, Contact Representatives, Service Representatives, Technical Support Technicians, and Customer Service Technicians. The employees serving in this MCO primarily work under DCO.

⁶ The Legal Assistant MCO consists of various positions including Case Technicians, Case Intake Technicians, and Legal Assistants. The employees serving in this MCO primarily work under the Deputy Commissioner for Disability Adjudication and Review.

Scope and Methodology

To accomplish our objective, we:

- Reviewed various Social Security Administration (SSA) documents related to Human Capital.¹
- Reviewed prior Office of the Inspector General and Government Accountability Office reports.
- Reviewed relevant Federal laws, regulations, and guidance.
- Reviewed data pertaining to SSA's mission-critical occupations (MCO), including SSA's position descriptions and the Office of Personnel Management's position classifications.
- Obtained documentation regarding training provided to employees in MCOs.
- Interviewed personnel from the Office of the Deputy Commissioner for Human Resources' Human Capital Planning Staff.
- Selected 4 of the Agency's 15 MCOs for review, based on the occupations with the largest number of employees as of October 2007. Although the Information Technology Specialist was the MCO with the third largest employees, this MCO was excluded as it was evaluated as part of a separate review.²

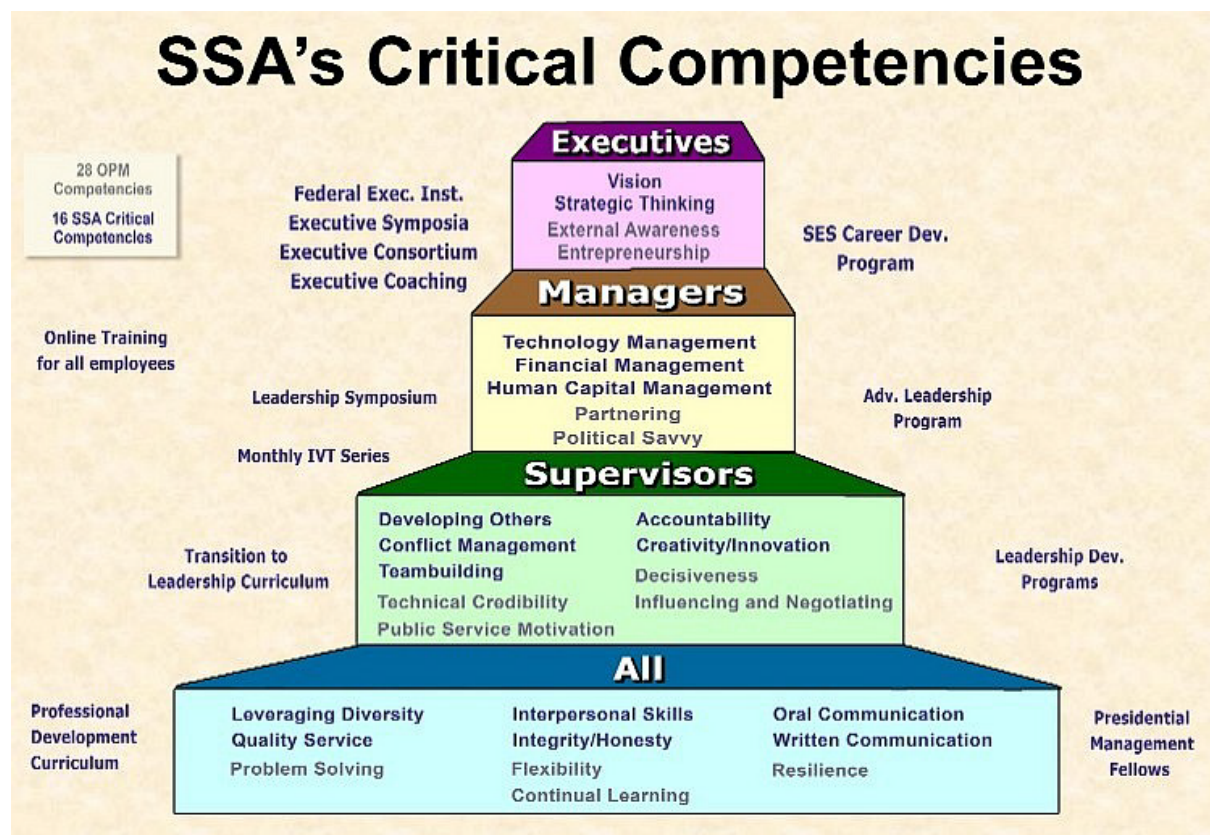
¹ Documents included SSA's Fiscal Year (FY) 2009-2011 Strategic Human Capital Plan; FY 2009 Human Capital Implementation Plan; FY 2008 Human Capital Management Report; 2008 Retirement Wave Mission Critical Occupations, FY 2007-2016; FY 2006 Human Capital Accountability Report; Human Capital Accountability System, July 2006; and Strategic Leadership Succession Plan, September 2006.

² *The Social Security Administration's Hiring and Training of Information Technology Specialists* (A-13-09-19082). The objective of this review was to assess SSA's human capital activities related to the hiring, training, and retention of staff that occupy the mission-critical position of Information Technology Specialist.

During our review, we did not evaluate whether the occupations SSA classified as mission-critical, or the number of employees in each position, were appropriate. We performed our review at SSA's Headquarters in Baltimore, Maryland, from September 2008 to December 2009. The entity reviewed was the Office of the Deputy Commissioner for Human Resources. We conducted our review in accordance with the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency's *Quality Standards for Inspections*.

Leadership Competencies

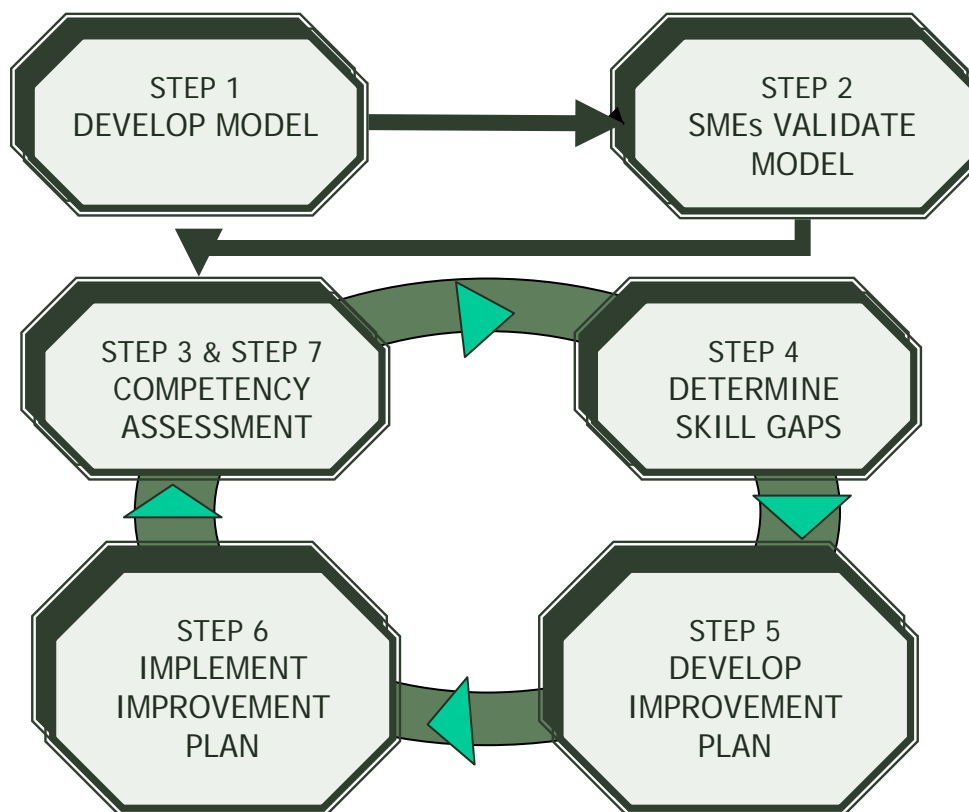
According to the Social Security Administration (SSA), it analyzed the Office of Personnel Management's (OPM) 27 leadership competencies—and reviewed leading human resources agencies and companies—to identify which competencies were most essential for successful leaders. Upon completion of this review, SSA's Office of Learning hosted a national workgroup of SSA leaders to review its findings and recommend which competencies were most essential for success at SSA. While the SSA managers recognized the importance of each of the 27 OPM competencies, they expressed the belief that 27 were too many for SSA to deal with at once. The managers originally recommended 11 of the OPM competencies. In subsequent discussions among SSA stakeholders, the number of competencies increased to 15. Recently, the number of leadership competencies increased to 28 OPM competencies and 16 SSA critical competencies, as shown below.¹



¹ The illustration depicts the leadership competencies at various levels. Executives include employees in the Senior Executive Service (SES) and participants in the SES candidate development program (grade 13 with a year of experience, grade 14, and grade 15). Managers generally include grades 13 to 15, although grade 12 employees with 1 year of supervisory experience are eligible to attend training at leadership symposiums. Supervisors include all employees who are designated as supervisors or who have leadership roles, regardless of grade. The last group of competencies includes all grade levels.

The Social Security Administration's Competency Process

The Agency established a seven-step competency process for evaluating the employees within its mission-critical occupations (MCO). See below for a flowchart and description of this process.¹



Step 1—Develop the Competency Model

This step includes identifying competencies for the occupation, competency names and definitions, and subject matter experts (SME). SMEs are non-bargaining unit or supervisory employees in the MCO being reviewed. The SMEs work in partnership with the Human Capital Planning Staff (HCPS) to develop the competencies for their series/positions.

¹ This process may vary and is used in some, but not all situations.

SMEs are trained by HCPS so they understand the entire process and their role in the competency definitions and identification. For example, SMEs are trained on the competency definition, competency characteristics, competency assessment process, and standard operating procedures for competency analysis.

According to the Agency's competency protocol, the competency model should include both general and technical competencies. General competencies are required of all incumbents in the occupation, regardless of level, expertise, or specialty, while technical competencies may show variation by grade level and specialty area. Further, the model should be based on extensive research of the duties and knowledge required for the position. Potential sources include position descriptions, vacancy announcements, and Office of Personnel Management studies.

Step 2—Validate the Model Using Subject Matter Experts

During this step, the SMEs validate the competency model and definitions. Also, SMEs identify the level of importance, skills needed at entry, and value of competencies. In addition, SMEs identify the proficiency levels for each grade level of the occupation. Various worksheets and forms are used to facilitate this process.

Step 3—Assess Competencies of Current Staff

First, HCPS identifies employees in the targeted occupation. Second, managers and employees are surveyed on the proficiency levels of the identified competencies in the MCO. Before the assessment, managers and supervisors identify current and future (1 to 3 years) competency needs and proficiency levels. The managers then assess each of their employees on the identified competencies by rating them on the proficiency level and determining the competency gap. Each competency is assessed against three (basic, intermediate, and advanced) or six (none, basic, foundational, intermediate, advanced, and expert) proficiency levels.

The Agency uses an Internet-based survey software from an outside vendor or an Excel spreadsheet to identify competency gaps.

Step 4—Determine Competency Gaps

After managers rate each employee, the scores are totaled for each competency. This step involves comparing the needed competency proficiency levels with the actual proficiency level of the employees. The difference between the two is the competency gap between the staff's current skill/proficiency level and the desired level. This involves a pre-test survey to discern competency proficiency levels of the MCO workforce. A Gap Analysis Report is prepared to document the competency gaps.

Step 5—Develop Improvement Plan and Timeline

After the gaps are identified, the Agency develops an Improvement Plan that outlines how it intends to close the gaps. This involves setting goals, targets, and milestones. When developing the plan, the Agency determines which competency to target for competency gap closure. The largest or more significant gaps for specific competencies indicate areas where improvement plans are needed. The Agency strategically targets the gaps that help carry out the Agency's mission and priorities. Also, the Agency develops strategies to improve employee competency levels including training, recruitment, mentoring, promotions, hiring, and seminars.

A timeline is developed for the improvement plan and subsequent competency gap assessment. Generally, the plan is to have the gaps closed within 2 quarters. The employees will be reassessed in the fourth quarter.

Step 6—Implement Improvement Plan

The next step in the process is to implement the strategies according to the improvement plan. The timeline is used as a guide for when to conduct and complete development strategies. The Agency prepares and submits a Progress Report (formally the Implementation Plan) to the Office of Personnel Management. The Agency reported it normally takes about 2 quarters to fully implement facets of the approved improvement plan.

Step 7—Reassess Competencies of Current Staff

After the strategies are completed, the Agency reassesses employee competencies in the targeted occupation. The results of the second survey, when compared with the results of the series' baseline survey, provide the data and percentiles that indicate improvements in the specific competencies and reductions of gaps within the specific competencies. Depending on the results of the competency assessment, the Agency will continue with the improvement plan or adjust the improvement plan. The Agency will reassess (after post-test) and report to HCPS for sharing with the Office of Personnel Management. The Agency prepares and submits a Measure Results Report that reports the extent to which goals were achieved. It also includes an updated Competency Profile and MCO Resource Tables.

Training Methods

The Social Security Administration (SSA) provides training to its employees nationwide using various methods, including classroom, online, video on demand (VOD), interactive video teletraining (IVT), and SSA Learn.

- **Classroom.** SSA offers an array of classroom training each month at its Headquarters in Baltimore, Maryland. For example, in Calendar Year 2009, training was available in computer skills, Title II/XVI fundamentals, managing projects and priorities, basic analyst, business writing and grammar, and contract officer technical representative.
- **On-line.** Training courses are also available on-line from the Office of Learning's Website. The classes offered fall into several categories, including computer skills, cross programs, disability, Title II, Title XVI, management, etc.
- **VOD.** The VOD training courses are offered at the national, regional, and component levels. The national VOD courses included training on computer skills, disability, Medicare, service representative, Title II, Title XVI, etc. Regional VOD courses included training for SSA's regions as well as the Office of Central Operations. The component VOD content included training for employees in the Office of Communications and the Office of Disability and Adjudication Review.
- **IVT.** Studios broadcast to Social Security and disability determination services employees. SSA has seven IVT studios. Studios 1, 2, and 7 are in Baltimore, Maryland, and provide in-service training. Studio 3 is in Kansas City, Missouri, and provides Title II Claims Representative Entry Level training. Studio 4 is in Atlanta, Georgia, and provides Title XVI Claims Representative entry level training. Studio 5 is in Dallas, Texas, and provides Service Representative entry-level training. Studio 6 is in Seattle, Washington, and provides Core, Area Systems Coordinator/Site LAN Coordinator, Automation Training Specialist, and transition to leadership training.
- **SSA Learn.** This is an Internet-based e-Learning site with over 3,000 on-line courses available to employees at work and at home. The Office of Learning's Website contains a matrix linking leadership competencies to related courses. These are short online courses available through SSA GoLearn to help supervisors learn more about specific subjects grouped in accordance with the Agency identified critical competencies.

Competency-Based Training for Selected Mission-Critical Occupations

Mission-Critical Occupation	Position	Course Title and Description	Delivery of Competency Based Training	Percentage of Staff Who Completed the Training ¹
0105 Social Insurance Specialist	Claims Representative (CR)	<p>CR Entry-Level Training provides basic information on program-specific aspects of the CR position, enabling staff to perform essential job functions.</p> <p>CR Advanced Level Training provides information on more advanced topics of the Title II/XVI program, enabling CRs to perform these job duties.</p>	Students attend the entry-level course in either a classroom setting or by Interactive Video Teletraining (IVT). The Advanced Course is conducted by Video on Demand (VOD).	100 percent of newly hired/promoted employees designated as a CR since October 2003.
	Claims Authorizer (CA) Claims Technical Examiner (CTE)	<p>CA/CTE Basic Entry Level Training provides basic information on program specific aspects of the CA and CTE positions, enabling trainees to perform essential job functions.</p>	Traditional face-to-face classroom training.	100 percent of newly hired/promoted employees designated as a CA or CTE since July 2006.

¹ Since the employee population continuously changes, we did not test and verify the training completed by staff within these mission-critical occupations.

Mission-Critical Occupation	Position	Course Title and Description	Delivery of Competency Based Training	Percentage of Staff Who Completed the Training
0105 Social Insurance Specialist	Management Support Specialist and Operations Supervisor	Transition to Leadership (TL) 101 Welcome to Management² is for all newly appointed supervisors and management staff to complete within 6 months of assignment to their position. This course consists of 12 hours of instruction covering personnel administration core topics.	IVT	100 percent of new members to the management team as they move into their positions.
		TL 201 Running Your Field Operation³ is Part II of the TL 101 course and is mandatory for all new supervisors and management staff to complete within 1 year of appointment to a position in a field office processing center or teleservice center. The TL 201 consists of up to 22 hours of instruction to orient the new supervisor quickly into management processes and personnel administration.	IVT and Classroom	

² The competencies enhanced by this training are conflict management, teambuilding, accountability, and creativity/innovation.

³ The competencies enhanced by this training are teambuilding, accountability, technology management, financial management, quality service, interpersonal skills, integrity/honesty, and oral and written communication.

Mission-Critical Occupation	Position	Course Title and Description	Delivery of Competency Based Training	Percentage of Staff Who Completed Training
0105 Social Insurance Specialist	Management Support Specialist and Operations Supervisor	TL 301 Nuts and Bolts⁴ is a 5-day course for all new supervisors and management staff to complete within 1 year of assignment to the new position. This course explains in greater depth the core topics addressed in the IVT course TL 101 and portions of TL 201. In addition, several additional topics are addressed such as: Federal Payroll and Personnel System, Management Time and Attendance System, Leave Administration, Benefits, Performance Management, and Financial Management.	Face-to-face Classroom	100 percent of new members to the management team as they move into their positions.
		TL 401 Leading People⁵ is a 5-day program for all new supervisors and managers to complete within 1 year of appointment to a supervisory position. This week-long program includes topics such as Leadership, Teambuilding, Conflict Management, Diversity, Accountability, Creativity and Innovation, and Communication.	Face-to-face Classroom	

⁴ The competencies enhanced by this training are technology management, financial management, Human Resource management, diversity, interpersonal skills, integrity/honesty, and written communication.

⁵ The competencies enhanced by this training are conflict management, teambuilding, accountability, and creativity/innovation.

Mission-Critical Occupation	Position	Course Title and Description	Delivery of Competency Based Training	Percentage of Staff Who Completed the Training
0901 Legal Administrative Specialist	Benefit Authorizer (BA)	BA/Benefit Technical Examiner (BTE) Basic Entry Level Training provides basic information on program-specific aspects of the BA and BTE positions, enabling trainees to perform essential job functions.	Traditional face-to-face classroom training	100 percent of newly hired/promoted employees designated as a BA or BTE since July 2006.
0962 Contact Representative	Service Representative (SR)	SR Entry Level Training provides basic information regarding aspects of the Title II and XVI programs that will enable new SRs to perform essential job functions. SR Advanced Training provides information about more advanced topics of the Title II and XVI programs that enable new SRs to perform their job duties.	Students attend the entry level course in either a classroom setting or by IVT. The Advanced Course is conducted by VOD.	100 percent of newly hired/promoted employees designated as a SR since October 2003.

Mission-Critical Occupation	Position	Course Title and Description	Delivery of Competency Based Training	Percentage of Staff Who Completed the Training
0962 Contact Representative	Teleservice Representative (TSR)	TSR Basic Entry Level Training provides basic information on program specific aspects of the TSR position, enabling trainees to perform essential job functions. TSR Advanced Entry Level Training provides information on more advanced topics of the Title II and XVI programs, enabling trainees to respond to telephone inquiries from the public.	Traditional face-to-face classroom training.	100 percent of newly hired/promoted employees designated as a TSR since December 2004.
	Teleservice Center Management	See training above for Management Support Specialist and Operations Supervisor.		
0986 Legal Assistant	Case Technician	Legal Assistant Training Program provides basic information on program aspects of the Senior Case Technician/Case Technician job functions.	Classroom training.	100 percent of newly hired/promoted employees since 2002.
	Legal Technician	Legal Assistant Training Program provides basic information on program aspects of the Senior Case Technician/Legal Technician job functions.	Classroom training.	100 percent of newly hired/promoted employees since 2002.

Agency Comments



SOCIAL SECURITY

MEMORANDUM

Date: May 17, 2010 **Refer To:** S1J-3

To: Patrick P. O'Carroll, Jr.
Inspector General

From: James A. Winn /s/
Executive Counselor to the Commissioner

Subject: Office of the Inspector General (OIG) Draft Report, "Mission-Critical Occupation Core Competencies" (A-13-08-28099)--INFORMATION

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the draft report. We appreciate OIG's efforts in conducting this review. Attached is our response to the report findings and recommendations.

Please let me know if we can be of further assistance. Please direct staff inquiries to Candace Skurnik, Director, Audit Management and Liaison Staff, at extension 54636.

Attachment:
SSA Response

**COMMENTS ON THE OFFICE OF THE INSPECTOR GENERAL (OIG) DRAFT
REPORT, "MISSION-CRITICAL OCCUPATION CORE COMPETENCIES"
A-13-08-28099**

Thank you for acknowledging our leadership role in addressing human capital challenges and our commitment to meeting those challenges while satisfying the needs of the American public we serve. We continuously strive to improve the knowledge, skills, and competencies of our employees, particularly those in mission critical occupations (MCO). As we identify competency gaps, we increase the quality and relevance of our training and work toward improving the proficiency of all employees. We schedule classes to coincide with hiring and provide content rich entry-level training to new hires, especially those in MCO positions.

See below for our responses to your specific recommendations:

Recommendation 1

Use a risk-based approach to identify competencies for the remaining positions in the GS-0105, 0901, 0962, and 0986 series and develop and implement a strategy to periodically assess the relevancy of the competencies.

Response

We agree. To the extent resources permit, we will continue to identify competencies for these positions and implement a strategy to periodically assess the relevancy of the competencies.

For these four positions, we face a significant challenge in identifying competencies, assessing gaps, and then closing those gaps. Within the GS-105 series alone, there are more than 63 organizational position titles at varying grade levels ranging from entry level through Associate and Regional Commissioner. Because of this, the competencies for each position and grade will vary.

We also appreciate that you acknowledge our efforts to identify the competencies for the GS-105 series at the GS-5/7 level. We are taking further actions in this area and have convened a workgroup to review other positions in the GS-105 job series. The workgroup is rewriting the position descriptions for the mission critical occupations of Claims Representative, Service Representative, Benefit Authorizer, Claims Authorizer, and Technical Expert. It will then develop job analyses, rating criteria, career-ladder plans, and performance expectations for the positions. The workgroup will then expand its review to the District Manager, Operations Supervisor, Module Manager, and Assistant Module Manager positions.

Recommendation 2

Conduct analysis to determine whether competency gaps exist in the GS-0105, 0901, 0962, and 0986 series. If appropriate, develop and implement strategies to address any identified competency gaps.

Response

We agree in principle. To the extent resources allow, we will perform this analysis.

OIG Contacts and Staff Acknowledgments

OIG Contacts

Shirley Todd, Director, Evaluation Division

Melinda Padeiro, Acting Audit Manager

Acknowledgments

In addition to those named above:

Melinda Lockhart, Auditor-in-Charge

For additional copies of this report, please visit our web site at www.socialsecurity.gov/oig or contact the Office of the Inspector General's Public Affairs Staff Assistant at (410) 965-4518. Refer to Common Identification Number A-13-08-28099.

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Social Security Advisory Board

Overview of the Office of the Inspector General

The Office of the Inspector General (OIG) is comprised of an Office of Audit (OA), Office of Investigations (OI), Office of the Counsel to the Inspector General (OCIG), Office of External Relations (OER), and Office of Technology and Resource Management (OTRM). To ensure compliance with policies and procedures, internal controls, and professional standards, the OIG also has a comprehensive Professional Responsibility and Quality Assurance program.

Office of Audit

OA conducts financial and performance audits of the Social Security Administration's (SSA) programs and operations and makes recommendations to ensure program objectives are achieved effectively and efficiently. Financial audits assess whether SSA's financial statements fairly present SSA's financial position, results of operations, and cash flow. Performance audits review the economy, efficiency, and effectiveness of SSA's programs and operations. OA also conducts short-term management reviews and program evaluations on issues of concern to SSA, Congress, and the general public.

Office of Investigations

OI conducts investigations related to fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement in SSA programs and operations. This includes wrongdoing by applicants, beneficiaries, contractors, third parties, or SSA employees performing their official duties. This office serves as liaison to the Department of Justice on all matters relating to the investigation of SSA programs and personnel. OI also conducts joint investigations with other Federal, State, and local law enforcement agencies.

Office of the Counsel to the Inspector General

OCIG provides independent legal advice and counsel to the IG on various matters, including statutes, regulations, legislation, and policy directives. OCIG also advises the IG on investigative procedures and techniques, as well as on legal implications and conclusions to be drawn from audit and investigative material. Also, OCIG administers the Civil Monetary Penalty program.

Office of External Relations

OER manages OIG's external and public affairs programs, and serves as the principal advisor on news releases and in providing information to the various news reporting services. OER develops OIG's media and public information policies, directs OIG's external and public affairs programs, and serves as the primary contact for those seeking information about OIG. OER prepares OIG publications, speeches, and presentations to internal and external organizations, and responds to Congressional correspondence.

Office of Technology and Resource Management

OTRM supports OIG by providing information management and systems security. OTRM also coordinates OIG's budget, procurement, telecommunications, facilities, and human resources. In addition, OTRM is the focal point for OIG's strategic planning function, and the development and monitoring of performance measures. In addition, OTRM receives and assigns for action allegations of criminal and administrative violations of Social Security laws, identifies fugitives receiving benefit payments from SSA, and provides technological assistance to investigations.