Privacy Act FAQ

The agency maintains a public web page explaining our privacy program. We recommend visiting this page (www.ssa.gov/privacy/) for additional information, however we summarize key concepts and information, below.

1. Q. What is the Privacy Act?
   A. The Privacy Act of 1974 protects individuals and their personal information from unwarranted invasion of privacy resulting from the collection, maintenance, use, and disclosure of personal information.

   In addition, this federal law provides an individual the right to:
   - Request his or her records from agency systems of records, and
   - Request a change to his or her records that are not accurate, relevant, timely, or complete.

2. Q. Why are we required to provide an oral Privacy Act statement to beneficiaries and other individuals?
   A. It’s the law. When we collect personal information that we maintain in our systems of records (e.g. electronic disability case folder), we are required to inform beneficiaries and other individuals about our information collection practices. Generally, the agency provides privacy statements in writing when we collect information using standard SSA forms (e.g. SSA-3368, SSA-3441, ADL’s and Work History forms).

   However, during the coronavirus pandemic the agency has increasingly relied on new processes and platforms to collect information (e.g. by telephone and, in limited situations, by video). Consequently, we are providing privacy statements in other ways, such as oral summaries.

3. Q. What is a system of records notice (SORN)?
   A. A SORN explains where we store the information we collect from beneficiaries and other individuals (e.g. electronic disability case folder), and the purpose for collecting these records (e.g. making disability determinations), how we disclose records (also referred to as “routine use(s)”), and other important information about our privacy practices.
4. Q. What kind of information might be disclosed as “routine use?”

A. Routine uses are ways in which we may disclose an individual's record from our systems of records without consent. Information may also be disclosed without consent as otherwise authorized by Federal law. Routine uses may cover disclosures for various purposes that we determine are compatible with the purpose for which it was originally collected. This could include disclosures for research, federal benefits determinations, or protection of our agency or employees. To find a list of routine uses, please view the SORN where we maintain the information.