Authorization Introduction

Instructor Lesson Plan

Time Required: 1.5 Hours

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| Lesson Description | |
| The information below provides the instructor with an overview of the lesson and the materials that are required to effectively present this instruction. | |
| TMS # | 4183443 |
| Prerequisites | Prior to this lesson, the Senior Veteran Service Representative (SVSR) should have achieved a passing score on the Veteran Service Representative (VSR) Skills Certification Test. The SVSR should also have at least 24 months of VSR experience. This experience includes knowledge of Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) systems including SHARE; VETSNET systems such as Awards, Modern Awards Processing – Development (MAP-D), and Participant Profile; Personnel Information Exchange System (PIES); Defense Personnel Records Information Retrieval System (DPRIS); Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS); and VBMS Awards (VBMS-A). |
| target audience | The target audience for this lesson is a SVSR. Although this lesson is targeted to teach the SVSR, it may be taught to other VA personnel as mandatory or refresher type training. |
| Time Required | 1.50 hours |
| Materials/ TRAINING AIDS | Lesson materials:   * Authorization Introduction PowerPoint Presentation * Authorization Introduction Trainee Handouts |
| Training Area/Tools | The following are required to ensure the trainees are able to meet the lesson objectives:   * Classroom or private area suitable for participatory discussions * Seating, writing materials, and writing surfaces for trainee note taking and participation * Handouts, which include a practical exercise * Large writing surface (easel pad, chalkboard, dry erase board, overhead projector, etc.) with appropriate writing materials * Computer with PowerPoint software to present the lesson material   Trainees require access to the following tools:   * VA TMS to complete the assessment * Access to VBA Intranet Page |

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| Pre-Planning | * Become familiar with all training materials by reading the Instructor Lesson Plan while simultaneously reviewing the corresponding PowerPoint slides. This will provide you the opportunity to see the connection between the Lesson Plan and the slides, which will allow for a more structured presentation during the training session. * Become familiar with the content of the trainee handouts and their association to the Lesson Plan. * Practice is the best guarantee of providing a quality presentation. At a minimum, do a complete walkthrough of the presentation to practice coordination between this Lesson Plan, the trainee handouts, and the PowerPoint slides and ensure your timing is on track with the length of the lesson. * Ensure that there are copies of all handouts before the training session. * When required, reserve the training room. * Arrange for equipment such as flip charts, an overhead projector, and any other equipment (as needed). * Talk to people in your office who are most familiar with this topic to collect experiences that you can include as examples in the lesson. * This lesson plan belongs to you. Feel free to highlight headings, key phrases, or other information to help the instruction flow smoothly. Feel free to add any notes or information that you need in the margins. |
| Training Day | * Arrive as early as possible to ensure access to the facility and computers. * Become familiar with the location of restrooms and other facilities that the trainees will require. * Test the computer and projector to ensure they are working properly. * Before class begins, open the PowerPoint presentation to the first slide. This will help to ensure the presentation is functioning properly. * Make sure that a whiteboard or flip chart and the associated markers are available. * The instructor completes a roll call attendance sheet or provides a sign-in sheet to the students. The attendance records are forwarded to the Regional Office Training Managers. |

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| Introduction to Authorization Introduction | |
| INSTRUCTOR INTRODUCTION | Complete the following:   * Introduce yourself * Orient learners to the facilities * Ensure that all learners have the required handouts |
| time required | 10 minutes |
| Purpose of Lesson | This lesson is intended to provide training for SVSR’s/authorizers. Authorizers will learn the elements of authorizing an award and identify the steps involved in the authorization process. |
| Lesson Objectives  Discuss the following:  Slide 2  Handout 2 | In order to accomplish the purpose of this lesson, the SVSR will be required to accomplish the following lesson objectives.  TheSVSRwill be able to:   * Distinguish VSR and SVSR responsibilities * Understand quality of award authorization * Recognize VBA system applications * Comprehend the duties a SVSR must fulfill to authorize an award * Identify the steps to authorizing an award |
| Explain the following: | Each learning objective is covered in the associated topic. At the conclusion of the lesson, the learning objectives will be reviewed. |
| Motivation | Tell the SVSRs about an incident where an incorrect award was authorized and resulted in an undue hardship on a Veteran. Explain how we can prevent these errors through the authorization procedures discussed in this lesson. |
| STAR Error code(s) | The Systematic Technical Accuracy Review (STAR) Program reviews cases and considers them either “accurate” or “in error” for the purpose of measuring technical accuracy.  Please discuss the common errors with the trainees. Common errors can include the following:   * Oversight in development * Claim not signed by correct party * Incorrect effective date for any benefits granted * Overlooked dependency information * Improper notification   All of the STAR code errors apply to authorization. |
| References  Slide 3  Handout 2 | Explain where these references are located in the workplace.   * [M21-1, Part III, Subpart v, 2.A.2.c, Award Processing Responsibilities](https://vaww.compensation.pension.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_ka/portal.html?encodedHash=%23!agent%2Fportal%2F554400000001034%2Farticle%2F554400000014229%2FM21-1-Part-III-Subpart-v-Chapter-2-Section-A-Decision-Authorization) * [M21-1, Part III, Subpart v, 2.A.3.b, Authorities of VSRs to Make Entitlement Decisions and Deny Benefits](https://vaww.compensation.pension.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_ka/portal.html?encodedHash=%23!agent%2Fportal%2F554400000001034%2Farticle%2F554400000014229%2FM21-1-Part-III-Subpart-v-Chapter-2-Section-A-Decision-Authorization) * [M21-1, Part III, Subpart v, 2.B, Decision Notices](https://vaww.compensation.pension.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_ka/#!agent/portal/554400000001034/article/554400000014231/M21-1-Part-III-Subpart-v-Chapter-2-Section-B-Decision-Notices) * [M21-4, Chapter 3, National Quality Reviews](https://vaww.compensation.pension.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_ka/#!agent/portal/554400000001034/article/554400000033436/Chapter-3-National-Quality-Reviews) * [M21-4, Chapter 6, Quality Review Team (QRT)](https://vaww.compensation.pension.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_ka/#!agent/portal/554400000001034/article/554400000037939/Chapter-6-Quality-Review-Team-QRT)   All M21-1 and M21-4 references are found in the [Live Manual Website](https://vaww.compensation.pension.km.va.gov/). |

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| Topic 1: Basics of Authorization | |
| Introduction | This topic will inform the trainee of the responsibilities of a SVSR and explain how review of quality works. It will also enlighten the trainees to the VBA applications. |
| Time Required | 20 minutes |
| OBJECTIVES/ Teaching Points | Topic objectives:   * Distinguish VSR and SVSR responsibilities * Understand quality of award authorization * Recognize VBA system applications   The following topic teaching points support the topic objectives:   * VSR Responsibilities Refresher * SVSR Responsibilities * Quality * VBA Systems * VBMS-A/VETSNET Award |
| VSR Responsibilities Refresher  Slide 4  Handout 3 | During the award process, a VSR is responsible for the following actions:   * Conduct a cursory review of the rating decision, to include the code sheet, in an attempt to identify any obvious errors * Enter additional data pertaining to the decision into the claims processing system * Enter information pertaining to a non-rating issue such as dependency and incarceration actions * Generate an award * Prepare a decision notice for the claimant * Route the award and decision notice to a SVSR * Prepare administrative decisions such as character of discharge |
| SVSR Responsibilities  Slide 5  Handout 3 | During the award process, a SVSR is responsible for the following actions:   * Review the award and decision notice for accuracy * Concur an administrative decision * **Authorize award** * Date the decision notice with the expected date of mailing * Release the decision notice with any attachments * Return claims folder to the files activity if a physical claims folder existed   **Note:** There are a small percentage of awards that require a concurrence by a Veteran Service Center Manager (VSCM) or VSCM designee, such as those claims paying over $25K in retroactive benefits and awards requiring Generate Award Override (GAO). |

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| Quality  Slides 6-8  Handout 3-4 | Effective quality reviews and positive action are necessary to ensure and improve quality levels and are required for all compensation claims. The quality review system is intended to assist managers in monitoring the level of service to claimants.  This system requires that quality observations and reviews be performed on a continuing basis in all areas of Veterans Service Center (VSC) operations.  STAR is the VBA’s national program for measuring compensation claims processing accuracy.  STAR includes review of work in two areas   * claims that usually require a rating decision, and * claims that generally do not require a rating decision.   ***Note***:  STAR results are generated for all of VBA’s regional offices (ROs) and are included in both the station’s and the RO Director’s Performance Dashboards.  The Compensation Service Quality Review Team (QRT) Program establishes a team of dedicated Quality Review Specialists (QRS’s) with a focused emphasis on station quality in every VBA (VBA) facility that processes compensation and pension claims.  The purpose of the QRT is to improve the quality and timeliness of claims processing while simultaneously decreasing the amount of work performed on individual cases. These goals are accomplished by evaluating station quality, identifying error trends, and ensuring individual employee reviews are performed monthly.  RO production is expected to improve as benefit entitlement accuracy improves.  Although VSRs are responsible for being compliant each time the claim is reviewed, it is the SVSR that verifies that everything with the claim is compliant before authorizing the award and closing out any tracking item such as an end product (EP). Authorizers are the last line of defense for any possible quality errors. Only you can prevent quality errors. |
| VBA Systems  *Slide 9*  *Handout 4* | SHARE and VETSNET applications are delivery networks of benefits systems used to process Veteran’s/claimant’s claims for VA benefits. VETSNET replaced VA’s old Benefits Delivery Network (BDN) system.  VBMS is the new electronic claims processing system. It may eventually replace SHARE and current VETSNET systems such as MAP-D – these systems are now referred to as legacy systems. As VBMS continues to be updated and eliminate legacy systems, a SVSR is responsible for making sure all systems are compliant and correct before authorizing an award and/or closing out an EP.  VBMS-A is the new award processing system responsible for processing awards and automatically generating notification letters. Implementation of this system will reduce the overall time that a claim awaits award generation and authorization. VETSNET C&P Awards and Personalized Computer Generated Letters (PCGL) (a Microsoft Word based system designed to generate notification letters) are also referred to as the legacy systems. VBMS-A has the same functionality as VETSNET C&P Awards and PCGL combined. Both programs may be used in VBA award processing. |

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| Topic 2: Authorizing an Award | |
| Introduction | This topic will recap VBA systems and explain the responsibilities of a SVSR in the role of authorizer. It will also provide the steps for authorizing an award and releasing a decision notice. |
| Time Required | 30 minutes |
| OBJECTIVES/ Teaching Points | Topic objectives:   * Comprehend the duties a SVSR must fulfill to authorize an award * Identify the steps to authorizing an award   The following topic teaching points support the topic objectives:   * VBMS-A/VETSNET C&P awards * SVSR duties as authorizer * SHARE and VETSNET applications * Notification letter * Status of the claim upon authorization * Authorizing or returning an award * CP Payment Address * Final steps |
| VBMS-A/VETSNET C&P Awards  Slide 10  Handout 5 | As indicated in the prerequisite for this training, a SVSR must be familiar and proficient with all legacy applications, as well as VBMS, and VBMS-A.  Prior to receipt of an award or claim that requires authorization, the VSR must generate the award in either VBMS-A or VETSNET C&P Awards. If a SVSR would like more information on how to generate an award in either VBMS-A or VETSNET C&P Awards, please direct them to VBMS-A/VETSNET Award (TMS #4175633) in the VBA Learning Catalog. |
| SVSR Duties as Authorizer  *Slide 11*  *Handout 5* | The most important job a SVSR has is the role of authorizer. Prior to authorization of an award, a SVSR is responsible for verifying that   * Claim is signed by correct party and in correct jurisdiction * VBA systems are updated and reflect the correct name; military service; Social Security number; address; and military retirement, separation, or severance pay * tracked items for a pending EP are updated to indicate the correct status * the correct EP and claim label are associated with the claim along with the correct date of claim * all claimed contentions are indicated under the correct EP and are addressed in the decision * correct power of attorney (POA) is designated in VBA systems and POA has access to documents in VBMS if authorization has been given by the claimant * dependency information is correctly reflected in VBA system(s), if applicable * Any flashes are indicated, if applicable * Section 5103 Notice is sufficient and development for evidence is complete * Effective date for any benefits granted is correct * that payment(s) and payment effective dates are correct * that proper withholdings are applied for any payment(s) * the payment address or direct deposit information is accurate |
| SHARE and VETSNET Applications  Slides 12-14  Handout 5-6 | Although VBMS and VBMS-A are the preferred systems to use during the authorization process, a claimant’s information must still be compliant in all VBA systems outside of VBMS.  There are three major components that are to be used in SHARE during the authorization process:   * Beneficiary Identification Records Locator Subsystem (BIRLS) Inquiry, * Corporate Inquiries, and * Pending Issue File (PIF) inquiry.   These three components must be reviewed to verify:   * military service * any military pay * EP, claim label, and date of claim * Personal information about claimant such as name, Social Security number, and address   Also, MAP-D must be reviewed to verify that tracked items for a pending EP are updated to indicate the correct status.  Additionally, service information may also need to be verified in Participant Profile before an award can be authorized. |

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| Notification letter  *Slides 15-16*  *Handout 6-7* | To access a letter in VBMS-A before authorizing an award, you must go to the “Current and Proposed Award/Authorization” screen. Select the option “GEN LETTER.” This generates the letter for review.  Although VBMS-A generates a notification letter, the SVSR must still review the letter to verify that the decision notice include   * the claim number, claimant name, and correct mailing address * What VA decided * Reason(s) for the decision * Monthly benefits and information on any withholdings, if applicable * Information about additional benefits, if applicable * Information about how to file an appeal * the correct POA   Awards that cannot be generated in VBMS-A must then be generated in VETSNET C&P Awards. VETSNET C&P Awards require a PCGL decision notice. This notice also requires that the above information be included.  **NOTE:** Make sure that notes from Rating Decisions are included in the notification letter. Also verify that the correct dependency development is included if necessary. |
| Status of the Claim Upon Authorization  Slide 17  *Handout 7-8* | Just prior to authorizing an award in VBMS-A or VETSNET Awards, a SVSR must verify that the status of the claim is correct. The three options for status are:   * Cancelled * Closed, or * Continued at Authorization   The option “Cancelled” should be selected for any reason the EP should be closed and the RO is not entitled credit for the EP. For instance, no action necessary for that EP or the EP was worked under other PIF/EP.  If the claim does not require any further development and/or any deferred issues, and there is no reason for the EP to be cancelled, then the SVSR must indicate the status of the claim as “Closed.”  If issues are deferred and/or further development is required, then the SVSR must indicate the status as “Continued at Authorization.” After authorizing such an award the SVSR must update the claim level suspense of the claim in either VBMS and/or MAP-D. |

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| Authorizing or Returning an Award  *Slide 18*  *Handout 8-10* | After following the steps above, the award must either be authorized or returned.  VBMS-A and VETSNET C&P Award functionality mirrors each other. To authorize an award in either VBMS-A or VETSNET C&P Award, a SVSR must go to the Proposed Award/Authorization Screen. This screen will provide the options “Authorize” and “Return” in the lower left corner.  ***Note:*** Make sure any comments in the remarks section of the award include the actions the VSR and SVSR have taken for the claim, such as:   * Per RD dated [insert date of rating decision], * Added/removed dep [insert dependent’s name], or * W/H for MRP/dis sev/sep pay.   If the SVSR identifies any errors, the SVSR must select the “return” option and return the award to the VSR that generated the award or appropriate employee with explanation of the oversight and for corrective action.  If the award is correct, systems compliant, and notification letter is accurate and provides the required information, then the award is approved for authorization. The SVSR must select the “authorize” option. ***Reminder***, before selecting the “authorize” option, the SVSR must verify that the correct status for the claim is selected. |
| CP Payment Address  *Slide 19*  *Handout 10* | Upon selecting “authorize” on the Proposed Award/Authorization screen, the CP Payment Address screen is prompted. Here, the SVSR needs to verify that the correct payment address or direct deposit information is inputted. |
| Final steps  *Slide 20*  *Handout 10* | Upon authorization of the claim and notification letter, a SVSR must release the notification letter and upload the letter and award to Veteran’s/claimant’s electronic folder.  If the claim must be continued at authorization, the SVSR must make sure the claim status and tracked item(s) in either VBMS or MAP-D are updated accordingly.  Finally, make sure that COVERS indicates the correct location of the folder after authorization or that the efolder is in VBMS. |

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| Lesson Review, Assessment, and Wrap-up | |
| Introduction  Discuss the following: | The Authorization Introduction lesson is complete.  Review each lesson objective and ask the trainees for any questions or comments.  **NOTE:** Inform the trainees of the authorization lesson in VSR Assistant; however, preface that although this information may be outdated, the step-by-step process on what to verify for authorizing a development letter or award is still the same. Inform them to access the authorization lesson in VSR Assistant prior to their assessment test to familiarize themselves with the process.  VSR Assistant can be found on the VBA Training Home Page at <http://cptraining.vba.va.gov/C&P_Training/Job_Aids/VSR_RVSR_Asst.htm>  Also, direct the trainees to review the ASPEN and STAR quality checklists at the end of the handout. These checklists are used by local and national quality review teams to decide if the claim was processed correctly. |
| Time Required | 30 minutes |
| Lesson Objectives | You have completed the Authorization Introduction lesson.  The trainee should be able to:   * Distinguish VSR and SVSR responsibilities * Understand quality of award authorization * Recognize VBA system applications * Comprehend the duties a SVSR must fulfill to authorize an award * Identify the steps to authorizing an award |
| Assessment | Remind the trainees to complete the on-line assessment in TMS to receive credit for completion of the course.  The assessment will allow the participants to demonstrate their understanding of the information presented in this lesson. |