

Social Security Administration Conference Expenditures in Fiscal Year 2013 A-05-14-24070



November 2014

Office of Audit Report Summary

Objective

To assess the Agency's compliance with conference reporting requirements under the *Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act of 2013*.

Background

The *Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act of 2013* requires that the Social Security Administration (SSA) submit an annual report to the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) on the costs and contracting procedures related to conferences the Agency held in Fiscal Year (FY) 2013 for which the cost to the United States exceeded \$100,000.

The annual report should describe the conference's purpose; the number of participants attending; a detailed statement of the costs of any beverages, audio-visual services, and employee or contractor travel to and from the conference; a discussion of the methodology used to determine which costs relate to the conference; and the contracting procedures used.

The Act also requires that SSA notify the OIG within 15 days the date, location, and number of employees attending a conference held by the Agency for which the cost exceeded \$20,000.

Our Findings

The Agency generally complied with the reporting and notification provisions under the *Consolidated and Further Continuing Appropriations Act of 2013*. However, we found SSA did not use its Conference Planning and Approval System (CPAS) to track about 23 percent of FY 2013 reported conference costs, primarily because (1) the new conference reporting provisions were implemented mid-year and (2) the Agency did not require that all components use CPAS for conference approvals. In addition, SSA did not adequately retain market research documentation and information on availability of Federal space for the only conference held outside of federally owned space, which it was required to do under SSA's conference approval policy. We noted improvements in FY 2014 in terms of CPAS completeness and documentation.

In FY 2013, SSA reported it held 49 conferences exceeding \$20,000 for about 11,000 employees and incurred costs of approximately \$7.8 million. The Office of Disability Adjudication and Review sponsored approximately 61 percent of conferences, whereas the Office of Human Resources incurred about 63 percent of conference costs. The conferences related to training (95 percent), meetings (4 percent), and leadership/career development (1 percent). Only one conference was held in non-Federal space. In addition, the Agency reported almost \$500,000 in speaker costs for 10 conferences.

Finally, we observed Agency efforts to move some training classes from face-to-face to virtual training while also making face-to-face conference content available online to employees who could not attend.

Our Recommendations

We made a number of recommendations for SSA to improve controls over conference planning. SSA agreed with our recommendations.