Essential Changes Imperative for

the Success of Social Security's IT Modernization and

Future Operations

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

IT Systems Expert Panel

Executive Summary

The Social Security Advisory Board established the Information Technology Systems Expert Panel (hereafter "the Panel") to provide expert advice and guidance on the Social Security Administration (SSA)'s [IT Modernization Plan](). The 2017 IT Modernization Plan is a significant, five-year systems upgrade estimated at $691 million investment.[a] This Plan outlines SSA's IT modernization initiative intended to update their legacy systems, streamline workload processing, and improve and modernize services to the public. The Panel served to evaluate this modernization, a government effort worthy of review by government oversight agencies, congressional authorization, appropriations, and others and provide.

The Panel completed a detailed examination of the IT Modernization Plan and conducted more than 20 stakeholder interviews. Stakeholders included representatives from state and federal agencies, advocacy groups, experts from across the government, and systems end-users. We partnered with SSA leadership from across the agency for modernization updates as part of our assessment while providing them insights and guidance to help them achieve their modernization goals.

During our Panel's evaluation, SSA revised its modernization priorities to emphasize service digitization. The COVID-19 pandemic forced SSA employees to work from home, creating an immediate need to transition thousands of staff to telework and enhance digital and telephonic service to agency customers. SSA's [Service Modernization: IT Modernization Plan, 2020 Update]() was then released with additional changes, including an added IT Modernization Plan domain and shifted priorities. Our findings and recommendations consider and address SSA's evolving modernization.

SSA's progress in modernizing and upgrading its IT systems is commendable. We were impressed by the SSA staff's expertise and dedication to their agency's mission. However, there is room to improve SSA's modernization efforts. We believe our recommendations could significantly increase SSA's modernization efficiency and effectiveness and propose the following, organized by focus areas, to bolster SSA's modernization success:

Operating Model Recommendations

- SSA's operating model must align with the agency's strategic vision and strategic plan.
- The operating model must address how today's interactions are simplified, streamlined, or made more responsive to public needs.

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[a] The initial investment of SSA's IT systems modernization was estimated at $677 million and was later increased to $691 million.

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- SSA must identify and include critical business lines within the operating model, including customer journeys within those business lines (there may be similarities across business lines).
- The operating model must address interactions with key stakeholders, claimants and beneficiaries, and their agents and other agencies at the federal and state levels of government.
- Journey maps must be developed from SSA's business lines with input from the field employees and customers.
- SSA's strategic vision and operating model should be field and customer-driven.
- A comprehensive understanding of the experience of all customer segments should be represented in the operating model.

Governance Infrastructure Recommendations

- A well-defined governance infrastructure is critical for modernization success, especially as SSA shifts to agile development. It aligns agency acquisition and development with the agency operating model.
- SSA should clearly define how its program management processes accommodate agile development.
- The chief business officer (CBO) should drive modernization goals and priorities in alignment with short-term DevOps teams.
- SSA should create or assign an agency component directed by a senior executive to lead customer experience efforts across the organization.

IT Modernization Strategy Recommendations

- SSA's Strategic Plan should align with the agency's operating model, Governance Infrastructure, and the agency's Modernization Plan.
- SSA's IT Modernization Plan should include metrics against which to measure performance against those goals.
- Clear governance with cross-agency stakeholders should be included in the planning stages of modernization, not just at the execution phase.
- SSA should strengthen the use of emerging technologies to enhance agency data stores.
- A stakeholder engagement process is needed to help SSA align its IT strategic planning to agency stakeholders, both internal and external, and continue through modernization.

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Customer Experience Recommendations

- SSA's Customer Experience (CX) Strategy should as a starting point:
  - Set the vision for the customers' experience
  - Identify the overall customer goals and objectives; initiatives focused on improving the pain points or gaps in the customer experience and metrics to measure success
  - SSA should create a customer experience strategy identifying the agency's vision of the customer's experience, the current customer's experience, and the future experience, along with a roadmap on how to get there.

- SSA should develop a Chief Customer Officer (CCO) role as leader of the Customer Experience Office (CXO) to address customer experience and the customers' needs.

Beyond our findings and recommendations discussed in greater detail within this report, we also offer guidance for navigating through COVID-19. Finally, the report ends with a case study demonstrating a federal agency's success in achieving what seemed impossible.

The dedication of SSA employees, coupled with the Panel's recommendations, will help guide the agency toward modernization success.