

Winning the SSA SAFE Program

ICF International

VALUE / SCOPE **\$12M over 5 years**

SITUATION

When I joined ICF, the Social Security Administration (SSA) issued a competitive solicitation to support and modernize the SAFE (Security Automated Features & Enhancements) suite — a set of mission-critical security applications used across more than 1,500 SSA facilities. SAFE managed physical access control workflows, compliance reporting, identity verification events, incident reporting, card management, and role-based access controls.

At the time, ICF had never been a prime contractor for SAFE, and we were competing against long-standing incumbents who had decades of institutional knowledge. SAFE was strategically important because it sat at the intersection of physical security, identity governance, and compliance reporting, and it was undergoing modernization pressure. SSA wanted not just sustainment, but a modernization roadmap that simplified operations and reduced cost.

We needed to demonstrate that ICF not only understood the SAFE mission but had a better, more scalable approach to compliance automation and role-based security workflows than any competitor.

TASK

My task was to build a winning capture strategy that:

1. Demonstrated deep understanding of SSA's security and compliance challenges.
2. Differentiated ICF with a modern, automation-driven solution.
3. Leveraged ICF's GroupAssure platform as a compelling modernization accelerator.
4. Provided SSA a path to reduce technical debt and improve long-term system reliability.
5. Built confidence that ICF could transition operations seamlessly despite not being the incumbent.

ACTION

I started by diving deep into the SAFE architecture, the SMACS ecosystem, the PIA documentation, and the physical-security workflows across SSA's 1,500+ field offices. I interviewed former SSA staff, prior program leads, and internal SMEs to understand why SAFE had accumulated complexity and where modernization would deliver immediate value.

Next, I led a series of strategy workshops where we mapped every SAFE workflow against ICF's GroupAssure capabilities — a compliance automation and workflow platform we had successfully deployed in other federal agencies. I built the case that GroupAssure could replace dozens of manual or aging SAFE components with a single configurable engine, reducing O&M, improving compliance reporting, and creating a future-ready path without forcing SSA into a risky re-platform.

I also worked closely with SSA's stakeholders — both business and technical — to validate their needs around:

- role-based access control (RBAC),
- onboarding/offboarding workflows,
- incident reporting automation,
- card issuance processes,

- facility-access oversight,
- audit readiness,
- and modernization sequencing.

To earn trust, I created a risk-adjusted transition plan that showed a "no disruption" shift from the incumbent while preserving all existing SAFE data, workflows, and authorizations. ICF's transition plan included detailed code-inheritance strategies, documentation recreation, security authority reviews, and a roadmap for using GroupAssure to gradually reduce technical debt.

We then crafted a solution narrative centered on simplicity, automation, and security rigor, positioning SAFE not just as a sustainment program but as a modernization opportunity. ICF's approach demonstrated a 3–5 year path for SSA to reduce cost, strengthen compliance, and achieve higher reliability with fewer tools.

RESULT

SSA evaluated the technical solution as the most complete, lowest risk, and most forward-leaning of all submissions. They cited our GroupAssure integration strategy as the defining strength of our proposal. ICF was awarded the SAFE contract, valued at approximately \$12M over five years, and immediately became SSA's trusted modernization partner for its physical security and compliance systems.

Within the first year, we delivered new SAFE enhancements faster than the incumbent had produced in the prior three years, strengthened role-based access governance, and automated reporting processes that previously required significant manual effort.

Winning SAFE significantly expanded ICF's federal security portfolio and positioned the firm as a leader in identity, compliance automation, and security workflow modernization across SSA.

LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES DEMONSTRATED

This example showcases Customer Obsession (understanding SSA's mission and constraints), Dive Deep (unpacking SAFE architecture and SMACS integration), Invent & Simplify (introducing GroupAssure as a modernization engine), Ownership (leading capture and solution strategy end-to-end), Earn Trust (building a low-risk transition plan), Insist on the Highest Standards, and Deliver Results (winning the contract and accelerating modernization post-award).

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