

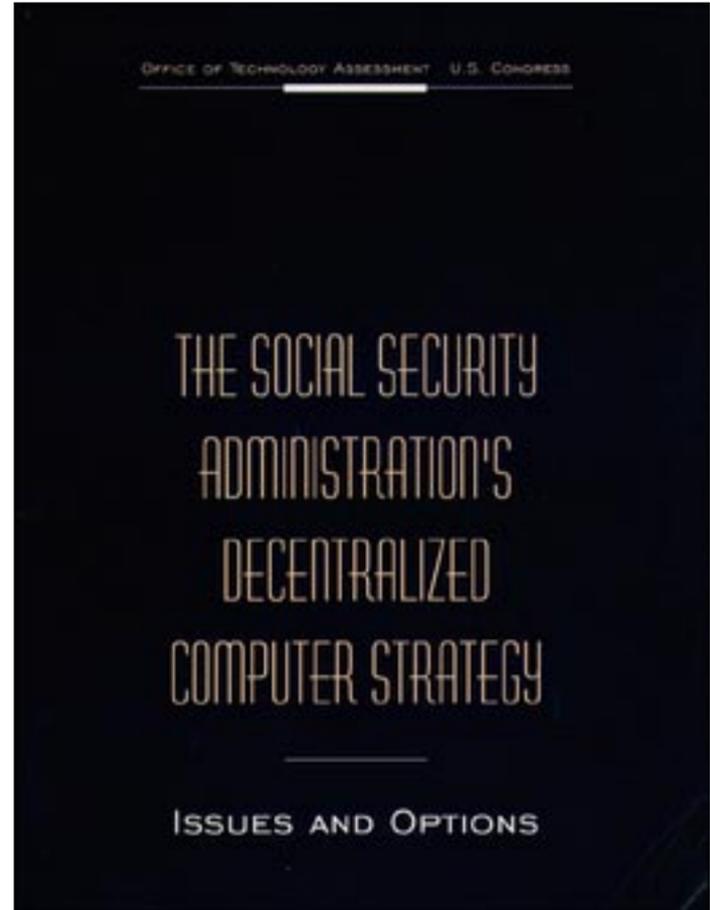
*The Social Security Administration's
Decentralized Computer Strategy: Issues
and Options*

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Foreword

The Social Security Administration is one of the largest federal service agencies, based on the number of clients and employees and the size of its budget. Millions of older, disabled, and low-income Americans depend on SSA benefits to make ends meet. However, SSA is struggling to meet congressional and public expectations for service delivery because of the relentless increase in its workload and the constraints on staff and resources.

Information technology is a vital tool for SSA for providing responsive and cost-effective service. The House Committee on Appropriations asked the Office of Technology Assessment to review SSA's plans for its latest round of technology modernization—known as the intelligent workstation and local area network program, or IWS/LAN—that will use decentralized networks of personal computers at SSA and the state offices. OTA found that SSA's planned evolution to IWS/LAN is technically sound and compatible with generally accepted public and private sector practices. But to realize the full benefits of IWS/LAN, SSA will need to improve its service delivery planning and think more creatively about the possibilities for electronic delivery.

This report provides Congress with OTA's evaluation of SSA's decentralized computer strategy and service delivery planning. It offers a range of congressional options for funding SSA's technology modernization, including possible benchmarks and milestones to help SSA achieve a higher return on its information technology investments. The report highlights some of the opportunities and challenges faced by a major federal agency in: 1) implementing the Administration's "National Performance Review**" and "National Information Infrastructure" programs, and 2) addressing issues raised in OTA's 1993 report *Making Government Work: Electronic Delivery of Federal Services*.

OTA appreciates the assistance of the many SSA and General Accounting Office staff who provided input and reviews, as well as the workshop participants and others who participated in the study. OTA values their perspectives and comments; the report is, however, solely the responsibility of OTA.



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