

Rapid Appeals Modernization Program (RAMP) Phase 2 Standard Operating Procedure (SOP)

In This Section This section contains the following topics:

Topic	Topic Name
1	Overview of RAMP
2	Opt-In Intake Procedures
3	Higher-Level Review (HLR)
4	Supplemental Claims
5	RAMP Decision Notification Requirements
6	RAMP Sample Letter Templates

Background

The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) will conduct a pilot program, the Rapid Appeals Modernization Program (RAMP), which allows most Veterans who have a pending legacy appeal to opt into VBA's **supplemental claim** or **higher-level review** lanes in the new claims and appeals process signed into law on August 23, 2017. VBA will administer this pilot during the 18-month period after enactment allowed for full implementation of the new process and continue processing elections by Veterans as long as necessary thereafter to continue to accelerate resolution of legacy appeals.

This conversion of legacy workload to new process workload will be phased based upon the age of the appeal, either overall or by appeal stage, or whether the Veteran has requested VBA's Decision Review Officer (DRO) review process or a Board of Veterans' Appeals (Board) hearing, as well as other factors. VBA will also test consolidation of the workload at certain regional offices that have capacity and proven workload management expertise. Most importantly, Veterans will benefit from the early resolution opportunities and effective date for benefits protection features of the new process.

RAMP requires opt-in notices to Veterans, training for claims processors and Veterans Service Organization (VSO) representatives and development of systems updates and controls to track and execute decisions under the supplemental claim and higher-level review lanes. The pilot will be conducted in phases. Phase 1 will begin in November 2017. Training for Phase 2 will begin in February 2018.

1. Overview of RAMP

Introduction

This topic contains information about RAMP, including:

- description of RAMP,
 - appeals eligible for RAMP processing,
 - Phase 1 of RAMP,
 - Phase 2 of RAMP,
 - opt-in notification letters,
 - centralized processing of RAMP, and
 - public contact concerning RAMP.
-

a. Description of RAMP

- Under RAMP, appellants will be allowed early participation in the new **supplemental claim** and **higher-level review** lanes beginning in November 2017.
 - Participation in RAMP is only open to Veterans with a legacy compensation appeal and is voluntary.
 - Participants must elect to have all of their appeal issues reviewed as a whole under only one lane option at a time.
 - RAMP will run continuously through the 18-month implementation period for the *Veterans Appeals Modernization and Improvement Act of 2017*.
 - VBA will continue to process elections as long as necessary to continue to accelerate resolution of legacy appeals.
 - During RAMP, VA will pilot the higher-level review and supplemental claims concepts, as well as the new decision notification requirements.
 - Employees processing RAMP reviews will follow the procedures provided in this SOP in addition to existing M21-1 guidance for developing evidence.
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b. Appeals Eligible for RAMP Processing

Participation in RAMP is only open to Veterans who have a **compensation benefit** appeal pending in the current (legacy) appeals process at the time of processing of the election form.

Updated
4/20/2018

To be eligible the appeal must be:

- an active appeal pending for a compensation claim and
- in one of the following appeals stages:
 - NOD
 - Form 9
 - Certified to the Board (not activated)
 - Remand

VA **will not** accept an election to participate in RAMP if the above noted conditions are not met. Additionally, if a Veteran no longer has an appeal in

one of the stages noted above at the time of intake, intake personnel must notify the Veteran of his or her ineligibility for RAMP as noted under section 2.c. of this SOP.

Note: Other issues on appeal, such as pension claims, survivors claims, insurance claims, or loan guaranty claims are excluded from processing under RAMP in addition to compensation appeals in the following stages:

- Certified to the Board (Activated: formally placed on the Board’s docket)
- Remand Returned

Excluded appeals will remain pending in the current (legacy) appeals process.

c. Phase 1 of RAMP

RAMP will be rolled out in phases. Phase 1 of RAMP began on November 1, 2017 and concludes March 31, 2018. Veteran participation in Phase 1 is by invitation only.

During Phase 1, VA began offering the opportunity to opt-in to Veterans who met the eligibility requirements in section 1.b. and had some of the oldest appeals in all eligible appeals stages. In the first initial monthly mailing, VA excluded participation of Veterans who were represented by a private attorney. In subsequent mailings, this exclusion was removed.

Reference: For additional information on participation requirements, see AMO Policy Letter 18-01, *Rapid Appeals Modernization Program* (Revised on April 2, 2018).

d. Phase 2 of RAMP

During Phase 2, which begins April 2, 2018, VA will continue to notify Veterans eligible to participate in RAMP through monthly mailings; however, VA will open RAMP to more Veterans by removing the requirement that Veterans first receive an invitation from VA in order to elect participation in the program.

In addition, VA will provide representatives with a “Representative RAMP Election” form that they may use to file on a Veteran’s behalf.

d. Opt-in Notification Letters

In November 2017, VA began mailing letters to appellants notifying them of the opportunity to participate in RAMP. The letter contains a response page that allows appellants to notify us of their desire to opt-in to the program and which lane they want their appeal(s) to be processed. VA will continue to mail notice letters to eligible Veterans throughout RAMP.

e. Centralized Processing of RAMP

Initially all intake and claims processing activities will be centralized at the Appeals Resource Center (ARC).

VBA will expand processing activities to other locations as needed.

f. Public Contact Concerning RAMP

When engaging in public contact concerning RAMP, use the approved scripts and frequently asked questions (FAQs) available on the [VA Contact Center Knowledge Management](#) webpage.

If a Veteran with an accredited representative has questions about participating in RAMP or needs assistance, encourage the Veteran to speak with his or her representative (Veterans Service Organization, attorney, or claims agent) to discuss whether to participate in RAMP. Do not advise or encourage a represented Veteran to participate in RAMP or select one lane over another. Notify the Veteran that his or her accredited representative can assist in determining the best review option for the appeal(s) and can file an election on the Veteran's behalf.

If a Veteran does not have a representative, or wants to change his or her representative, provide a listing of the recognized Veterans Service Organizations and/or representatives.

g. Concurrent Claims Not Allowed

As with issues on appeal, issues under RAMP cannot be concurrently processed with a claim.

**Added
4/20/2018**

When processing a new claim, intake personnel must review VACOLS to see if the issue(s) claimed are currently on appeal and review to see if the issue(s) are a contention on an active or closed RAMP EP (682/683). RAMP issues are historical in VACOLS.

If a Veteran files a claim for an issue currently in RAMP,

- generate the "Claim already on Appeal" letter in *Letter Creator* available under the "IPC" area category,
- select the option for RAMP, and
- send the letter to the Veteran and representative, if applicable.

If a Veteran requests reconsideration or files a legacy NOD for any contention processed (active or closed EPs) under RAMP, forward the document to the ARC for processing.

**h. Inextricably
Intertwined
Issues/
Downstream
Issues**

**Added
5/4/2018**

As with issues on appeal, an issue is *inextricably intertwined* with a matter(s) in RAMP when a decision on that issue by the regional office (RO) could have a significant impact on the matter(s) being reviewed under RAMP.

When this occurs, any intertwined issues must be brought into RAMP and addressed according to the procedures included in this SOP to include notice requirements. This also applies to any downstream issues.

A *downstream issue* is an issue which arises as a direct result of a favorable decision on an issue and must be addressed by the decision maker.

Example: A Veteran files an appeal for service connection (SC) for depression and elects RAMP. When granting SC for depression, the DRO must address the following downstream issues:

- disability evaluation
- effective date, and
- entitlement to any ancillary benefits that arise, based upon the evidence, such as
 - individual unemployability (IU)
 - Dependents' Educational Assistance, and/or
 - special monthly compensation (SMC).

Important: A decision on a downstream issue will receive RAMP review rights.

For higher-level reviews, if a Higher-level reviewer cannot fully address a downstream issue or inextricably intertwined issue, the reviewer must follow the procedures for potentially returning the claim for correction or granting of the maximum benefit per 3.j and 3.k below.

2. Opt-In Intake Procedures

Introduction This topic contains information about opt-in intake procedures, including:

- acceptable format of RAMP opt-in elections,
 - RAMP lanes,
 - placing RAMP opt-in elections under control,
 - PCT: Receipt of RAMP Opt-in Election or RAMP Selection,
 - exhibit of RAMP Opt-in Election,
 - exhibit of ARC Coversheet, and
 - placing RAMP SELECTIONS under control.
-

a. Acceptable Format of RAMP Opt-in Elections

To participate in RAMP, the Veteran, or his/her authorized representative, must opt-in in writing. As the opt-in equates to withdrawal of the pending appeal, VBA cannot take the opt-in over the phone.

VBA will not accept opt-in elections in any format other than the *RAMP Opt-In Election* or *Representative Opt-in Election* documents. The notification to opt-in requests a response within 60 days; however, VBA will accept opt-in elections from any qualified appellant or appellant's authorized representative that are received outside of the 60 days submission period.

b. Ramp Lanes

Under RAMP, appellants are offered the opportunity to opt-in to one of the following new Appeals Modernization lanes:

- Higher-Level Review, or
- Supplemental Claim.

Note: After receiving an initial decision under RAMP, Veterans will also have up to one year from the date of the RAMP decision notification letter to file a Notice of Disagreement (NOD) with the Board. The Board will not process NODs submitted in response to RAMP decisions until no earlier than October 2018.

c. Placing RAMP Opt-in Elections Under Control

VA will receive RAMP Opt-in Elections through the Centralized Mail Portal at the centralized intake office. The centralized intake office is the Appeals Resource Center (ARC).

**Updated
4/20/2018**

If an election is received by an office other than the centralized intake office, they will follow the instructions in the Centralized Mail Portal Standard Operating Procedure to route it to the ARC.

When a RAMP Opt-in Election is received in the mail portal, the intake team at the centralized intake office will take the steps in the table below to place the election under control.

Step	Action
1	<p>In VBMS,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure the DOCUMENT TYPE is <i>RAMP Opt-in Election</i>, and • upload the document to the Veteran’s eFolder. <p>If the election is on an approved <i>RAMP Election</i> document, go to step 3.</p> <p>If the election is not on an approved document, go to step 2.</p>
2	<p>Generate the “RAMP Incomplete Election Letter” in Letter Creator.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attach a copy of the “RAMP Opt-in Election” document (see 2.e), • upload the letter to the eFolder with document type “Notification Letter”, • update the subject line with “RAMP Incomplete Election Letter,” • mail the letter and enclosure to the Veteran and a copy to the POA (if applicable), and • document the above actions with a permanent note in VBMS. <p>Use the following text for the permanent note in VBMS.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>RAMP Election received [insert date]. Letter sent to Veteran for ineligibility based on receipt of unapproved election document.</i></p> <p>Reference: See section 6.a. for a sample “RAMP Incomplete Election Letter.”</p>
3	<p>Review the eFolder and VACOLS to determine if the Veteran has an appeal eligible to participate in RAMP.</p> <p>If yes, go to step 4.</p> <p>If no,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • generate the “RAMP Ineligible Letter” in <i>Letter Creator</i>, • select the reason why the Veteran is ineligible, • upload the letter to the eFolder with document type

	<p>“Notification Letter”,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • update the subject line with “RAMP Ineligible Letter,” • mail the letter to the Veteran and a copy to the POA (if applicable), and • document the above actions with a permanent note in VBMS. <p>Use the following text for the permanent note in VBMS.</p> <p><i>RAMP Opt-in Election received [insert date]. RAMP Ineligible Letter sent to Veteran based on [insert ineligible reason].</i></p> <p>Reference: See section 1.b. above for eligibility criteria and section 2.g. for a sample “RAMP Ineligible Letter.”</p>									
4	<p>Using Caseflow Intake, establish an end product (EP) with the appropriate claim label based on the following table:</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>If the appellants elects ...</th> <th>Then establish an EP ...</th> <th>With claim label...</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>higher-level review</td> <td>682</td> <td> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RAMP - Higher-Level Review Rating </td> </tr> <tr> <td>supplemental claim</td> <td>683</td> <td> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RAMP- Supplemental Claim Review Rating </td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	If the appellants elects ...	Then establish an EP ...	With claim label...	higher-level review	682	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RAMP - Higher-Level Review Rating 	supplemental claim	683	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RAMP- Supplemental Claim Review Rating
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5	Close the VACOLS record using Caseflow Intake.									
6	Cancel any associated appeals EPs using SHARE.									

**d. PCT:
Receipt of
RAMP Opt-in
Election or
RAMP
Selection**

VBA will only accept RAMP Opt-in Elections or RAMP SELECTION forms for Veterans who have appeals eligible for RAMP.

When an appellant visits a local office in person and wishes to submit a RAMP Opt-in Election, Public Contact Team personnel should review the VBMS eFolder and VACOLS to determine if a an eligible appeal is pending.

If the appellant has an eligible appeal pending:

- accept the RAMP Opt-in Election,
- date stamp it to preserve the date of receipt,
- fax the RAMP Opt-in Election with the ARC Coversheet on top to the scan vendor as outlined in M21-1, Part III.ii.1.E.3, and
- document your actions in VBMS as a permanent note.

If the appellant *does not* have an eligible appeal pending:

- do not accept the Opt-in Election and
- notify the appellant that he or she does not have an appeal eligible for participation in RAMP at this time.

For RAMP participants who wish to seek additional review of a RAMP decision and want to submit a RAMP SELECTION form, Public Contact Team personnel should review the VBMS eFolder to determine if a RAMP decision was issued for the claim.

If a RAMP decision was provided to the Veteran:

- accept the RAMP SELECTION form,
- date stamp it to preserve the date of receipt,
- fax the RAMP SELECTION with the ARC Coversheet on top to the scan vendor as outlined in M21-1, Part III.ii.1.E.3, and
- document your actions in VBMS as a permanent note.

If a RAMP decision *was not* provided to the Veteran, do not accept the RAMP SELECTION form, and let the Veteran know that the selection is premature or that the Veteran cannot participate in RAMP at this time.

Reference: See 2.f. for a copy of the ARC Coversheet.

**e. Exhibit:
RAMP Opt-in
Election**

The following links contains a sample of the RAMP Opt-in Election and Representative Opt-in Election forms.

[RAMP OPT-IN ELECTION](#)

[REPRESENTATIVE RAMP OPT-IN ELECTION](#)

**f. Exhibit:
ARC
Coversheet**

The following link contains a sample of the ARC Coversheet.

[ARC COVERSHEET](#)

**g. Placing
RAMP
SELECTIONS
Under Control**

When VA receives a RAMP SELECTION form, the intake team at the centralized intake office will take the steps in the table below to place the RAMP SELECTION under control.

Step	Action
1	In VBMS,

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ensure the DOCUMENT TYPE is <i>RAMP Opt-in Election</i>, and • update the SUBJECT LINE with <i>RAMP Refile</i>.
2	<p>Review Caseflow Intake and the eFolder to determine if a “RAMP Decision Notification Letter” was sent to the Veteran for the issue(s) identified on the RAMP SELECTION form.</p> <p>If yes, go to step 3.</p> <p>If no,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • generate the “RAMP Ineligible Letter” in <i>Letter Creator</i>, • select the reason for ineligibility, • upload the letter to the eFolder with document type “Notification Letter,” • update the subject line with “RAMP Ineligible Letter,” • mail the letter to the Veteran and POA if applicable, and • document the above actions with a permanent note in VBMS. <p>Use the following text for the permanent note in VBMS.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>RAMP SELECTION received [insert date]. RAMP Ineligible Letter sent to Veteran based on no RAMP Decision Notification Letter sent to Veteran.</i></p> <p>Reference: See section 6.a. for a sample “RAMP Ineligible Letter” and “RAMP Incomplete Election Letter.”</p>
3	<p>If the lane selection is on the approved RAMP SELECTION document, go to step 4.</p> <p>If the election is NOT on an approved <i>RAMP SELECTION</i> document, send a “RAMP Incomplete Election Letter” to the Veteran with another copy of the “RAMP SELECTION” document.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generate the “RAMP Incomplete Election Letter” in <i>Letter Creator</i>, • select the reason for ineligibility, • upload the letter to the eFolder with document type “Notification Letter”, • update the subject line with “RAMP Incomplete Election Letter,” • mail the letter to the Veteran, and • document the above actions with a permanent note in VBMS.

	<p>Note: If a claimant selects multiple lanes on the RAMP Opt-in Election, the VSR should complete one attempt to contact the Veteran or POA via phone to clarify which lane the claimant intended to select.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If no contact is made, • send the claimant the RAMP Incomplete Election Letter <p>Use the following text for the permanent note in VBMS.</p> <p><i>RAMP SELECTION document received [insert date]. Letter sent to Veteran for ineligibility based on receipt of unapproved selection document.</i></p> <p>Reference: See section 6.a. for a sample “RAMP Ineligible Letter” and “RAMP Incomplete Election Letter.”</p>									
4	<p>Use Caseflow Intake to track receipt of the lane selection and establish an end product (EP) with the appropriate claim label based on the following table:</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="574 890 1398 1226"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="574 890 834 961">If the Veteran elects ...</th> <th data-bbox="834 890 1062 961">Then establish an EP ...</th> <th data-bbox="1062 890 1398 961">With claim label...</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="574 961 834 1077">higher-level review</td> <td data-bbox="834 961 1062 1077">682</td> <td data-bbox="1062 961 1398 1077"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RAMP - Higher-Level Review Rating </td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="574 1077 834 1226">supplemental claim</td> <td data-bbox="834 1077 1062 1226">683</td> <td data-bbox="1062 1077 1398 1226"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RAMP-Supplemental Claim Review Rating </td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	If the Veteran elects ...	Then establish an EP ...	With claim label...	higher-level review	682	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RAMP - Higher-Level Review Rating 	supplemental claim	683	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RAMP-Supplemental Claim Review Rating
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5	<p>Using Caseflow Intake, add the contentions identified on the RAMP SELECTION document to the pending EP.</p>									
6	<p>Generate a RAMP Acknowledgement Letter using <i>Letter Creator</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Upload the letter to the eFolder with document type “Notification Letter”, • update the subject line with “RAMP Acknowledgement Letter,” and • mail the letter to the Veteran and POA if applicable. 									
7	<p>For a higher-level review request, if there is an informal conference request, add a custom tracked item for “Informal Conference” with a suspense of 7 calendar days.</p>									
8	<p>Refer the EP 682 to a Higher-level reviewer for continued processing.</p>									

	For supplemental claim elections, refer the EP 683 to a VSR for processing.
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**h. Placing
Subsequent
RAMP Opt-in
Elections Under
Control**

**Updated
3/29/2018**

As VA continues to mail RAMP Opt-in Notice letters to eligible Veterans, there is the potential for a Veteran to request to participate in RAMP based on a newly filed NOD.

If VA receives a subsequent RAMP Opt-in Election in the mail portal, the intake team at the centralized intake office will take the steps in the table below to place the election under control.

Step	Action
1	<p>Ensure the DOCUMENT TYPE in VBMS is <i>RAMP Opt-in Election</i>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the election is on an approved <i>RAMP Election</i> document, go to step 3. • If the election is not on an approved document, go to step 2.
2	<p>Determine if the Veteran has an eligible appeal pending.</p> <p>If no, go to step 3.</p> <p>If Yes, generate the “RAMP Incomplete Election Letter” in Letter Creator.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attach a copy of the “RAMP Opt-in Election” document (see 2.e), • upload the letter to the eFolder with document type “Appeal Notification Letter”, • update the subject line with “RAMP Incomplete Election Letter,” • mail the letter and enclosure to the Veteran and a copy to the POA (if applicable), and • document the above actions with a permanent note in VBMS. <p>Use the following text for the permanent note in VBMS.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>RAMP Election received [insert date]. Letter sent to Veteran for ineligibility based on receipt of unapproved election document.</i></p> <p>Reference: See section 6.a. for a sample “RAMP Incomplete</p>

	Election Letter.”									
3	<p>Review the eFolder and VACOLS to determine if the Veteran has an appeal eligible to participate in RAMP.</p> <p>If yes, go to step 4.</p> <p>If no,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • generate the “RAMP Ineligible Letter” in <i>Letter Creator</i>, • select the reason why the Veteran is ineligible, • upload the letter to the eFolder with document type “Notification Letter”, • update the subject line with “RAMP Ineligible Letter,” • mail the letter to the Veteran and a copy to the POA (if applicable), and • document the above actions with a permanent note in VBMS. <p>Use the following text for the permanent note in VBMS.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>RAMP Opt-in Election received [insert date]. RAMP Ineligible Letter sent to Veteran based on [insert ineligible reason].</i></p> <p>Reference: See section 1.b. above for eligibility criteria and section 2.g. for a sample “RAMP Ineligible Letter.”</p>									
4	<p>Does the Veteran have any current issue(s) pending in RAMP?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If yes, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -determine which lane the Veteran selected on the RAMP Election form. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ If a current RAMP issue(s) is pending, the new issue(s) may only be processed in the same lane as the current pending RAMP issue(s). • If no, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -proceed to the next step. 									
5	<p>Using Caseflow Intake, establish an end product (EP) with the appropriate claim label based on the following table:</p> <table border="1" style="width: 100%; border-collapse: collapse;"> <thead> <tr> <th style="text-align: left;">If the appellants elects ...</th> <th style="text-align: left;">Then establish an EP ...</th> <th style="text-align: left;">With claim label...</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>higher-level review</td> <td style="text-align: center;">682</td> <td> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RAMP - Higher-Level Review Rating </td> </tr> <tr> <td>supplemental claim</td> <td style="text-align: center;">683</td> <td> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RAMP- Supplemental </td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	If the appellants elects ...	Then establish an EP ...	With claim label...	higher-level review	682	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RAMP - Higher-Level Review Rating 	supplemental claim	683	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RAMP- Supplemental
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			Claim Review Rating
6	Close the VACOLS record using Caseflow Intake.		
7	Refer the election to the designated VSR for processing.		

3. Higher-Level Review

Introduction

This topic contains information about HLR, including:

- definition of higher-level review,
- initial actions by VSR on an HLR,
- higher-level review authority,
- overview of the HLR process,
- definition of informal conference,
- conducting informal conferences,
- HLR informal conference worksheet,
- definition of duty to assist error,
- handling duty to assist errors,
- definition of maximum benefit,
- HLR and closed evidentiary record,
- handling new and relevant evidence received before an opt-in election,
- handling new and relevant evidence received after an opt-in election,
- proper tracking of DTA errors,
- exhibit of HLR Informal Conference Worksheet, and
- exhibit of the Non-Rating HLR Decision Document.

a. Definition: Higher Level Review

A *higher-level review* (HLR) under RAMP will consist of a *de novo* review of the issue(s) previously on appeal.

Important: The Higher-level reviewer will only consider evidence that was before VBA at the time the appellant elected to opt-in to RAMP. VBA **WILL NOT** consider any evidence submitted after the appellant elected the Higher-Level Review lane.

b. Higher-Level Review Authority

Authority to conduct higher-level reviews is granted to Decision Review Officers (DROs) for rating issues and Senior Veterans Service Representatives (SVSRs) or Authorization Quality Review Specialists (AQRs) for non-rating issues.

**Updated
5/4/2018**

Important: This authority cannot be delegated to any other personnel.

c. Overview of the HLR Process

The following table is an overview of the process used by the Higher-level reviewer.

Stage	Description
1	Identify if an informal conference was requested by the claimant.

2	Determine if a duty to assist error was committed in the processing of the prior decision.
3	Determine if evidence was submitted after the HLR election, and if needed, follow the procedures in 3.d.
4	Conduct <i>de novo</i> review of the prior decision, considering any additional evidence submitted prior to the HLR opt-in election.
5	Issue a decision.

d. Initial Actions by VSR on an Initial HLR Request

Updated 5/4/2018

When a Veteran first elects to participate in RAMP and chooses the HLR lane VSRs will conduct the initial review of the HLR and take the following actions:

Step	Action				
1	Review VACOLS and the eFolder to determine what appeal issues are eligible for processing under RAMP.				
2	<p>Send <i>RAMP Appeal Withdrawal Letter</i> in <i>Letter Creator</i>.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generate the letter by adding the appeal issue(s) (e.g. right knee condition, PTSD, Chapter 35 benefits, etc.) being withdrawn to the body of the letter. • Upload the letter to the eFolder with document type “Notification Letter” and • Update the subject line with “<i>RAMP Appeal Withdrawal Letter.</i>” <p><i>Note:</i> Always include the full issue in the letter. (i.e., DO NOT list “effective date”, list “effective date for right knee arthritis.”)</p>				
3	Cancel any related pending appeals EPs using SHARE.				
4	Enter all contentions to the EP 682 Higher-Level Review.				
5	<p>Update the EP 682 claim label based on the type of issue(s).</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="574 1310 1414 1461"> <tr> <td>For “rating” issues use</td> <td>• RAMP - Higher-Level Review Rating</td> </tr> <tr> <td>For “non-rating” issues use</td> <td>• RAMP - Higher-Level Review Non-Rating</td> </tr> </table> <p>If there are both rating and non-rating issues, use the RAMP - Higher-Level Review Rating claim label.</p>	For “rating” issues use	• RAMP - Higher-Level Review Rating	For “non-rating” issues use	• RAMP - Higher-Level Review Non-Rating
For “rating” issues use	• RAMP - Higher-Level Review Rating				
For “non-rating” issues use	• RAMP - Higher-Level Review Non-Rating				
6	Add a “RAMP Participant” flash to the Veteran’s corporate record using SHARE.				
7	<p>If an informal conference is requested, make the claim “ready to work,” add a tracked item for “Informal Conference” and suspense for 7 calendar days. Go to step 8.</p> <p>If there is <i>no request</i>, go to step 8.</p>				
8	Review the eFolder to see if the Veteran alleges treatment at a VA facility. Upload all identified records to the VBMS eFolder.				

	<p>If the Veteran states he or she received treatment by VA but does not provide the name of a specific VAMC or facility,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • conduct an enterprise-wide search in CAPRI/AWIV for any relevant VA treatment records and • upload any identified records dated on or before the date of receipt of the RAMP Opt-in Election. <p>Reference: For instructions on adding VA treatment records to the eFolder, see 3.t and 4.h.</p>
9	Make the claim ready for decision.

**e. Definition:
Informal
Conference**

For the purposes of RAMP, an *informal conference* is defined as contact with a claimant and/or his or her representative, telephonically, or as determined by VA, for the sole purpose of allowing the claimant or representative to identify any errors of law or fact in a prior decision.

**f. Conducting
Informal
Conferences**

**Updated
5/4/2018**

When requested by the claimant or authorized representative, VA will conduct one informal conference during a higher-level review. The Higher-level reviewer with determinative authority over the issue will conduct the informal conference. VA will not accept any new evidence to support the issue(s) under higher-level review during the informal conference.

Informal conferences will take place telephonically. On a case-by-case basis, VA may make an exception and conduct the informal conference in person when good cause is shown as to why telephonic communication cannot take place.

If the claimant or representative requests an informal conference on the RAMP opt-in response, the Higher-level reviewer will make two attempts to contact the Veteran or his or her representative to schedule the informal conference **within the next 7 business days from contact.**

An informal conference may be conducted with only the authorized representative. The Veteran is not required to be present on the call when he or she has an authorized representative.

If contact cannot be made on the first attempt,

- the Higher-level reviewer will leave a general voicemail message requesting a call back at 1-800-827-1000 if possible,
- document the unsuccessful contact on [VA Form 27-0820, Report of General Information](#),
- add a permanent note in VBMS, documenting the reason for the call and

- requesting the National Call Center document the Veteran's availability if the Veteran calls back, and
- suspense the EP 682 for three business days.

For the permanent note in VBMS, indicate if a voicemail was left, and use the following text:

I called the Veteran regarding his or her request for an informal conference for the pending higher-level review. When he or she returns my call, please complete a formatted VA Form 27-0820 and capture a date and time when the Veteran is available to receive a call to conduct the informal conference in the next week.

Note: If a voicemail could not be left, provide the note above and indicate that a voicemail **was not** left.

If contact cannot be made on the second attempt,

- document the unsuccessful contact on VA form 27-0820,
- close the associated tracked item,
- add a permanent note in VBMS, and
- provide a copy of the form to the Veteran's accredited representative (if applicable) and associate it with the eFolder.

If contact is made,

- document it on a HLR Informal Conference Worksheet,
- close the associated tracked item, and
- provide a copy of this documentation to the Veteran's accredited representative and associate it with the electronic claims folder (eFolder).

**g. POA
Contact for
Informal
Conferences**

When attempting to schedule and conduct an informal conference for a Veteran with an authorized representative, make sure to contact the representative first.

Review the RAMP election form for the name of the POA and the contact information.

Check to ensure VA Form 21-22, *Appointment of Veterans Service Organization as Claimant's Representative* or VA Form 21-22a, *Appointment of Individual As Claimant's Representative*, is of record for the identified POA.

Validate the accreditation status of the representative by locating the POA within the Office of General Counsel [accreditation database](https://www.va.gov/ogc/apps/accreditation/index.asp) at <https://www.va.gov/ogc/apps/accreditation/index.asp>.

If the POA is not accredited, DO NOT contact the POA. Call the Veteran at the contact number of record to conduct the informal conference.

If the POA is accredited, make contact with the POA to coordinate the informal conference with the Veteran.

Contact management for assistance in locating contact information for a POA, when needed.

Reference: For a sample of the *HLR Informal Conference Worksheet*, see section 3.o.

**h. HLR
Informal
Conference
Worksheet**

**Updated
5/4/2018**

Use the *HLR Informal Conference Worksheet* to

- document the informal conference, and
- describe specific error(s) of fact or law identified by the claimant or representative.

During an informal conference a Veteran or representative may indicate a desire to add to the evidentiary record or requests review of evidence outside the scope of the higher-level review. If the Veteran or representative requests to change the lane selection to the Supplemental Claim lane, the Higher-level reviewer will

- document the request on the *HLR Informal Conference Worksheet*,
- close the tracked item for the informal conference,
- add a permanent note in VBMS, and
- forward the request to a VSR for action to PCHNG the EP to an EP 683, *RAMP - Supplemental Claim Review - Rating*, for review by an RVSR.

Note: Place the *HLR Informal Conference Worksheet* in the Veteran's eFolder.

Reference: For a sample of the *HLR Informal Conference Worksheet*, see section 3.o.

**i. Definition:
DTA Error**

For the purposes of RAMP, a **duty to assist (DTA) error** is defined as an error in applying the provisions of 38 CFR 3.159 for the gathering of evidence, to include examinations, which occurred prior to the appealed decision.

Reference: For instructions on handling evidence received after the appealed decision that triggers VA's duty to assist, see section 3.l.

**j. Handling
Duty to Assist
Errors or
Missed
Development**

**Updated
5/4/2018**

For the initial selection of higher-level review, the Higher-level reviewer may consider new and relevant evidence that was submitted before receipt of the opt-in election form but after VA’ decision being reviewed. When this evidence requires additional development actions, this is considered *missed development*.

Additionally, a higher-level reviewer may identify a *duty to assist (DTA) error* that took place prior to the **appealed** decision.

When required development is identified in a higher-level review (*missed development or DTA error*), if the reviewer is not able to grant the “maximum benefit” based on the evidence of record for the impacted issue(s), the reviewer must return the issue(s) for readjudication.

Important: Board remand instructions should not be classified as “required development” unless the instructions are for correction of a DTA error as defined in 3.i above. Do NOT return an issue for correction based on remand instructions unless it is for correction of a DTA error.

Reference: For a definition of “maximum benefit”, see section 3.k.

Follow the procedures in the table below when a higher-level review case contains new evidence received prior to the HLR election but after the last decision on an issue(s) that requires development or a duty to assist error is identified.

Note: Issue a decision for any issue not affected by the development action.

Step	Responsible Employee	Action
1	Higher-level reviewer	<p>Can the maximum benefit be granted for any issue?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If <i>yes</i>, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – issue a decision for the issue(s) that can be granted, and – proceed to the next step for any remaining issue. • If <i>no</i>, proceed to the next step. <p>Note: If issuing a rating decision, do not list any deferred issue(s) in the rating decision narrative. Add the issues as a special notation on the codesheet instructing the VSR to refer to the deferred rating sheet.</p>
2	Higher-level reviewer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete deferred rating action for any remaining issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – documenting any relevant evidence, if applicable,

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – detailing the development actions needed – instructing the VSR to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ clear the EP 682 for a complete deferral or promulgate the EP 682 if any issues are decided, ▪ establish an EP 683 with <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ claim label <i>RAMP – HLR – DTA Error</i> or <i>RAMP – HLR – Additional Evidence</i>, and ○ using the date of receipt of the RAMP Election or RAMP SELECTION as the date of claim, and ▪ add the appropriate DTA special issue to a contention, • refer the claim to the VSR, and • proceed to the next step.
3	VSR	<p>Send the <i>HLR DTA</i> letter from <i>Letter Creator</i> to the participant or, if a subsequent development letter is needed, add the following:</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>You elected to participate in the Rapid Appeals Modernization Program (RAMP). VA completed your request for higher-level review, and discovered an error in our duty to assist in gathering evidence in support of your claim. VA will take the following development actions to correct our error and forward your claim to the rating activity for further processing.</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>We are currently working on your claim.</i></p>
4	VSR	Complete required development activity.
5	VSR	Once all records development is complete, make the claim ready for decision and refer to an RVSR for a new rating decision.

**k. Definition:
Maximum
Benefit**

For the purposes of RAMP, ***maximum benefit*** is defined as the highest schedular evaluation allowed by law and regulation for the issue under review. For ancillary benefits, an award of the benefit sought is the ***maximum benefit***.

Important: The above definition applies even if the issue under appeal is service connection.

l. HLR and

If a Veteran opts to participate in RAMP through the Higher-Level Review

**Closed
Evidentiary
Record**

**Updated
4/20/18**

lane first, the record will be considered closed as of the date the HLR election is received by VBA. This means any decision issued should consider both the evidence in the prior decision, as well as the evidence received after the decision, but before the opt-in election was received.

For RAMP participants who receive a RAMP decision on a supplemental claim and wish to continue to seek review under the RAMP Higher-Level Review lane, the evidentiary record is closed as of the date of the notification letter for the RAMP decision being reviewed.

**m. Handling
New and
Relevant
Evidence
Received After
an Opt-in
Election**

**Updated
5/4/2018**

Follow the procedure in the table below when a RAMP HLR contains new and relevant evidence submitted ~~with or~~ after the RAMP HLR election.

Step	Action						
1	<p>Attempt to contact the RAMP participant based on the following table.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="573 890 1414 1150"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="573 890 995 928">If the participant ...</th> <th data-bbox="995 890 1414 928">Then ...</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="573 928 995 1073">has a representative</td> <td data-bbox="995 928 1414 1073">attempt to contact the representative first and if unsuccessful, contact the participant.</td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="573 1073 995 1150">does not have a representative</td> <td data-bbox="995 1073 1414 1150">make two attempts to contact the participant.</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	If the participant ...	Then ...	has a representative	attempt to contact the representative first and if unsuccessful, contact the participant.	does not have a representative	make two attempts to contact the participant.
If the participant ...	Then ...						
has a representative	attempt to contact the representative first and if unsuccessful, contact the participant.						
does not have a representative	make two attempts to contact the participant.						
2	<p>Was contact with the participant or representative successful?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If <i>yes</i>, explain to the participant or representative that for the evidence to be considered, he or she must elect a supplemental claim, but that if HLR is still desired, VBA will not be able to consider the submitted evidence as part of the HLR, and proceed to the next step. • If <i>no</i>, proceed with the HLR process without considering the new evidence, and proceed to Step 4. <p><i>Note:</i> Document</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • successful contact on <i>VA Form 27-0820, Report of General Information</i>, or • unsuccessful attempts as a permanent VBMS note. 						
3	<p>Did the participant elect the supplemental claim route?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If <i>yes</i>, refer the claim to the VSR to change the EP 682 to an EP 683, <i>Supplemental Claim</i>. • If <i>no</i>, proceed with the HLR process without considering the 						

	new evidence, and proceed to Step 4.
4	<p>Document evidence received but not considered in the HLR by adding the following statement to the rating decision INTRODUCTION field in VBMS-R:</p> <p><i>The evidentiary record closed upon receipt of your election for higher-level review. VA received additional evidence after your election that was not considered as part of this decision. If you would like VA to consider this evidence, you may submit a supplemental claim at any time; however, VA must receive your application within one year of the date of notice of this decision to preserve your right to receive the maximum possible benefit.</i></p>

n. Non-Rating Higher-Level Review Process

For the purposes of RAMP, a Higher-level reviewer will complete a decision on a non-rating issue on a ***Non-rating Higher-level Review Decision Document***.

This document will be completed for grants and denials.

Reference: See 3.s for a copy of the decision document.

o. Handling Non-Rating HLR decision document

Once the Non-rating HLR Decision Document is complete, upload the decision document in VBMS according to the Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS) User Guide.

The decision notification letter for a non-rating higher-level review decision will include a copy of the Non-rating HLR decision document as an enclosure.

p. Proper Tracking of DTA Errors

To ensure proper tracking, when the Higher-level reviewer returns a claim for correction of a duty to assist (DTA) error,

- establish an EP 683 with claim label *RAMP – HLR DTA Error Rating or RAMP – HLR DTA Error Non-Rating*,
- use the date of receipt of the election for higher-level review as the date of claim,
- list all remaining contentions, and
- assign the appropriate DTA special issue to one of the contentions based on the table below.

If the DTA error involved ...	Then use the ...
private medical records	<i>DTA – PMRs</i> special issue.

Federal records	<i>DTA – Fed Recs</i> special issue.
other records	<i>DTA – Other Recs</i> special issue.
an examination or medical opinion	<i>DTA – Exam/MO</i> special issue.

**q. Exhibit:
HLR Informal
Conference
Worksheet**

The following link contains a sample of the *HLR Informal Conference Worksheet*.

[HLR INFORMAL CONFERENCE WORKSHEET](#)

**s. Exhibit:
Non-Rating**

The following link contains a sample of the *Non-Rating HLR Decision Document*.

[NON-RATING HLR DECISION DOCUMENT](#)

**t. Missing VA
Treatment
Records**

For higher-level reviews, the evidentiary record is closed. **When a Veteran first opts into RAMP and selects a higher-level review, the record closes upon receipt of the RAMP Opt-in Election.**

**Added
2/27/2018**

**Updated
5/4/2018**

When a Veteran requests subsequent higher-level review under RAMP, the evidentiary record closes at the time of the prior RAMP decision. If the Veteran or representative alleged treatment at a VA facility but the records were not properly associated with the eFolder prior to VA issuing the decision under review and were not listed as part of the evidence on the prior decision, document this as a duty to assist error. The Higher-level reviewer must return any impacted issue(s) for correction unless the reviewer can grant the maximum benefit.

Reference: For guidance on associating VA treatment records with the eFolder, see 4.h.

4. Supplemental Claims

Introduction This topic contains information about supplemental claims, including:

- definition of
 - supplemental claim
 - new and relevant evidence
 - initial actions by VSR on a supplemental claim
 - supplemental claim decision authority
 - overview of the supplemental claim process,
 - authority to overturn prior decision, and
 - review for new and relevant evidence.
-

a. Definition: Supplemental Claim For the purposes of RAMP, a *supplemental claim* is a request by an appellant to have their appeal(s) reviewed by VBA based on additional evidence that is *new and relevant* to the benefit(s) sought.

For initial requests to participate in RAMP, VA will consider the Veteran’s submission of the RAMP Opt-in Election form to be a complete application as new and relevant evidence is presumed to be of record.

For all subsequent requests, a supplemental claim must be filed on the appropriate application form, with *new and relevant* evidence, or the Veteran must identify *new and relevant* evidence that VA can assist in gathering, to be a complete application.

Note: VA will not decide a claim on the merits for incomplete applications.

b. Definition: New and Relevant *New evidence* means evidence not previously submitted to agency adjudicators, and *relevant evidence* means evidence that tends to prove or disprove a matter in issue in a claim. The “new and relevant” evidentiary standard will not impose a higher standard than that of “new and material” under 38 CFR 3.156.

Note: For purposes of RAMP, an initial election for supplemental claim review will be presumed to have new and relevant evidence warranting a decision on the merits. See 4.a.

c. Initial Actions by VSR on a When a Veteran elects to participate in RAMP and requests review under the Supplemental Claim lane, VSRs will conduct the initial review of the

Supplemental Claim

supplemental claim and take the following actions:

Step	Action				
1	<p>Determine if this is the Veteran’s first lane selection under RAMP.</p> <p>If this is the first lane selection submitted on a RAMP Opt-in Election document, go to step 2.</p> <p>If this is not the first lane selection, but is a request to seek review of a RAMP decision, confirm that the contentions are listed correctly on the EP and go to step 5.</p>				
2	<p>For the initial lane selection only, review VACOLS and the eFolder to determine what appeal issues are eligible for processing under RAMP.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generate the “RAMP Appeal Withdrawal Letter” in <i>Letter Creator</i> by adding the appeal issue(s) being withdrawn to the body of the letter (e.g. PTSD, right knee, Chapter 35 benefits, etc.), • upload the letter to the eFolder with document type “Notification Letter”, • update the subject line with “<i>RAMP Appeal Withdrawal Letter</i>”, and • mail the letter to the Veteran and a copy to the POA (if applicable). <p><i>Note:</i> Do not list “effective date” as an issue. You must indicate what issue the Veteran is appealing the effective date for.</p> <p>Then go to step 3.</p>				
3	Enter all contentions to the EP 683 using VBMS.				
4	Add a “RAMP Participant” flash to the Veteran’s corporate record and cancel any associated pending appeals EPs using SHARE.				
5	<p>Update the EP 683 claim label based on the type of issue(s).</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="574 1591 1414 1745"> <tbody> <tr> <td data-bbox="574 1591 870 1667">For “rating” issue(s) use</td> <td data-bbox="870 1591 1414 1667"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RAMP – Supplemental Claim Review Rating </td> </tr> <tr> <td data-bbox="574 1667 870 1745">For “non-rating” issue(s) use</td> <td data-bbox="870 1667 1414 1745"> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RAMP – Supplemental Claim Review Non-Rating </td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>If there are both rating and non-rating issues, track under the rating issues claim label.</p>	For “rating” issue(s) use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RAMP – Supplemental Claim Review Rating 	For “non-rating” issue(s) use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RAMP – Supplemental Claim Review Non-Rating
For “rating” issue(s) use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RAMP – Supplemental Claim Review Rating 				
For “non-rating” issue(s) use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • RAMP – Supplemental Claim Review Non-Rating 				
6	Complete any additional development actions needed based on				

	any new and relevant evidence in accordance with existing M21-1 procedures.
7	If the participant has not submitted additional evidence yet and it has been less than 30 days since the opt-in election was received, create a custom tracked item, <i>RAMP Pending Evidence</i> , with a suspense date equivalent to the remainder of the 30-day period.
8	Once all development activity has been completed, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • make the claim ready for decision by closing all tracked items and manually changing the claim status to “Ready for Decision” and • refer to an RVSR.

d. Supplemental Claim Decision Authority

For supplemental claims, RVSRs have decision making authority for rating issues and VSRs have decision making authority for non-rating issues.

Important: This authority cannot be delegated to other personnel.

Updated 5/4/2018

e. Overview of the Supplemental Claim Process

The following table is an overview of the supplemental claim process.

Stage	Description
1	Determines if additional evidence requires VBA to perform duty to assist.
2	Once all duty to assist requirements are complete, issue a decision.

f. Authority to Overturn Prior Decision

Any decision to award previously denied benefits under the Supplemental Claim lane must be based on an evidentiary record that contains *new and relevant evidence* or a clear and unmistakable error is identified in the prior decision. There is no difference of opinion authority based on the prior evidentiary record alone.

g. Review for New and Relevant Evidence

When a Veteran first elects to participate in RAMP and selects the Supplemental Claim lane,

- complete a rating decision on the merits regardless of whether new and relevant evidence is of record, and
- clear the appropriate end product.

For all subsequent elections to file a supplemental claim, the Veteran must submit new and relevant evidence. If no new and relevant evidence is submitted or acquired,

- notify the Veteran of his or her incomplete application for supplemental claim review,
- clear the appropriate end product, and
- take no further action.

Note: See the RAMP Letter Guide for a sample “RAMP Incomplete Application Letter”.

h. VA Medical Center Treatment Records

**Added
2/27/2018**

If a Veteran alleges treatment at a VA Medical Center (VAMC) or other VA facility, VA must conduct a search to identify any medical evidence relevant to a pending issue. If medical evidence is available electronically through the Compensation and Pension Record Interchange (CAPRI) or VistA Imaging Advanced Web Image Viewer (AWIV), claims processors must add the records to the eFolder.

A claims processor can create a single collection of pertinent medical records with the CAPRI Report Builder, save the selected records as a portable document format (PDF) document with Adobe PDF or MS Word, and upload the records into VBMS Documents folder using the Upload Document function.

When a Veteran does not identify a specific VA facility, claims processors must

- perform an enterprise search in CAPRI, and
- associate any relevant records with the eFolder.

Reference: For additional guidance on

- associating VA treatment records with the eFolder, see M21-1, III.iii.1.C.2.h and M21-1, III.v.6.G.1.c.
 - associating VA treatment records after a higher-level review, see 3.t.
-

5. RAMP Decision Notification Requirements

Introduction

This topic contains information about RAMP decision notification requirements, including:

- required elements of a decision notice,
 - definition of favorable finding,
 - RAMP rating decision requirements,
 - RAMP decision notification requirements,
 - RAMP decision “Review Rights”, and
 - RAMP Selection form.
-

a Required Elements of a Decision Notice

As part of RAMP, VBA will be testing the new 8-point decision notice requirements. Each decision must include:

- identification of the issues adjudicated
- a summary of the evidence considered
- an explanation of the laws and regulations applicable to the claim
- a summary of any findings made by the adjudicator that are favorable to the claimant,
- identification of the element(s) required to grant the claim(s) that were not met
- if applicable, identification of the criteria that must be satisfied to grant service connection or the next higher level of compensation
- an explanation of how to obtain or access evidence used in making the decision, and
- a summary of the applicable review options available for the claimant to seek further review of the decision.

Reference: See the *RAMP Improved Decision Notification Guide* for instructions on how to address all the required elements in a rating decision.

b. Definition: Favorable Finding

Updated
5/4/2018

Any finding favorable to the claimant made by a VA adjudicator during RAMP, are binding on all VA adjudicators, unless rebutted by clear and unmistakable evidence to the contrary. For the purposes of this section, favorable findings are conclusions on questions of fact or application of law to facts, as established during the course of adjudicating a claim.

A favorable finding is a determination of fact, based on applicable laws and regulations, made by the adjudicator on an issue under review. Favorable findings should relate to a material element that would be required to grant the benefit sought.

Decisionmakers must document all favorable findings for each issue addressed in a decision. Since the findings are based on evidence supported by the record, favorable findings should be specific and indicate the evidence used to support the finding. They may not be documented as general statements.

Adjudicators must state the element satisfied and state the evidence used to support it with the date of the evidence or the date of receipt by VA.

For example: Current diagnosis of right knee arthritis shown on VAMC Houston examination report dated October 3, 2017.

Adjudicators must separately document favorable findings in list format for denied issues.

Reference: See the *RAMP Improved Decision Notification Guide* for additional information and instructions on documenting favorable findings.

**c. RAMP
Rating Decision
Requirements**

In all rating decisions issued under RAMP, insert the following text in the INTRODUCTION field in VBMS-R:

As a result of the enactment of the Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017 (Public Law 115-55), the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is required to change its current appeals process. Under the authority of Public Law 115-55, VA created the Rapid Appeals Modernization Program (RAMP) to provide Veterans with the earliest possible resolution of their claims. You have chosen to participate in RAMP, and you selected to have your claim reviewed under the [Supplemental Claim or Higher-Level Review] lane option.

Reference: See the *RAMP Improved Decision Notification Guide* for instructions on how to address all the required elements identified in 5.a and 5.c.

**d. RAMP
Decision
Notification
Letter
Requirements**

The table below details the additional notification requirements for RAMP decision notices.

VSRs must

- Use PCGL to generate the decision notification letter.
- Include the RAMP participation statement after the salutation.
- Include the following enclosures:
 - Rating Decision
 - RAMP Review Rights

Updated
4/2/2018

- VA Form 21-4138, Statement in Support of Claim, “RAMP Selection”
- Replace the text under the *What You Should Do If You Disagree With Our Decision* section of the notice letter with the text identified in the table below.

Note: DO NOT include a VA Form 4107. The “RAMP Review Rights” document replaces this form. **DO NOT** include VA Form 21-0958, *Notice of Disagreement*.

Reference: See the *RAMP Improved Decision Notification Guide* for a sample notification letter.

If issuing notice of a(n) ...	Then in the decision notice insert ...
HLR decision Or Supplemental Claim decision	<p>If you do not agree with our decision, you should write and tell us why. You have one year from the date of this letter to file one of the following options:</p> <p>For review of a supplemental claim decision, you may</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • File a Supplemental Claim • Request a Higher-Level Review • File an Appeal to the Board of Veterans’ Appeals <p>For review of a higher-level review decision, you may</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • File a Supplemental Claim • File an Appeal to the Board of Veterans’ Appeals <p>Please note: You may not request a higher-level review of a decision on a higher-level review or a decision on an appeal to the Board of Veterans’ Appeals.</p> <p>You must use the attached VA Form 21-4138, Statement in Support of Claim, “RAMP Selection” to notify us of your decision to seek further review. The VA Form 21-4138, “RAMP Selection” is the only form accepted by VA during RAMP.</p>

	<p>If you elect to file an appeal with the Board of Veterans' Appeals, your Notice of Disagreement (NOD) will be assigned a docket number based upon the date of receipt. The Board will begin processing these appeals in the new, more efficient appeals process no earlier than October 2018.</p> <p>The enclosed "<i>RAMP Review Rights</i>," explains your options in greater detail and provides instructions on how to request further review.</p> <p>If you would like to obtain or access evidence used in making this decision, please contact us by telephone, email, or letter as noted below letting us know what you would like to obtain. Some evidence may be obtained online by visiting www.eBenefits.va.gov.</p>
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e. RAMP Decision "Review Rights"

The following link contains a sample of the "RAMP Review Rights" enclosure for decisions issued under RAMP.

[RAMP REVIEW RIGHTS](#)

Reference: See the *RAMP Improved Decision Notification Guide* for a sample notification letter.

f. "RAMP Selection" Form

The following link contains a sample of the "RAMP Selection" enclosure for decisions issued under RAMP.

[RAMP SELECTION](#)

Reference: See the *RAMP Improved Decision Notification Guide* for a sample notification letter.

g. Higher-Level Review Returns (DTA Error or Missed Development)

**Added
3/19/2018**

When a Higher-level reviewer finds a DTA error or missed development, he or she will complete a deferred rating for the issue(s) impacted.

Under the “What We Decided” section of the decision notification letter, include the statement below to notify the Veteran of the disposition of the impacted issue(s).

We completed your request for higher-level review on the following issues. We discovered additional development actions are necessary for us to fulfill our duty to assist in gathering evidence in support of your claim. We will take action to finish our development and notify you once a decision is made on your claim.

- *[Insert Issue]*
- *[Insert Issue]*

Reference: See the ***RAMP Improved Decision Notification Guide*** for a sample notification letter.

h. Updating RAMP EP Contentions prior to Authorization

**Added
5/4/2018**

Prior to authorizing a RAMP EP, VSRs must ensure all adjudicated issues are reflected in the contention list for the EP. This includes any issues included in a rating decision or non-rating issues addressed in the notice letter.

For Example: A Veteran in his appeal requests service connection for diabetes. The Veteran elects RAMP and the diabetes claim is the only pending issue. In the rating decision an RVSR or DRO grants service connection for diabetes and peripheral neuropathy. Prior to authorizing the EP, the VSR must add peripheral neuropathy as a contention.

If the VSR can now grant dependency benefits as part of the award generation because the Veteran now meets the eligibility criteria, the VSR must add the dependency issue(s) to the contention list on the EP prior to authorization.

6. RAMP Sample Letter Templates

Introduction This topic contains samples information on RAMP notice letters content and sample development letter paragraphs described in this SOP.

a. RAMP Letter Templates The *RAMP Letter Guide*, included in the link below, contains templates for the following pre-decisional notification letters that employees must use to provide notice to RAMP participants.

- RAMP Ineligible Letter,
- RAMP Appeal Withdrawal Letter,
- DTA Examination Letter,
- RAMP Incorrect Election Letter,
- RAMP Acknowledgement Letter,
- RAMP Refile Rejection Letter, and
- RAMP Incomplete Application Letter (Supplemental Claim).

[RAMP LETTER GUIDE](#)

Employees must generate the letters using the *Letter Creator* tool on the [Rating Job Aids](https://vbaw.vba.va.gov/bl/21/rating/rat00.htm) page. (<https://vbaw.vba.va.gov/bl/21/rating/rat00.htm>)

b. RAMP DTA Development Letter Paragraph Insert the following paragraph at the top of the development letter sent to the Veteran during RAMP because of identification of a duty to assist error.

You elected to participate in the Rapid Appeals Modernization Program (RAMP) and have your claim reviewed in the Higher-Level Review lane. We completed your request for higher-level review, and discovered an error in our duty to assist in gathering evidence in support of your claim. We will take action to correct our error and forward your claim to the rating activity for further processing under RAMP.

Reference: For DTA errors resulting in an examination use the “DTA Examination Letter” template.

c. RAMP Development Letter Paragraph Insert the following paragraph at the top of any development letter sent to the Veteran during RAMP.

You elected to participate in the Rapid Appeals Modernization Program (RAMP) The following development actions are processed under RAMP.
