

Social Security Administration Employees Who Received Salary Increases While Working Under an Opportunity to Perform Successfully Plan

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September 2017

Office of Audit Report Summary

Objective

To identify Social Security Administration (SSA) employees who received a promotion or Within-grade Increase (WIGI) while working under an Opportunity to Perform Successfully (OPS) plan.

Background

SSA's General Schedule employees receive WIGIs periodically based on the basic pay rate from one step of a grade to the next higher step of that grade. SSA policy states that employees must be in good standing and performing successfully (summary level 3.0) on their Performance Assessment and Communication System appraisal to be eligible for a WIGI or promotion. SSA considers employees to be performing at the not successful level (summary level 1.0) while they are under an OPS plan. While under an OPS plan, SSA employees are ineligible for a promotion or WIGI.

We obtained and matched SSA data on WIGIs and promotions awarded and OPS plans issued for Fiscal Years (FY) 2011 through 2016.

Findings

SSA improperly awarded a WIGI or promotion to 32 of 497 employees who were working under an OPS plan during FYs 2011 through 2016. For one employee, SSA awarded two WIGIs (in 2012 and 2013). Accordingly, SSA made 33 improper awards (32 WIGIs and 1 promotion) during our review period.

The improperly awarded WIGIs and promotion resulted in overpayments. In March 2017, SSA told us it had processed corrective actions for the 22 employees who received a WIGI in FYs 2011 through 2015. The Department of the Interior, SSA's payroll provider, determined their overpayments were over \$22,000. In September 2017, SSA told us that it was taking corrective action on the nine employees who improperly received a WIGI and one who received a promotion in FY 2016.

SSA stated that multiple systems involved in the performance assistance process did not interface, which caused it to incorrectly issue the WIGIs and promotion. SSA's process relied on management to manually enter data into these systems and keep the appropriate parties informed of necessary actions.

Recommendations

We recommend that SSA:

1. Ensure employees' OPS plan data are recorded in the Workload Management System and require that all management and hiring officials review Federal Personnel and Payroll System data before they process personnel actions, including WIGIs and promotions, during any OPS period.
2. Recover the overpayments from the 22 employees who received WIGIs while working under an OPS plan during FYs 2011 through 2015.
3. Complete corrective actions and recover the overpayments from the nine employees who received WIGIs and one employee who received a promotion in FY 2016 while working under an OPS plan.

SSA agreed with our recommendations.