

Report Summary

Social Security Administration Office of the Inspector General

August 2009



Objective

Our objectives were to determine whether (1) Social Security Administration (SSA) policies and procedures for charging and collecting fees at field offices were adequate and (2) field offices complied with existing guidance.

Background

The *Social Security Act*, *Freedom of Information Act*, and *Privacy Act of 1974* provide the public the right to request information about themselves and the Government. These laws, as well as SSA regulations, provide the Agency the authority to charge fees for certain information requests. Generally, SSA is allowed to recover the costs for its work, so the SSA trust funds do not bear the costs of such activities.

In Fiscal Year (FY) 2007, SSA's field offices collected 68,934 fee remittances totaling about \$2.9 million.

To view the full report, visit <http://www.ssa.gov/oig/ADO/BEPDF/A-04-09-19041.pdf>

Field Office Procedures for Charging and Collecting Fees **(A-04-09-19041)**

Our Findings

SSA policies and procedures governing field office collection of fees for information requests could be improved. Current policies, procedures, and field office practices do not ensure the consistent determination and collection of fees.

Our review disclosed that not all field offices charged fees for processing information requests when they should have. Some field offices charged different fees for the same type of information, while other offices charged various standard fees not contained in SSA policy. SSA managers and staff attributed the inconsistencies in the fee process to the complex, confusing, and cumbersome fee policy. Had SSA charged the full cost to process field office remittances in FY 2007, it would have recovered about \$205,000 more for the trust funds.

Our Recommendations

Some of our more important recommendations include that SSA clarify and simplify governing policies and procedures for field office calculation and collection of fees for information requests. Also, determine whether the full cost of processing information requests is being recovered and update the fee calculation as needed. Further, ensure managers have useful and reliable information to determine how effective field offices are performing in the overall process of responding to information requests and charging and collecting fees. Finally, develop a program to train field office staff on fee collections for information requests.

SSA agreed with all of our recommendations.