

Summary of Cloud Computing at the Social Security Administration

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Objective

Our objectives were to (1) assess the Social Security Administration's (SSA) plan to move computer services to a cloud, (2) determine the risks associated with moving computer services to a cloud, and (3) identify opportunities to save monies by partnering with other Federal agencies in moving computer services to a cloud.

Background

Cloud computing is a general term for anything that involves delivering hosted services over the Internet.

According to the National Institute of Standards and Technology, cloud computing provides convenient, on-demand access to a shared pool of configurable computing resources (for example, networks, servers, storage, and computer services) that can be made available rapidly and with minimal management effort or service provider cooperation.

Our Findings

Based on our interviews with SSA staff, analysis of the Agency's Cloud First Plan, and inquiries with other Federal agencies, we determined that SSA's Cloud First Plan generally complied with Office of Management and Budget (OMB) requirements. However, we found the Agency needs to develop a service-based methodology to identify and track costs related to moving computer services to a cloud.

Further, we found the Agency identified execution risks, as required by OMB, for the three computer services planned for cloud implementation, but additional risks may affect the Agency's data and legacy systems. Finally, we determined the Agency had already partnered with some agencies; however, other opportunities existed.

Although we identified some concerns, we applaud the Agency for cautiously moving services to the cloud. SSA needs to decide whether the risks associated with moving computer services to a cloud outweigh the benefits to maximize capacity, improve information technology flexibility and responsiveness, and minimize cost.

Our Recommendations

Based on our report findings, we recommend SSA:

1. Develop a service-based methodology to identify and track costs including the costs of retiring segments or entire legacy systems for all information technology initiatives so the Agency can determine whether moving computer services to a cloud provided an equal or greater return on investment than keeping the status quo.
2. Consider additional potential risks to its data or legacy systems before moving future computer services to a cloud.
3. Continue reaching out to Federal Risk and Authorization Management Program officials; other Federal, State, and local government agencies; as well as private industry to obtain best practices and lessons learned before moving its computer services to a cloud.

SSA disagreed with our recommendations.