Development of the Preliminary Claims System
A-14-20-50912

Objective

To determine whether the Social Security Administration (SSA) complied with Agile software development methods and industry best practices when it developed the Preliminary Claims System (PCS).

Background

In 2017, SSA began planning the development of the Consolidated Claims Experience product, which the Agency intends will become the single-entry point for employees to process all claims for the Agency.

In March 2018, SSA began its PCS project, the goal of which was to help employees uniformly evaluate the benefits an inquiring individual may be eligible to receive. PCS would share the information collected with the claims systems to eliminate duplicate keying and save time.

In July 2019, SSA delivered a Beta version of PCS to 8 field offices and, in November 2019, delivered it to an additional 40 field offices.

SSA developed PCS using Agile methods, which is an iterative, incremental approach to software development characterized by frequent releases developed in collaboration with customers.

Results

SSA complied with most of the Agile software development methods and many industry best practices but could have made improvements while it was developing PCS. Team members were new to Agile development and were not familiar with the Agile tool used to manage the development of PCS. As a result, SSA was not able to accurately determine or predict the schedule or progress for PCS. The PCS Beta release was delayed, with reduced scope and increased cost.

In September 2020, SSA stopped developing PCS and began integrating its programming and functionality into a larger effort aimed at replacing all aspects of the claims process.

We have not included formal recommendations in this report; however, we have included suggestions to help SSA improve the management of future Agile projects, update its policies for Agile development, and ensure development teams follow the Agency's policies and guidance. We included recommendations, to be considered together with the suggestions from this report, for the Agency to improve and mature its use of the Agile methodology in another audit, *Agile Software Development at the Social Security Administration (A-14-20-50497)*, which we issued in August 2022.

SSA agreed to consider our suggestions as it continues implementing a scaled Agile framework based on industry best practices.