(VSR VIP Pre-D) Telephone Development

Instructor Lesson Plan

**Time required: 45 Minutes**

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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 # | 4183447 |
| Prerequisites | None |
| target audience | The target audience forTelephone Development isEntry Level VSRs.  Although this lesson is targeted to teach theEntry Level VSR employees, it may be taught to other VA personnel as mandatory or refresher type training. |
| Time Required | 45 minutes |
| Materials/ TRAINING AIDS | Lesson materials:   * Telephone Development PowerPoint Presentation * Telephone Development Trainee Handout Packet * Telephone Development Answer Key |
| Training Area/Tools | The following are required to ensure the trainees can 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 |

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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 Telephone Development | | |
| **INSTRUCTOR INTRODUCTION** | | Complete the following:   * Introduce yourself. * Orient learners to the facilities. * Ensure that all learners have the required handouts. |
| **time required** | | 5 minutes |
| **Purpose of Lesson**  *Explain the following:* | | The purpose of this lesson is to provide the trainees with the skills and tools needed to conduct a telephone contact and document the evidence received. Additionally, trainees will learn various customer service skills necessary for effective telephone development.  This lesson will contain discussions and exercises that will allow you to gain a better understanding of:   * Telephone Development |
| **Lesson Objectives**  *Discuss the following:*  *Slide 2*  *Handout pg. 2* | To accomplish the purpose of this lesson, the VSR will be required to complete an assessment that covers the following lesson objectives:  Thetraineewill be able to:   * List the appropriate situations for telephone development * Describe the telephone development requirements and contact procedures * Identify the procedures to complete VA Form 27-0820, *Report of General Information* * Recognize the purpose of VA Form 21-0845, *Authorization to Disclose Personal Information to a Third Party* * Summarize how to manage difficult telephone calls * Review Telephone Courtesy Tips | |

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| *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**  *Share the following:* | To encourage the VSR to use proper telephone development to attempt to development the veteran’s claim in a timelier manner. |
| **STAR Error code(s)** | Task 1 |
| **References**  *Slide 3*  *Handout pg. 3* | Explain where these references are located in the workplace.  All M21-1 references are found in the [Live Manual Website](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/topic/554400000003061/M21-1-Adjudication-Procedures-Manual)   * [38 CFR 3.217(b) Submission of statements or information affecting entitlement to benefits](https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=c841080008e357c12ba48d519985c2c5&node=se38.1.3_1217&rgn=div8) * [M21-1 Part III*,* Subpart ii, 3.C*,* System Updates](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014125/M21-1-Part-III-Subpart-ii-Chapter-3-Section-C-System-Updates) * [M21-1, Part III, Subpart iii, 1. B, Evidence Requested from the Claimant](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014152/M21-1-Part-III-Subpart-iii-Chapter-1-Section-B-Evidence-Requested-From-the-Claimant) * [M21-1, Part III. Subpart iii, 1. C, Requesting Evidence from Federal Record Custodians](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014156/M21-1-Part-III-Subpart-iii-Chapter-1-Section-C-Requesting-Evidence-From-Federal-Record-Custodians) * [M21-1, Part III, Subpart iii, 5.A, General Information on Relationship and Dependency](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000015798/M21-1-Part-III-Subpart-iii-Chapter-5-Section-A-General-Information-on-Relationship-and-Dependency) * [M27-1 Part I, 3. Telephone Interviews](https://www.benefits.va.gov/WARMS/M27_1.asp) * [M27-1 Part I, 5. 6. Development Claims using Telephone, E-Mail, and Facsimile](https://www.benefits.va.gov/WARMS/M27_1.asp) * [M27-1 Part I, 5. 8 Using VA Form 27-0820 (Series)](https://www.benefits.va.gov/WARMS/M27_1.asp) |

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| Topic 1: Telephone Development | | |
| Introduction | This topic provides trainees with the skills and tools needed to conduct a telephone contact and document the evidence received from the Veteran or beneficiary. Trainees will learn:   * The types of evidence that may be documented during a telephone contact * How to document the evidence received * How to complete VA Form 27-0820, *Report of General Information* * The purpose of VA Form 21-0845, *Authorization to Disclose Personal Information to a Third Party* * How to deal with special circumstances that could develop during the telephone contact * Customer Service Courtesy | |
| Time Required | 25 minutes | |
| OBJECTIVES/ Teaching Points | Topic objectives:   * List the evidence suitable for telephone development. * List the telephone development requirements. * Identify 38 CFR 3.217 (b) procedures when conducting a telephone contact * Identify procedures for special circumstances that could develop during a telephone contact * Identify the procedures to complete VA Form 27-0820, *Report of General Information* after receiving evidence from a telephone contact * Identify the available versions of VA Form 27-0820 * Document information on VA Form 27-0820 in calculation of benefits * Understand the importance of being professional and polite with claimant   The following topic teaching points support the topic objectives:   * Suitable Evidence * Telephone Development Requirements * Documenting VBA Systems * Contact Procedures | |
| Appropriate situations for telephone development  Slide 4  Handout pg. 4 | VSRs can use a telephone contact to solicit or verify essential information. This method is recommended when only a few pieces of information or evidence are required and can easily be obtained by telephone.  Understanding the types of evidence that may be obtained by telephone is important. A list of issues suitable for this method of development is available in M21-1 III.iii.1.B.1.d., *Claims Development by E-mail, Fax and Telephone* and M21-I, III.iii.5.A.1.f, *Issues to Consider When Determining Whether Dependency and/or a Familial Relationship Exists* *and M27-1, I.3.h, Types of Information Suitable for Telephone Development.*  List of appropriate situations for telephone development includes:   * Clarification of claimed conditions * Names and mailing addresses of physicians or medical facilities * Medical evidence * Social Security numbers (SSNs) * Award/denial letters for certain benefits, such as Social Security disability benefits * Mailing addresses and direct deposit information * Employment information * Clarification of income-related issues and medical expenses * Dependency information * Whether the Veteran has service treatment, personnel, or other records provide | |
| 38 CFR 3.217(b) Contact Requirements  *Slide 5*  *Handout pg. 4* | When conducting a telephone contact, appropriate procedures must be followed.  38 CFR 3.217(b), Submission of statements or information affecting entitlement to benefits states:  “VA may take action affecting entitlement to benefits based on oral or written information or statements provided to VA by a beneficiary or his or her fiduciary. However, VA may not take action based on oral information or statements unless the VA employee receiving the information meets the following conditions:”  During the conversation in which the information or statement is provided, the VA employee must:   * Identify yourself as a VA employee who is authorized to receive the information or statement and state the purpose of the call; * Verify the identity of the provider as either the beneficiary or his or her fiduciary by obtaining specific information about the beneficiary. This information needs to be verified from the beneficiary's VA records, such as Social Security number (SSN), date of birth, branch of military service, dates of military service, or other information; and * Inform the provider that the information or statement will be used for the purpose of calculating benefit amounts.” | |
| Contact Procedures  *Slides 6-7*  *Handout pg.* *5* | Based on 38 CFR 3.217(b) Submission of statements or information affecting entitlement to benefits: use the following procedures when making a telephone contact:   * Verify the identity of the provider as either the beneficiary or his or her fiduciary by doing the following:   + Obtain specific information about the Veteran or beneficiary that can be verified from VA records, including SSN, date of birth, branch of military service, dates of military service, and address. \*   + Terminate the call if the person to whom you are speaking is not able to furnish the information requested, or you remain uncertain of the person’s identify, and complete a development letter. * Inform the veteran, beneficiary, or fiduciary the information or statement provided will be used for the purpose of calculating benefit amounts * Obtain the information you are seeking. * Close the call.   + Use finishing phrases.   + Summarize.   + Ask “Have I answered your questions(s) pertaining to your inquiry today?”   + Sign off with “good-bye,” or a similar appropriate word or phrase.   + Let the caller disconnect first.   \*It is appropriate to ask for the last four numbers of their Social Security number instead of the entire number. | |
| Documenting Telephone Contact  *Slide 8*  *Handout pg.* *5* | Document the information received during the call by summarizing it on VA Form 27-0820 (Series), Report of General Information, or the equivalent, such as the Informal Conference Report for Decision Review Officers (DROs) for action.  When documenting telephone calls on VA Form 27-0820 (Series), keep in mind that:   * beneficiaries are ***not*** required to advise VA in writing of   + Changes in income or net worth, or   + Changes in dependency status, such as loss of a dependent due to death, divorce, or annulment of a marriage. * If the caller has a Power of Attorney (POA), ensure the POA information is noted on VA Form 27-0820 * Upload the VA Form 27-0820 to the e-folder in VBMS CORE * Send a copy of the completed form to the beneficiary’s power of attorney, if applicable * Enter an appropriate note in VBMS CORE that a copy of the completed form was sent to the POA, if applicable | |
| Required Information on VA Form 27-0820  *Slide 9*  *Handout pg. 5* | When using VA Form 27-0820, the following items must be  documented:   * Specific information or statement provided * Date the information or statement was provided * Identity of the provider * Steps taken to verify the identity of the provider as being either the beneficiary or his or her fiduciary * Confirmation the employee informed the caller that VA would use the information or statement he/she provided for the purpose of calculating benefits and amounts * Clear identification of the employee executing the VA Form 27-0820 including a signature that meets the requirements described in M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, 1.C.2.e   Additional Information:   * Information required to properly document the call is not included on the VA Form 27-0820 and filed in the claims file; no action can be taken on the evidence received. If due process is required, then a letter must be sent. Also, if the file is not properly documented a development letter must be sent. * Beneficiary has a power of attorney (POA), a copy of VA Form 27-0820, *Report of General Information* must be sent to his or her representative. * Information received by telephone results in award or denial action, the notification letter references the information received by telephone and include the date of telephone contact and the name of the person who provided the information.   Specific guidelines about documentation requirements when using VA Form 27-0820 can be found in 38 CFR 3.217(b) and M27-1, Part I.5.8. | |
| Available Versions of VA Form 27-0820  *Slide 10*  *Handout pg. 6*  DISCUSSION  *Handout pg. 11* | The following is a list of the available versions of VA Form 27-0820:   * VA Form 27-0820: *Report of General Information* * VA Form 27-0820a: *Report of First Notice of Death* * VA Form 27-0820b: *Report of Nursing Home or Assistant Living Information* * VA Form 27-0820c: *Report of Defense Finance & Accounting Service (DFAS)* * VA Form 27-0820d: *Report of Non-Receipt of payment* * VA Form 27-0820e: *Report of Incarceration* * VA Form 27-0820f: *Report of Month of Death*   Refer trainees to Attachment A: VA Form 27-0820 in the trainee handout packet. Use the form to show the trainees where the following telephone contact information should be documented:   * Specific information or statement provided * Date the information or statement was provided * Identity of the provider * Steps taken to verify the identity of the provider as being either the beneficiary or his or her fiduciary * Verification the employee informed the provider that the information would be used for the purpose of calculating benefit amounts | |
| **Target Your Telephone Development**  Slide 11  *Handout pgs. 6* | The Compensation Service encourages stations to incorporate telephone development into their individual workload management plans.  This process can bring many claims closer to resolution. Wherever possible, the VSRs should use telephone development on information such as:   * Military Treatment Facilities * Contact the claimant to retrieve missing information on a claim or form.   The timeliness of claims processing decreases dramatically with constant use of telephone development. | |
| **Unsuccessful Telephone Contact**  Slides 12-13  Handout pg. 7 | If the claimant cannot be reached by telephone, employees may leave a message for a claimant as voice mail or with a third party. However, the message must not include any information that is protected by the Privacy Act. The employee should simply leave VA’s toll-free number (1-800-827-1000) and ask for a return call. After doing so, the employee must immediately enter a detailed note in VBMS CORE regarding the information or evidence he/she is seeking, so the National Call Center can respond to any returned call.  Unsuccessful attempts must be documented in the “notes” section in VBMS CORE. Include the following:   * Name of the individual/facility attempting to contact * Specific evidence required   Compensation Service no longer requires completion of VA Form 27-0820 to document unsuccessful attempts to make telephone contact. Nevertheless, the employee who made the attempt is still responsible for documenting the action in VBMS CORE notes.  NOTE: If leaving a contact number, always give the VA toll free number (1-800-827-1000). The VSR should TAKE PRECAUTION before considering giving out his or her direct work phone number. Some VA Employees are required to contact Veterans in certain VA programs such as Women’s Veterans Coordinators, Military Service Coordinators, POW Coordinators, and OEF/OIF Managers. | |
| **Third Party Authorization**  *Slide 14*  *Handout pg. 7-8* | VA Form 21-0845, *Authorization to Disclose Personal Information to a Third Party*  To effectively use VA Form 21-0845, the VSR must understand the form:   * Allows National Call Centers (NCCs) and Regional Office to release specified information normally protected under privacy provisions to family members or other designated persons who are not POAs, Agents, or Fiduciaries * Allows designated individuals to provide certain information to VA (e.g., such as changes in address or direct deposit accounts). Designated persons must correctly answer a security question chosen by the claimant or beneficiary to confirm their authorization. * May only have one designated person or organization. | |
| **Third Party Authorization (cont.)**  *Slide 15*  *Handout pg. 7-8* | * Incompetent beneficiaries (including those with supervised direct pay) cannot submit the form without their fiduciary’s signature. If incompetent beneficiaries submit the form, a letter explaining that VA cannot accept the form unless his or her fiduciary signs it needs to be sent. The fiduciary is also responsible for revoking the authorization. * Requires the beneficiary/claimant to determine whether the designated individual has access to limited or unlimited information (e.g., the status of claims, benefit information, payment history, payment rate, debt owed VA, or any other information specified by the authorizer). * Beneficiaries may revoke third party authorization over the telephone. In addition, only one form may be valid at a time. If a new form is received, revoke the prior authorization. | |
| **Verifying third-party Authorization**  Slide 16  *Handout pg. 8* | If someone claims to have third-party authorization:   * Verify authorization using VBMS CORE. * Solicit their identity and ask the security question. * If the caller responds correctly, proceed with the standard protocol to identify the beneficiary or claimant. * If the individual does not know the answer to the security question, inform him/her that he/she does not have the proper authorization. If the individual persists, refer him/her to the beneficiary/claimant. * Review the authorization carefully.   Note what type of information is permitted for release and the expiration date of the authorization, if any. | |
| DISCUSSION  *Handout pg. 13* | Refer trainees to the Compensation Service page under Publication, Forms, VBA to review VA Form 21-0845. Review the form and discuss with trainees.  The instructor should review every line on the form with the class. | |
| How to Approach Difficult Telephone Calls  *Slide 17*  *Handout pg. 8*  How to Approach Difficult Telephone Calls (cont.)  *Slide 18*  *Handout pg. 8-9*  Courtesy Tips – Speaking Voice  *Slide 19* Handout pgs. 9 | It is important to stress to the trainee most phone conversations are cordial and polite. However, there are rare occasions when you will be confronted with an angry, threatening, or abusive caller.  VBA does not expect its employees to tolerate or listen to abusive language or behavior on the part of its callers.  Before terminating a call, inform the caller:   * “I want to help you.” * “I’m asking that you please stop using foul language.” * “If you do not stop, I will need to disconnect the call.”   If the caller refuses to stop and continues using abusive or foul language, inform the caller the call will be terminated and to please call back when they are ready to discuss the situation more calmly  Note: Never respond in anger towards the caller. Often after taking a long silent pause, the caller may refrain from using foul language.  In extremely rare circumstances, a veteran may make a suicidal threat.  Take all suicidal threats seriously. Remain calm and listen carefully to the caller.  The primary goals when dealing with a suicidal caller are to keep the caller alive, keep the caller from any further injury, and get the caller in contact with a trained crisis center.  Follow the steps below if you encounter a suicidal caller:   * Never place a suicidal caller on hold * Get the attention of someone who can alert a supervisor * If the caller agrees, transfer them to the Veterans Crisis Line: 1-800-273-8255 * If the caller does not agree, the supervisor will seek second-party assistance * Continue the call until the crisis is managed and under control   Note- The internal warm transfer number for the suicide hotline is (585) 393-7938. The VA Suicide Hotline can be reached at 1-800-273-TALK (8255).  The following web site includes a state-by-state listing of suicide prevention organizations: [www.suicidehotlines.com](http://www.suicidehotlines.com)  Explain to the trainee the following:  Good customer service is a direct by-product of how courteous we are to our callers. By using a proactive approach and emphasis in the following areas, we can ensure we provide professional, consistent, and meaningful customer service to our callers. These areas include:   * your speaking voice * your active listening skills * acknowledging your caller’s feelings, and * use of effective customer service techniques   How you use your voice is more critical over the telephone because the caller is not able to use visual communication tools to gauge your level of involvement in the conversation. As such, you must be able to project your customer service attitude through your voice.  Use the following five methods to improve your speaking voice:   * Speak in low tones * Articulate * Match the other person’s rate of speech (take note that you are not speaking at a rate too fast for your caller to comprehend) * Control volume (do not allow your voice to indicate disturbance), if your caller begins to speak in a louder tone in reference to their frustration – attempt to lower you volume since the caller will often lower the volume of their voice to match the volume of the conversation * Use voice inflections (changing the pitch of your voice to create enthusiasm or concern) | |
| Courtesy Tips – Listening Skills  *Slide 20* Handout pg. 9 -10 | Explain to the trainee the following:  Active listening skills are just as important as your speaking skills, if not more so. The ability to listen to your caller is of paramount importance in order to allow you to properly assess the purpose of the call and what the caller expects from you.  Use the following seven methods to improve your listening skills:   * Visualize what you are hearing (not what you are going to do later) * Take notes on the important parts of the conversation * Do not interrupt or cut off the caller (however, it may be necessary to utilize call control techniques to resolve a rambling call) * Listen for feelings (is the caller anxious, argumentative, or distressed?) * Acknowledge what the caller is saying (best way to accomplish this is to paraphrase the caller or use an empathetic statement) * Ask questions (this will help you understand and will show you are engaged in the process * Concentrate (the most fundamental skill in effective listening) | |
| Courtesy Tips – Acknowledging the Caller’s Feelings  *Slide 21* Handout pg. 10 | Explain to the trainee the following:  One of the most important aspects of ***world-class service*** is to show your caller that you are sympathetic or understanding of their situation and feelings. By using the four methods below, your caller will recognize that you are “hearing” them and want to be of service.  These methods are:   * Showing empathy * Asking questions * Giving feedback * Summarizing the problem or issues * Common manners such as please, thank you and you’re welcome | |
| Effective Customer Service Techniques  *Slide 22* *Handout pgs. 10 - 11* | Explain to the trainees the following:  The final area to address in ensuring our callers receive the courteous service they deserve is the use of effective customer service techniques. These seven techniques, called “The 7 Cs,” are provided below:   * Caring – **Care about the VA**. Show loyalty (do not tell a caller that someone else made a mistake). **Care about the customer**. Do not view a phone call as an interruption of your job. View it as your job – it is, you know. **Care about yourself**. Be careful of stress and burnout. Know the signs and learn how to deal with them. * Confident – Be confident in your *ability to handle your interactions*. If you do not know the answer, advise your caller that you “will be happy to research the information for them.” Be confident of your technical knowledge. As you use your technical skills, it will become second nature to you. ***Remember:*** no *one person* will have the ability to answer all the questions that may be asked, but you will be provided with the tools and training to be successful in your position. * Considerate – Be considerate *of the customer*. If the customer is upset, do not gloss over it. Acknowledge the customer’s feelings and attempt to address his/her concerns. * Committed – Go *the extra step*. Make appropriate referrals. Do not just tell customers they have the wrong department or agency. Help them to reach the department or agency they need. * Creative – Be *resourceful*. There will be many days when you will repeatedly get the same questions repeatedly (***Example***: “I didn’t get my check on the first!”) Take it as a challenge to be *innovative* with your answers and don’t allow the repeated questions to cause you to provide those later callers with a lower level of customer service. * Controlled – Do not lose it! No matter how angry a customer gets, you must *always maintain control.* Always remember: It isn’t you the customer is angry with – it’s the situation. * Contagious – ***Remember***: *What goes around comes around*. If you challenge the customer, it will often create more anger and cause you to lose control of your call. | |
| Practical Exercise | |
| Time Required | 10 minutes |
| EXERCISE *Handout pg. 15* | Ask if there are any questions about the information presented in the exercise, and then proceed to the Review.  Have the trainees answer the questions at the end of the Handout. Review the answers with the trainees. |

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| Lesson Review, Assessment, and Wrap-up | |
| Introduction  Discuss the following: | The Telephone Development lesson is complete.  Review each lesson objective and ask the trainees for any questions or comments. |
| Time Required | 5 minutes |
| Lesson Objectives | You have completed the Telephone Development lesson.  The trainee should be able to:   * List the appropriate situations for telephone development * Describe the telephone development requirements and contact procedures * Identify the procedures to complete VA Form 27-0820, *Report of General Information* * Recognize the purpose of VA Form 21-0845, *Authorization to Disclose Personal Information to a Third Party* * Summarize how to manage difficult telephone calls * Review Telephone Courtesy Tips |

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| Assessment | Remind the trainees to complete the online 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. |