The Return on Knowing Sooner

An ROI Framework for Death Master File Matching

A Rocket Vetting White Paper

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Published: October 2026

In brief. When someone on your list dies and you don't find out, money keeps going out the door: pension checks, benefit payments, monthly fees paid on the person's behalf. Some comes back, at a cost in staff time; some never does. Insurers face the opposite problem: unpaid benefits owed to families. The federal government measured what better death data is worth: in 2024, Treasury's use of the full Social Security death file returned about 23 times its cost. This paper gives you a worksheet, not a promised number. You fill in your own roster size, payments and detection delays. The biggest lever is time. Rocket Vetting is autonomous and continuous: it runs without manual effort, checks your roster as SSA's death data updates, and communicates anomalies in minutes, not days or months. The paper also covers voter registration offices, where the payoff is accurate rolls and compliance with federal list-maintenance law.

Key terms

- **Limited Access Death Master File (LADMF):** the Social Security Administration's (SSA's) file of reported deaths, available to certified users through the National Technical Information Service (NTIS).
- **Improper payment:** a payment that should not have been made or was made in the wrong amount; an **overpayment**, such as a check paid after death, is one kind.
- **Detection delay:** the time between a death and the moment your organization knows about it and stops payment.
- **Return on investment (ROI):** net benefit divided by cost. **Payback** is how many months of benefit it takes to cover a year's cost.

1. Why delays after death cost money

Every month between a death and its detection adds another payment that must be stopped, traced and reclaimed. Three costs follow. **Payments that are never recovered:** the U.S. Office of Personnel Management's (OPM's) Inspector General found that short-term overpayments, often from a death just before the month's payment or a family's "month or two" delay in reporting, "are usually recovered in full"; the paramount concern was deaths undetected for years. **The work of recovery:** even money that comes back costs staff time. **Regulatory exposure:** auditors and regulators treat death matching as a basic control.

Three public audits show how delay builds:

- **Massachusetts State Retirement Board.** A 2016 state audit found $687,491 paid to 105 deceased pensioners, dead a median of 103 days (range 5 to 403). A vendor data gap had cut recent deaths out of the board's quarterly matches. The board later recovered about $608,785 (net); auditors encouraged monthly matching.
- **CalPERS.** A 2021 internal audit of 30 aged overpayment receivables found deaths identified an average of 47 months after death, leaving $2.34 million outstanding; open receivables passed $41.6 million in July 2020. Management disputed the sample, which targeted older, larger cases, and CalPERS reported an overall average of 21 days from death to notification. The late tail is where money is lost.
- **OPM.** From FY2006 through FY2010, OPM paid more than $601 million to deceased federal annuitants, about $120 million a year. Amounts owed back rose 70% (from $66 million to $113 million), against 19% growth in annuity payments.

2. What the government measured

The best evidence on the value of death data comes from the federal government's own payment-integrity system. Treasury's **Do Not Pay** service checks payments against eligibility data before money goes out. Starting in December 2023, a three-year pilot gave it access to SSA's full Death Master File, including state-reported deaths it had lacked before.

Measure	Result	Source
Improper payments prevented or recovered, calendar year 2024	$113.5 million	GAO-26-107181
Cost of the pilot in that year	$4.6 million	GAO-26-107181
Return on investment	About 23 times cost	GAO-26-107181
Projected net benefit over 3 years	More than $337 million	GAO-26-107181
Increase in death matches with the full file (5-month pilot)	139%	Treasury, Jan. 2025

Congress made the arrangement permanent. The **Ending Improper Payments to Deceased People Act** (Pub. L. 119-77), signed February 10, 2026, takes effect December 27, 2026. For context, federal agencies estimated $186 billion in improper payments in FY2025, about $153 billion of it overpayments. That total covers all causes, not only deaths.

Treasury's result shows that better death data pays for itself many times over at national scale. It does not predict any one organization's return; that depends on your roster, your payments and your current delays.

3. Sector snapshots

Medicaid

States pay managed care organizations a monthly fee, called a **capitation payment**, for each enrollee. When an enrollee's death goes unrecorded, the fee keeps going out. HHS's Inspector General estimated

$207.5 million ($138.6 million federal share) in unallowable capitation payments for deceased enrollees from July 2021 through June 2022, across 35 states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico. Earlier audits of 14 states found more than $249 million. In Ohio, it estimated at least $51.3 million not recovered over two years, partly because caseworkers were not always notified of deaths the state's systems had received.

Life insurers

For insurers, the risk runs the other way: unpaid benefits owed to beneficiaries. A multistate investigation launched in 2011 found insurers had used the Death Master File to stop annuity payments but not to find deceased policyholders. By 2018 it had led insurers to pay nearly $10 billion to beneficiaries, with settlements or concluded investigations covering 31 of the top 40 life insurers. MetLife's 2012 settlement required the company to compare its records against the Death Master File at least monthly and to pay $40 million for the states' examination and monitoring costs. MetLife estimated about $438 million in insurance in force for affected policyholders, and it agreed that periodic Death Master File matching "is a best practice." Here the return is mainly avoided penalties, examination costs and liability.

Voter registration

Federal law requires states to make a reasonable effort to remove deceased registrants from voter rolls, and to coordinate their statewide lists with state death records. Pew's 2012 study estimated more than 1.8 million deceased people listed as voters nationwide, and about 24 million registrations (one in eight) that were invalid or significantly inaccurate.

Rocket Vetting's own review. In January 2026, Rocket Vetting reviewed about 207 million voter registration records from 47 states and the District of Columbia. Matching on name and date of birth (not SSN) against the LADMF, it found more than 500,000 registrations matching people recorded as deceased: roughly 1 in 410 records. The review did not examine voting records or ballots. It makes no claim that any deceased person voted; it measures registrations of deceased people still on the rolls. As with any name-and-date-of-birth match, each record should be confirmed under the office's own procedures before removal. Pew's study and Rocket Vetting's review differ in method and date and should not be compared directly.

4. The ROI worksheet

The worksheet uses your own numbers. Do not substitute national totals: a national dollar figure divided by your share of the population is not your savings.

The delay lever. In the worksheet below, the overpayment line (A) grows with every month of detection delay saved ($L_{now} - L_{rv}$). The audits in Section 1 show how large L_{now} can get: a 103-day median in Massachusetts under quarterly matching, 47 months in a CalPERS sample of older cases (a sample management disputed), and the "month or two" families often take to report a death (OPM). Rocket Vetting is autonomous and continuous: it runs without manual effort, checks your roster as SSA's death data updates, and, by Rocket Vetting's design, identifies and communicates anomalies in minutes, not

days or months. Detection still depends on when SSA records a death; what Rocket Vetting removes is the wait between scheduled, manual matches. Use your own measured L_now, and set L_rv to reflect SSA's reporting lag for your population, not zero.

Line	Input or calculation	Your value
N	Records on roster	
m	Annual death rate in your population (for example, from SSA's period life table for your age mix)	
D	**Deaths per year = N × m**	
P	Monthly payment per person (or value at risk per record)	
L_now	Average months from death to detection today	
L_rv	Average months from death to detection with Rocket Vetting	
u	Share of post-death payments never recovered (1 minus recovery rate)	
A	**Overpayment avoided = D × P × (L_now − L_rv) × u**	
R	Recovery cases avoided per year × cost per case	
S	Staff time saved = hours per year on manual death checks × loaded hourly rate	
F	Settlements, fines or audit costs avoided per year (expected value)	
B	**Annual benefit = A + R + S + F**	
C	Annual cost: Rocket Vetting fees	
ROI	**(B − C) ÷ C**	
Payback	**C ÷ (B ÷ 12), in months**	

Count only the unrecovered share (u) as a loss in line A; recovered money appears in line R as staff cost. Use a death rate that matches your population: on SSA's 2023 period life table, annual death probability is about 1.1% for a 60-year-old man and about 5.6% for an 80-year-old man.

Rocket Vetting customers do not need their own LADMF certification. Their Terms of Service agreement with Rocket Vetting fulfills SSA's LADMF requirements, so line C has no separate NTIS subscription or certification fees.

Illustrative example

Every input below is made up for illustration. None is a Rocket Vetting price, result or customer figure.

Line	Example input (made up)	Result
N, m	20,000 retirees; 2% annual death rate	D = 400 deaths per year
P, L_now − L_rv, u	$1,800 per month; 2 months saved; 10% never recovered	A = 400 × $1,800 × 2 × 0.10 = $144,000
R	200 recovery cases avoided × $100 each	$20,000
S	500 staff hours × $50 per hour	$25,000
F	None assumed	$0
B	A + R + S + F	$189,000
C	Annual cost (made up)	$60,000
ROI	($189,000 − $60,000) ÷ $60,000	2.15 (215%)
Payback	$60,000 ÷ ($189,000 ÷ 12)	About 3.8 months

5. Voter registration offices: a different return

Voter offices do not recover payments. Their return is accuracy, cost avoided and legal defensibility.

Line	Input or calculation	Your value
D_v	Deceased registrations identified and confirmed per year	
k	Cost per bad record: returned mailings, printing, poll-book pages, staff handling	
Cost avoided	**D_v × k**	
S	Staff time saved on manual obituary and death-record checks	
Compliance value	Documented, regular death matching (see below)	Qualitative

There is no authoritative published cost per deceased registration; use your own mailing and handling costs for k. One published reference point: a 2008 Pew study with Oregon found that state and local taxpayers spent $4.11 per active voter to maintain the list, or $7.67 per registration transaction.

Compliance value comes from federal list-maintenance law:

- **NVRA, 52 U.S.C. § 20507(a)(4):** states must conduct a general program that makes a reasonable effort to remove ineligible voters by reason of death.
- **NVRA, § 20507(c)(2):** the 90-day pre-election limit on systematic removals does not bar removals by reason of death.
- **NVRA, § 20507(i):** records of list-maintenance programs must be kept for at least two years and made available for public inspection.
- **HAVA, 52 U.S.C. § 21083(a)(2) and (a)(4):** statewide lists must be coordinated with state death records and maintained regularly, with safeguards so eligible voters are not removed in error.

Regular, documented matching against the national death file supports each of these duties and gives an office a record to show when its list maintenance is questioned.

Timing matters here too. Many offices learn of deaths through periodic reporting cycles in which staff prepare and load data files, in some programs at intervals of up to 60 days, so a death can take weeks to reach the office. Rocket Vetting runs continuously and autonomously instead, and identifies and communicates likely matches within minutes of a death appearing in SSA's data. Because the federal 90-day limit does not bar removals by reason of death, faster detection stays useful even close to an election.

About Rocket Vetting

Rocket Vetting (rocketvetting.com) is a death-record vetting service, publicly launched on September 22, 2026, that matches customer rosters against the LADMF for benefits and pension administrators, insurers, voter registration offices, and finance and HR teams. It runs autonomously and continuously on the customer's own hardware, inside the customer's firewall, where names, SSN parts and roster keys are hashed and tokenized before any data leaves; matching runs on keyed hashes, not plain names (see

Private and Secure by Design). Under the LADMF certification program (15 CFR Part 1110), FSC goes through an annual certification process with NTIS and an independent attestation and audit every three years.

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