

Report Summary

Social Security Administration Office of the Inspector General

May 2010



Objective

The former Chairman of the Social Security Subcommittee and Representatives Johnson and Linder asked the Office of the Inspector General to examine off-site training conferences held during the past 5 years where Social Security Administration (SSA) funds were used or Agency staff was present and to provide information regarding conferences planned through Fiscal Year (FY) 2010.

Background

Federal agencies are allowed to use a variety of methods to train employees, including classroom, on-the-job, technology-based, satellite, self-development activities, coaching, mentoring, career development counseling, details, rotational assignments, cross-training, and developmental activities at retreats and conferences.

To view the full report, visit
http://www.ssa.gov/oig/ADO_BEPDF/A-05-10-21035.pdf

Congressional Response Report: Off-site Training Conferences (A-05-10-21035)

Our Findings

Between October 2004 and November 2009, SSA conducted 168 training conferences for about 26,000 attendees at a cost of approximately \$23.5 million. SSA reported 158 training conferences were held from October 2004 through September 2009 and another 72 conferences for FY 2010 (10 during the first 2 months of FY 2010). SSA components were able to provide us with about 85 percent of the requested conference details for our period of review. From the reported information, we determined that the average training cost per attendee at an SSA-sponsored, off-site event was about \$900. In addition to direct conference costs, we estimate the total salaries and benefits associated with the 168 training events under review to be about \$29.1 million. We also found that approximately \$1 million was spent for audiovisual services and another \$2 million for speakers. In addition, some conferences included costs related to award ceremonies and receptions. The top three States in terms of number of conferences held were Maryland, Georgia, and California, indicating SSA was attempting to keep many of the conferences close to Headquarters in Baltimore, Maryland. In August 2009, the Commissioner centralized conference oversight and related procurement activity.

Our Conclusion

We found that most SSA components were conducting conferences and the nature of the training varied depending on the components' missions. In addition, while we found that conferences were held in 28 States, as well as the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, the majority of the conferences reviewed took place at locations in geographic proximity to SSA Headquarters in Baltimore, Maryland. And while we found a general lack of centralized control over conference planning and administration during our review period, the Commissioner's new policy on conferences should provide (1) increased assurance as to the appropriateness and necessity of future conferences; (2) stronger control over training expenditures; and (3) improved compliance with Agency policy and statutory regulations.