

Unused Facilities and Capacity at Social Security Administration Headquarters

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Office of Audit Report Summary

Objective

Our objectives were to (1) identify unused office space in buildings at the Social Security Administration (SSA) Headquarters location, (2) determine whether the Agency had a plan to freeze its real estate footprint, and (3) determine whether the Agency was meeting the objectives of its plan.

Background

SSA's Headquarters has been located in Woodlawn, Maryland, since 1960. Approximately 13,000 of SSA's 68,000 employees work at its Headquarters facilities. These employees perform many of SSA's core functions in 9 buildings at the Headquarters campus and 14 buildings in the surrounding area.

In May 2012, President Obama implemented a "Freeze the Footprint" (FTF) policy, which states that in each year, an agency shall not increase the size of its domestic real estate inventory.

In response to FTF, SSA is examining its rent costs and outlying building leases to develop strategies to reduce its footprint. In January 2012, SSA embarked on a plan to ". . . create a flexible, secure, and sustainable campus environment for SSA." Specifically, the plan's goal was to (1) reduce SSA's real estate footprint, rent, and operating costs; (2) respond to future organizational and operational changes; (3) promote the best use of Headquarters space and land; (4) provide a safe and secure environment; (5) meet sustainability and energy reduction goals; and (6) create a beautiful campus.

Our Findings

During our walkthroughs, we identified empty workstations and workstations that SSA used to store such items as office supplies, boxes, obsolete computer equipment, and furniture. We also identified large areas of open space the Agency was not using.

Additionally, we identified off-campus leased space that SSA was not fully occupying. However, SSA was paying for all this space, regardless of occupancy.

Finally, we determined that SSA was taking steps to reduce its real estate footprint and associated costs, in accordance with Federal initiatives. SSA also has a plan to consolidate multiple components in single locations on the Headquarters campus so it can terminate existing leases for some outlying buildings. We concluded that SSA was meeting the objectives of its plan and was creating systems to better manage its office space.

Our Recommendation

We recommend that SSA explore opportunities to use vacant space in the Woodlawn Office Complex and Security West buildings to house components and expedite the termination of outlying leases.

SSA agreed with our recommendation.