

IT Systems Expert Panel

Essential Changes Imperative for the Success of Social Security's IT Modernization and Future Operations

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An independent panel commissioned by the Social Security Advisory Board

IT Systems Expert Panel

Table of Contents

Preface.....	3
Executive Summary	4
Introduction.....	7
The Importance of an Operating Model for Modernization Success.....	9
Modernization Governance Infrastructure.....	13
The Importance of an IT Modernization Strategy	17
Customer Services and Experience.....	22
Recommended Guidance to SSA for Navigating Beyond COVID-19.....	26
Lessons for Leadership in Managing Change – How to Get.....	27
Difficult Things Done in Government.....	27
Conclusion & Recommendations	30
Appendix.....	33
Panel Background and Activity	33
SSAB’s Information Technology Systems Expert Panel Charter.....	46
Panelist Bios.....	47
List of IT Systems Expert Panel Meetings	53
Acronym List	56
References.....	58

IT Systems Expert Panel

Preface

Against the backdrop of the many challenges and opportunities facing the American people in the 21st Century, we face an urgent call to improve and modernize our Federal government so it better lives up to the expectations of the American people. Acceptance of the "status quo," heeding those who say "because that's the way we have always done it," or even modest, incremental change is not sufficient to meet the problems we must deal with today. The fiscal realities of entitlement obligations and an increasing national debt make it even more important that we achieve transformational improvements in both the efficiency and effectiveness of Federal spending. Legacy information technology (IT) challenges, inconsistent and antiquated data capabilities and outmoded and citizen-unfriendly systems and applications all make it difficult for our government to adapt to the current needs of the country.

The Social Security Advisory Board (SSAB) chartered this independent IT Systems Expert Panel to review the important Modernization Program underway at the Social Security Administration (SSA) -- a multi-year, \$700+ million initiative. It was my honor to chair this panel, composed of distinguished and seasoned management professionals. Their experience and expertise, developed over remarkable careers in the academic, public, private, and non-profit sectors, were focused on assisting the SSA on the pressing problems of IT modernization and business change. The Panel met regularly to discuss the agency's plan, to hear from both internal and external experts, current and former executives, as well as outside stakeholders. While it is important to understand how current leaders are approaching the implementation of a major modernization effort, it is equally important to understand from those who have seen and led similar initiatives what lessons might be applied to avoid common pitfalls, shorten implementation cycles, improve and increase institutionalization of goals and processes, and, in short, increase the likelihood of success.

I am so appreciative of the opportunity to again contribute to public service and to attempt to help those at SSA who work hard every day to make our government better. My thanks to the SSAB for chartering this Panel, to all those who took the time to meet with us and share their knowledge and insights, to the wonderful staff of the SSAB, and of course to my fellow panel members who volunteered their time to participate. I want to give special thanks to the Panel's SSAB liaison and Staff Panel Lead, Dr. Pamela Crawford, who did so much to organize our meetings, conduct research, follow up on questions and issues, and draft several sections of this report. Our intent in this report is not to critique but to advise, and to identify opportunities for improvement in both approach and program that can lead to better outcomes from this worthy modernization initiative. If we are successful, we will have advanced the vision of "a government that works, and works for all."

Alan P. Balutis

Chair, IT Systems Expert Panel

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IT Systems Expert Panel

Executive Summary

The Social Security Advisory Board established the Information Technology Systems Expert Panel (hereafter “the Panel”) to provide expert advice and guidance on the Social Security Administration (SSA)’s [IT Modernization Plan](#). The 2017 IT Modernization Plan is a significant, five-year systems upgrade estimated at \$691 million investment.^a This Plan outlines SSA’s IT modernization initiative intended to update their legacy systems, streamline workload processing, and improve and modernize services to the public. The Panel served to evaluate this modernization, a government effort worthy of review by government oversight agencies, congressional authorization, appropriations, and others and provide.

The Panel completed a detailed examination of the IT Modernization Plan and conducted more than 20 stakeholder interviews. Stakeholders included representatives from state and federal agencies, advocacy groups, experts from across the government, and systems end-users. We partnered with SSA leadership from across the agency for modernization updates as part of our assessment while providing them insights and guidance to help them achieve their modernization goals.

During our Panel’s evaluation, SSA revised its modernization priorities to emphasize service digitization. The COVID-19 pandemic forced SSA employees to work from home, creating an immediate need to transition thousands of staff to telework and enhance digital and telephonic service to agency customers. SSA’s [Service Modernization: IT Modernization Plan, 2020 Update](#) was then released with additional changes, including an added IT Modernization Plan domain and shifted priorities. Our findings and recommendations consider and address SSA’s evolving modernization.

SSA’s progress in modernizing and upgrading its IT systems is commendable. We were impressed by the SSA staff’s expertise and dedication to their agency’s mission. However, there is room to improve SSA’s modernization efforts. We believe our recommendations could significantly increase SSA’s modernization efficiency and effectiveness and propose the following, organized by focus areas, to bolster SSA’s modernization success:

Operating Model Recommendations

- SSA’s operating model must align with the agency’s strategic vision and strategic plan.
- The operating model must address how today’s interactions are simplified, streamlined, or made more responsive to public needs.

^a The initial investment of SSA’s IT systems modernization was estimated at \$677 million and was later increased to \$691 million.

IT Systems Expert Panel

- SSA must identify and include critical business lines within the operating model, including customer journeys within those business lines (there may be similarities across business lines).
- The operating model must address interactions with key stakeholders, claimants and beneficiaries, and their agents and other agencies at the federal and state levels of government.
- Journey maps must be developed from SSA's business lines with input from the field employees and customers.
- SSA's strategic vision and operating model should be field and customer-driven.
- A comprehensive understanding of the experience of all customer segments should be represented in the operating model.

Governance Infrastructure Recommendations

- A well-defined governance infrastructure is critical for modernization success, especially as SSA shifts to agile development. It aligns agency acquisition and development with the agency operating model.
- SSA should clearly define how its program management processes accommodate agile development.
- The chief business officer (CBO) should drive modernization goals and priorities in alignment with short-term DevOps teams.
- SSA should create or assign an agency component directed by a senior executive to lead customer experience efforts across the organization.

IT Modernization Strategy Recommendations

- SSA's Strategic Plan should align with the agency's operating model, Governance Infrastructure, and the agency's Modernization Plan.
- SSA's IT Modernization Plan should include metrics against which to measure performance against those goals.
- Clear governance with cross-agency stakeholders should be included in the planning stages of modernization, not just at the execution phase.
- SSA should strengthen the use of emerging technologies to enhance agency data stores.
- A stakeholder engagement process is needed to help SSA align its IT strategic planning to agency stakeholders, both internal and external, and continue through modernization.

IT Systems Expert Panel

Customer Experience Recommendations

- SSA's Customer Experience (CX) Strategy should be a starting point:
 - Set the vision for the customers' experience
 - Identify the overall customer goals and objectives; initiatives focused on improving the pain points or gaps in the customer experience and metrics to measure success
 - SSA should create a customer experience strategy identifying the agency's vision of the customer's experience, the current customer's experience, and the future experience, along with a roadmap on how to get there.
- SSA should develop a Chief Customer Officer (CCO) role as leader of the Customer Experience Office (CXO) to address customer experience and the customers' needs.

Beyond our findings and recommendations discussed in greater detail within this report, we also offer guidance for navigating through COVID-19. Finally, the report ends with a case study demonstrating a federal agency's success in achieving what seemed impossible.

The dedication of SSA employees, coupled with the Panel's recommendations, will help guide the agency toward modernization success.

IT Systems Expert Panel

Introduction

The Information Technology Systems Expert Panel (hereafter “The Panel”) was chartered by the Social Security Advisory Board (SSAB or Board). The Panel would provide the Board expert advice, guidance, information, and updates on the Social Security Administration (SSA) Information Technology (IT) Modernization Plan (hereafter “the IT Modernization Plan”), including successes, potential challenges, and areas requiring special attention. The IT Modernization Plan is a critical element of the agency’s initiatives, aimed at improving services to citizens and beneficiaries, to deal with budget and financial pressures and constraints, and to operate in a modern, mobile, on-demand environment. The Charter for the Panel and short bios of the Chair and the members are included in the Appendices. Together the Panelists have years of experience in the public, private, and non-profit sectors. Their work cuts across all management areas – including budget, finance, planning, IT, acquisition, program and project management, oversight, and so on. Panelists have worked in central agencies (e.g., the Office of Management and Budget), departments and agencies, and on Capitol Hill. They cut across the political spectrum and include both long-time government careerists and those who help political or Presidential Appointed Senate Confirmed (PAS) roles. The SSAB is an advisory, not an oversight body. Accordingly, the Board, together with the Panel, understood the Panel mission to be advisory, not oversight. The SSA IT Modernization is a significant government systems effort – a multi-year upgrade budgeted at nearly 700 million dollars -- and, as such, deservedly earns careful review from SSA’s Office of the Commissioner (COSS), OMB, the Inspector General, the Government Accountability Office (GAO), House and Senate authorization, appropriations and oversight committees, and others. The Panel sought to partner with SSA to provide insights and guidance to help them achieve their modernization goals. We hope this report will do just that.

The Emergence of Modernization Themes

Each member brought their unique areas of expertise and professional experience to the Panel, providing a broad spectrum from which to evaluate systems-related issues. The Panel held a series of meetings with key program and IT leaders within SSA and interested parties from outside the agency. These included OMB, GAO, Congressional staff, union leaders, field staff, outside experts, past agency experts, and many more. Our goal was to get a solid grounding on what was happening from different perspectives and why – akin to a surveyor’s use of triangulation to get a firm fix on the progress made and what was still needed, unresolved issues, and ongoing concerns. A complete listing of the meetings held and documents reviewed is found in the Appendix. Specific issues, categories of topics, and themes emerged over time and were further refined and honed with each additional stakeholder meeting. Once the fact-finding phase was completed, the Panel met in several executive sessions to deliberate on what we believed to

IT Systems Expert Panel

be the essential themes and focus areas. The Panel developed key topic areas deemed critical to ensure SSA's success with its IT Systems Modernization Plan.

The Panel prepared this report to provide expert feedback and guidance on SSA's IT Modernization to agency leadership. But the primary audience is the Social Security Advisory Board, according to the charter establishing the Panel. The authorizing statute for the Social Security Advisory Board states the Board advises and makes recommendations to the President, the Congress, and the Commissioner of Social Security Administration.^b These stakeholders were also included in the Panel's intended audience for the report. It is also hoped the findings and recommendations could be useful to others working on major IT systems modernizations in other agencies and organizations.

Defining Modernization Focus Areas

The Panel determined SSA's IT Modernization Plan's most significant gaps and weaknesses based upon their evaluative findings. These areas are addressed in this report and organized by the focus areas, including the need for an organizational model, a modernization governance structure, the importance of a strategic plan for modernization (including all supporting components), and the value of customer services and experience. Following each focus area discussion, the report provides recommendations that, if implemented, will most benefit the Social Security Administration, beneficiaries, and the American public overall with the changes to the IT Modernization Plan.

These themes, listed below, were developed, hoping the feedback, guidance, and recommendations would be useful to the Social Security Advisory Board and other end users. Key topics highlighted in this report as critical to IT modernization success include:

- Operating Model Modernization Concept
- Modernization Governance Infrastructure
- IT Modernization Strategy
- Customer Services and Experience.

Additional Panel feedback and guidance also include:

- Recommended Guidance for Navigating Beyond COVID-19

^b *Authorizing Statute of the Board*. (2020). Social Security Advisory Board. <https://www.ssab.gov/about-ssab/authorizing-statute/>

IT Systems Expert Panel

- Lessons for Leadership in Managing Change – How to Get Difficult Things Done in Government

Panel Focus Areas, Finding & Recommendations

Based on their evaluation and research, the Panel developed their findings and recommendations organized around the four focus areas gleaned from their fact-finding phase. Below are Panel findings and recommendations on the following focus areas: Operating Model, Modernization Governance Structure, IT Modernization Strategy, and Customer Service and Experience.

The Importance of an Operating Model for Modernization Success

The importance of SSA's operational model development and use to achieve success with its IT systems modernization initiative was mentioned frequently throughout the Panel's meetings with the various stakeholder groups. An operating model is an abstract and visual representation or model of how an organization delivers value to its customers and beneficiaries - and how the organization works. Below we define the operational model approach and discuss the difference between an ad hoc or planned operating model. Operational model concepts specific to SSA as an organization are mentioned. Then we highlight our Panel's findings and provide general recommendations to SSA for the operating model.

Defining the Operating Model Approach

IT Modernization can be pursued for multiple purposes, including cost reduction and improving the user experience of a website or business application. Over the past thirty years, there have been societal shifts in the daily use of technology, and the COVID-19 pandemic has driven many organizations to a virtual work environment with the substantially increased use of technology to change business processes and interactions with customers. For many organizations, options such as telework/remote work, secure information sharing, and digital signatures will now be a mainstay of operations in the 2020s. These shifts in modern technology use have substantial business model implications when considered in combination with demographic trends.

The Panel believes an operating model is essential for any business, public or private, with customer/citizen focus as the organizing principle. It is the organizing paradigm against which IT, policy, human resources, operations, and process decisions can be evaluated and understood. It allows baseline comparisons with best of breed organizations operating with the same model. Without a strategic vision and operating model, the SSA Modernization Plan runs the risk of merely listing somewhat related initiatives organized under broad program and infrastructure categories, unrelated to the comprehensive SSA Business Plan. More specifically, lack of a

IT Systems Expert Panel

strategic vision and operating model could risk a timely completion of SSA's IT Modernization Plan, with poorer outcomes and a less efficient and effective initiative, overall.

Ad Hoc or Planned Operating Model

SSA operates in a dynamic environment influenced and altered by legislation, administration changes, and environmental changes like demographics and COVID 19. In responding to these changes and challenges, the one constant should be the vision of the SSA operating model built through policy, process, human resources, and IT. However, the Panel heard inconsistent objectives for technology use, ranging from in-sourcing the disability claims processing system to reducing field operating costs to generically improving customer service. Is SSA's vision the ad hoc result of various initiatives, or are initiatives evaluated and implemented against the vision of how SSA wants to do business?

A case in point is the impact of COVID-19 on the question of the role of more than 1,200 field offices versus online, interactive access to service made necessary by COVID-19. Will the response be a temporary measure using telephone and teleconferencing to respond to the unanticipated emergency? Or will it be the vision of future customer interactions, much like work at home is questioning the need for large office space, or how online commerce now questions the need for brick and mortar stores?

Operation Model Concepts for SSA

In industries such as insurance, pension funds, and wealth management, modern technologies had profound impacts on the operating model, improving customer value while reducing administrative costs. There is, therefore, a need to understand the operating model changes to manual processes and interactions with beneficiaries, their family members or agents, and other government agencies at the state and federal levels. Will the changes be superficial, with little impact on the operations beyond a modern look and feel? Or, will the changes be substantial with large impacts on those SSA interacts with? What comprises an interaction, and how today's interactions are simplified, streamlined, or made more responsive to public needs?

These changes, challenges, and initiatives, especially the question of operating in an internet-connected environment with SSA's employees and clients, raise the question for the Panel of what is SSA's operating model. For example, does SSA want to operate like an insurance company or a pension plan or wealth management company, an integrated member of government social services agencies, or a public utility?

SSA's Original 2017 IT Modernization Plan and the 2020 Modernization Plan Update are serious efforts to apply modern IT technology to provide easier, faster, more efficient service to the public. Each plan organizes its presentation into Business Domains and Technical Domains and, within those domains, identifies several initiatives/investments and the expected value from

IT Systems Expert Panel

each. Each of these initiatives has justified value in and of itself. What is not clear is how each initiative relates to a holistic view of operations. What is the overall vision of the SSA business model demonstrated from these initiatives? Who and how is the public benefiting from the investments?

Modernization projects and initiatives do not always move in perfect lockstep from front to back because priorities differ, implementation time frames differ, and political, and policy changes introduce new requirements. However, SSA can establish a future operating model with business architecture and IT, data, and operations architectures. Then agency initiatives can be seen, planned, and rationalized within these architectures and related processes. There would be an overall map in which these initiatives can be prioritized, planned, and understood instead of a collection of somewhat related or loosely related initiatives.

It does not mean that all IT Modernization Plan initiatives need to come to a halt in the immediate SSA situation. It is assumed that SSA's evaluation of these initiatives has identified both customer and organizational gains from doing them. The question here is what role they fit. How are they moving SSA towards a consistently strategic business vision? How do the IT initiatives fit into the overall architectures for customer interactions, business process flows, data, telecommunications, and the like?

Panel Findings - Operating Model for Modernization Success

From the Panel's perspective, with SSA founded as a Social Insurance Program, the insurance company-operating model most parallels SSA's businesses. Envision the account number process as the initiation of a policy and the earning process and quarters of coverage as determinants of premium payments. The application process to file for benefits and the record maintenance process are strongly similar. An insurance-like operating model is relevant even for the SSI program because, among other things, its services and processes are similar. Each has an application or enrollment process, eligibility determination, post-entitlement maintenance, customer/beneficiary contact, and notification.

In the commercial world, insurance companies develop an operating model taking advantage of innovation in business practices to attract customers in a competitive market while also managing risks in their portfolios to maintain profitability. As a government agency, SSA's strategic vision of how it wants to do business should result from its own ideas, deliberations, and understanding of its business. In this context, an operating model would be a valuable help, perhaps a necessity, in its strategic visioning process for modernization.

There will be specific customer experience (CX) recommendations based on the operating model. SSA should follow industry best practices for leading companies in CX for the industry operating model. For the insurance industry, JD Powers maintains a rating structure (found here: <https://www.thebalance.com/top-insurance-companies-by-customer-purchase-experience->

IT Systems Expert Panel

[4122462](#)). Specific Panel recommendations relevant to the operating model and CX are defined below.

The Panel recommends that SSA's strategic vision and operating model be driven by both the customer and employees providing services to the public. Critical business lines, including disability and retirement claims and appeals, must be identified. The essential customer journeys within those business lines, some of which will be similar across business lines, are also necessary to identify.

A customer journey is the process a claimant or beneficiary goes through to file for Social Security benefits, including filing a disability or retirement claim, or filing for an appeal. There are some common functions across the customer journeys and SSA's business lines, including filling out forms, etc. When information is sent to someone at the wrong address because SSA's systems do not connect and share data, mapping the journey from the customer's perspectives will identify pain points. A pain point is any time a person has difficulty interacting with the agency for services. Examples could include going to a field office and waiting in line for hours, calling the 800 number for services, and not obtaining consistent information from each SSA representative.

In addition to existing data, each business line's pain points need to be identified and used to map the customer's journey. Pain points and business lines should include input from both the public-serving employees and beneficiaries. A clear understanding of all customer segments' experiences is needed and addressed in the operating model, including systems customers internal and external to the agency. Customer segments should be considered across sociodemographic characteristics, including access and use of IT. The operating model must also address how today's interactions are simplified, streamlined, or made more responsive to public needs. Finally, the operating model must manage the interactions with key stakeholders, beneficiaries, agents, and other agencies at the federal and state levels of government. Agents at other agencies are increasingly exchanging information with SSA regarding issues such as identity verification and electronic health records.

With a governance structure in place (discussed later in this report), an organization leader such as the new Chief Business Officer needs to serve an integrator role across the business lines and IT. The role of IT is essential in enabling many of the components of a "future" experience. The Chief Business Office should seek ideas from its employees to include in the planning. This would help encourage engagement within the staff and with beneficiaries so that problems can be understood and corrected and common solutions to multiple problems identified.

The most important question is whether SSA leadership will commit to undertaking a comprehensive SSA Business and IT approach based on a broader operational model? Without a

IT Systems Expert Panel

more comprehensive approach, resources invested in the IT Modernization Plan will be less efficiently used and may not achieve their intended goals.

Panel Recommendations - SSA's Operating Model

As earlier described, the Panel believes an operating model is vital for any business, public or private, with customer/citizen focus as the organizing principle for modernization. It should serve as the organizing paradigm against which the agency can evaluate and understand IT, policy, human resources, operations, and process decisions. To develop and establish a successful operating model capable of supporting and facilitating the agency in these ways, the Panel offers the following recommendations to the Social Security Administration:

1. SSA's operating model must align with the agency's strategic vision and strategic plan.
2. The operating model must address how today's interactions are simplified, streamlined, or made more responsive to public needs.
3. SSA must identify and include critical business lines within the operating model, including customer journeys within those business lines (there may be similarities across business lines).
4. The operating model must address interactions with key stakeholders, claimants and beneficiaries, beneficiary agents, and other agencies at the federal and state levels of government.
5. SSA should develop journey maps from SSA's business lines with input from the field employees and customers.
6. The needs of the customer and SSA employees providing services to the public should drive SSA's strategic vision and operating model.
7. The operating model should include a clear understanding of the experience of all customer segments should be represented.

Should SSA adopt and implement these recommendations for the operating model, we firmly believe these organizational changes will strengthen the potential of their IT Systems Modernization Plan success while also improving the experience for their customers, now and in the future.

Modernization Governance Infrastructure

During the Panel's meetings with the stakeholders, there was an emphasis on the need and value of addressing gaps in the governance infrastructure to facilitate SSA's IT modernization success. Hence, it became a focus area for this report. The following sections highlight the importance of governance structure for SSA, summarize what the Panel heard about a governance structure, and highlight our findings and recommendations as related to an organizational governance structure for the agency.

IT Systems Expert Panel

Importance of Modernization Governance Structure

The Commissioner is the senior accountable official for SSA, responsible for maintaining effective operations through his or her tenure. Commissioner Saul's vision and fundamental principle intends "to improve our service to the millions of Americans who expect and deserve timely and accurate help from us." His Strategic Plan sets forth the vision and specific goals and capabilities SSA intends to pursue in the coming years. Commissioner Saul's stated focus on improving service to the millions of Americans is the "why" of IT Modernization that should align with SSA's Strategic Plan and operating model. Within that document, Focus Area 2 addresses the "how" of achieving that vision and a set of capabilities to improve employee and customer experience while also protecting taxpayers' dollars and data.

Our IT Expert Systems Panel members have many years of experience in modernizing federal agencies, not just focusing on IT capabilities. As important as the "what" is in modernization, equally important is knowing where you want to go. The "how" is just as important and knowing how to get there. Complexities of changing service offerings and the processes and systems and data in a large, complex operational organization are many in number and interrelated. Coordinating all of these concurrent changes while maintaining operational excellence and the confidence of leaders, employees, customers, and interested stakeholders is a massive and ongoing program management challenge. It is critically important to have an enterprise-wide governance infrastructure to implement these changes successfully. This infrastructure will support collaboration with clearly defined roles and decision-making processes. It should also facilitate consistency, agility, and excellence for executing the "what." Defining a common governance infrastructure with program management processes and milestones defines the "how" to modernize successfully.

We see this interrelated set of program management processes and the maturity of these disciplined processes applicable across SSA and the mechanism for defining how to modernize SSA capabilities to achieve the Commissioner's vision. Defining these processes within a governance infrastructure is not uniquely needed by SSA; rather, they are critical to all large, complex organizations, public or private, intent on modernization.

What the Panel Heard About Governance Infrastructure

The Panel applauds SSA's recent designation of a Chief Business Officer (CBO) to ensure alignment between SSA's IT and the operations components in support of its IT Modernization Plan. When we learned of the CBO's role, we were told there was a good relationship between the CIO, the Deputy CIO for IT Modernization, and the CBO for IT Modernization and Digital Services. A good relationship between these agency leaders is essential. However, having clearly defined program management processes spanning all agency modernization, not only IT systems, is more important considering the many hundreds, if not thousands of people, inside and outside of SSA, involved in modernization. Good leaders working together is often viewed

IT Systems Expert Panel

as the lowest level of capability in a maturity model. We do not discount the value of good relationships between these roles, but stress more is needed to ensure the long-term success of SSA's modernization.

SSA agreed to provide the Panel their business process for integration between SSA's IT systems and SSA operations components. It would help the Panel understand SSA's management guidance issued around their governance infrastructure. SSA provided a diagram of an oversimplified product life cycle. (Additional information about our request is found in the report section entitled "Fact-Finding Phase- Informational Requests to SSA"). Providing insights and recommendations regarding governance infrastructure is exceptionally challenging when the Panel's access to information on SSA's business process management guidance is restricted. Additionally, we do not know if established management strategies provide a solid foundation for a governance infrastructure without being able to review this process. To ensure IT developments were consistent with business process changes, the Panel asked about a business reference architecture. The response sounded like this might be under development, and the CBO believed they should manage it. The Panel cannot be sure, however, lacking sufficient information to evaluate the matter.

SSA should have clearly defined processes at the front of the product life cycle for gathering employee and customer experience input and information as part of the governance structure. However, we did not hear any clearly defined processes SSA has for gathering customer input, as noted in the customer experience section. The Panel did hear from two different stakeholder groups who believed SSA should collect customer input and were planning to do so in the future. The Chief Business Officer stated the agency seeks employee end-user feedback from field office employees. It is unclear whether this is a one-time action by SSA or a systematic, defined, agile development process integrated with a specified component's organizational functions and requirements.

Panel Findings - Governance Infrastructure

As SSA shifts to agile development, possessing program management processes or governance infrastructure is critical to ensure what the agency acquires and aligns with its overarching Operating Model and specific goals. It was unclear to us how SSA changed its program management processes to accommodate agile development. Agile development efforts often focus on improving a user interface or experience without changing processes or organizational functions from the legacy business operating model. To support a new business model with process and organization change, we believe the CBO has a representative on agile development teams, which is a positive sign. However, we would have liked to see a set of processes where

IT Systems Expert Panel

the CBO was driving the modernization goals and priorities and worked with short-term DevOps¹ teams^c to consistently stay aligned with overarching goals.

The Social Security Administration's recently released *The Service Modernization: IT Modernization Plan, 2020 Update*.² SSA states a key change to their modernization strategy is "Refining our governance and development methodologies to include the Chief Business Officer (CBO) and ensure we are working on projects that deliver the greatest value to the public."³ However, we saw almost nothing in the 2020 Update document or any documents we received demonstrating an existing or updated governance structure or development methodologies. Although we are hopeful SSA has a governance structure and uses governance structure-related methodologies, we detected no evidence in our evaluation. More information from SSA would have helped us assess the agency's governance structure and provide informed suggestions to enhance their modernization efforts' success.

There is no single executive at SSA with the responsibility for managing the customer experience - bringing customer data together to understand the full range of experiences. Having an organizational leader focused on CX is critical for the achievement of quality customer service and experience. This role would support the agency in understanding and prioritizing its customers' pain points as they interact with SSA.

Panel Recommendations - Governance Infrastructure

Based on our evaluation, the following are the Panel recommendations for SSA's governance infrastructure.

1. As SSA shifts to agile development, clearly defining a governance infrastructure is critical for modernization success. A well-defined governance strategy will support agency acquisition and development in alignment with its overarching Operating Model.
2. SSA should clearly define how its program management processes accommodate agile development.
3. Ensure the CBO drives modernization goals and priorities which align with short-term DevOps teams.
4. SSA should create or assign an office led by a senior executive to lead customer experience efforts across the agency. This position should report to the Deputy Commissioner of the agency, and the organization should prioritize customer initiatives and track performance toward these initiatives.

^c DevOps teams use a set of practices combining software development and IT operations with an aim at shortening the systems development life cycle and providing continuous delivery with high software quality. DevOps is complementary with Agile software development; in fact, several aspects come from Agile methodology.

IT Systems Expert Panel

Should SSA implement these recommendations, the efforts would further support the agency and its successful IT modernization overall.

The Importance of an IT Modernization Strategy

SSA's IT Modernization Strategy: Stepping Forward But Falling Short

Effectively building and communicating a modernization strategy is critical to the successful implementation of an operating model across the agency. Contributions by internal and external stakeholders are paramount. A crisp, succinct discussion of the “what” and the “how” in language that political and business-line executives can decipher, support, champion, and co-own is a must.

Our discussions with SSA leaders and stakeholders did not reveal a strong connection from strategic planning to execution. This finding was true even after we reviewed SSA's current IT Modernization Plan (as updated earlier this year)⁴ and the agency's overall Strategic Plan⁵ (last updated in 2018) in the context of our work.

The current SSA IT Modernization Plan puts a major focus on problem-solving the “as is” and providing broad goals for the future but is less specific about where SSA needs to go and metrics to assess performance against the plan. Leadership continues to face a tension between prioritization of incremental or quick win improvements and focus on more substantive business transformation projects. This gap is growing at a time when modernization acceleration, scale, velocity, and uplift are sorely needed to support a new operating plan and a renewed focus on customer service.

Panel Findings - SSA's IT Modernization Strategy

Our review of the IT Modernization Plan and its Update led to the following observations and findings:

- Liquid expectations vs. artificial targets – SSA's plan lays out a broad and comprehensive set of eight goals in technical and tactical detail but lacks relevant metrics, such as beneficiary response time, needed to measure performance against those goals.
- Funding and acquisition constraints continue SSA's reliance on legacy technologies – Many of the services that SSA provides are delivered using outdated technology applications and infrastructure. While the agency is making some progress toward migrating applications to the cloud, the IT Modernization Plan focuses primarily on technical steps to close incremental gaps and does not address the external budget and acquisition issues that constrain critical modernization efforts.

IT Systems Expert Panel

- Automation, including robotic process automation (RPA) and artificial intelligence (AI) – SSA is not standing still in adopting emerging technologies. Effective data usage is key to SSA’s future success in efficiency and improving customer interactions. The IT Modernization Plan’s discussion of the Data Domain could be strengthened by a stronger linkage to the potential for emerging technologies to significantly enhance agency data stores.
- Engagement of internal and external stakeholders in developing the Modernization Plan – SSA may have reached out across other agencies and externally (e.g., beneficiaries and family members) for input, but this is not reflected in the document. There is relatively little focus on stakeholder engagement, suggesting that this was not done in a robust fashion. Further, our discussions with SSA staff had little focus on the import of IT strategic planning to align stakeholders – the CIO’s office periodically has different views than those of the business units. A stakeholder engagement process can help create jointly owned solutions. This observation contrasts with the positive focus on communication with the public on SSA services in Plan.
- The IT Modernization Plan has a short discussion of systems architecture. Still, while it’s clear that the CIO focuses on architecture, there is no evidence connected to goals in the IT Modernization Plan or operational improvement needs that we heard from stakeholder interviews.

The current *SSA Agency Strategic Plan, 2018-2022*,⁶ is also crucial in guiding how the agency intends to change operations and services. Following review and discussions with a wide variety of executives, we offer the following observations about the agency Strategic Plan:

- Comprehensive in scope as a management improvement plan – covering services, operations, and stewardship goals with a focus on improving efficiency
- Lacks a future vision statement, which would be an effective way to communicate the agency's direction.
- SSA’s Commissioner has not incorporated his shift in focus to customer service into an updated strategic plan – this relates to our observation that any IT Modernization Plan, including the 2020 update, could be linked more closely to a revised overall strategic plan. IT is an enabler; it can serve as a force multiplier. But at SSA – and this has been a long-standing concern – IT planning appears to have supplanted strategic planning to guide the agency’s future.
- It does not portray how SSA moves towards a new operating model or uses the operating model as a milestone. Please refer to the earlier report section on the operating model.
- Lack of sufficient attention to solving internal and external customer needs – SSA could benefit from a customer journey map tied to a real customer experience emphasis. Please

IT Systems Expert Panel

refer to the subsequent report section on customer service and experience for specific recommendations.

- It does not fully define – across SSA’s broad landscape of stakeholders – what success looks like (without a performance measure and target for achievement, SSA risks being in never-ending “fix it” mode).
- No mention of cross-agency dependencies on SSA data and how SSA partnerships could be transformational if addressed adequately with new automation and analytical capabilities.
- No mention of privacy/data protection, which is incongruous with the enormous energy and resources SSA puts into risk reduction

The governance structure is absent and lacks the policies or procedures to execute the Strategic Plan. Please refer to the earlier report section on governance infrastructure for specific recommendations.

Key Questions the IT Modernization Efforts at SSA Should Address

We believe that modernization strategies and plans should, at a minimum, address six basic questions listed below. These questions have often proven critical for success based on experience with research on best practices in modernization. Additional Panel findings are included with each question.

Q1: Does SSA’s IT Modernization Strategy substantiate mutually owned expectations developed by all stakeholders?

- In conducting stakeholder interviews with internal offices and state DDS officials, it is unclear that mutually owned expectations exist. Sometimes there was no agreement on how and why SSA is modernizing certain capabilities in the fashion it is pursuing. The agency’s approach to some IT investments is not understood by all components affected within the organization.
- No outreach to key external stakeholders is apparent – this includes AARP, disability groups, agencies who depend on SSA data, and other vital stakeholders.

Q2: Are critical drivers influencing the direction of the IT Modernization Strategy explained?

- Drivers are acknowledged (including service improvements, IT cost management, White House, and congressional pressures). Still, it is less clear how SSA responds to diverse drivers while influenced by different constituencies and customers (both internal and external).

IT Systems Expert Panel

- IT modernization goals are well-defined (on p. 9 of the IT Modernization Plan), but data are not mentioned as a primary goal area. Instead, data are only a bulletized item listed under IT value, and privacy is not mentioned.

Q3: Is the IT investment direction and alignment with business/mission needs and priorities made explicitly clear?

- The IT investment direction and alignment with business and mission needs and priorities are not quantified, nor is there an analysis presented that documents the alignment of resources to needs. In addition, priorities are not understood or commonly shared across stakeholders. Solutions – like those provided to the Disability Determination Service centers (DDS) across the country – are not systematically addressed or widely supported. State and field offices feel excluded from many of the decision-making processes occurring at SSA headquarters.
- Agency strategic plan goals are provided as an afterthought rather than focus – they are depicted on page 58 of the 91-page report, and only at a very high level.⁷
 - No discussion of how incentives (i.e., executive, workforce, budget, acquisition) are tied to IT investments.⁸

Q4: Is the IT Modernization and Agency Strategic Plan Client-Centric?

- SSA’s IT Modernization Plan is only partially client-centric. They use good language on customer service in their first goal, but the IT Modernization Plan still is mostly internal, rather than external, CX oriented.
- If state agencies (DDSs) are considered clients as users of the systems, they should be referenced, not omitted, in the IT Modernization Plan.

Q5: Does the IT Modernization Plan contain outcome-based performance measures that can gauge progress and success?

- “Expected Value” statements are used without any specific measures for improved outcomes. Value is described as a mixture of actions (e.g. “automate”) or generic outcomes (e.g. “improve quality,” “reduce time,” “expand access to,” “increase speed,”)
 - It is not clear if or how these are measured to determine whether outcomes are achieved or not.

The end of the cost-benefit discussion has a helpful analysis of the breakeven return on investment (ROI); however, it provides few other measures. While it is helpful that each goal has

IT Systems Expert Panel

a set of objectives, and each business domain has a set of benefits, neither are accompanied by performance measures.

Q6: Does the IT Modernization or Strategic Plan outline the Governance Process needed to execute the strategic planning process and oversee approved IT investment decisions?

- Governance is incomplete. Regardless of membership (or lack thereof) on key executive decisional bodies, there is no defined process used to make strategic modernization decisions involving stakeholders (e.g., employees at SSA headquarter, in the field offices, states DDS, etc.).
- There is a Governance discussion under Execution of Plan (p. 59); however, governance included at the execution phase is too late to be successful. Governance with cross-agency stakeholders should occur in the planning stage.
 - Note that this is the only section where an Operating Model is discussed, and that is about the project management office (PMO) and not the more extensive IT-business mission delivery process.

Panel Recommendations - SSA's IT Modernization Strategy

From our evaluation of the agency's IT Modernization Plan,⁹ the 2020 Update to the IT Modernization Plan,¹⁰ and the agency's Strategic Plan,¹¹ we recommend the following to increase SSA's modernization initiatives' success.

1. SSA's Strategic Plan should align with the agency's operating model, Governance Infrastructure, and the agency's Modernization Plan.
 - a. SSA should update their Strategic Plan to reflect the agency's 2020 Update to the IT Modernization Plan.
 - b. The IT Modernization Plan should clearly specify the priorities and approach for on-going alignment of resources to stakeholder needs throughout the period covered by the IT Modernization Plan.
2. SSA's IT Modernization Plan should include metrics against which to measure performance against those goals.
 - a. Incentives to support modernization success should be clear and tied directly back to the Strategic Plan, IT Modernization Plan, and the 2020 Update to the Modernization Plan.
 - b. There should be an intentional alignment between decision-making and milestone achievement.
3. Clear governance with cross-agency stakeholders should be included in the planning stages of modernization, not just at the execution phase.

IT Systems Expert Panel

4. SSA should strengthen the use of emerging technologies to enhance agency data stores significantly.
5. A stakeholder engagement process is needed to help SSA align its IT strategic planning to internal and external agency stakeholders and should continue through modernization.
 - a. SSA needs a defined process to make strategic modernization decisions involving all stakeholders (e.g., employees at SSA headquarter, in field offices, states DDS, etc.).
 - b. SSA and its stakeholders should hold mutually understood and owned expectations of modernization success.

Customer Services and Experience

Being a truly beneficiary or customer-focused agency means that customer experience is in the DNA of its modernization plan. SSA has many people across the organization that believe they are customer-focused. However, when SSA lacks data needed to understand the customer's current experience and evolving needs, those at SSA cannot adequately understand customer experiences gaps. Understanding the gaps in fulfilling customer needs is the foundation by which the agency should make decisions and prioritize its modernization resources.

Panel Findings - Customer Service and Experience

Based on the Panel's research, SSA does not understand the difference between customer service and customer experience. The customer experience (CX) includes the governance or decision-making process for customer-focused initiatives. Customer experience should include the organizational leadership making technology investments aligned to the customer needs; aligning the entire organizational culture to the customer needs. CX also involves SSA employees' commitment to customer-focused efforts, including using data to fully understand the customer experience, performance management, design thinking, and a customer-focused strategy or blueprint. We reviewed the customer experience from the SSA frontline employee perspective of those providing services to the public and on-line interactions with beneficiaries, their family or agents, and state government agencies. The agency staff involved in the customer experience are undergoing social and demographic changes, let alone the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic that has forced SSA's customers to rely on virtual interactions heavily. The Panel found SSA's commitment to improving customer service and the customer experience does not align with the agency's modernization priorities.

Panel Recommendations - Customer Experience at SSA

While SSA highlights its focus on improving the customers' experience, the Panel could not verify such actions in its modernization activities. Improving customer experience is not about technology or the digitization of customer services. It's primarily focused on people and

IT Systems Expert Panel

process, while technology only enables and supports this process. Customers expect experiences that are:

1. Omnichannel
2. End-to-end digital with the ability to get accurate answers from other channels
3. Private
4. Secure
5. Personalized to be responsive to the person's situation

All decisions across the agency must be informed by the customer experience and what customers value as important. This approach to the agency's service provision should also be how SSA investments are prioritized based upon improving the customer experience and addressing customer needs. Specific recommendations to improve the customer experience of current and future SSA customers are listed below. These include CX recommendations for SSA's operating model and more general CX recommendations.

Customer Experience-Specific Recommendations for SSA's Operating Model Success

We recommend specific customer experience elements for SSA's operating model. If implemented, these recommendations will help SSA improve and optimize their customers' experiences when interacting with the agency.

SSA should create a customer experience strategy identifying the agency's vision of the customer's experience, the current customer's experience, and the future experience, along with a roadmap on how to get there. The SSA CX relies on more than the technology infrastructure, and it needs to include the people and process aspects of the agency's goals.

SSA's CX Strategy should as a starting point:

1. Set the vision for the customers' experience rooted in a collective sense of purpose to serve the customer's true needs expressed in a simple, crisp statement. An aspirational vision statement helps to set the guiding principles for the frontline.
2. Identify the overall customer goals and objectives; initiatives focused on improving the pain points or gaps in the customer experience and metrics to measure success.
 - a. Description of the overall customer experience
 - b. Level of customer satisfaction
 - i. Highlights of key customer performance data by channel and/or the overall customer experience
 - ii. Highlights of customer feedback data and the actions to address the feedback
3. Implement a Customer Experience Program that maps the full end-to-end customer journey to identify pain points with the goal of creating an integrated experience.

IT Systems Expert Panel

4. Implement a robust voice of the customer program with real-time insights across all channels. These insights drive actions and support resource investment on things that matter to customers.
5. Determine the key customer-focused performance measures and track progress.

More general CX recommendations include the following:

- **SSA should create a Customer Experience Office to address customer experience and the customers' needs.**

The Customer Experience Office (CXO) should be the architect of the customer's SSA experience, both from an employee perspective internally and the customer experience externally. The CXO should work across the entire agency and be responsible for driving the transformation of services across SSA towards a customer-centric culture (i.e., putting the customer in the center of all decisions, including priorities in initiatives and investments). The CXO should report directly to the SSA Commissioner or Deputy Commissioner.

A Chief Customer Officer (CCO) should lead the CXO. The CCO should address both internal and external services and customer experience to ensure that contracting, acquisition, human resources, and information technology are delivering according to CX standards internally, enabling the agency's mission. The CXO should empower the organization's leaders to improve customer service levels in their respective components and hold them accountable for results.

The CXO acts as the duct tape across the C-suite to ensure that beneficiaries get the experience they deserve. The primary functions of a CXO are:

1. Research, Data Analysis, and Insights
2. Performance metrics
3. Business Process Improvements (e.g., Six Sigma or equivalent)
4. Marketing and Outreach
5. Partner and Supplier Relationships
6. Culture.

The Customer Experience Office should ensure the following are achieved:

1. Align the leadership across SSA on the customer vision and values (Note: this alignment between leadership and customer vision and values is critical to support and improve the CX).

IT Systems Expert Panel

2. Drive the creation of the customer strategy. A Customer Strategy embeds customer thinking into the organization. It is a roadmap that guides the creation of a citizen/customer-centric organization. The customer strategy should ensure:
 - a. SSA audiences are defined, understood, and segmented
 - b. The future experience of their customers is identified
 - c. The main pain points for each customer segment are defined and understood
 - d. Align with SSA's operating model.
3. Create a dashboard of key performance indicators for the customer/citizen-focused services.
4. Provide advice and assistance to the significant program managers across the agency and departments to improve their customers' experience, including understanding their customers and what matters to them.
5. Leverage data across the agency to understand the customers' experience and satisfaction levels to identify areas requiring improvement and create initiatives to achieve those improvements.
6. Understand the customers' journeys for the most important agency-related journeys experienced and for major agency services
7. Oversee the agency voice of the customer (VoC) and voice of the employee (VoE) programs; aggregating the VoC and VoE data to determine initiatives for improvement and ensuring there are some consistency and transparency in VoC data.
8. Monitor the progress on service improvements and report the results to senior leaders and other oversight bodies.
9. The CCO should work with the Chief Human Capital Officer (CHCO) to ensure that the agency addresses employee engagement in the agency.
10. The CCO should be included in the investment decisions to ensure that the customer perspective is considered as resources are prioritized.

If SSA followed and implemented these recommendations, they would both shift the organizational focus back to the customer and should experience a dramatic increase in customer satisfaction, overall.

IT Systems Expert Panel

Recommended Guidance to SSA for Navigating Beyond COVID-19

Panel member Bill Eggers recently co-authored a study entitled “Post Covid-19 government: How flipping orthodoxies can reinvent government operating models,” examines ten government orthodoxies being challenged by the pandemic and how flipping them could lead to greater mission value, developing a culture of innovation, a better experience for citizens, businesses, and employees, and revamped post-pandemic operating models.

Orthodoxies are neither inherently good nor bad; many simply represent the best practices of previous eras. But failing to recognize and challenge them can impede innovation, restrict risk-taking, and, in this case, impede the reopening of government operations.

Challenging, and in some cases, flipping existing orthodoxies could be a useful exercise for the Social Security Administration as it wrestles with providing services during and after the pandemic.

The Social Security Administration has approximately 1,230 field offices across the United States where beneficiaries can apply for new Social Security cards or replace old cards, apply for Social Security and Supplemental Security benefits, and check the status of their application, among other services.¹²

While most of the agency’s services were also available online or by phone pre-pandemic, beneficiaries continued to travel to field offices to receive in-person services. Before COVID-19, only about half of retirement and disability benefit claims were filed online.¹³ Many people still preferred using in-person government services due to privacy and security concerns, a lack of digital skills, or a simple desire for human connection.¹⁴

Most of the in-person services provided at SSA field offices were shut down by mid-March 2020 since the people served daily by these field offices—mostly elders and the disabled—are considered in the high-risk category for COVID-19.¹⁵

As the SSA works through how to provide services during and after COVID-19 and reduce backlogs, addressing the following orthodoxies could help.

How to Use Digital Technology to Provide More Accessible and Personalized Service

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced beneficiaries to move to online services wherever available, bringing about a much-needed cultural change. The SSA could use this as an opportunity to expand its digital offerings to include services such as social security card replacement, which is the number one reason beneficiaries visit field offices and still not

IT Systems Expert Panel

available online in 10 states.¹⁶ Improving the digital customer experience will be critical to sustain this shift.

How to Move to a Model Where Very Few Services Require In-Person Delivery

SSA provides video service options, which allow beneficiaries to interact with field office employees, ask questions, and apply for services through real-time conferencing. However, that option is currently only available to individuals living in rural and frontier areas.¹⁷ Expanding video service across all regions would provide the public with a face-to-face service option while reducing the health risk of in-person services.

Adopt a hybrid model where some services are moved online, but certain services are delivered on location to the recipient. Some SSA users might not have access to the internet or may not feel comfortable using online services. For such cases, the SSA can consider a hybrid model, making all services are available online and dispatching field office employees to deliver in-person services and answer queries at beneficiaries' doorsteps. A hybrid model would also eliminate the need to maintain all 1,230 social security field offices across the US, which handle more than 170,000 beneficiaries each day.¹⁸

Partner with local community organizations and non-profits to deliver more in-person services. The SSA could develop partnerships with local community organizations and non-profits to improve the efficacy of social services and reach some of the most difficult-to-serve segments of the population. These partnerships might also become a source of innovative ideas and new business models.

Lessons for Leadership in Managing Change – How to Get Difficult Things Done in Government

Leading and managing complex change efforts in government can be difficult – it can at times seem like progress happens very slowly and only after a set of tough hurdles are cleared while facing significant headwinds – such as a tough funding environment or inadequate staffing. According to GAO,¹⁹ the SSA IT Modernization effort is among the most complex technology modernizations in government, based on “attributes such as age, criticality, and risk.” The IT Systems Expert Panel provides a variety of concrete recommendations throughout this paper to help align SSA’s IT Modernization Plan to best practice. This section will dive deeper into management best practice elements by providing an example from a different complex problem.

To create an enabling environment for IT modernization, SSAs leaders need to provide authoritative documentation to stakeholders and customers (the Executive branch, Congress, state agencies, and the public) that improving agency capacity to deliver on mission requires

IT Systems Expert Panel

significant investment in technology - and that this investment has a clear return. This requires SSA leaders to commit to a management strategy that aligns modernization spending to the achievement of agency strategic goals.

The National Academy of Public Administration is undertaking a review of Agile Government Principles²⁰ that may help with such a strategy.^d Additionally, Focus Area 3 of this report also contains key questions the IT Modernization efforts at SSA should address and specific recommendations to do so. Agile government need not be an on/off switch. Implementing some of the principles is better than none at all. And several agile concepts are already aligned to best practices for results. For example: accurately defining a problem, connecting it to the mission, measuring it relentlessly, and breaking down siloes.^e One of the best examples of using these best practices to address a tough problem is the effort to end Veteran homelessness.

An Example – Ending Veteran’s Homelessness With a Clear Mission, Vision and Goals

In 2010 the Obama Administration, through the small federal agency the U.S. Interagency Council on Homelessness, worked with stakeholders from across the country and with 19 federal agencies to put forward a comprehensive plan²¹ to end homelessness.^f It was the first-ever federal strategic plan to prevent and end homelessness. This Plan featured four bold goals for ending homelessness – not just improving federal programs working with people experiencing homelessness, not only reducing homelessness, but ending homelessness. With credit to author Jim Collins, this was a set of Big, Hairy, Audacious Goals (BHAGs).²² BHAGs are clear, compelling goals and can be used as an organizing principle for staff at all levels. Collins’ research showed that successful companies often use this method to inspire and achieve progress.

One of the four goals in this plan was to: “Prevent and end homelessness among Veterans in five years.” The comprehensive plan was clear on the mission and vision for four challenging goals, providing internal and external stakeholders clarity on how leaders intended to achieve these tough goals.

Importance of Leadership Commitment

In addition to articulating goals, objectives, and strategies, the effort to end Veteran Homelessness benefited from the focused attention from the leadership of many agencies, particularly from the Secretaries of Veterans Affairs (VA) and Housing and Urban Development

^d A note on Agile – SSA technology staff are already implementing agile principles in IT modernization. What we are suggesting here is that the entire organization – top leadership and business owners implement an agile approach in their governance of IT Modernization.

^e And there are many other examples of how to lead and get hard things done in government. A good example is the implementation of the Recovery Act. Lessons from this effort found [here](#).

^f In collaboration with internal and external stakeholders, USICH updated this plan [in 2012](#) and [in 2015](#).

IT Systems Expert Panel

(HUD). In 2010, HUD Secretaries Erik Shinseki and Shaun Donovan together worked on specific, evidence-based strategies to end Veteran homelessness. For example, they worked with Congress to expand the HUD-VA Supportive Housing (HUD-VASH) program, which combines HUD-issued housing vouchers with VA case management and clinical services. This showed early results,²³ using evidence on what works to support a “Housing First” strategy. They also set the tone from the top.

Stakeholder Engagement and Cross-Silo Staffing

Progress towards these goals was facilitated and tracked by the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness (USICH). The USICH²⁴ is a Congressionally authorized organization created to serve as an “independent establishment” within the executive branch. It consists of 19 federal agencies (including SSA) and is charged with coordinating the federal response to homelessness in partnership with every level of government^g. USICH staff supported these goals in many ways but importantly kept a connection to communities by providing technical assistance in localities across the country to help achieve these goals. USICH not only created space for agencies to collaborate but guided those collaborations through its independent, expert staff. USICH also played a key role in connecting this work to non-federal stakeholders – and in ensuring that federal policies, planning, and programs were well-informed by on-the-ground experiences in states and communities.

At HUD, USICH facilitated monthly homelessness meetings chaired by Secretary Donovan (and later, Secretary Castro), which included department leaders from across the agency to discuss the homeless program elements. And the Secretary convened a quarterly performance management meeting to use data to increase accountability and better understand whether HUD was meeting its goals (sometimes called HUDStat, discussed further below).

Create Authentic Metrics to Measure Your Progress and Manage Towards Them

Both agencies worked to define key performance indicators and track them rigorously. They deployed a strategy borrowed from cities – called “CitiStat” – which uses the most recent data to make decisions in an agile manner.

At HUD’s problem-solving meetings – called “HUDStat,”²⁵ staff could together analyze data and trends on key performance indicators to determine whether their strategies were making progress towards goals. The notion at meetings is to encourage leadership and staff to use data to problem solve, break down siloes, and redirect resources and effort if needed. HUD and VA staff participated in these meetings. So if an indicator was lagging, enough people across VA, HUD,

^g We cannot stress enough the importance of good staffing to authentically incorporate stakeholder feedback. More detail about USICH efforts [here](#).

IT Systems Expert Panel

and USICH (including program experts and also representation from contracts, HR, budget, and research) were present to give more background and hear suggested next steps in real-time. HUD and VA used these data to make program improvements and to coordinate resources for maximum impact.

While HUD and VA did not end Veteran homelessness in five years, they cut the numbers almost in half over six years.

SSA Could Deploy a Similar Strategy

SSA made progress²⁶ on redesigning the Representative Payee System and could make strides on its modernization project in the same manner. Clearly linking IT Modernization to SSA's overall mission and goals, improving governance, and engaging stakeholders, even more can serve to drive results.

SSA could share data about its results more often and more clearly. This would help SSA become more transparent externally and internally – signaling progress or improvement areas to SSA's many employees.

One doesn't have to look very far to see that ending veteran's homelessness is still incorporated into the way VA operates. The federal government's 2019 Strategic Reviews²⁷ show the difference between the VA's specific and measurable goals and the broader goals listed for SSA.

Without an IT modernization effort grounded in a broader strategic and management framework, it will be increasingly difficult for SSA to communicate its progress towards goals and to align staff capacity and stakeholder support behind its efforts.

Conclusion & Recommendations

IT Systems Expert Panel

In summary, the Panel commends the progress made by the current leadership at SSA to modernize and upgrade their existing IT systems and infrastructure and focus on “customer service” as a – if not “the” – key element strategic vision for a 21st-century agency. We were impressed with the staff expertise and dedication to the agency mission of those we met with, both in headquarters and the field, both at the most senior executive levels as well as from front-line agents. The Panel also hopes this report enables the SSAB to better understand and therefore support the modernization program. If we have accomplished both, we will view that as a significant success. Thank you for the opportunity to serve again. Let us reiterate our report recommendations in a single summary (See below):

Operating Model Recommendations

- SSA’s operating model must align with the agency’s strategic vision and strategic plan.
- The operating model must address how today’s interactions are simplified, streamlined, or made more responsive to public needs.
- SSA must identify and include critical business lines within the operating model, including customer journeys within those business lines (there may be similarities across business lines).
- The operating model must address interactions with key stakeholders, claimants and beneficiaries, and their agents and other agencies at the federal and state levels of government.
- SSA should develop journey maps from SSA’s business lines with input from the field employees and customers.
- SSA’s strategic vision and operating model should be field and customer-driven.
- A comprehensive understanding of the experience of all customer segments should be represented in the operating model.

Governance Infrastructure Recommendations

- A well-defined governance infrastructure is critical for modernization success, especially as SSA shifts to agile development. It aligns agency acquisition and development with the agency operating model.
- SSA should clearly define how its program management processes accommodate agile development.
- The CBO should drive modernization goals and priorities in alignment with short-term DevOps teams.
- SSA should create or assign an agency component directed by a senior executive to lead customer experience efforts across the organization.

IT Systems Expert Panel

IT Modernization Strategy Recommendations

- SSA's Strategic Plan should align with the agency's operating model, Governance Infrastructure, and the agency's Modernization Plan.
- SSA's IT Modernization Plan should include metrics against which to measure performance against those goals.
- Clear governance with cross-agency stakeholders should be included in the planning stages of modernization, not just at the execution phase.
- SSA should strengthen the use of emerging technologies to enhance agency data stores significantly.
- A stakeholder engagement process is needed to help SSA align its IT strategic planning to agency stakeholders, both internal and external, and should continue through modernization.

Customer Experience Recommendations

- SSA's CX Strategy should as a starting point:
 - Set the vision for the customers' experience
 - Identify the overall customer goals and objectives; initiatives focused on improving the pain points or gaps in the customer experience and metrics to measure success
 - SSA should create a customer experience strategy identifying the agency's vision of the customer's experience, the current customer's experience, and the future experience along with a roadmap on how to get there.
- SSA should create a Customer Experience Office (CXO) to address customer experience and the customers' needs.

The Panel believes the above-listed recommendations would help ensure the success of SSA's IT systems modernization initiative.

IT Systems Expert Panel

Appendix

Panel Background and Activity

Social Security Advisory Board's Interest in SSA's IT Modernization

In October 2017, the Social Security Administration (SSA) released its IT Modernization Plan²⁸ at an initial estimated cost of \$677 million (later updated to an investment of \$691 million). With this release, the Social Security Advisory Board's (hereafter "Board") interest in SSA's modernization initiative was keen, especially due to the importance of SSA's systems modernization in the agency's service provision to the American people. This review was also considered critical because of the significant taxpayer investment projected for SSA's modernization initiative.

To determine the optimal evaluative approach of SSA's modernization initiative, Board staff conducted extensive research, including informational interviews with experts, to formulate strategic options on behalf of the Board moving forward. Experts interviewed represented multiple public and private sector organizations, with expertise from across a broad spectrum of IT systems and other areas relevant to the IT Modernization Plan. A common theme presented during informational interviews conducted was the importance of experts reviewing SSA's IT Modernization Plan. Since Board members' respective areas of expertise fall outside of IT systems, and recognizing the value of expert guidance to understand better and assess the SSA's modernization initiative, and after reviewing other options, the Board decided to commission an expert panel to evaluate SSA's IT modernization.

Commissioning an Independent Panel

After the Board determined the ideal strategy moving forward was to commission an independent panel of experts to review SSA's IT Modernization Plan and modernization initiatives, the Board commenced by considering leaders and experts across a spectrum of relevant fields as potential panel candidates. Simultaneous to evaluating potential candidates, the Board also created a panel charter and negotiated rules of engagement with SSA leadership. Dr. Alan Balutis had served as former Chair of SSA's Future Systems Technology Advisory Panel (FSTAP) during 2008-2012 and worked with a wide variety of experts to evaluate SSA's IT systems. FSTAP was commissioned by SSA, per the request of former SSA Commissioner Mike Astrue. The Board selected Dr. Balutis to chair their independent panel due to his expertise, extensive professional experience, and past background and familiarity with both SSA's systems and organizational culture. Following his selection, Dr. Balutis was pivotal in recruiting esteemed experts for the Panel representing varied disciplines and backgrounds. Panel candidates recommended for the IT Systems Expert Panel (hereafter "Panel"), many of whom spent more than 30 years in government service, represent leaders in the fields of:

IT Systems Expert Panel

- IT Systems Modernization
- Organizational Leadership
- Contracts & Acquisitions
- Customer Service & Citizen Experience.

The Board selected and vetted each candidate considered for the Panel. Following Board approval, outreach to the candidates commenced. Additional information on the panelists' background and experience is available in the appendix.

Convening the Panel

The Panel's initial kickoff meeting took place on September 25, 2019. SSA's IT Modernization Plan was reviewed in advance of the meeting to well-utilize time during this initial meeting. The Panel reviewed their charter and discussed their defined scope of duties. The conversation transitioned to a full discussion of SSA's IT Modernization Plan, including the plan's perceived strengths and weaknesses. Also discussed were additional areas whereby the Panel, coming from their respective areas of experience and expertise, could support SSA and their organizational initiative.

Panel Strategy Defined

During the discussion, the Panel agreed the optimal approach moving forward would be to start with a fact-finding phase for information gathering purposes. This strategy would facilitate collection of a wide array of information from multiple perspectives about SSA's modernization initiative. The Panel would seek information directly from SSA to support their evaluation of the IT Modernization Plan. The Panel also identified significant stakeholders to consult during their tenure. Determining the list of essential stakeholders was prioritized by those who would help the Panel understand the many interrelated issues relevant to the agency's modernization initiative. Stakeholders considered vital for inclusion were those involved with, or impacted by, SSA's IT modernization. They included system developers, end-users, experts (both inside and external to SSA), government agencies (both federal and state), advocacy groups, and professional employee associations. Details of stakeholder meetings are listed below. From these information-gathering sessions, the Panel believed they would then be able to target their attention and efforts to the most critical areas for SSA's successful IT modernization.

Panel Fact-Finding Phase

Panel Information Gathering with Stakeholder Groups

While the Panel determined which stakeholder groups they would consult, some stakeholders reached out directly to connect with the Panel and were also included. Stakeholders consulted

IT Systems Expert Panel

represented a variety of perspectives. They included those who could provide the Panel a better understanding of SSA's systems and systems-related processes (both internal and external systems' end-users), a broad spectrum of SSA leadership, leadership, and experts from other federal and state agencies, and advocacy agencies. One additional advocacy program, a software development company, and some state Disability Determination Service centers reached out directly to Board staff to connect with the Panel. All met with the Panel or a subset of Panel members.

SSA Stakeholders Consulted by the Panel

Social Security Administration

The Panel held multiple fact-finding sessions with SSA leadership and representatives in various agency components. The meetings allowed the Panel to hear diverse organizational perspectives and learn about updates on their modernization effort. Interactions with SSA leadership furthered the Panel's understanding of SSA's IT systems modernization initiative overall, focus areas, challenges, successes, and planned next steps.

The Panel as a whole (or a subset of the Panel) met with the following among SSA's leadership:

- **The Honorable Andrew Saul**, SSA Commissioner
- **David Black**, SSA Deputy Commissioner
- **Arturo Ronderos**, Senior Advisor to the Commissioner
- **Emry Sisson**, Senior Advisor to the Commissioner
- **Nancy Berryhill**, Former Acting Commissioner and current Senior Advisor to the Commissioner
- **Sylviane Haldiman**, SSA Assistant Deputy Commissioner for Systems
- **Grace Kim**, Deputy Commissioner of Operations
- **Kim Baldwin-Sparks**, Chief Business Office of SSA's IT Systems Modernization Plan.

The Panel also held multiple sessions with most directly involved in the IT Modernization Plan implementation from a systems perspective, including SSA leadership in the Office of the Deputy Commissioner of Systems and the Office of the Chief Information Officer:

- **Rajive Mathur**, Chief Information Officer and Deputy Commissioner of Systems

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IT Systems Expert Panel

- **Sean Brune**, Deputy Chief Information Officer and Assistant Deputy Commissioner of Systems.

Multiple meetings with Rajive Mathur and Sean Brune provided the Panel with updates on the initiative's success and changes.

Meetings with Prior SSA Chief Information Officers

The Panel also consulted former Social Security Administration leaders overseeing agency systems to elucidate further all aspects of SSA IT Systems. We met with prior SSA Chief Information Officers to obtain a historical perspective on SSA IT Systems, including organizational strengths and challenges, legacy systems concerns, agency culture regarding IT systems, and changes over time.

- **Frank Baitman, Former SSA Chief Information Officer (2009-2011)**
Frank Baitman served as Social Security's Chief Information Officer (CIO) from August 2009 to August 2011. He later served as CIO of the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (from February 2012 to December 2015). Mr. Baitman provided the Panel Chair an overview of the most significant IT systems challenges experienced during his leadership as agency head of IT systems, including past modernization efforts, legacy system challenges and concerns, and other relevant information to provide a historical context for SSA's current IT modernization initiative.
- **Bill Zielinski, Former SSA Chief Information Officer (2013-2015)**
Bill Zielinski served as former SSA CIO (from June 2013 to July 2015) and former SSA Regional Commissioner (from August 2011- May 2013) of SSA's San Francisco Region. This region covers SSA offices in Arizona, California, Nevada, Hawaii, Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands. The Panel consulted him as an expert stakeholder regarding his experiences as at SSA (both as former CIO and former Regional Commissioner), his perspectives on SSAs systems (including challenges with their legacy systems), and his recommendations to the Panel.
- **Rob Klopp, Former SSA Chief Information Officer (2015-2017)**
Rob Klopp served as SSA's CIO from January 2015 to April 2017. The Panel consulted him as an expert stakeholder regarding his experiences at SSA and his understanding of their IT systems' strengths and areas needing improvement. During his tenure as SSA CIO, he managed SSA's IT Systems budget and investments of approximately \$1.2 billion per year, used agile approaches to address systems challenges, worked to

IT Systems Expert Panel

transition SSA systems to cloud-based systems, among other accomplishments. Rob Klopp shared his expert insights and perspectives about SSA's systems modernization needs as another stakeholder consulted during the Panel's fact-finding phase.

Other Federal Government Stakeholders Consulted

The Panel met with expert representatives from other federal agencies during their fact-finding phase useful to better understand SSA modernization. Stakeholders from other federal agencies listed below included SSA's Office of Inspector General, the Office of Management and Budget, the Government Accountability Organization, and the General Services Administration. Further details of these fact-finding sessions are described below.

SSA Office of Inspector General

During the SSA's Office of Inspector General (OIG) meeting, the Panel received historical context on SSA's IT systems modernization efforts, past successes and challenges, and critical areas needing significant attention. OIG also provided their most recent updates on OIG efforts to evaluate and assess SSA's IT systems and related difficulties. During the meeting, the OIG also stated they had conducted multiple reviews of SSA's Disability Case Processing System (DCPS) and the more recent DCPS2 and provided an update on their review results. They also stated the OIG would review SSA's progress on its IT Modernization Plan. SSA OIG Representatives with whom the Panel met include:

- **Jeffrey Brown**, Director of IT Audit Division and Inspector General Acting Deputy Assistant Inspector
- **Walter Bayer**, SSA-OIG Congressional & Intragovernmental Liaison.

Office of Management and Budget

The Panel's fact-finding session with Office of Management and Budget (OMB) representatives included both current and former OMB staff who worked on SSA's budget, especially those whose work portfolios included SSA's IT systems. The inclusion of former OMB staff provided the Panel with a historical perspective on SSA's investment, prioritization, and successes with their IT systems. Participants included:

- **Jordan Burris**, Chief of Staff to the Federal Chief Information Officer
- **Chantel Boyens**, Principle Policy Associate of the Urban Institute and former OMB Acting Branch Chief and Senior Program Examiner
- **James Hurban**, OMB Program Examiner, Income Maintenance Branch

IT Systems Expert Panel

- **Jack Smalligan**, Senior Policy Fellow, Urban Institute and former OMB Deputy
Associate Director

Government Accountability Office

The Panel consulted experts at the Government Accountability Office (GAO) on their audits and reviews of SSA's systems and systems modernization efforts. Issues discussed included GAO's view on SSA's IT Modernization Plan, GAO review of SSA legacy systems, optimization of SSA's Data Centers, transitioning to Cloud computing, and their CIO scorecard. GAO representatives including in the Panel's stakeholder interview included:

- **Carol C. Harris**, Director, IT Acquisition Management Issues
- **Sabine Paul**, Assistant Director, IT Acquisition Management Issues
- **Kevin Walsh**, Assistant Director, IT Acquisition Management Issues
- **David Hinchman**, Assistant Director, IT Acquisition Management Issues
- **Jessica Waselkow**, Assistant Director, IT Acquisition Management Issues.

General Services Administration

The Panel held an informational session with the General Services Administration (GSA)'s Executive Director of Identity. The Panel received the most up-to-date information on governmental efforts to protect system users' identity and personal information. Also discussed were online authentication efforts utilized by other government agencies and relevant to SSA's systems modernization. As SSA expands the rollout of their *mySocialSecurity* accounts²⁹ for online service access and broadens digital service provision, identity protection and authentication will play an essential role in SSA's IT systems modernization. The Panel met with the following identity expert from GSA:

- **Philip Lam**, GSA Executive Director of Identity.

Stakeholders Consulted for Their End-User Experiences

State Disability Determination Service Centers

The Panel or representatives met with State Disability Determination Service centers (DDS) leadership to better understand their IT systems and operational-related challenges. DDS are state-based agencies funded by SSA, which process the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) and

IT Systems Expert Panel

Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) case reviews. DDS staff use both SSA and externally developed systems to process their case workloads and the Disability Case Processing System (DCPS2), discussed further below. Stakeholders shared about their systems use, including usability and functionality issues with the respective systems used for their caseload processing and their organizations' operations, overall. Some DDS^h consulted contacted the Panel via Social Security Advisory Board staff and requested a meeting to discuss the systems-related issues.

Other DDS consultedⁱ were recommendations from the SSA Office of the Commissioner to broaden the information the Panel heard from DDS end-user experiences. This included the Maine, Wyoming, and Ohio DDS. In total, the Panel met with the following DDS administrators and staff:

- **Kentucky DDS**
- **Oklahoma DDS**
- **Ohio DDS**
- **Maine DDS**
- **Wyoming DDS**
- **Texas DDS.**

SSA Employee End Users

In addition to hearing from state DDS employees about systems used to process disability case applications for Social Security, the Panel also consulted end-users working directly in the field and teleservice centers across the country.

To inform the Panel on IT systems' issues experienced by SSA employees, the Panel conducted a fact-finding session with a professional association comprised of SSA field office and teleservice center managers.

^h DDS administrators from the Kentucky, Oklahoma and Texas DDSs contacted the Social Security Advisory Board staff in November 2019 requested a meeting with the IT Systems Panel to discuss end user systems-related issues.

ⁱ The IT Systems Panel met with DDS administrators and staff, per the request of SSA's Commissioner's Office, from the Maine, Ohio and Wyoming DDS to hear more about DDS end user systems-related issues. The SSA Commissioner's Office made the request to the Panel on January 14, 2020.

IT Systems Expert Panel

National Council of Social Security Management Associations (NCSSMA)

The National Council of Social Security Management Associations³⁰ (NCSSMA) represents approximately 3,400 members of SSA's management team in over 1,200 field offices and 35 teleservice centers across the country. For almost 30 years, NCSSMA's dedication to improving SSA's management and program administration has included sharing knowledge and experience of its front-line management for inclusion in all SSA's planning and decision-making phases. As a professional association, NCSSMA does not represent individual employee rights or interests. NCSSMA's efforts and initiatives are directed toward providing the best service to the American people via effective and efficient administration of SSA's programs. NCSSMA representatives shared their experiences with IT systems and associated operational challenges across SSA's field offices and teleservice centers. They answered Panelist questions about current challenges, experiences communicating with the agency, and their wish list for systems improvements to improve operations and workload processes. NCSSMA representatives included:

- **Peggy Murphy**, President (from SSA's office in Great Falls, Montana)
- **David Lescarini**, Vice President (from SSA's office in McMinnville, TN)
- **Joe Deaton**, Executive Officer (from SSA's office in Hot Springs, AR)
- **Christopher Detzler**, Immediate Past President (from SSA's office in Vancouver, WA)
- **Rachel Emmons**, Washington D.C. Representative.

Non-Governmental Stakeholder Groups Consulted

AARP (formerly the American Association of Retired Persons)

The Panel also consulted representatives of AARP, a large non-partisan, non-profit organization serving the interests of older Americans.³¹ An organizational focus includes providing Americans resources on Social Security.³² According to the organization, AARP had more than 38 million members as of 2018. AARP representatives consulted explicitly focus on how the Social Security Administration's policies and programs affect their elderly Americans. Topics included the systems-related and communication needs of their membership as they relate to SSA service provision. AARP also shared with the Panel their organizational research findings on unaddressed membership needs of SSA programs and policies, and communication and their past experiences with the SSA. AARP representatives who met with the Panel included:

- **Nancy LeMond**, AARP Chief Advocacy and Engagement Officer

IT Systems Expert Panel

- **Cristina Martin Firvida**, AARP Government Affairs Vice President of Financial Security & Consumer Affairs
- **Alison Bryant**, AARP Senior Vice President of Research
- **Tim Gearan**, AARP Senior Legislative Representative
- **Thomas Nicholls**, AARP Senior Legislative Representative.

National Organization of Social Security Claimant's Representatives

Panel Members met with a representative of the National Organization of Social Security Claimant's Representatives (NOSSCR)³³ to learn about SSA claimant representatives' issues and concerns (CRs) as they represent Social Security claimants.^j Formed in 1979, NOSSCR has more than 3,000 members from across all 50 states and Puerto Rico. The organization provides educational and research resources to support quality representation and advocacy for those seeking SSI and Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI). Efforts to support claimants include advocacy for improvement in the disability determination and adjudication processes and providing expert testimony before Congressional committees.

NOSSCR presented its systems-related topics of concern. Recommendations for improvement included some simple systems changes with the potential for dramatic improvements for end-users. For example, automating all SSA forms. Some forms are presently paper-based and must be uploaded as attachments into the system with wet signatures, while other forms are fully automated. NOSSCR questioned why all SSA forms were not automated- and envisioned form automation as an opportunity for the agency to streamline processes for both end-users and for SSA operations. NOSSCR also highlighted how updates to representative and representative payees' contact information for claimants and beneficiaries on SSA's systems is not updated across all SSA systems simultaneously. This results in the representative and claimant or beneficiary believing SSA is aware of their corrected information when only those viewing that respective system see the updates. This is a challenge for both SSA and external end-users.

A few other examples of recommended modifications for SSA include providing CRs electronic access to claims files at initial and reconsideration phases of the levels, automating submission of queries to claims files, and simple things like emailing and texting receipts for reporting required information. These are just a few examples of recommended improvements provided by NOSSCR. They had many other recommendations to improve SSA's systems. The NOSSCR

^j NOSSCR contacted the Social Security Advisory Board staff and requested a meeting with the IT Systems Panel to discuss SSA systems-related issues as it affects claimant representatives and their work on behalf of SSA claimants and beneficiaries.

IT Systems Expert Panel

representative providing the Panel with these issues of concern and recommended improvements from the CR perspective was:

- **Stacy Braverman Cloyd**, NOSSCR Deputy Director of Governmental Affairs.

MicroPact, Inc.

MicroPact, now a subsidiary of Tyler Technologies,³⁴ contacted Social Security Advisory Board staff to request a Panel meeting. According to their website,³⁵ MicroPact engineers developed web-based, commercial off the shelf (COTS) solutions for the U.S. government agencies and other private sector companies for decades. MicroPact representatives wanted to inform the Panel of their case processing system used by many Social Security's DDSs. Their Disability Case Management (DCM) software was a precursor, and now a competitor program to DCPS2. They wanted to present the Panel with their software program successes and plans. Since the Panel was open to learning from a variety of SSA system stakeholders, some Panel members held a call with:

- **Chuck Barthlow**, Vice President of the DCM software
- **Karen Clark**, Subject Matter Expert and Business Analyst.

SSA's Disability Case Processing System

The Panel learned about the Disability Case Processing System (DCPS, later DCPS2) used in the DDS from multiple DDS leaders and their staff. DDS stakeholder groups consulted included both supporters and critics of the case processing systems. The Panel also heard about the case processing system from SSA's OIG's perspective (including their ongoing investigations and evaluations of the system) and the Office of Management and Budget. SSA's IT Modernization Plan excluded DCPS2, so it was not considered in-scope for Panel review. The Panel met with stakeholders interested in DCPS2 per request of stakeholders. And although DCPS2 has been an SSA system of intense oversight and scrutiny for years, other important government oversight bodies include DCPS2 in their review. Organizations with ongoing efforts to review DCPS2 include SSA's OIG (who has been monitoring and investigating the SSA's progress and use of DCPS for years), the Office of Management and Budget, and congressional oversight committees. Considering the Panel's scope included those presented in SSA's IT Modernization Plan, DCPS2 exclusion from SSA's original IT Systems Modernization Plan, and a keen focus on DCPS2 by other governmental and oversight bodies reviewing the system, the Panel heard and learned from DCPS2 end users, but did not consider it as a topic area for this report.

IT Systems Expert Panel

Fact-Finding Phase- Informational Requests to SSA

As noted earlier, the Board negotiated rules of engagement with the Social Security Administration in advance of commissioning the Panel. The rules of engagement document went through multiple iterations before it was found acceptable by SSA. Although this document was finalized and agreed upon by both the Board and the SSA, obtaining information from SSA in response to the Panel requests was often challenging. Many information requests took multiple reminders and many months to receive. The Panel could play a more valuable role if it were able to achieve a more cooperative and open dialogue with SSA executives.

FSTAP Reports

Former Commissioner of the Social Security Administration, Michael Astrue, established SSA's Future Systems Technology Advisory Panel (FSTAP) in February 2008. The intention behind establishing FSTAP was to provide the agency advice and recommendations on their future of systems technology and electronic services, projected 5 to 10 years in the future. FSTAP, established under the Federal Advisory Committee Act^k (FACA) as a FACA panel, conducted an extensive review of SSA's IT Systems. The Panel comprised experts from various backgrounds across private industry, federal government agencies, nonprofit organizations, and universities.

FSTAP guidance was summarized and provided to the agency via four reports, including 78 specific recommendations for IT systems improvement to better SSA service provision to the customer. SSA agreed with 52 of the 78 (67%) of the FSTAP recommendations.³⁶ In its audit, SSA's Office of Inspector General was unable to determine if SSA implemented *any* FSTAP recommendations because SSA failed to track implementation or any related cost-savings. Consistent with federal guidance, the Office of Inspector General recommended SSA implement recommendations with the most significant potential for SSA to meet the future customer service demands via modern technology application, but SSA disagreed with this recommendation.³⁷

Because FSTAP had conducted an extensive review of IT systems, there was great value for the Systems Panel to access this information to build from their independent efforts. These reports would provide an overview and evaluation of SSA's earlier systems challenges, including legacy systems issues and other background information beneficial to Panelists as they evaluate SSA's current IT modernization initiative. Dr. Alan Balutis, the Panel chair, also served as FSTAP chair and requested FSTAP reports and materials from SSA.

The initial request for the FSTAP reports was made directly to the SSA Office of Commissioner on October 4, 2019. The Panel made multiple additional requests to SSA made over several

^k "Federal Advisory Committee Act". (Pub. L. 92-463, §1, Oct. 6, 1972, 86 Stat. 770.)

<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCODE-2012-title5/pdf/USCODE-2012-title5-app-federalad.pdf>

IT Systems Expert Panel

months, and after extensive internal review and final SSA approval, one FSTAP report was received on July 8, 2020. In October 2020, some additional reports were provided to the Panel.

The Panel is grateful for the FSTAP reports received after multiple requests and a months-long wait. However, at the time of this report's release, FSTAP meeting minutes³⁸ were never shared, and the Panel waited over a year for requested reports. However, the agency is required to make them public.¹

SSA's Digitization Plan

At a meeting with the SSA Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner, CIO, and Senior Advisors to the Commissioner on January 14, 2020, the Commissioner promised SSA would provide the Panel their "Digitization Plan" for their expert review and feedback. After multiple requests to follow up on this offer, on May 21st, 2020, the Panel finally received a 1.5-page "Digital Transformation Matrix." This matrix was a list of planned steps to support 13 digitization strategies. Because the Panel never received the promised SSA Digitization Plan, they could not provide the agency the feedback initially requested.

Requested Panel Review and Guidance

During the January 2020 meeting with the Panel Chair, Dr. Alan Balutis, SSA's Commissioner Andrew Saul, Deputy Commissioner David Black, and senior advisors to the Commissioner about the agency's IT modernization, mainly their focus on digitization of services. At this meeting, the Commissioner asked the Panel to use their expertise to review the DDS reception of SSA's homegrown, in-house software DCPS2. The goal was to obtain the Panel's expert opinion on DDS's end-user experience from DDS, who had fully adopted the software. The Panel reached out to all DDS recommended by the Commissioner's Office and consulted those who responded to the request. During the consultation, participating DDS highlighted the software program's strengths, challenges, weaknesses, and operational issues for them as end-users. In December 2019, the Panel had also consulted DDS as primary users of the legacy software used, so they could provide SSA expert guidance and recommendations, based on what the Panel learned from both groups of stakeholders. The Panel provided a summary of the information gleaned to Commissioner Saul directly about what they learned from these DDS, with the hope the information provided would be useful to the agency. Additionally, the Panel provided more detailed and specific IT-systems-related recommendations and highlights of the evaluation to the SSA Deputy Commissioner of Systems/Chief Information Officer. The Panel hoped this direct feedback to the Office of Systems would enable the software's positive

¹ "Federal Advisory Committee Act". (Pub. L. 92-463, §1, Oct. 6, 1972, 86 Stat. 770.)
<https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/USCODE-2012-title5/pdf/USCODE-2012-title5-app-federalad.pdf>

IT Systems Expert Panel

transformation to be as receptive to the end-users and facilitate smoother use of the software for caseload processing and operations overall.

IT Systems Expert Panel

SSAB's Information Technology Systems Expert Panel Charter

The Information Technology (IT) Systems Expert Panel (Panel), consisting of IT systems and other relevant experts appointed by the Social Security Advisory Board (Board), is asked to provide independent technical assistance and expert guidance in plain language to the Board by reviewing the Social Security Administration's (SSA) IT systems modernization efforts, including but not limited to IT, business and policy processes, communication and training, and any other topical areas that could inform and improve SSA's IT systems modernization efforts, overall. Specific timelines will be developed jointly between the Board and the Panel Chair when appointed.

The Panel will provide the Board with advice, guidance, information, and periodic updates on SSA's IT systems modernization initiative. In particular, the Panel will provide the Board expert advice, guidance, information, and updates on SSA's IT systems modernization initiative, including successes, potential challenges, and areas requiring special attention. The information provided to the Board may concern technical IT domains (defined by SSA as infrastructure, data, cybersecurity and privacy) and business domain areas (defined by SSA as communications, disability, Title II [Old Age, Survivors and Disability Insurance], Title XVI [Supplemental Security Income], Earnings and Enumeration). The Panel will begin its work in calendar year 2019 and will meet regularly.

The Board will consider information provided by the Panel to formulate advice to the President, the Congress, and the Commissioner of Social Security on the status of SSA's IT systems modernization, and related areas.

Approved:

4/24/19

Date

/s/ Kim Hildred

Board Chair, Kim Hildred

IT Systems Expert Panel

Panelist Bios



The 2019-2020 Panel is chaired by **Alan Balutis, PhD**, a distinguished fellow and senior director of North American Public Sector Cisco Systems' Business Solutions Group, the firm's global strategy and consulting arm. Before joining the network firm, Balutis served more than 30 years in public service and industry leadership roles. Balutis is a founding member of the Federal Chief Information Officers (CIO) Council. As a founding member, he led its strategic planning and outreach committees, helped create the council's e-government committee and served as its first chair. At the Department of Commerce, Balutis headed the management and budget office for over a decade and was the department's first CIO. Balutis won the Federal Computer Week FED 100 seven times and is a member of the Government Computer News as well as the Federal Computer Week halls of fame. He is also a fellow of the National Academy of Public Administration (NAPA).

The other Panel members are:



Dan Chenok, executive director of the IBM Center for the Business of Government, is a CIO Strategic Advisors to Government Executives (SAGE) with the Partnership for Public Service, fellow of NAPA, and chair of the Cybersecurity Subcommittee of the Department of Homeland Security's (DHS) Data Privacy and Integrity Advisory Committee. Chenok is also a member of

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IT Systems Expert Panel

the George Washington University Center for Cyber and Homeland Security Board of Directors, American University IT Executive Council, and serves as co-chair of the Senior Executives Association Community of Change for Governance Innovation. Chenok served as the Office of Management and Budget's branch chief for information policy and technology with oversight of federal information and IT policy, including electronic government, computer security, privacy and IT budgeting. Chenok served on President Obama's transition team for the Technology, Innovation and Government Reform group and won numerous honors and awards, including a 2010 Federal 100 winner for work on the presidential transition, and the 2016 Eagle Award for Industry Executive of the Year.



Nani A. Coloretti is the senior vice president for financial and business strategy at the Urban Institute. Coloretti served the Obama administration for almost eight years, most recently as deputy secretary of the US Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). As the second-most senior official at HUD, Coloretti managed the department's day-to-day operations and cross-cutting program initiatives, including a \$45 billion annual budget and approximately 8,000 employees. Coloretti also served as the assistant secretary for management at the Department of the Treasury. Coloretti is a chief operating officer SAGE at the Partnership for Public Service, a NAPA fellow, a director on the board of Bank of the West and serves on the advisory board for Access Democracy.

IT Systems Expert Panel



Renato (“Renny”) A. DiPentima, PhD serves on the Boards of Directors of Cap Gemini Government Solutions, Amida Technology Solutions, iNovex Information Systems, and Gunnison Consulting Group, as well as the Advisory Board at Blue Delta Capital Partners. DiPentima also served as a board director for Brocade Communication Systems. DiPentima held several senior management positions in the federal government, including serving as Social Security Administration’s deputy commissioner and as the agency’s CIO.



Martha Dorris has over thirty years of federal government experience in information technology acquisition roles, ranging from technical and program management to customer and citizen experience. Dorris was the deputy associate administrator in the General Services Administration’s (GSA) Office of Citizen Services and Innovative Technologies (now the Technology Transformation Service) for the majority of 34 years focused on improving the services government delivers to citizens. Dorris has been active in the information technology community worldwide. Dorris served as the chair of the American Council for Technology and fulfilled numerous positions with the International Council for IT in Government Administration. Dorris was recently elected to the World Information Technology and Services Alliance Board of Directors. Dorris is one of 21 directors elected for the 2018-2020 term and the only representative from the United States.

IT Systems Expert Panel



William (Bill) D. Eggers is the executive director of Deloitte’s Center for Government Insights where Eggers is responsible for the firm’s public sector thought leadership. Eggers’ newest book is *Delivering on Digital: The Innovators and Technologies that are Transforming Government* (Deloitte Insights, 2016). Eggers has authored eight other books, including *The Solution Revolution: How Government, Business, and Social Enterprises are Teaming up to Solve Society’s Biggest Problems* (Harvard Business Review Press 2013) which The Wall Street Journal calls “pulsating with new ideas about civic and business and philanthropic engagement,” and was named to ten best books of the year lists.



Mark Alan Forman was the first administrator at the Office of E-Government and Information Technology. Forman was the first person in the federal government to fulfill responsibilities normally associated with a corporate CIO. Forman is currently vice president, Digital Government Strategy at SAIC Corp. Forman’s prior experience includes senior positions at KPMG, IBM, and the US Senate Committee on Governmental Affairs. Forman has over 30 years of experience in successful government modernization initiatives, including turn-around of poor-performing major transformation initiatives, federal enterprise architecture, IT governance, cybersecurity, acquisition, and IT strategy.

IT Systems Expert Panel



Greg Giddens, partner with Potomac Ridge Consulting, is a chief acquisition officer SAGE with the Partnership for Public Service, a fellow of NAPA, and a member of National Contract Management Association Board of Advisors. Giddens previously served as chief acquisition officer for Veterans Affairs (VA) and as the principal executive director for VA's Office of Acquisition, Logistics, and Construction. Giddens has over 36 years of federal service and prior to the VA, Giddens served in DHS and the Department of Defense where Giddens led large, transformational programs. Giddens has twice received the FED 100 award and also received the Presidential Rank Award for Distinguished Executives.



Dave McClure, PhD, is a leader of transformational IT initiatives at Accenture Federal Services. McClure oversees future-focused client projects, including Cloud computing adoption, digital transformation, IT modernization, Cloud security, and creative customer-focused web design. While serving in the Obama Administration, McClure led the design and implementation of FedRAMP, the federal security authorization process for Cloud computing products and services, which is the most significant security authorization process of its kind, worldwide. Previously, McClure was a cybersecurity chief strategist at Coalfire Federal/Veris Group, where McClure worked extensively with both government and commercial enterprises and as managing director of Gartner Global Government Research, led public sector CIO engagements worldwide.

IT Systems Expert Panel



Jim Williams has thirty plus years of successful federal government experience designing, building, delivering, and running outstanding critical and transformational programs, as well as acquisition operations in several government agencies. Currently, a partner in Schambach & Williams Consulting, LLC, Williams worked as a senior executive for over 18 years in several government organizations. Williams' past roles include acting administrator of GSA, first federal acquisition service and commissioner at GSA, and first director of DHS's US-VISIT Program. Williams also headed the Internal Revenue Service's procurement organization and program management for IRS's Modernization Program.

IT Systems Expert Panel

List of IT Systems Expert Panel Meetings

- SSAB IT Systems Panel Kick-Off Meeting – September 25, 2019
- National Council of Social Security Management Association (NCSSMA) – October 23, 2019
- SSA Chief Information Officer and Deputy Commissioner of Systems Rajive Mathur – October 31, 2019
- SSA Deputy Chief Information Officer and Assistant Deputy Commissioner of Systems Sean Brune – October 31, 2019
- Office of Management and Budget (Current and Former OMB Staff focused on SSA) – November 20, 2019
- SSA Office of Inspector General – November 20, 2019
- National Organization of Social Security Claimant’s Representatives (NOSSCR) – December 5, 2019 (Requested by NOSSCR)
- Texas DDS – December 6, 2019 (Requested by Texas DDS)
- Kentucky DDS – December 6, 2019 (Requested by Kentucky DDS)
- Oklahoma DDS – December 6, 2019 (Requested by Oklahoma DDS)
- MicroPact Inc. – December 6, 2019 (Requested by MicroPact Inc.)
- SSA Senior Advisor to the Commissioner and Former Acting Commissioner, Nancy Berryhill – January 6, 2020

IT Systems Expert Panel

- SSA Assistant Deputy Commissioner of Systems (role held during the meeting with Panel, Current position is Executive Director of SSA Enterprise Services), Sylviane Haldiman – January 6, 2020
- SSA Office of the Commissioner – January 14, 2020
 - SSA Participants Included:
 - SSA Commissioner Andrew Saul
 - Deputy Commissioner David Black
 - Chief Information Officer Rajive Mathur
 - Senior Advisor to the Commissioner Emry Sisson and Arturo Ronderos
 - Senior Advisor to the Commissioner Arturo Ronderos
- Panel Debriefing on Meeting with SSA’s Commissioner’s Office – January 15, 2020
- SSA Deputy Commissioner of Operations, Grace Kim – January 27, 2020
- SSA Chief Business Officer for SSA’s IT Modernization Plan, Kim Baldwin-Sparks – January 27, 2020
- Government Accountability Office – January 27, 2020
- Maine DDS – February 25, 2020 (Per request of the SSA Commissioner)
- Wyoming DDS – February 25, 2020 (Per request of the SSA Commissioner)
- Ohio DDS – February 25, 2020 (Per request of the SSA Commissioner)
- General Services Administration – May 1, 2020
- AARP (formerly the American Association of Retired Persons) – May 1, 2020
- SSA Chief Information Officer and Deputy Commissioner of Systems Rajive Mathur – May 1, 2020

IT Systems Expert Panel

- SSA Deputy Chief Information Officer and Assistant Deputy Commissioner of Systems
Sean Brune – May 1, 2020
- SSA Chief Information Officer and Deputy Commissioner of Systems Rajive Mathur –
September 30, 2020
- SSA Deputy Chief Information Officer and Assistant Deputy Commissioner of Systems
Sean Brune – September 30, 2020

IT Systems Expert Panel

Acronym List

AARP	Formerly the American Association of Retired Persons
ADC	Assistant Deputy Commissioner
AI	Artificial Intelligence
BHAGs	Big, Hairy, Audacious Goals
CBO	Chief Business Officer
CCO	Chief Customer Officer
CIO	Chief Information Officer
COSS	SSA Commissioner or Office of the Commissioner
COTS	Commercial Off the Shelf (referring to software)
CR	Claimant Representative (an employee role of those serving the public in SSA field offices)
CX	Customer Experience
DC	Deputy Commissioner
DCM	Disability Case Management (caseload processing software developed for the Disability Determination Service Centers by a private software company, MicroPact Inc.)
DCPS2	SSA-developed Disability Case Processing System for Disability Determination Service Centers
DDS	Disability Determination Service Center
FACA	Federal Advisory Committee Act
FO	Field Office

IT Systems Expert Panel

FSTAP	Future Systems Technology Advisory Panel
GAO	U.S. Government Accountability Office
GSA	U.S. General Services Administration
HUD	U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development
IT	Information Technology
OIG	Office of Inspector General
OMB	U.S. Office of Management and Budget
PAS Role	Presidential Appointed Senate Confirmed Role.
PMO	Program Management Office
NCSSMA	National Council of Social Security Management Association
NOSSCR	National Organization of Social Security Claimant's Representatives
ROI	Return on Investment
RPA	Robotic Process Automation
SSA	Social Security Administration
SSAB	Social Security Advisory Board (Board)
SSDI	Social Security Disability Insurance
SSI	Supplemental Security Income
USAA	United Services Automobile Association
USICH	United States Interagency Council on Homelessness
VA	U.S. Veteran's Affairs
VOC	Voice of the Customer
VOE	Voice of the Employee

IT Systems Expert Panel

References

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² Social Security Administration. (2020a, June). *Service Modernization: IT Modernization Plan, 2020 Update*. <https://www.ssa.gov/open/materials/IT-Modernization-Plan-2020-Update.pdf>

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