

Trends in the Social Security Administration's Conference Expenditures

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Office of Audit Report Summary

Objectives

To review the Agency's
(1) compliance with Federal
conference reporting requirements and
(2) trends in its internal and external
conference expenditure reporting.

Background

The November 2011 Executive Order 13589, *Promoting Efficient Spending*, and the May 2012 Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Memorandum M-12-12, *Promoting Efficient Spending to Support Agency Operations*, require that Federal agencies exercise discretion and judgment with respect to spending. Agencies must ensure expenses are appropriate, necessary, and managed in a way that minimizes expenses, including spending on conferences.

In accordance with subsequent legislation and OMB guidance, the Social Security Administration (SSA) is required to notify the Office of the Inspector General (OIG) of conferences that cost more than \$20,000 within 15 days of when each is held. SSA must also report detailed expenses annually for conferences that cost more than \$100,000.

Annual reports include a description of each conference's purpose, the number of participants attending, a detailed statement of the costs to the Government, and a description of the contracting procedures used.

Findings

We reviewed documentation for 317 conferences with expenditures over \$20,000 that SSA held in Fiscal Years (FY) 2013 through 2016. The costs of these conferences totaled approximately \$31.9 million. SSA generally complied with Federal conference reporting requirements. However, in FY 2016, SSA did not notify OIG of two conferences with expenditures in excess of \$20,000 within 15 days of the conference dates, as required.

In January 2015, OMB clarified existing guidance on conference reporting. Although this guidance increased the number of SSA conferences that met the requirements for OIG notification in FY 2015, the total expenditures for these conferences decreased. With respect to conferences with expenditures over \$100,000, both the number of conferences and reportable expenditures decreased.

Recommendations

We recommend SSA notify OIG of all conferences with expenditures in excess of \$20,000 within 15 days of the conference dates. If extenuating circumstances prevent OIG notification within 15 days, SSA should notify OIG as soon as it becomes aware of total expenditures.

SSA agreed with the recommendation.