



Consortium for Citizens with Disabilities Social Security Task Force Social Security Disability Insurance Demonstration Project Principles:

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The CCD Social Security Task Force strongly supports efforts to improve the Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) program work incentives and provide better services and supports to help beneficiaries obtain and maintain employment. Demonstration and pilot projects can be extremely valuable in testing possible program changes prior to full scale implementation and statutory or regulatory changes. Specifically, demonstrations can help the Social Security Administration (SSA) identify the best design of provisions by testing multiple options, reveal unintended consequences and allow for design changes to mitigate or eliminate them, and prevent harm to beneficiaries that could result from the implementation of untested policy change options. At the same time, it is important that demonstrations not be undertaken when a policy proposal has been sufficiently tested or sufficient evidence supports immediate implementation of a policy change. To help achieve that balance, the CCD SSTF urges that SSA conform to the following principles (and the [SSTF disability program reform principles](#))¹ whenever designing or initiating any demonstration or pilot projects:

1. **Congress should restore SSA's demonstration authority for SSDI.** This authority, however, must include beneficiary protections similar to the Supplemental Security Income (SSI) demonstration authority including:
 - a. **Protection of total income and resources:** ("the Commissioner is not authorized to carry out any project that would result in a substantial reduction in any individual's total income and resources as a result of his or her participation in the project;"²)
 - b. **Participation in demonstrations must be voluntary and participants must be allowed to leave the demonstration and return to regular program rules at any time** ("the Commissioner may not require any individual to participate in a project; and the Commissioner shall assure (i) that the voluntary participation of individuals in any project is obtained through informed written consent which satisfies the requirements for informed consent established by the Commissioner for use in any experimental, pilot, or demonstration project in which human subjects are at risk, and (ii) that any individual's voluntary agreement to participate in any project may be revoked by such individual at any time;"³)
2. **Demonstration authority for SSA should also contain provisions designed to maximize the usefulness of the project findings, including:**
 - a. **Meaningful Opportunity for Stakeholder Feedback:** People with disabilities, their families, and advocates for people with disabilities should be provided with opportunities to provide input and feedback on any demonstration design, implementation, or evaluation. The opportunities should occur early enough in the process to be taken into account and SSA should have procedures for ensuring that feedback provided is collected and analyzed.

¹ http://c-c-d.org/fichiers/CCD_Disability_Program_Reform_Principles3-2012.pdf

² 42 U.S.C. 1301(b)(2)(A).

³ 42 U.S.C. 1301(b)(2)(B).

- b. **Reports:** SSA should be required to produce and release an evaluation report to the President and Congress for every demonstration project initiated, regardless of whether the demonstration project is completed. When it had demonstration authority, SSA started and canceled certain SSDI demonstrations but often did not provide information about why demonstrations were not carried to completion. Requiring a report on every demonstration initiated would ensure that all evidence obtained from activities conducted pursuant to this authority is available to inform future actions and demonstrations. Reports should include, at a minimum, demonstration design, what rules changes or interventions the demonstration was designed to test, outcomes of the demonstration, recommendations regarding next steps/adopting changes tested, how stakeholder input was obtained and how the input was used and, in the case of demonstrations canceled, what was learned, why the demonstration was not carried to conclusion, and whether a different demonstration ought to be conducted.
 - c. **Ensuring useful results:** SSA should design demonstrations carefully and allow sufficient time for implementation of the demonstration to provide for adequate outreach and education both to potential demonstration participants and SSA field office staff, and to ensure the appropriate infrastructure exists to support the demonstration. Demonstrations should be of sufficient length to produce results that provide evidence for making permanent program changes. At the same time, demonstrations must also be timely and completed within a reasonable timeframe so as to inform policymakers.
- 3. **SSA Must Have Adequate Administrative Resources to Run Effective Demonstration Projects:** Any demonstration project that attempts to test rule changes or interventions designed to improve employment outcomes of SSDI beneficiaries will rely on SSA's existing infrastructure and staff to complete tasks in a timely manner – such as processing earnings reports and adjusting benefits. Overpayments resulting from the failure to complete the post-entitlement workload are a significant disincentive to work and will affect demonstration participation and outcomes. Adequate resources and timely processing of post-entitlement eligibility and benefit changes are necessary to ensure the usefulness of demonstration projects and their ability to accurately test the intervention.
- 4. **Social Security Trust Fund and LAE dollars should not be used to complete demonstration projects with non-beneficiaries.**
 - a. Although the CCD Social Security Task Force strongly supports increasing efforts to support people with disabilities to maintain employment and economic security without applying for or receiving SSDI benefits, we do not believe that SSA has the staff, expertise, infrastructure or resources to directly provide that assistance.
 - b. SSA should not be tasked with undertaking demonstrations designed to divert people from applying for or receiving SSDI benefits, commonly referred to as early intervention. Research suggests that the most effective time to provide early intervention may be years before an individual applies for SSDI. Any demonstrations or pilots designed to help people with disabilities retain their attachment to the workforce ought to be completed by Federal agencies already tasked with providing services and supports to workers (such as the Department of Education's Vocational Rehabilitation program and the Department of Labor's Workforce Investment Act programs).
 - c. SSA should, however, work closely with other agencies undertaking demonstrations, joint program initiatives, and research with non-beneficiaries. SSA can provide advice to those agencies based on SSA's knowledge of SSDI (and Supplemental Security Income) beneficiaries and previously completed research, when appropriate. It is also appropriate for SSA to play a role in evaluating the impact of demonstrations and related initiatives designed to improve

employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities undertaken by other agencies. A collaborative model (like the one employed in the PROMISE initiative) where another agency (Department of Education) funds an intervention and SSA evaluates that impact on Social Security disability programs would be consistent with this principle.

5. **Beneficiary Outcomes:** Any demonstration project designed to increase employment of people with disabilities should focus on providing beneficiaries with opportunities to obtain self-supporting employment at competitive wages in an integrated setting. Employment in segregated settings at sub-minimum wages should not be considered successful employment outcomes.