

Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018

Fiscal Years 2022–2026

Capacity Assessment



Securing today
and tomorrow



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Selected Abbreviations

ALJ	Administrative Law Judge
CDR	Continuing Disability Review
DDS	Disability Determination Services
DI	Disability Insurance
OASDI	Old-Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance
OMB	Office of Management and Budget
RDRC	Retirement and Disability Research Consortium
SSA	Social Security Administration
SSI	Supplemental Security Income

INTRODUCTION

The *Fiscal Years 2022–2026 Capacity Assessment* provides a baseline that we will use to measure improvements to the coverage, quality, methods, effectiveness, and independence of our evaluation, research, statistics, and data analysis. We develop internal capacity through investments in our employees and our data infrastructure, and external capacity through partnerships with other Federal agencies, academic institutions, private sector contractors, and the National Academy of Sciences. Our evaluation capacity covers various types of evaluations including formative, process, outcome, and impact evaluations. Our offices that specialize in conducting research and evaluations have experience using quantitative methods, qualitative methods, and mixed methods for different purposes such as assessing agency operations, determining if we are implementing policies as intended, and deciding if we should implement new programs and policies. We made investments to enhance capacity in our office that is designated a statistical unit under the Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act (CIPSEA). We also invested in training and technology to improve data analysis. As our research, evaluation, statistical, and data analysis needs change, we make corresponding changes to our capacity to meet those needs.

We organized our capacity assessment using requirements described in the *Foundations for Evidence-Based Policymaking Act of 2018 (Evidence Act)*. The *Evidence Act* requires the *Fiscal Years 2022–2026 Capacity Assessment* to include the following information.

1. A list of the activities and operations of the agency that are currently being evaluated and analyzed.
2. The extent to which the evaluations, research, and analysis efforts and related activities of the agency support the needs of various divisions within the agency.
3. The extent to which the evaluation research and analysis efforts and related activities of the agency address an appropriate balance between needs related to organizational learning, ongoing program management, performance management, strategic management, interagency and private sector coordination, internal and external oversight, and accountability.
4. The extent to which the agency uses methods and combinations of methods that are appropriate to agency divisions and the corresponding research questions being addressed, including an appropriate combination of formative and summative evaluation research and analysis approaches.
5. The extent to which evaluation and research capacity is present within the agency to include personnel and agency processes for planning and implementing evaluation activities, disseminating best practices and findings, and incorporating employee views and feedback.
6. The extent to which the agency has the capacity to assist agency staff and program offices to develop the capacity to use evaluation research and analysis approaches and data in the day-to-day operations.

In our capacity assessment, we provide information for each of these requirements.

REQUIREMENTS

1 ACTIVITIES AND OPERATIONS BEING EVALUATED AND ANALYZED

List of the activities and operations of the agency that are currently being evaluated and analyzed.

We identify the activities and operations that we are currently evaluating or conducting evidence-building activities in four separate documents that we publish on an annual basis. We describe many of our planned research and evaluations in our [Annual Report on Section 234 Demonstration Projects](#) that we submit to the Congress, and in a section of the *Supplemental Security Income Program Technical Materials Supporting Our Annual Budget* titled *Research, Demonstration Projects, and Outreach*. Our *Annual Performance Report* includes an appendix titled *Program Assessments* that describes our ongoing studies and surveys to assess the effectiveness of our programs. A description of our pilot program evaluations is located in the *Pilot Program Metrics* section of the *Limitations on Administrative Expenses* section of our Annual Budget. Below, we identify the list of research and evaluation activities that we describe in more detail in these documents.

Demonstration Projects

Our [Annual Report on Section 234 Demonstration Projects](#) that we deliver to the Congress each year provides additional information on the following demonstration projects.

- **Promoting Work through Early Interventions Project**: Identifies, selects, and evaluates programs likely to improve the employment and economic outcomes of individuals who have not yet applied for SSI and have little or no work history, have current or foreseeable disabilities, and have ties to U.S. safety net programs.
- **Retaining Employment and Talent After Injury/Illness Network (RETAIN) Demonstration**: Evaluates early interventions that focus on the early coordination of health care and employment-related supports and services to help injured or ill workers remain in the workforce.
- **Promoting Readiness of Minors in SSI (PROMISE)**: Evaluates interventions that improve the health, education, and post-school outcomes of children who receive SSI, including the completion of postsecondary education and employment.
- **Ohio Direct Referral Demonstration**: Evaluates the effectiveness of providing direct referrals to vocational rehabilitation services for 18 and 19 year-olds who are, or may become, SSI or SSDI beneficiaries.
- **Supported Employment Demonstration (SED)**: Evaluates whether offering evidence-based interventions of integrated vocational, medical, and behavioral health services to individuals with behavioral health challenges can significantly reduce the demand for disability benefits and help individuals remain in the labor force.
- **Promoting Opportunity Demonstration (POD)**: Evaluates the effect of a \$1 for \$2 benefit offset with simplified work incentives for DI beneficiaries on earnings, benefit payments, and the DI Trust Fund.
- **Lessons Learned from SSA Demonstrations**: Assesses the lessons learned from prior tests of new policies.

Additional Activities in FY 2022 Research, Demonstration Projects, and Outreach Exhibit

The *Research, Demonstration Projects, and Outreach* section of our *Supplemental Security Income Program Technical Materials Supporting Our Annual Budget* describes additional research and evidence-building activities that we plan to complete.

- **Ticket to Work (TTW) Notice Optimization:** Evaluates the impact of targeting outreach to TTW-eligible beneficiaries on participation in the TTW program and employment.
- **Ticket to Work Evaluation:** Assesses TTW program operations and experiences of the services users.
- **Beyond Benefits Study:** Identifies the types of services and supports that individuals exiting the DI or SSI programs need to maintain or achieve self-sufficiency.
- **National Beneficiary Survey:** Collects data from a nationally representative sample of DI beneficiaries and SSI recipients on a wide range of topics not available in our administrative data or in other public databases. These data include health and functional status, health insurance coverage, interest in work, barriers to work, use of services, work history, income, and experience with Social Security programs.
- **Disability Research Surveys:** Includes three surveys. The first of the three surveys will be an additional round of the NBS, awarded in FY 2021 and fielded in FY 2023. The second will be awarded in FY 2023 and fielded in FY 2025, and it will focus on helping us better understand SSDI and SSI applicants' experiences, their use of services, and the pathways they take before and after application. We will identify the topics for a final survey based on input from stakeholders, such as agency leaders, OMB, or Congress.
- **Disability Perceptions Survey:** Assesses the knowledge, perceptions, and opinions working-age adults have about the DI program.
- **Understanding America Study Enhancements:** Informs our evaluation of the public's knowledge of Social Security programs through an innovative, nationally representative longitudinal internet panel.
- **Occupational Information System (collaboration with Bureau of Labor Statistics):** Updates information on the requirements of work in the national economy.
- **Work Disability - Functional Assessment Battery (WD-FAB) Data Collection:** Provides the necessary data to evaluate the potential uses and value of the WD-FAB in our CDR process.
- **SSA-National Institutes of Health Research on Data Analytics and the Work Disability-Functional Assessment Battery (WD-FAB):** Provides in-depth analysis of our existing data and continues to provide us support related to evaluating the WD-FAB in our CDR process. The WD-FAB may provide uniform information about individuals' self-reported functional ability that we can use to inform our disability data collection and determination processes.
- **Advisory Services to Assist SSA with Disability Issues:** Continues our work on research into disability issues through a five-year contract (awarded in FY 2018) with the National Academy of Sciences (NAS). NAS established a new standing committee of medical, vocational, and other experts to assist with policy issues.
- **Interventional Cooperative Agreement Program (ICAP):** Facilitates collaboration with States, private foundations, and others who have the interest and ability to identify, operate, and partially fund interventional research.
- **Retirement and Disability Research Consortium (RDRC):** Comprises four competitively selected research centers based at the University of Michigan, Boston College, the National Bureau of

Economic Research (NBER), and the University of Wisconsin-Madison that are broadly charged with planning, initiating, and maintaining a high quality, multidisciplinary research and evaluation program that covers retirement, disability, and Social Security program issues.

- **Blanket Purchase Order Agreement for Time Sensitive Research Projects:** Provides an alternate research channel for policy and program assessments and studies related to social science, medical, or vocational rehabilitation topics.
- **Health and Retirement Study:** Provides data on health and economic well-being after retirement that is not available in our program data.
- **Census Bureau Surveys:** Provides supplemental data from two Census Bureau data collections efforts: (1) the Survey of Income and Program Participation; (2) the new “Ask US” Panel.

Activities in *Annual Performance Report* “Program Assessments”

The *Program Assessments* appendix of our *Annual Performance Report* includes information on the following evidence-building activities.

- **Office Visitor Surveys (Biennial):** Measures customer satisfaction with our in-person service and includes the field office and hearing office segment, and the Social Security Card Center segment.
- **Prospective Client Survey (Biennial):** Measures the service expectations and preferences of the upcoming wave of retirees.
- **Retirement Application Survey (Biennial):** Measures customer satisfaction with the retirement application process and identifies service expectations and preferences for future service among recent retirees.
- **Federal Information Security Modernization Act Report (Annually):** Measures whether our overall information technology security and privacy programs and practices comply with the Federal Information Security Modernization Act of 2014.
- **Safeguard Review (Triennial):** Assesses the use of Federal tax information and the measures we employ to protect this information.
- **Annual Report of the Board of Trustees of the Federal Old-Age and Survivors Insurance and Federal Disability Insurance Trust Funds (Annually):** Assesses the financial and actuarial status of the two Social Security trust funds.
- **Annual Report to Congress on Medical Continuing Disability Reviews (Annually):** Assesses medical CDRs conducted for a completed fiscal year (FY), including actuarial estimates of the lifetime savings in OASDI, SSI, Medicare, and Medicaid benefits resulting from the reviews conducted during that fiscal year.
- **Annual Report of the Supplemental Security Income Program (Annually):** Assesses the status of the SSI program and provides 25-year projections of program participation and costs.
- **Assessment of the Continuing Disability Review Enforcement Operation Predictive Model (Annually):** Assesses the results of a predictive model used to score work issue CDR cases to ensure that cases most likely to result in overpayments are prioritized to help prevent the accrual of greater overpayments.
- **Human Capital Evaluations (Annually):** Monitors and assesses how well human capital policies and programs support our mission accomplishments and is a critical step in assessing organizational performance and determining how to improve processes.

- **Management Directive 715 Report (Annually):** Describes the status of our efforts to establish and maintain effective equal employment affirmative action programs under Section 717 of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and effective affirmative action programs under Section 501 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973.
- **Pre-Effectuation Review of Disability Determinations (Annually):** Assesses the accuracy of initial and reconsideration disability allowances made by DDSs as required in the Social Security Act.
- **Targeted Denial Review (Annually):** Assesses the accuracy of initial and reconsideration disability denials made by the DDSs.
- **Retirement, Survivors, and Disability Insurance Stewardship Review (Annually):** Assesses the accuracy of payments to persons receiving Social Security retirement, survivors, or disability benefits.
- **Supplemental Security Income Stewardship Review (Annually):** Assesses the accuracy of payments to persons receiving SSI benefits by reviewing all non-medical factors of eligibility and payment.
- **Supplemental Security Income Transaction Accuracy Review (Annually):** Assesses the adjudicative accuracy of SSI initial claims, redeterminations, and limited issues to ensure compliance with operational policy.
- **Retirement, Survivors, and Disability Insurance Transaction Accuracy Review (Triennial):** Assesses recently processed retirement, survivors, and disability insurance claims to ensure compliance with operational policy.
- **Enumeration Accuracy Report (Triennial):** Assesses the accuracy of original Social Security numbers assigned during the fiscal year.

Activities in FY 2022 “Pilot Program Metrics”

The *Pilot Projects Metrics* sub-section of the *Limitations on Administrative Expenses* section of our annual budget submission includes information on the following active pilot projects.

- **Ticket to Work Notice Optimization:** The Ticket to Work and Work Incentives Improvement Act of 1999 established the Ticket to Work program that provides DI and SSI beneficiaries with more options for receiving employment services. This project tests modified versions of the notices we send to beneficiaries and changes to the notice schedule to determine if the changes reduce the barriers to assigning a Ticket.
- **SSA Mobile Wage Reporting Pilot:** Mobile Knowledge-based Wage Reporting is a mobile phone application available in the Apple and Google play stores for SSI recipients, their representative payees, and their spouses. This pilot will determine the viability of new technologies to replace the existing mobile wage reporting application with a hybrid application.
- **OARO Hearing Recordings and Transcriptions Incubation:** This pilot explores using technology to generate written transcripts from the previously recorded hearings. There is the potential for significant savings in time and resources for the agency. Additionally, the pilot will determine the viability of using automation to process previously recorded hearings into official court transcripts, including an automated workflow where possible.
- **Office of Quality Review Group II Deficiencies Pilot:** The goal of this pilot is to reduce improper payments by quickly identifying deficiencies related to onset and/or disability cessation dates and assigning the correct code on reviews with minimal human intervention by leveraging Intelligent Medical Analysis GENERation (IMAGEN) to accelerate the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI). This will

aid in the reduction of decision errors made on CDR cessations, childhood disability benefit claims, and established onset dates for prior denial periods with well-defined results.

- **Office of Hearings Operations (OHO) Hearing Recordings & Transcriptions Pilot:** OHO is currently conducting video disability hearings using MS Teams. Currently, the DRAP system records the audio for disability hearings. For this pilot, we are testing the MS Teams recording function to record disability hearings. We will leverage MS Teams live transcription and closed captioning features to create a text transcript of the disability court hearing in real time as the hearing occurs. By investing in recording hearings in MS Teams, there is the potential for significant savings in time and resources for the agency. Additionally, MS Teams recordings would automate and simplify creation of official court hearing transcripts needed for disability hearing appeals.
- **Video Interviews for Workloads:** During the COVID-19 pandemic, we piloted a new MS Teams service delivery option for certain Social Security replacement cards in November 2020 at 100 of our highest enumeration workload offices. The initial results of the pilot are promising, and we will continue to assess this new service delivery option as we roll it out nationally.
- **United States Postal Service (USPS) Proof of Concept (PoC) for Digital Identity:** If customers are unable to verify their identity online for a *my Social Security* account, they may verify their identity in-person to begin the registration process. This method is known as in-person proofing (IPP) and is currently available only at our field offices. The USPS PoC will allow customers to verify their identity in-person at certain USPS facilities.
- **Headquarters Mail Digitization Pilot:** In March 2021, we developed a 12-month pilot to digitize approximately 96,000 pieces of mail we receive in six headquarters components. Using our Headquarters Mail Service Center, we will sort incoming mail and bulk ship to our scanning vendor. The scanning vendor will open, prepare, scan, and save the images to a shared server. Participating employees will be able to access the electronic mail from the server and process their workloads virtually.

2 EVALUATIONS, RESEARCH, STATISTICAL ACTIVITIES, AND DATA ANALYSIS TO SUPPORT VARIOUS DIVISIONS

The extent to which the evaluations, research, and analysis efforts and related activities of the agency support the needs of various divisions within the agency

Our evaluations, research, statistical activities, and data analysis efforts meet the needs of various divisions within the agency. We regularly monitor our capacity to support evaluations, research, statistical activities, and data analysis needs of various divisions within the agency; and we hire and train employees to ensure we are meeting agency-wide needs. We make investments in data and in our IT infrastructure that provide a foundation for the evaluations, research, and analysis efforts and related activities. We identify and obtain external expertise that our various divisions use to support their needs. As we continue to expand our evidence-building activities, we will reassess these needs and request additional resources, as appropriate.

We have several offices that work closely with other divisions within the agency to ensure that our evaluation, research, statistical, and data analysis efforts meet agency-wide needs. These offices communicate regularly with the various divisions within the agency to assess needs on a regular basis, and they develop plans to meet their needs. Below, we describe how our evaluation, research, statistical, and analytics offices identify and support the evaluation needs of our various divisions.

- Our **Office of Research, Evaluation, and Statistics (ORES)** obtains information on a regular basis on the research and evaluations needs of various divisions within the agency and sends an annual memorandum to the Social Security Advisory Board that requests information on their priorities for agency research and evaluation activities. ORES uses this information to set their research plan for in-house research and evaluations. ORES has conducted in-house research and evaluations that address the needs of various divisions by providing information on: changes to the *Social Security Statement*; the income of the aged population; disability trends; modernizing the DI and SSI disability determination process; the methods and assumptions used for the *Annual Report of the Board of Trustees of the Federal Old-Age and Survivors Insurance and Federal Disability Insurance Trust Funds (Trustees Report)*; and the relationship between State and local government pension programs and the OASDI program. ORES also uses the information to set the plan for research and evaluations conducted by external entities such as the **Retirement and Disability Research Consortium (RDRC)** centers and external organizations under the **Blanket Purchase Order Agreement for Time Sensitive Research Projects**. These two external resources include the capacity to conduct quick turnaround projects that various divisions may use to support research, evaluations, and evidence-building activities.

ORES is also an OMB designated statistical unit under the Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act (CIPSEA) and is responsible for producing and disseminating core statistical products (publications and tables) about Social Security. These statistical products support the needs of various divisions within the agency and inform external stakeholder research and evaluation activities. ORES is obligated to carry out four fundamental responsibilities as a statistical unit:

1. Produce and disseminate relevant and timely information. ORES is a team of researchers with long-standing SSA careers who built and maintained knowledge about Social Security and other economic programs and policies, and who have analyzed the implication of those programs and policies. Through development of our research agenda, particularly the RDRC research agenda and discussion at the annual RDRC conference, ORES seeks input from various divisions within the agency and from external stakeholders including the Social Security Advisory Board, the Office of Management and Budget, and the broader research community. ORES also regularly interacts with the Social Security Advisory Board (SSAB) to exchange information about research interests. ORES collects public and private sector input through our website (<https://www.ssa.gov/policy/>).

ORES recently made major investments in modernizing statistical publication processes, and built a state-of-the-art data analysis platform that various divisions within the agency use to conduct evidence-building activities (information on the platform is located [here](#)). ORES uses its web presence to disseminate statistical information and reports (<https://www.ssa.gov/policy/>).

2. Conduct credible and accurate statistical activities. ORES ensures the use of sound statistical methods and accuracy with our rigorous research and disclosure review processes. ORES provides references within statistical tables and research papers that explain data collection, limitations, and sources of error. ORES provides publication schedules and notifications on our website (<https://www.ssa.gov/policy/>).
3. Conduct objective statistical activities. ORES maintains functional separation and independence from the operational and enforcement side of SSA. ORES never provides data or participates in actions intended to directly affect the rights, privileges, or benefits of a particular individual. We have independent data access controls, and ORES research is impartial.
4. Protect the trust of information providers by ensuring the confidentiality and exclusive statistical use of their responses. ORES maintains functional separation from the operational and enforcement side of SSA, employs disclosure protection techniques, and only use data we

collect or obtain from other federal statistical agencies for research and statistical (non-enforcement) purposes.

We monitor our capacity to fulfill our responsibilities as a designated statistical unit, and we make requests for staff and resources. As we implement the requirements for statistical units under Title III of the Evidence Act, we will reassess our needs and request the necessary resources to carry out our responsibilities.

- Our **Office of Research, Demonstration, and Employment Support (ORDES)** has worked with teams in other offices to support impact evaluations and data analysis on the DI and SSI programs. ORDES conducts beneficiary surveys to supplement information available in administrative records that can help the agency answer important questions about individuals' experiences with the disability programs. ORDES leads a cross-agency demonstration workgroup and encourages participants to suggest topics for future projects. They brief Congressional staff on research results and solicit ideas for new demonstration projects. ORDES maintains research partnerships with other Federal agencies and seeks input from internal stakeholders to inform future research and analytical activities.
- Our **Office of Quality Review (OQR)** conducts agency-level research, analysis, and special projects to support the needs of various divisions within the agency; more specifically, the office offers advice and recommendations on a range of issues related to quality and performance management in each of the agency's core business processes. OQR supports internal customers including the Commissioner, the Principal Deputy Commissioner, and component-level Deputy Commissioners. OQR also provides services to external customers including Congress, the Office of Management and Budget, the Office of the Inspector General (OIG), and financial auditors.
- Our **Office of Appellate Operations (OAO)** provides adjudicators and policymakers with data-driven feedback on the performance of the hearings process in accordance with the direct delegation of authority from the Commissioner to the Appeals Council. OAO collects and analyzes nationwide data on policy compliance of adjudicators and performance of the SSA disability adjudication process. OAO also shares findings with other agency components for use in feedback to adjudicators and staff, improvements in training, and clarification of agency policies and procedures. In collecting and analyzing nationwide data, OAO also tracks and analyzes court case trends.
- Our **Office of Analytics and Improvement (OAI)** collaborates with agency divisions and technology experts to perform analyses of agency data, provide management consultation, and develop innovative business solutions to drive agency priorities, improve operations efficiency, increase organizational performance, and meet strategic goals and objectives.
- Our **Office of the Chief Actuary (OCACT)** provides technical and consultative services to support the needs of various divisions within the agency, the Commissioner, and the Board of Trustees of the Social Security trust funds. OCACT conducts research and analyses to support the *Annual Report of the Board of Trustees of the Federal Old-Age and Survivors Insurance and Federal Disability Insurance Trust Funds (OASDI Trustees Reports)*, which are available to the public here: <https://www.ssa.gov/oact/TR/2021/index.html>. OCACT conducts research and analyses to support the *Annual Report of the Supplemental Security Income Program (SSI Reports)*, which are available here: <https://www.ssa.gov/OACT/ssir/SSI21/index.html>. In addition to these major annual reports, OCACT conducts research and analyses published as notes located here: <https://www.ssa.gov/oact/NOTES/actnote.html>; and published as studies located here: <https://www.ssa.gov/oact/NOTES/actstud.html>. OCACT disseminates statistical data on the program that are available here: <https://www.ssa.gov/OACT/ProgData/benefits.html> and <https://www.ssa.gov/oact/ProgData/funds.html>. OCACT also conducts analyses of comprehensive

legislative proposals located here: <https://www.ssa.gov/oact/solvency/index.html> and individual provisions that are available here: <https://www.ssa.gov/oact/solvency/provisions/index.html>.

- Our **Office of Systems (OS)** supports various divisions within the agency on their data analysis and evaluation needs in a number of ways, including through the **Advanced Data Analytics Lab (ADAL)** that primarily uses agency administrative data to conduct innovative program evaluations, policy evaluations, predictive analytics, descriptive analytics, data quality analysis, prototype new technologies and machine learning projects. OS also leads the continual development and expansion of the **Enterprise Data Warehouse (EDW)**, which provides our employees and program offices with access to our master data files and management information data, as well as the infrastructure to perform the data analysis necessary for our research and evaluation activities. The EDW provides the foundation for our research, evaluation, statistics, and data analysis activities.

We adjust our research and evaluation activities as the needs of our divisions change. For example, as we invested in modernizing our information technology infrastructure to improve service delivery, we also invested in broader research and evaluations to improve service delivery—including creating a new service delivery focal area for our Retirement and Disability Research Consortium (RDRC) grantees. Updating the occupational information used to administer the disability program is another agency priority. We invested in a new survey to develop updated occupational information to eventually help us make disability decisions, and we completed extensive analysis of the new data to determine how to best use the data for our programs.

While we respond to internal needs, we also adjust our activities to reflect broader, external factors. We continue to conduct studies seeking to improve the labor force participation of our disability beneficiaries, testing the effects of alternative policies and services on employment and benefit outcomes. In recent years, we also collaborated with other agencies to test interventions that may help people maintain their attachment to the workforce and prevent or delay application for disability benefits.

Finally, we seek external expertise to support the research and evaluation needs of various divisions within our agency. In addition to working with private contractors on various research and evaluation projects, we developed the following programs that provide our various divisions with more timely research and evaluation expertise to support our programs, policies, and operations.

- A contract with the **National Academy of Sciences (NAS)** to conduct research that informs our disability programs. NAS established a standing committee of medical, vocational, and other experts to assist us with policy issues. It manages Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA) compliant consensus study committees; organizes and leads workshops with subject matter experts; and plans and organizes outreach conferences with members of the public.
- A **Retirement and Disability Research Consortium (RDRC)** cooperative agreement that comprises four competitively selected research centers based at the University of Michigan, Boston College, the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER), and the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The centers perform valuable research and evaluation of retirement and disability policy, disseminate results, provide training awards, and facilitate the use of our program data by outside researchers. To give SSA flexibility to fund projects outside of the annual project award cycle, we include funds in each center's budget for "quick-turnaround projects," or QTPs. The primary goal of QTPs is to respond to a high-priority research area that may not have been a priority when the focal area list was developed. A recent example of an SSA-initiated call for QTPs is a request for research on the impacts of COVID-19. This resulted in three projects being funded—two awarded in May 2020 and one awarded in June 2020.

- A new **Interventional Cooperative Agreement Program (ICAP)** that will facilitate collaboration with States, private foundations, and others who have the interest and ability to identify, operate, and partially fund interventional research related to the DI and SSI programs.
- A **Blanket Purchase Order Agreement for Time Sensitive Research Projects** aimed at providing an alternate research channel for policy and program assessments and studies related to social science, medical, or vocational rehabilitation topics.

3 BALANCE BETWEEN EVALUATION, RESEARCH, STATISTICS, AND DATA ANALYSIS NEEDS

The extent to which the evaluation research and analysis efforts and related activities of the agency address an appropriate balance between needs related to organizational learning, ongoing program management, performance management, strategic management, interagency and private sector coordination, internal and external oversight, and accountability.

Our evaluation, research, analysis, and related activities strike an appropriate balance between needs related to organizational learning, ongoing program management, performance management, strategic management, interagency and private sector coordination, internal and external oversight, and accountability. In this section, we organize the evaluation, research, analysis, and related activities by the Deputy Commissioner-level office that oversees such activities and describe how the activities address an appropriate balance between various needs.

1. Our Office of Analytics, Review, and Oversight (**OARO**) specializes in evaluating program operations and management and provides feedback to our operational components on their performance based on quality reviews and special studies. These reviews support organizational learning in that they identify the prevalence of specific deficiencies when conducting a particular workload. When deficiencies on a specific policy or workload are prevalent, we use the reviews to identify training needs. The OARO studies support ongoing program management, performance management, strategic management, internal and external oversight, and accountability. The OARO organization includes our Chief Data Officer who is leading the development of our Enterprise Data Strategy (EDS). The EDS is designed to ensure that we can provide timely, accurate, objective, and relevant statistical data to drive agency-wide evidence-based decision-making. The EDS will include a strategic vision and tactical roadmap that lays out the key steps of an actionable plan to implement the strategy.
2. Our Office of Retirement and Disability Policy (**ORDP**) specializes in broader policy analysis that involves estimating the effect of broader changes to programs and policies. ORDP often collaborates with other Federal agencies, State agencies, and the private sector when conducting these evaluations. Thus, ORDP studies support organizational learning related to the effects of program or policy changes, and also support interagency and private sector coordination. ORDP reports the results of its research and demonstration projects in an annual report to Congress, which has external oversight over the work and supports accountability. In addition, ORES, organizationally located within ORDP, is a principal federal statistical unit under the Confidential Information Protection and Statistical Efficiency Act (CIPSEA) and has responsibilities for producing and disseminating core statistical products (publications and tables) about Social Security. These statistical products support and inform organizational learning and program management.
3. Our Office of the Chief Actuary (**OCACT**) conducts research and evaluation studies to support organizational learning, program management, internal and external oversight, and accountability

by planning and directing a program of actuarial estimates and analyses relating to our OASDI programs and SSI program, and to proposed changes in those programs.

OARO includes three sub-offices (*OAI*, *OAO*, and *OQR*) that conduct research, evaluation efforts, and related activities that support organizational learning, ongoing program management, performance management, strategic management, internal and external oversight, and accountability. For example, *OQR* conducts assessments and studies on many of our program operations, including the following studies.

- The **Pre-effectuation Review of Disability Decisions** and the **Targeted Denial Review of Disability Decisions** assess the quality of disability decisions that are made by DDSs located in the 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. These reviews support organizational learning by providing feedback on disability decision deficiencies to the DDSs and identifying potential training needs. They support ongoing program and performance management as we use the results of the assessment for performance metrics, and we include the results in our *Annual Performance Report*. The reviews support internal and external oversight, as well as accountability, as we use the results to assess DDS performance. We provide Congress an annual report of the results.
- The **OASDI Stewardship Review** and the **SSI Stewardship Review** assess the payment accuracy rate related to the non-medical aspects of payments. These reviews support organizational learning by providing us with feedback on the sources of payment errors and identifying potential training needs. They support ongoing program and performance management as we use the results of the evaluation for performance metrics. We summarize the results in our *Annual Performance Report*. The evaluations meet the reporting requirements of the Improper Payments Information Act of 2019 and support external oversight and accountability by providing the results in reports to monitoring authorities. Additionally, they support internal oversight and accountability as we use these findings to establish the Title II Payment Accuracy Performance Measure in the *Agency Strategic Plan*.
- **Special studies** throughout the year to evaluate the efficiency and/or accuracy of our various other workloads. We generally conduct these studies to support organizational learning, program management, performance management, strategic management, internal oversight, and accountability.

OAO contributes to organizational learning, program management, performance management, internal oversight, and accountability by providing adjudicators and policymakers with data-driven feedback on the performance of the hearings process in accordance with the direct delegation of authority from the Commissioner to the Appeals Council. In FY 2010, OAO established a *Division of Quality* to implement the provisions of the regulations that permit the Appeals Council to consider a random or selective sample of un-appealed hearing decisions for possible own motion review. OAO's quality reviews include the following activities.

- **Post-effectuation Quality Reviews of ALJ Decisions.** In FY 2011, OAO's Division of Quality began conducting post-effectuation reviews in the form of focused quality reviews of ALJ decisions. Post-effectuation means the ALJ decision is final, and the agency will not take any further action on the case. The Division of Quality conducts post-effectuation focused quality reviews, in part, to identify (a) recurrent decisional issues for incorporation into future focused training and (b) where the agency may need to change policy or hearing office procedures.
- **Pre-effectuation Quality Reviews of ALJ Decisions.** Beginning in FY 2011, OAO's Division of Quality began conducting pre-effectuation reviews of randomly selected favorable hearing decisions before we made any payments to claimants. The Division of Quality conducts pre-effectuation reviews, in part, to (a) address error-prone adjudication issues and (b) focus on error-prone patterns involving impairments or other specific criteria.

- **Special studies.** OAO's Division of Quality occasionally conducts other studies, such as the FY 2016 Appeals Council remand order study, for quality purposes.

OAI performs research, evaluations, and related activities that include the analyses of agency data. OAI provides management consultation and develops innovative business solutions to drive agency priorities, improve operations efficiency, increase organizational performance, and meet strategic goals and objectives. OAI works collaboratively with other components to enhance SSA's programs and processes through data analytics, developing innovative business solutions, and enhancing value realization with program management support. In these efforts, OAI operates in five major functional areas:

- *Division of the Analytics Center of Excellence:* Supports evidence-based policies and decision-making across the agency using artificial intelligence, machine learning, and advanced analytics. Designs, manages, and updates predictive models and provides statistical analysis in support of agency program integrity and quality review efforts.
- *Division of Analysis, Development, and Support:* Develops custom applications that streamline processes, visualizes data, and provides in-depth data analysis.
- *Division of Programmatic Support:* Identifies case processing efficiencies using data analysis and programmatic expertise and develops automated assistance software that support frontline payment-related activities and workloads.
- *Division of Continuous Improvement Programs:* Assesses processes, programs, policies, and procedures to identify areas of improvement and possible solutions through documenting business processes, workflow diagrams, and/or surveys. Develops complex business process simulation models and enables budget and resource planning and decision making by providing key data.
- *Division of Enterprise Program Management Operations:* Increases Programs and Projects' (P/PM) delivery success, promotes enterprise-wide P/PM standards, enhances value realization, and strengthens the P/PM profession across the agency through enhanced decision-making and business capabilities.

OAI leverages our modern **Enterprise Data Warehouse (EDW)** and **Big Data Platform (BDP)** to provide advanced analytical support including artificial intelligence, machine learning, and natural language processing solutions to serve all agency components.

Some examples of OAI's efforts to foster and nurture evidence-based decision-making are as follows.

- **Insight** is an innovative decision support software that uses natural language processing and artificial intelligence to automatically "read" the text of disability decisions and identify potential quality issues. Insight also offers case-specific reference information and powerful tools to help adjudicators efficiently issue high quality decisions. Utilizing Insight will improve the quality, consistency, and efficiency of the disability adjudication process. It is a core project in our IT Modernization (Disability) Plan and our CARES Plan.
- **Enumeration Reports and Data Visualization Dashboards.** OAI has designed, developed, and deployed management information reports including data charts and visualizations that are updated weekly to allow executives to monitor enumeration workloads across various service delivery channels such as online and in field offices. In addition, OAI has created a data dashboard that provides year over year comparisons and monthly updates for the enumerations workload, broken out by service delivery channel and for citizens and non-citizens. Most recently, OAI added an additional reporting dashboard focused specifically on the enumerations workload conducted through Microsoft Teams. This report allows SSA leadership to track and assess the implementation of the new Microsoft Teams interview capability during its phased rollout.

- **Court Remands Dashboard.** OAI has designed and delivered visual graphical dashboards that merge data from multiple administrative systems to improve strategic decision making. Specifically, it provides data about final agency decisions on claims made in Federal courts; it is used to identify any needed adjustments in allocation of personnel resources; and it is used to assess whether the recent changes to the disability regulations and program rules are meeting the expectations for improved outcomes in Federal courts.

ORDP conducts research, evaluations, and related activities that support organizational learning, program management, strategic management, interagency coordination, internal and external oversight, and accountability. Below, we provide several examples that demonstrate our activities are striking a good balance at meeting these various objectives.

- We will collect information about the service, medical, and employment needs of working-age adults exiting Social Security disability programs because of medical improvement. The **Beyond Benefits Study** will include qualitative and quantitative data collection as well as small-scale use of Motivational Interviewing to gain more insight into the needs and barriers with respect to promoting sustained and substantial work activity leading to self-sufficiency among those leaving the disability rolls. The information collected will help to identify potential interventions and inform policy recommendations that may help these individuals achieve successful employment outcomes.
- The development of a number of SSA questions that the Census Bureau added to their new **Household Pulse Survey (HPS)**, which they launched to learn about the national COVID-19 response. The Census Bureau selected six of our questions to include in the HPS Phase 2 Questionnaire, which they began fielding on August 19, 2020. Findings from this survey will help SSA evaluate trends in benefit applications during the COVID-19 pandemic, including applications for OASDI, SSI, and Medicare.
- An **Interventional Cooperative Agreement Program (ICAP)** that will allow us to collaborate with states, private foundations, and others who have the interest and ability to identify, operate, and partially fund interventional research. The research and interventions under this program will target the increased employment and self-sufficiency of individuals with disabilities (whether beneficiaries, applicants, or potential applicants of the DI or SSI programs) that could lead to a reduction in DI or SSI participation. Projects may also address agency priorities such as assisting claimants in underserved communities apply for DI or SSI benefits or conducting outreach to children with disabilities who are potentially eligible to receive SSI. This program will provide a process through which we can systematically review demonstration proposals from outside organizations and enter into agreements to collaborate with these non-Federal groups.
- Research and analysis to inform the occupational information used for the disability determination process. This includes a collaboration with the Bureau of Labor Statistics on the **Occupational Requirements Survey (ORS)** that provides us with the data we need on the requirements of work. ORDP research staff also completed extensive research and data analysis documenting recent trends in the requirements of work in the modern economy to support revised regulations.
- Research and analysis to inform the assumptions and methods used for the **Annual Report of the Board of Trustees of the Federal Old-Age and Survivors Insurance and Federal Disability Insurance Trust Funds**. This includes analysis of demographic trends, economic trends, and beneficiary trends.

OCACT conducts research and evaluation studies that support organizational learning, ongoing program management, performance management, strategic management, interagency coordination,

and accountability. Below, we provide several examples that demonstrate our activities are striking a good balance at meeting these various objectives.

- Annual evaluations of the operations of the Federal [Old-Age and Survivors Insurance Trust Fund](#) and the Federal [Disability Insurance Trust Fund](#), including work on the *Annual Report of the Board of Trustees of the Federal Old-Age and Survivors Insurance and Federal Disability Insurance Trust Funds (OASDI Trustees Report)*. OCACT performs the evaluations and projections for the report; and the OASDI Trustees review and signoff on the report. This evaluation provides a foundation for many of our evaluation activities because an important outcome in many of our evaluations is the program cost effect on the trust funds.
- Annual assessment of the operations of the SSI program that supports organizational learning, program management, strategic management, external oversight, and accountability. This includes leading the agency’s work on the *Annual Report of the Supplemental Security Income Program (SSI Report)*. This evaluation provides a foundation for many of our evaluations related to changes in the SSI program because an important outcome in many of our evaluations is the effect on SSI payments and SSI program costs or savings.
- Actuarial and demographic research on social insurance and related program issues that supports organizational learning and program management, including:
 - the research and analysis that informs the methods and assumptions within the OASDI Trustees Report that is posted on our website: <https://www.ssa.gov/oact/TR/2021/index.html>; and
 - other actuarial studies and notes that supplement the OASDI Trustees Report, SSI report, or provide information on the program that are posted here: <https://www.ssa.gov/oact/pubs.html>.
- Projections of our future workloads. This is critical to our planning and budgeting process and supports program management and strategic management.

4 METHODS ARE APPROPRIATE

The extent to which the agency uses methods and combinations of methods that are appropriate to agency divisions and the corresponding research questions being addressed, including an appropriate combination of formative and summative evaluation research and analysis approaches.

We use rigorous methods and combinations of methods that are appropriate to agency divisions and the corresponding research questions being addressed, including an appropriate combination of formative and summative evaluation research and analysis approaches. We have extensive experience developing, implementing, and analyzing surveys, as well as analyzing survey data from other sources, to support our evidence-building activities. When we need additional information before implementing a large-scale demonstration project or new program, we conduct formative evaluations to determine whether the project or program is feasible, appropriate, and acceptable. Our research and demonstration projects use an appropriate combination of evaluation methods, including both process evaluations to evaluate whether the program or policy change is being implemented as intended, and impact evaluations to estimate the effect of the change on specific outcomes. We conduct process and outcome evaluations of our programs on a regular basis, and we use evaluation methods that are rigorous, well-documented, and appropriate.

We have extensive experience supporting and analyzing survey data from other sources, as well as developing and fielding our own surveys to support evidence-building activities. Below, we provide several examples of the surveys we used for evidence-building purposes.

- We use survey data from the **Understanding America Study** to build an evidence base on the public's service delivery preferences, as well as knowledge of the OASI, DI, and SSI programs.
- We conduct our own surveys to build evidence on the public's service delivery preferences, their internet use preferences, and their satisfaction with the services that we deliver online, in our field offices, and by our teleservice centers.
- We are planning to conduct a **Disability Perceptions Survey** to gather information on knowledge, perceptions, and opinions working adults have about the disability programs.

We have extensive experience conducting formative evaluations, and our evaluation policy explicitly encourages the use of formative evaluations when appropriate. Below, we provide several examples of our formative evaluations.

- We designed and conducted the **Benefit Offset Pilot Demonstration (BOPD)** to test the feasibility of a national demonstration providing a \$1 reduction in DI benefits for every \$2 in earnings, in combination with employment supports.
- As recommended by one of our **Technical Evaluation Panels (TEP)**, we are conducting the **Beyond Benefits Study** to collect information about the service, medical, and employment needs of a study population consisting of disability beneficiaries who are likely to exit the DI or SSI programs due to a medical CDR. The study will also involve small-scale motivational interviewing to gain more insight about their needs and barriers with respect to promoting sustained and substantial work activity leading to self-sufficiency among this population. We expect the results of the study will provide evidence on the feasibility of program improvements and innovations that may help the study population return to work and become self-sufficient and provide policymakers an evidentiary base from which to consider changes to the DI or SSI programs.
- We are collaborating with the Department of Labor (DOL) on the **RETAIN project**, which includes a first phase that is a formative evaluation of ways to improve the early coordination of health care and employment-related supports and services, train health care providers in occupational best practices, and facilitate communication and return-to-work efforts between workers, their employers, and their health care providers. Based on findings from the formative evaluation, we will fund a second phase to expand and implement the strategies that have the most potential to increase employment and reduce future reliance on our disability programs.

We use randomized controlled trial (RCT) designs, when appropriate, to test policy changes. Information on our demonstrations projects that use RCT designs is available in our annual report to Congress, which is available to the public here: <https://www.ssa.gov/disabilityresearch/demos.htm>. Below, we provide examples of some of our program evaluations that are RCTs.

- The **Promoting Readiness of Minors in SSI (PROMISE)** demonstration project tests whether interventions that improve the health, education, and post-school outcomes of children who receive SSI results in long-term reductions in the children's reliance on SSI. The evaluation of PROMISE includes a process evaluation on how the programs were implemented and operated, an impact evaluation based on an RCT that estimates the effects on youth and family outcomes, and an analysis of the cost-effectiveness of the PROMISE projects.
- The **Supported Employment Demonstration (SED)** evaluates whether offering evidence-based packages of vocational, medical, and mental health services to recently denied DI and SSI applicants (ages 18 to 50 with a mental impairment) can reduce the demand for DI benefits. The

SED evaluation uses an RCT design to estimate the impact of SED on outcomes, and it includes process evaluation and a cost-benefit analysis.

- The **Promoting Opportunity Demonstration (POD)** tests the effects of reducing the DI benefit amount by \$1 for every \$2 that a beneficiary earns above a threshold below the level of Substantial Gainful Activity along with simplified work incentives, on employment, benefits paid, and the DI Trust Fund. This demonstration uses an RCT design for the impact evaluation and includes a process evaluation, participation evaluation, and cost-benefit analyses.

We use appropriate methods for our other evaluations, which are reviewed and assessed by external organizations. For example, **OACT** describes the methods used for their assessment of the status of the OASI and DI Trust Funds, as well as their assessment of the SSI program on our website: <https://www.ssa.gov/oact/pubs.html>. An external auditing firm, working with our Office of the Inspector General, conducts an annual review and assessment of the methods and assumptions that OACT uses for the *Annual Report of the Board of Trustees of the Federal Old-Age and Survivors Insurance and Federal Disability Insurance Trust Funds*. In addition, once every four years, the Social Security Advisory Board commissions an expert technical panel on the methods and assumptions used for the *Annual Report of the Board of Trustees of the Federal Old-Age and Survivors Insurance and Federal Disability Insurance Trust Funds* (<https://www.ssab.gov/research/2019-technical-panel-on-assumptions-and-methods-a-report-to-the-board/>). The panel reviews and provides recommendations on the report. The publicly available documentation and extensive external reviews help to ensure that the methods and assumptions OACT uses for their reports are rigorous, well documented, and appropriate.

Following leading industry best practices, **OARO** uses a wide variety of internal controls to ensure that its analytical work and any accompanying analysis is complete, accurate, reliable, and performed in accordance with industry analytical standards. In all of OARO's analytical work, these standards include rigorous validation and testing of all programs used to extract, process, and analyze data, technical peer review of data development of analysis, and the development and maintenance of technical documentation that details sources, methods, and procedures used in conducting our analytical work. External auditors and oversight organizations routinely review our policies, procedures, and methodologies for conducting such work. These reviews consistently find that OARO is operating within the Federal Agency internal control standards and guidelines pertaining to policies and procedures that govern the performance of analytical work.

5 EVALUATION, RESEARCH, STATISTICS, AND DATA ANALYSIS CAPACITY PRESENT WITHIN THE AGENCY

The extent to which evaluation and research capacity is present within the agency to include personnel and agency processes for planning and implementing evaluation activities, disseminating best practices and findings, and incorporating employee views and feedback.

We continually monitor our personnel involved in implementing evaluations, research, statistics, and data analysis activities, as well as disseminating the results of such activities, and we hire and train employees to maintain a sufficient capacity. Our capacity includes external resources to supplement and support our personnel on these activities. The external resources include research and evaluation expertise from our **RDRC centers** (Boston College, NBER, University of Michigan, and University of Wisconsin-Madison), the National Academy of Science, a **Blanket Purchase Order Agreement for Time Sensitive Research Projects**, the **Interventional Cooperative Agreement Program (ICAP)**, and private contractors.

In addition, we have built an evidence-building infrastructure that enhances our capacity. Our infrastructure, as well as our efforts to further develop it, are described below.

Planning and Implementation Evaluation Infrastructure

- Our *Research and Demonstration Project Guidebook* provides agency employees with information on agency processes for planning and implementing evaluation activities. The Government Accountability Office (GAO) reviewed our guidebook and determined that it was consistent with research practices and GAO standards and that the guidebook addressed GAO recommendations regarding coordinating with internal and external stakeholders as we implement evaluations. We are currently reassessing our guidebook against guidance outlined in OMB memorandum M-20-12 and will use the results to make necessary revisions. In the interim, we are communicating changes in evaluation strategies and practices throughout the agency through regular meetings with staff.
- We developed an *Agency Evaluation Policy* consistent with OMB guidance in M-20-12 that outlines the standards the agency will use when planning and implementing evaluation activities. We developed the policy with input from our other offices that have expertise in this area, and we distributed the policy to all Deputy Commissioner level offices for their review and concurrence. We posted the policy on our website: <https://www.ssa.gov/data>.
- As part of our planning and implementation of evaluation activities, all of our offices that conduct evaluations develop project plans that pre-specify evaluation activities. These plans help to ensure that our evaluations meet the standards identified in our *Agency Evaluation Policy* and contribute to keeping the evaluations within scope.
- We use **Technical Expert Panels (TEPs)** when necessary to obtain guidance on policy, implementation, and evaluation issues. The TEPs highlight potential barriers to success and suggest alternative strategies to improve upon the original proposals. The reports are available to the public on our website: <https://www.ssa.gov/disabilityresearch/demos.htm>.
- We conducted a project to identify lessons learned from planning and implementing evaluations of our major demonstration projects. This project included evaluation experts from academia and the private sector who reviewed our prior demonstration projects and provided insights on how we can apply lessons learned to inform the design and implementation of future evaluations. The results from this project will advance our efforts to conduct rigorous evaluation and evidence-building activities.

Dissemination of Best Practices Infrastructure

- We have a **Contracting Officer's Representative (COR) Workgroup** that shares best practices on developing and managing research and evaluation contracts. This community of practice shares guidance on topics such as developing a Statement of Work and Independent Government Cost Estimates, as well as tips for ongoing project management.
- Our **Business Intelligence Competency Center (BICC)** is a collaborative structure and community for sharing business intelligence activities, applications, tools, and best practices across the agency. We define business intelligence as the process for using a standardized set of tools and techniques to turn broad raw data into meaningful information to drive decision-making, optimize performance, and improve stewardship. The BICC also provides guidance to implement the agency's BI strategy and the **Enterprise Data Warehouse (EDW)** initiative.

- Our **Analytics Center of Excellence (ACE)** organizes the **Data Science Technology Exchange**, which is a series of training seminars on various data science topics. The ACE team identifies the topics and presenters for these seminars, organizes the seminars, and our Office of Learning records videos of these seminars so that our employees can access them at any time.

Infrastructure for Dissemination of Findings by SSA

- Our internet site (www.ssa.gov) provides the public with access to information on our evaluation activities. Our evaluation findings are found in our *Annual Performance Report* (<https://www.ssa.gov/agency/budget-and-performance.html>); our disability research site (<https://www.ssa.gov/disabilityresearch/>); our actuarial resources site (<https://www.ssa.gov/oact/>); and our research, statistics, and policy analysis site (<https://www.ssa.gov/policy/>).
- Our **Office of Research, Evaluation, and Statistics (ORES)** publishes on a quarterly basis the *Social Security Bulletin*, which contains research and evaluation articles related to retirement programs, disability programs, and means-tested programs, including the programs we administer. The *Bulletin* has a diverse readership of policymakers, government officials, academics, graduate and undergraduate students, business people, and other interested parties.
- ORES, as an OMB designated statistical unit, publishes data and statistics on programs administered by the Social Security Administration—the Old-Age, Survivors, and Disability Insurance program and Supplemental Security Income program. Our flagship statistical publication the *Annual Statistical Supplement to the Social Security Bulletin* has been published annually since 1940. The data in the *Supplement* and our other statistical publications provide a base for research, policy analysis, and proposals for changing the programs.
- Our employees publish findings in leading professional journals, present findings at professional forums, and present findings to our external stakeholders including Congress, the Social Security Advisory Board, OMB, and other Federal agencies. ORDP and the Office of Communications worked with our Chief Actuary to use social media to communicate findings from the *Annual Report of the Board of Trustees of the Federal Old-Age and Survivors Insurance and Federal Disability Insurance Trust Funds*.

Infrastructure for the Dissemination of Findings by External Organizations

- One of the primary functions of our four **Retirement and Disability Research Consortium (RDRC)** centers—Boston College, the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER), the University of Michigan, and the University of Wisconsin-Madison—is to disseminate information on research and evaluations related to Social Security programs to policymakers, researchers, stakeholder organizations, and the general public.
- The Department of Labor’s (DOL) **Clearinghouse for Labor Evaluation and Research (CLEAR)**, which reviews studies in a variety of labor-related topic areas that are determined in collaboration with the DOL Chief Evaluation Office and DOL agency staff, disseminates findings from several of our evaluations. The vast majority of our evaluations included in CLEAR received a causal evidence rating of “high causal evidence”, indicating that DOL is confident that the estimated effects from our evaluations are solely attributable to the intervention examined.

Infrastructure for Incorporating Employee Views and Feedback

- Our employees review and provide feedback on: (1) research and evaluation technical proposals from contractors, (2) grant proposals from the **RDRC** centers and other entities, and (3) the annual RDRC research agenda.
- Our employees identify topics, research and evaluations, and provide input into the content of our *Learning Agenda*, our *Evaluation Plan*, our *Evaluation Policy*, and other research and evaluation studies.
- We incorporate our employees' views and feedback into our annual extramural research plan that we submit as part of the annual budget process.
- We have an internal peer review process for our research and evaluation activities, during which employees participate with external scholars to review and provide feedback on research and evaluation reports before we consider them ready for dissemination.

6 DEVELOP EVALUATION, RESEARCH, STATISTICS, AND DATA ANALYSIS CAPACITY

The extent to which the agency has the capacity to assist agency staff and program offices to develop the capacity to use evaluation research and analysis approaches and data in the day-to-day operations.

We continually monitor our capacity to assist agency staff and program offices to develop the capacity to use evaluation, research, statistics, and data analysis in the day-to-day operations, and we make the necessary investments to ensure we have sufficient capacity in this area. While most of our offices need to evaluate policies and programs to some extent, they generally rely on our offices with significant expertise in supporting other divisions with using evaluation, research, statistics, and data analysis approaches in day-to-day operations. Below, we describe our major offices with this capacity and how they assist agency staff and program offices to develop the capacity to use evaluation research and analysis approaches in day-to-day operations.

- **ORDP** is the agency lead for implementing the *Evidence Act*. Our designated Evaluation Officer and Statistical Official have leadership positions within ORDP, and played an active role working with other major offices to identify their research and evaluation needs, and to incorporate them into our *Learning Agenda* and *Annual Evaluation Plan*. ORDP has also developed a new senior-level position of Chief Research Officer who is working with the Evaluation Officer to develop and implement the *Learning Agenda* and *Evaluation Plan*. The Evaluation Officer and Chief Research Officer developed an agency-wide *Evaluation Policy*, and actively promote the policy to other divisions within the agency. The Evaluation Officer encourages other divisions within the agency to participate in **training sessions and presentations** on research and evaluation topics offered by the *Evidence Team* within the Office of Management and Budget, the Federal Committee on Statistical Methodology, the Committee on National Statistics, and other organizations. In addition, ORDP oversees our **Contracting Officer's Representative (COR) Workgroup**. The primary offices within ORDP with the capacity to assist agency staff and program offices with using evaluation, research, statistics, and data analysis approaches in the day-to-day operations are: the Office of Research, Evaluation, and Statistics (ORES); the Office of Research, Demonstration, and Employment Support (ORDES); and the Office of Disability Policy (ODP).

ORES, as an OMB designated statistical unit under the Confidential Information Protection and

Statistical Efficiency Act (CIPSEA), has responsibilities for producing and disseminating core statistical products and research datasets from administrative records and other sources to serve the needs of SSA components and key external stakeholders. These statistical and data products support and inform organizational learning and program management.

The ORES Associate Commissioner serves as SSA's Statistical Official as required by the Evidence Act, and she provides advice to our various divisions on statistical policy, techniques, and procedures as part of our efforts to develop agency-wide capacity to use appropriate statistical approaches and data in our day-to-day operations. Our Statistical Official coordinates the **RDRC Research-in-Progress Seminar Series** where RDRC researchers present their findings. The seminar series is open to employees across the agency and attendance has grown significantly over the years. She also coordinates an **Annual RDRC Research Conference** that is open to our employees and to external stakeholders. Both events are specifically aimed at highlighting key research and analysis findings relevant to our various divisions and are an important component of our efforts to assist agency staff and program offices to use evaluation, research, statistics, and data analysis in the day-to-day operations. We monitor our capacity to fulfill our responsibilities as a designated statistical unit, and we make requests for staff and resources when we have well-justified needs. As we implement the requirements for statistical units under Title III of the Evidence Act, we will reassess our needs and request the necessary resources to carry out our responsibilities.

- **OARO** has a primary role in implementing the *Evidence Act* and the Federal Data Strategy Action Plan. Our designated Chief Data Officer has a leadership position within OARO and is working with our other designated officials to complete the requirements within the *Evidence Act*. OARO directly supports the agency's mission, goals, and service principles by reviewing program quality and effectiveness; making recommendations for program improvement using feedback from the adjudication of cases, predictive modeling, and advanced data analysis; coordinating the agency's detection and prevention of fraud; and responding to recommendations of external monitoring authorities. OARO leads our **Business Intelligence Competency Center** and our **Analytics Center of Excellence**. Both centers assist agency staff and program offices to develop the capacity to use evaluation research and analysis approaches and data in the day-to-day operations. There are four offices within OARO that work with agency staff and program offices to develop the capacity to use evaluation research and analysis approaches and data in the day-to-day operations, including: the Office of Analytics and Improvements (OAI), the Office of Appellate Operations (OAO), the Office of Quality Review (OQR), and the Office of Program Integrity (OPI).
- **OACT** plays a primary role in evaluating the financial status of the OASI, DI, and SSI programs under current law, and how proposed changes to the programs will affect the programs' financial status. For example, OACT supports our various divisions, Congress, and the Administration by assessing the effects of proposed legislative changes and proposed regulations. OACT provides our various offices expert consultation on the design and implementation of research and evaluation projects. OACT also conducts extensive research and analysis that the Commissioner and the Board of Trustees use by as the foundation for the **Annual Report of the Board of Trustees of the Federal Old-Age and Survivors Insurance and Federal Disability Insurance Trust Funds**, and it leads the inter-component work on the **Annual Report of the Supplemental Security Income Program**. OACT makes important contributions to other regular evaluations that the agency conducts for Congress and other external stakeholders.
- **OS** plays a major role in implementing the *Evidence Act* and the Federal Data Strategy, and it assists agency staff and program offices to develop the capacity to use evaluation research and analysis approaches and data in the day-to-day operations. One of their major contributions is the development and expansion of our **Enterprise Data Warehouse (EDW)**, which provides our staff and

program offices with access to our data, as well as the infrastructure to perform advanced analytics. The EDW provides the foundation for our research, evaluation, and data analysis activities.

OS also oversees our **Advanced Data Analytics Lab (ADAL)**. ADAL staff use our master data files to conduct advance data analytics for many of our major offices. The results of ADAL analyses are often used as input in senior executive decisions and actions. ADAL services include program evaluation, policy evaluation, predictive analytics, descriptive analytics, data quality analysis, prototyping new technologies, and machine learning exercises.

We are committed to hiring and developing staff with the specialized knowledge and skills needed to conduct rigorous research and evaluations. We provide our employees with training opportunities to develop the capacity to use evaluation research and analysis approaches and data in our day-to-day operations. For example, our employees participated in, or are scheduled to participate in, the following training.

- The Joint Program on Survey Methodology's **Big Data for Social Science** course that OMB arranged with the University of Maryland, which covers the key big data tools in a non-intimidating way to social and data scientists.
- The **Evaluation and Evidence Training Series** hosted by OMB and the Office of Evaluation Sciences within the General Services Administration.
- The **Federal Data Science Pilot Training Program** hosted by the Chief Information Officer Council and is designed to assist agencies in filling a critical skills gap by training current Federal employees in emerging data science skills.
- Courses from Claremont Graduate University's **The Evaluators' Institute**, which offers a variety of courses that, provide evaluators with the capacity that they need to conduct high quality evaluations.

As we expand our evidence-building activities, we are seeking new training opportunities for all of our employees. For example, we are exploring training opportunities for our senior executives that can help them better understand the results of our evaluations and use data and research more effectively in managing our programs. We are exploring additional training opportunities for our technical staff that will allow them to enhance their expertise on evaluation methods and research techniques. Finally, we are exploring training opportunities for our non-technical staff so that they will better understand the importance of evaluations for supporting evidence-based policymaking.



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