

Report Summary

Social Security Administration Office of the Inspector General

August 2011



Objective

To assess the Social Security Administration's (SSA) effectiveness in implementing the Representative Video Project (RVP).

Background

In September 2008, under the *Video Hearing* backlog initiative, SSA expanded the use of video teleconferencing (VTC) through RVP, allowing representatives and claimants to attend VTC hearings at claimant representatives' offices while the administrative law judge (ALJ) is at another location. Under RVP, participating claimant representatives are required to sign an agreement with SSA and procure their own video equipment.

To view the full report, visit <http://www.ssa.gov/oig/ADO/BEPDF/A-05-09-19101.pdf>

Representative Video Project (A-05-09-19101)

Our Findings

During the first 18 months of RVP, the Chicago and Kansas City Regions used the RVP sites extensively; both Regions had experienced significant hearing backlogs. Four RVP sites in the Chicago and Kansas City Regions represented 71 percent of all activity among the 23 RVP sites. About 48 percent of the RVP sites had fewer than 10 hearings. While some of the low usage related to recent participation in the program, in other cases, the RVP participants experienced problems related to faulty equipment or scheduling issues. About 18 percent of the RVP hearings was conducted between three or more locations, allowing experts and other parties at a third location to participate. In terms of regional workloads, we found SSA used RVP as part of service area realignments, allowing ALJs from one region to alleviate backlogs in another region.

Before SSA implemented RVP, we found the Agency had limited communication with the public. In addition, better communication by SSA with its employees and RVP participants would have allowed all parties to more fully understand how the program was to operate. This enhanced communication would have increased the probability of identifying and addressing potential problems early in the process. Moreover, the Agency did not (1) conduct a test or pilot of RVP before its nationwide implementation or (2) monitor relevant RVP trends, such as low use by participants. Finally, during the audit, some of the parties we interviewed raised potential legal issues related to RVP. We believe the Agency should consider these issues if it has not already done so.

Our Recommendations

We made five recommendations to SSA to enhance communication related to RVP, as well as monitoring of RVP workloads and outcomes. The Agency agreed with four recommendations. In response to our fifth recommendation, the Agency stated it did not believe there were any unresolved RVP legal issues at this time.