

# Intervention Evaluation and Communicating Results

Behavioral Economics: Policy Applications and  
Practical Guidance for State and Local Initiatives

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# What is the Office of Evaluation Sciences (OES)?

The **Office of Evaluation Sciences (OES)** is an **interdisciplinary team** that works across the federal government to **help agencies build and use evidence**.



# A snapshot of our work

Since 2015, we have...



Hired over 175  
team members



Brought in talent  
from nearly  
100 institutions



Completed over  
120 collaborations



Completed over  
100 evaluations



Partnered with over  
20 federal agencies

# OES Evaluation Methods: **Rigor and Transparency**

# We commit to analysis plans before analyzing data

This is critical to ensuring that claims of statistical significance are well founded, and others can be confident we didn't tailor our methods to get a desirable result.

## **Wherever possible, we prespecify:**

- Outcomes
- Statistical models and tests
- Criteria for statistical significance
- Cases to be excluded from analysis
- How missing data will be handled
- Adjustments for multiple comparisons
- Other analytic choices that could be determine how the results turn out

Our [Analysis Plan template](https://oes.gsa.gov/analysis-plan-template) is available on our website: oes.gsa.gov

# We commit to analysis plans before analyzing data

We post a detailed analysis plan on our website before working with the data

## Analysis Plan Registration



[Photo credit](#)

This evaluation is currently being implemented. We have created this project page as a mechanism to pre-specify what data will be collected, what we plan to measure, and how we'll conduct our analysis. We believe this is a critical component of conducting transparent, replicable, and high-quality research; and aim to share our Analysis Plans whenever possible.

The Analysis Plan at the right indicates the date locked, and you can verify our upload date [here](#).

Check back for results!

Year  
2023

Status  
Ongoing

Project Type  
Program Change and Evaluation

Agency  
Health and Human Services



Domain  
American Rescue Plan

Resources

[View Analysis Plan \(PDF\)](#)

# We commit to analysis plans before analyzing data

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### Analysis Plan

Project Name: Increasing Access to Minnesota Child Care Stabilization Base Grants  
Project Code: 2209-B  
Date Finalized: May 9, 2023

### Project Description

This evaluation is part of the Office of Evaluation Sciences (OES) [American Rescue Plan Act of 2021](#) (ARP) portfolio. The ARP was designed to address immediate needs related to the pandemic, with a specific focus on addressing historically disparate outcomes across race, class, and geography that were further exacerbated by the pandemic. As federal programs are innovating and finding new ways to achieve these goals, the OES [portfolio of evaluations](#) will measure whether ARP-funded interventions are working as intended and share lessons learned.

In support of the [ARP Equity Learning Agenda](#), OES is working with agency partners to better understand how to improve awareness, access, and allocation of ARP programs and resources, focusing on ARP programs with equity goals. This set of evaluations will be intentional and strategic in building evidence to understand the role of ARP programs and supported interventions in improving outcomes for historically underserved populations.

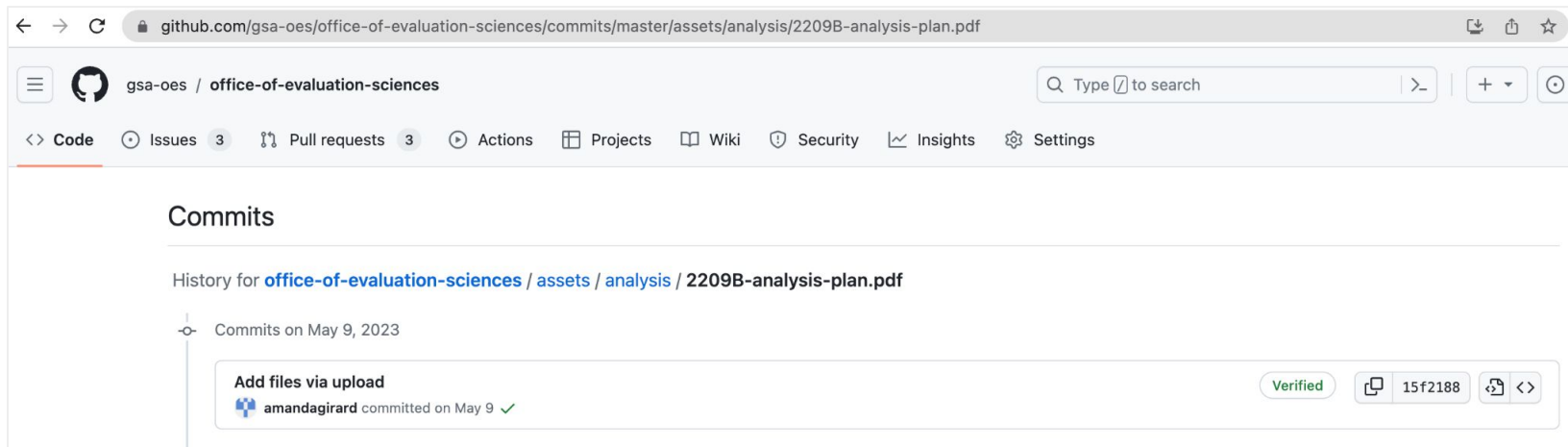
This project aims to identify methods to enhance equitable access to child care grants among child care providers in the state of Minnesota. The pandemic highlighted the instability of the child care market and put additional financial burdens on child care providers. ARP allocated approximately \$24 billion for child care stabilization grants that the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS)'s Administration for Children and Families (ACF), working with states, territories, and tribes, provides as subgrants to child care providers.

Specifically, this project aims to answer the following questions:

- To what extent does a communication bundle of proactive phone calls, text messages, and behaviorally-informed emails impact awards of Minnesota's Child Care Stabilization Base Grant (CCSBG) among eligible providers who have never or infrequently taken-up the program?
- To what extent does a communication bundle of text messages and behaviorally-informed emails impact awards of CCSBG among eligible providers who have never or infrequently taken-up the program?
- Is the effect of the communication bundle of text messages and behaviorally-informed emails on awards different than the effect of a communication bundle of proactive phone calls, text messages, and behaviorally-informed emails on awards?

# We commit to analysis plans before analyzing data

Analysis plan posting dates can be verified via GitHub



The screenshot shows a web browser window displaying a GitHub commit page. The address bar shows the URL: `github.com/gsa-oes/office-of-evaluation-sciences/commits/master/assets/analysis/2209B-analysis-plan.pdf`. The page header includes the repository name `gsa-oes / office-of-evaluation-sciences` and a search bar. Below the header is a navigation bar with links: `<> Code`, `Issues 3`, `Pull requests 3`, `Actions`, `Projects`, `Wiki`, `Security`, `Insights`, and `Settings`. The main content area is titled `Commits` and shows the history for the file `office-of-evaluation-sciences / assets / analysis / 2209B-analysis-plan.pdf`. A commit history timeline shows a commit on May 9, 2023. The commit details show the file was added via upload, verified, and committed by `amandagirard` on May 9. The commit hash `15f2188` is displayed next to the file icon.

github.com/gsa-oes/office-of-evaluation-sciences/commits/master/assets/analysis/2209B-analysis-plan.pdf

gsa-oes / office-of-evaluation-sciences

Type to search

<> Code Issues 3 Pull requests 3 Actions Projects Wiki Security Insights Settings

## Commits

History for [office-of-evaluation-sciences](#) / [assets](#) / [analysis](#) / [2209B-analysis-plan.pdf](#)

Commits on May 9, 2023

Add files via upload

Verified 15f2188

amandagirard committed on May 9 ✓



# We publish all results regardless of outcome

We publish an abstract on our website regardless of whether results are **favorable, unfavorable, or neutral.**

This helps others understand **what doesn't work**, as well as what does.

It also **avoids publication bias** and helps ensure that accumulated evaluations will yield an accurate picture of what works.

## INCORPORATING EVALUATION INTO DIGITAL FORMS



Five GSA offices and the American public worked together to improve federal forms

### Target a Priority Outcome

The American public spends approximately 11.5 billion hours per year filling out federal forms.<sup>1</sup> Form complexity can result in lack of submission or completion, and errors on forms can cause processing delays and affect whether the form is accepted—which can have far-reaching consequences. Complex federal forms also place a large burden on government agencies who are responsible for processing responses, investigating errors, and verifying information. This evaluation takes an incremental step to build evidence and capacity on the testing of digital federal forms. While this study tests only one intervention, a central goal of this study was “proof-of-concept” for building evidence to improve federal form design in the future.

### Translate Behavioral Insights

The burdens associated with completing a form can be reduced by providing clear instructions and utilizing effective formatting.<sup>2</sup> However, many respondents do not carefully read or follow instructions about how to complete a form, and when written instructions conflict with examples, respondents consistently use the example information and disregard instructions.<sup>3,4</sup> Embedding instructions alongside questions may make them more accessible (physically closer), more obviously relevant, and less demanding to process (shorter blocks of text). In contrast, embedding instructions alongside questions may also mean that people start answering questions without having read the full set of instructions. Providing instructions alongside questions may also entail using a link to pop-up those

instructions, which may further decrease the likelihood that instructions are read, as they would require an additional effort to access. Rigorous evidence on how the positioning of instructions on a form affects responses is limited and relevant to most—if not all—federal forms.

### Embed Evaluation

OES implemented a randomized control trial (RCT) to build evidence on the magnitude and direction of the effect of instruction positioning in federal forms. OES evaluated two versions of a brief digital form which included questions typical of federal forms. One version included the form instructions on the first page, while the other version embedded the form instructions within each page of the form. To generate a sample of users, OES conducted outreach among the general public and federal employees. Outreach included tweets, email newsletters sent to federal employees (i.e., GSAToday) and the general public (i.e., USA.gov), listservs, a pop-up on forms.gov, and a posting on challenge.gov. Individuals voluntarily chose to participate by clicking a link to the form that was included in the tweet, on the site, or in the email.<sup>5</sup> Between July 19 and August 19, 2022, there were 3,203 instances in which an individual clicked on a link to fill out the form. An online platform randomly assigned individuals who clicked on the form link to either the form with embedded instructions or instructions at the front.<sup>6</sup>

### Analyze Using Existing Data

The primary outcome of the evaluation is form submission, defined as starting and submitting the form.<sup>7</sup> The online platform was used to identify the

<sup>1</sup> Office of Management and Budget, Information Collection Budget of the United States, FY 2018, <https://www.eef.gov/eef/oeo-content/federal/2020/12/20/15-ICB-Report-1-Updated>

<sup>2</sup> Barnard, P. J., P. Wright, and P. Wilcox. “Effects of response instructions and question style on the ease of completing forms.” *Journal of Occupational Psychology* 52, no. 3 (1979): 209–226. [Experiment 1a]

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* (Experiments 1c, 3b)

<sup>4</sup> Lefevre, J.A. and Dixon, R. 1986. Do written instructions need examples? *Cognition and Instruction* 3(1), pp.1–30.

<sup>5</sup> When users clicked on the link to start the form, they were taken to a page on the OES website that provided additional details about the form and a link to start it.

<sup>6</sup> We cannot determine if these are unique individuals or if some people participated multiple times. If an individual participated multiple times in the same browser they would be routed to the same form, rather than re-randomized.

<sup>7</sup> New reported secondary analysis examines form completeness, which is defined as the percent of answers that were blank or listed as “undefined” for users who submitted

# Increasing SSI Uptake Among a **Potentially Eligible Population**

# Supplemental Security Income (SSI)

## **Eligibility in 2017**

- Low income (\$755/month) and assets (\$2,000)
- Are blind, disabled, or aged 65 or older

## **Benefit in 2017**

Cash payments up to guaranteed minimum monthly income

- \$735 for an individual, \$1,103 for a couple
- In some states, auto-enrolled in Medicaid, SNAP, and/or additional cash assistance

## **Enrollment among 65 +**

Estimated between 60-72% (McGarry and Schoeni 2015, Strand et al. 2009)

# Social Security Administration Supplemental Security Income

## Important Information

Address Line 1  
Address Line 2  
Address Line 3  
Date:  
Claim Number:

[RP NAME FOR, if applicable]  
[NH NAME]  
[ADDRESS]  
[CITY, STATE ZIP]

**Our records show you may be able to get Supplemental Security Income (SSI) benefits because you are age 65 or over.**

**If you are eligible, you may be able to earn up to \$735 (single) or \$1,103 (married) per month in SSI benefits.**

**Applying is simple! Call to schedule an appointment to apply in person or by phone. A Social Security representative will help you apply.**

### What is SSI?

SSI is a monthly cash benefit that is in addition to regular Social Security retirement benefits.

### How do you apply for SSI?

Call Social Security for more information on how to apply: toll-free at 1-800-772-1213, or call your local Social Security office at \*F2. We can answer most questions over the phone.

If you are deaf or hard of hearing, you may call our TTY/TDD number \*F3. For general information about Social Security we invite you to visit our website at [www.socialsecurity.gov](http://www.socialsecurity.gov) on the Internet. If you do call or visit an office, please have this letter with you. It will help us answer your questions.

*Social Security Administration*

## Letter 4: Combines all interventions

- (1) Informs of potential eligibility
- (2) Maximum monthly benefit
- (3) "Applying is simple"

# Study design

**Sample is adults 65+ with Social Security benefits < \$755/mo**

SSA identified over 4 million individuals

400,000 were sent letters

**Data is from SSA's Supplemental Security Record dataset**

Primary outcomes:

- Application filed
- Application awarded

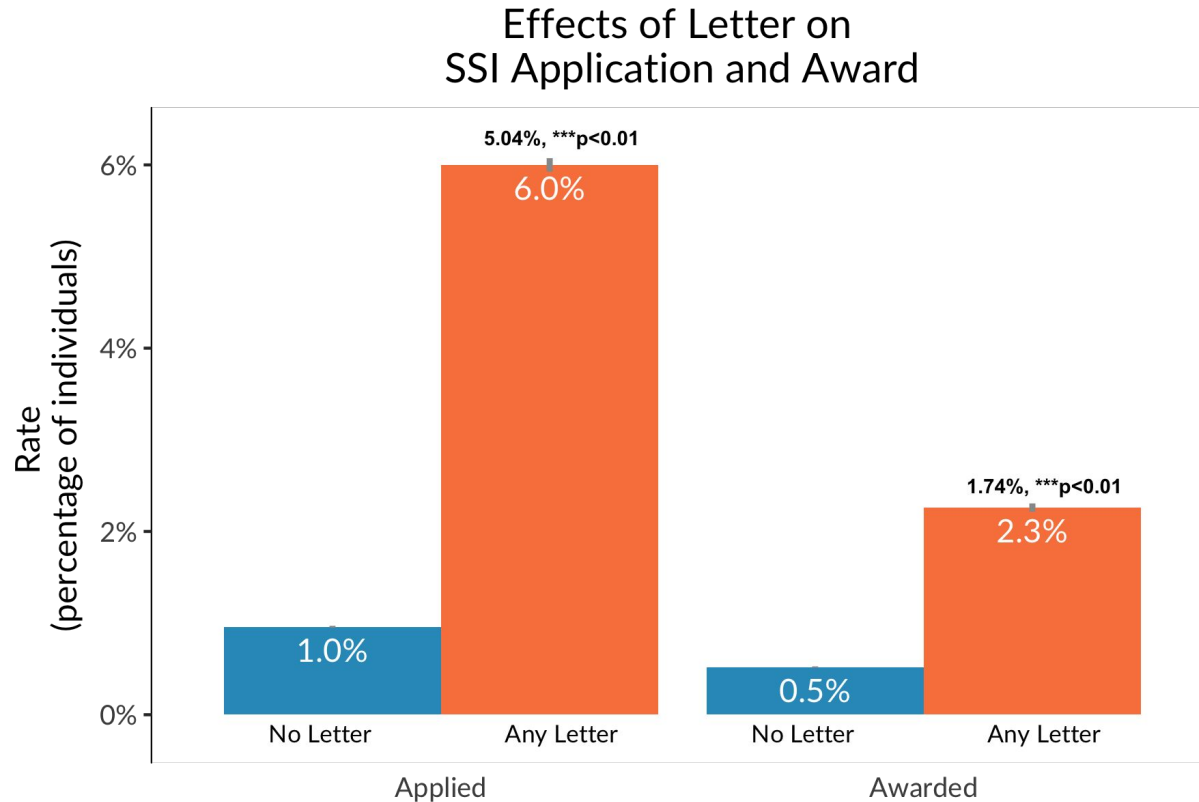
Secondary outcomes:

- Number of months received SSI
- Total amount of SSI benefits received
- Average amount of SSI benefit (for months with benefits)

**Outcomes measured after 3, 6, and 9 months**

September 2017 – June 2018

# SSI award rate quadrupled after 9 months



# Key findings

## Information matters

- All letters had a large impact on **applications and awards**
- **Maximum benefit amount** boosts applications and awards

## Self-selection:

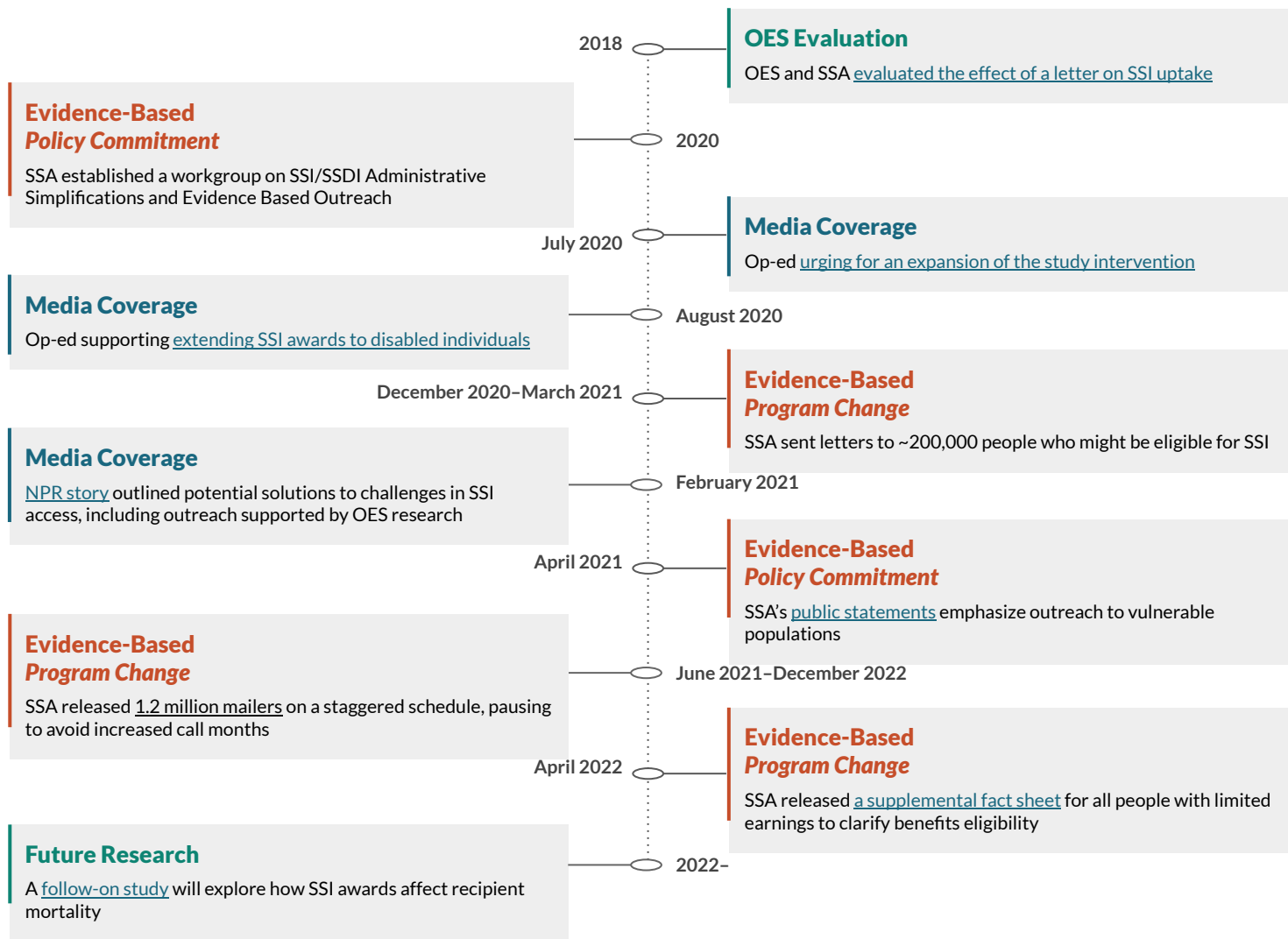
- Monthly and total SSI payments were \$60/month lower among those who received SSI after being sent a letter
- Rate of successful application (award / applied) seems to drop due to the treatment
  - Award rate is 54% for no letters; 38% for letters

Hemmeter, Jeffrey, John Phillips, Elana Safran, and Nicholas Wilson. (2023). Communicating Program Eligibility: A Supplemental Security Income (SSI) Field Experiment. Working paper. Revised and resubmitted, *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy*.

<https://oes.gsa.gov/projects/increasing-ssi-uptake/>

Using OES evidence to inform SSA's  
**outreach to low-income elderly populations**





# SSA's Annual Performance Goals, 2022-2023

## Improve Equity in the Supplemental Security Income Program

Improve equity in our Supplemental Security Income program **through increased outreach** and improved benefit delivery, including to communities of color and underserved communities.

- By September 30, 2023, increase the number of all SSI applications by 15 percent, relative to the 2021 baseline, restoring rates closer to pre-pandemic levels.
- By September 30, 2023, increase the number of SSI applications from underserved communities by 25 percent, relative to the 2021 baseline.

### Press Release

Thursday, May 25, 2023  
For Immediate Release

Mark Hinkle, Press Officer  
[press.office@ssa.gov](mailto:press.office@ssa.gov)

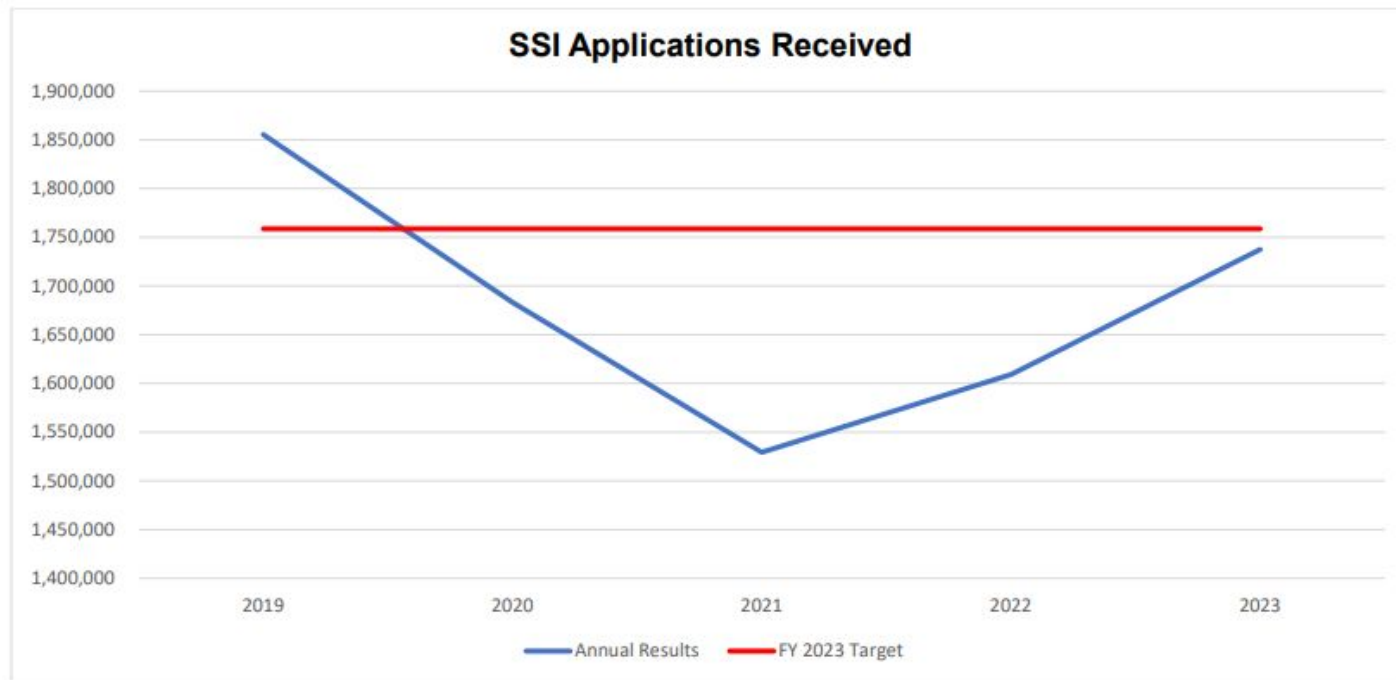
### Social Security Administration Expands Outreach and Access for Supplemental Security Income

Campaign Also Targets Underserved Communities

Link:  
<https://www.ssa.gov/news/press/releases/2023/#5-2023-2>

# Key indicators

**Primary Indicator:** Total SSI Applications<sup>2, 4</sup>



<sup>4</sup> Returning to previous expectations would require an increase of about 7 percent of SSI applications per year in FY 2022 and FY 2023. Between FY 2021 and FY 2022, we saw about a 5 percent increase in SSI applications. FY 2022 is a 53-week year for management information (MI) purposes. Data shown in the table reflects MI results through 53 weeks. In FY 2022, we received 1,573,245 SSI applications through week 52.