Manual Processes for Resource-intensive Workloads
A-07-19-50882

Objective

Our objective was to determine whether the Social Security Administration's (SSA) automation enhancements (1) reduced manual processing for resource-intensive workloads and (2) were cost-effective.

Background

As of December 2021, the Old-Age, Survivors and Disability Insurance (OASDI) program comprised more than 65 million beneficiaries whom SSA paid more than $1.1 trillion in Calendar Year 2021. Through the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) program, SSA paid 7.7 million recipients approximately $55.5 billion. Because of limitations, SSA's systems do not always fully automate actions to establish or update records. In these situations, SSA technicians must input information manually, which can lead to incorrect calculations, keying mistakes, or erroneous inputs.

SSA's 2017 *IT Modernization Plan* included plans to retire old technology, improve information technology (IT) development processes, and update legacy systems to reduce manual workloads so it can better serve the public. In 2020, SSA updated the Plan to include additional investments focused on enhancing service delivery, modernizing IT, and automating manual workloads to improve timeliness and eliminate and prevent backlogs. SSA stated its *IT Modernization Plan* was an $863 million investment over 5 years.

Results

SSA's automation enhancements reduced the need for manual processing for some workloads from Fiscal Years 2019 to 2021. These initiatives aimed to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of SSA's operations; however, they were not always immediately cost-effective.

SSA also introduced robotic applications (bots) to assist processing center employees with manual workloads. SSA could increase its return on investment for the robotics initiative by increasing the use of existing bots and developing new bots to assist with additional workloads.

For the SSI workloads SSA identified as resource-intensive and error-prone, SSA must improve its ability to monitor nation-wide pending levels to determine how best to prioritize automation enhancement efforts. A lack of data hinders SSA's ability to identify the most critical SSI processes and workloads on which it should focus its efforts and to determine which initiatives are the most cost beneficial.

Recommendations

We made six recommendations that SSA implement measures to assess cost savings and effectiveness of its automation enhancements; determine whether existing bots are cost beneficial and whether it is cost beneficial to develop bots to assist with field office workloads; issue unused licenses for bot-related software; re-evaluate its licensing needs and, if appropriate, modify its licensing agreement; and establish processes to monitor nationwide pending levels for manual SSI workloads.

SSA agreed with our recommendations.