Introduction to Workload Management

Trainee Handout

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Objectives

TheVSRwill be able to:

* identify claims that require priority processing
* navigate ASPEN and input daily production and excluded time
* sort and filter the VBMS Work Queue

References

All M21-1 references are found in the [Live Manual Website](https://vaww.compensation.pension.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_ka/portal.html?encodedHash=%23!agent%2Fportal%2F554400000001034%2Farticle%2F554400000014110%2FM21-1-Part-III-Subpart-i-Chapter-3-Section-B-Processing-Fully-Developed-Claims-FDCs).

* [M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, 1.D – Claims That Require Priority Processing](https://vaww.compensation.pension.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_ka/#!agent/portal/554400000001034/article/554400000020037/M21-1-Part-III-Subpart-ii-Chapter-1)
* M21-4 Chapter 2 – Workload Management
  + [Subchapter I - Overview](https://vaww.compensation.pension.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_ka/#!agent/portal/554400000001034/article/554400000011633/Subchapter-I-Overview)
  + [Subchapter II – Claims and Appeals Workflow Management](https://vaww.compensation.pension.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_ka/#!agent/portal/554400000001034/article/554400000011636/Subchapter-II-Claims-and-Appeals-Workfl)
* [M21-4 Chapter 4 – Claims and Appeals Processing Timeliness](https://vaww.compensation.pension.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_ka/#!agent/portal/554400000001034/article/554400000011649/Chapter-4-Claims-and-Appeals-Processing)

Topic 1: Claims that Require Priority Processing

**Priority Processing Claim/Claimant Types**

Any claim from the following types of claimants is always considered priority:

* cases of financial hardship
* homeless
* terminally ill
* former Prisoner of War
* Medal of Honor recipient
* older than 85 years of old
* seriously injured (SI) or very seriously injured (VSI)

Any of the following claim types are considered priority:

* Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) or Lou Gehrig’s Disease
* Fully Developed Claims

To be classified as having a financial hardship, the Veteran must submit documentation supporting his assertion. Examples of documentation are:

* an eviction notice
* a statement of foreclosure
* past-due utility bills
* collection notices from creditors

42 US Code Section 11302 defines homelessness as an individual or family:

* who lacks a fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence
* whose primary nighttime residence is a place not designed for or ordinarily used as a regular sleeping accommodation
* whose primary residence is a shelter designated to provide temporary living arraignments
* who is exiting a temporary living arrangement and would be forced to utilize one of the previous three types of residences
* who is in danger of imminently losing his/her residence (i.e., foreclosure or eviction) and would be forced to utilize one of the previous three types of residences

Upon receipt of any of these claims, the employee must take any and all actions required to move the claim to the next stage before working any non-priority claim.

When handling multiple claims that all require priority processing attempt to prioritize. If prioritization is not possible, seek guidance from a veteran VSR or your supervisor. If timely completion of all priority claims is not possible, notify your supervisor immediately.

Priority Development

Regional Offices are required to manage priority claims by:

* frequently following up on any pending development actions
* utilizing issue specific coordinators, where applicable
* utilizing the telephone for development or follow up actions, whenever possible
* collaborating with any third parties (i.e., the VAMC) to expedite development

**System Flashes**

There are a number of different flashes used to identify and track claims that require priority processing (M21-1 III.iii.1.D):

* Claimant Flashes
* Claim Flashes
* Special Issue Flashes

Claimant flashes are utilized to identify and track issues that are directly related to the claimant (e.g. homelessness, terminal illness, former POW, or SI/VSI). These issues generally persist from claim-to-claim. Claimant flashes are added in the system using the Corporate Flashes command in SHARE. The VSR should not add these flashes on their own accord. Once the VSR has identified a claimant with a possible claimant-level priority issue, a request should be made to the appropriate person at their RO for a review.

Claim flashes are utilized to identify and track issues that are directly related to the claim as a whole and not one specific issue of that claim (e.g. FDC). These issues are resolved when the claim is finalized. Claim flashes are added in the system utilizing VBMS. The VSR is responsible for reviewing the efolder and adding claim-level flashes to the claim as appropriate.

Special issue flashes are utilized to identify and track issues that relate directly to a specific contention claimed by the claimant (e.g. ALS). These issues are resolved when a decision has been made on that contention. Special issue flashes are added in the system utilizing VBMS. The VSR is responsible for reviewing the eFolder and adding special issue flashes to the claim as appropriate.

Topic 2: ASPEN Overview

**Entering Production**

Either during the day or at the end of the day, the VSR must enter the work completed for that day into ASPEN. To enter a production item, click on *Add Production Record*. On the next screen, the VSR must enter the date, action, claims processing priority, claim number, and EP. If the claim was worked on overtime, click on the *Worked on Overtime* box. Click on *Update* to save the entry.

Reminders:

* Each claim worked must be entered separately.
* Although you can change the date, you should always enter your work by the end of COB. You can add a production item up to seven days retroactively.
* Overtime must be entered on the *Employee Time Reporting* screen, before entering production items for that overtime period.

The following are the different VSRs options for action:

* 104 – Process award/decision
* 105 – Authorize award
* 106 – Initial Development (1-2 issues)
* 107 – Initial Development (3+ issues)
* 108 – Supplemental Development (1-2 issues)
* 109 – Supplemental Development (3+ issues)
* 110 – Ready for Decision (1-2 issues)
* 111 – Ready for Decision (3+ issues)
* 112 – Telephone Development

Reminders:

* Claims for dependency, IU, due process, etc. are considered one issue.
* The 112 count can only be taken if the VSR actually speaks with someone on the phone and, as a result, can move the claim forward.
* You cannot take count for each EP processed (excluding tracking EPs, i.e., 810s).

If a mistake is made and the entry needs to be updated, click on *Workload Reporting* on the main screen. There are a number of filters at the top of the screen to limit the number of entries that show up. Be careful not to search for too large a range of entries as the system can get bogged down.

Once the entry is located, click on *Edit* or *Delete*. You can only edit an entry up to seven days retroactively.

**Entering Excluded Time**

Either during the day or at the end of the day, the VSR must enter any excluded time for that day into ASPEN. To enter excluded time, click on *Employee Time Reporting*. On the next screen, click on *Add Time Reporting Record*. On the next screen, enter the date, type of excluded time, total number of hours for that type of excluded time, and a description (if appropriate). Click on *Update* to save the entry.

Reminders:

* Each type of excluded time must be entered separately.
* Although you can change the date, you should always enter your excluded time by the end of COB. You can add excluded time up to fifteen days retroactively. You can also add excluded time prospectively through the current pay period.

The following are the different types of excluded time:

* Deduct – Leave
* Deduct – Training
* Deduct – Second Signature Review of Trainees
* Deduct – Special Projects
* Deduct – Union Time
* Deduct – Other
* Deduct – Credit Hours Taken
* Add – Credit Hours Worked
* Add – Overtime Worked

Reminders:

* *Deduct – Other* should only be used sparingly.
* Although leave, credit time, overtime are tracked in VATAS, you still must enter them in ASPEN so that production statistics are accurate.
* All excluded time is subject to approval by your supervisor.

If a mistake is made and the entry needs to be updated, click on *Employee Time Reporting* on the main screen. There are a number of filters at the top of the screen to limit the number of entries that show up. Be careful not to search for too large a range of entries as the system can get bogged down.

Once the entry is located, click on *Edit* or *Delete*. You can only edit an entry up to thirty days retroactively.

Topic 3: VBMS Work Queue

**Work Queue Columns**

There are a large amount of columns on the VBMS Work Queue, too many to utilize efficiently. However, there are a smaller number of columns that are particularly helpful to the VSR when managing their workload. The following columns are some of the more helpful ones:

* Date of Claim
* EP Code – Claim Label
* File Number
* Suspense Reason
* Claim Level Status
* Days Assigned to User
* Ready to Recall
* Lifecycle Phase

While these columns are generally considered helpful, the choice is ultimately up to you. To customize your VBMS Work Queue, click on *Show/Hide Columns*. Check the columns you want to be displayed and uncheck the columns that you do not want displayed. You can also control the number of claims that show per page in your VBMS Work Queue. Now that the National Work Queue is active, fifty or one hundred claims in your queue would be an anomaly. Selecting ten or twenty-five is recommended. Once you have your work queue the way you like it, click *Save Preferences*. You can edit the layout of the VBMS Work Queue at any time.

**Work Queue Filters**

In addition to the columns in the VBMS Work Queue, you can also filter the claims using the *Narrow Results* feature. Again, there are a large number of different filters to employ in managing your work queue, but only a few are helpful to VSRs. The following filters are helpful:

* Keyword
* File Number
* Claim Status
* Lifecycle Phase

Again, there is no requirement to use certain filters and the choice is yours. To use the filters, click on the specific filter(s) you want to use. A field will drop down allowing for different input depending on the filter. You can use one or multiple filters to manage your workload. Once you have your filter(s) set up, click *Filter*. If there is a filter or set of filters that you use frequently, you can save this filter criterion. To do this click *Save*. You can save multiple filter criteria and select them using the drop down at the very top of *Narrow Results* window. If you need to delete or edit a saved filter criterion, click *Manage.*

**Attachment A: VSR Job Standards**

# ELEMENT 1 – QUALITY (Critical)

The VSR must consistently and conscientiously exercise sound, equitable judgment in applying stated laws, regulations, policies and procedures to ensure accurate information is disseminated to Veterans and accurate decisions are provided on all benefit claims administered by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Standard

Quality of Work

Successful Level

GS-7: The accuracy rate during the evaluation period equals or

exceeds 80% (cumulative)

GS-9: The accuracy rate during the evaluation period equals or

exceeds 85% (cumulative)

GS-10: The accuracy rate during the evaluation period equals or

exceeds 92% (cumulative)

GS-11: The accuracy rate for work produced during the evaluation period equals or exceeds 93% (cumulative)

**Indicators**

A random selection will be made of an average of 5 actions per month regardless of number of contentions claimed. Quality of action taken on each contention will be evaluated. The selection of actions, while random, must reflect an appropriate mix of work performed by the employee throughout the month (i.e. not from a single day or single week).

If a routine review of a VSR’s work demonstrates the need for quality improvement, an expanded sample of an average of 10 actions per month will be reviewed for quality purposes.

The ASPEN checklist to be used will mirror the STAR worksheet and will include a component on systems compliance, which will be considered a substantive error.

# ELEMENT 2 – TIMELINESS/WORKLOAD MANAGEMENT (Critical)

Timely processing of Veterans claims is of paramount importance, as it is highly correlated with customer satisfaction. The VSR will operate in an efficient manner to accurately finalize claims using all appropriate workload management tools and processes.

VSRs are responsible for the cycles/type of work respective to their assigned duties. If multiple timeliness sub-elements apply to a VSR (e.g. average days awaiting award, non-rating, and corrective actions) they must meet the fully successful level for all applicable sub-elements to be successful for the element.

Extenuating circumstances and notification to the employee’s supervisor will be considered. An incident will not be called until after the first notification of non-compliance of the above standard.

**Timeliness**

**Timeliness of Rating End Products (including EP 930 series)**

Fully successful: All grade levels must meet locally established timeliness requirements, which are to be derived from end of year station targets.

The percentage of claims in each cycle pending over the locally established cycle goal must align with station goals for percentage of claims greater than 125 days. Management for each station sets goals.

Cycle Times

1. Average Days Awaiting Development
2. Average Days Awaiting Evidence
3. Average Days Awaiting Award
4. Average Days Awaiting Authorization

**Timeliness of Non-Rating & Control End Products (i.e. EPs 600, writeouts, 800 series)**

Fully successful: All grade levels must meet locally established timeliness requirements, which should be derived from station targets.

**Timeliness of Direct Services (i.e. IRIS, Congressional Inquiries, etc.)**

Fully successful: All grade levels must meet locally established timeliness requirements, which should be derived from station targets. There will be no more than 5 instances where the VSR fails to meet established timeliness, or failure of employee to notify their supervisor when cases cannot be worked within established time frames and reasons thereof.

**Timeliness of Special Projects & Duties (i.e. Women Veterans Coordinators, AEW Project, etc.)**

Fully successful: There will be no more than 3 instances of tasks not being worked within established time frames, or failure of employee to notify their supervisor when cases cannot be worked within established time frames and reasons thereof.

**Timeliness of Corrective Actions**

Fully Successful: There will be no more than 3 instances of failure to complete a returned corrective action, or failure of employee to notify their supervisor when cases cannot be worked, within three days of the case being returned to them for correction.

**Workload Management**

Fully successful: All grade levels must manage their workload in accordance with locally established workload management plans. There will be no more than 2 instances where the VSR fails to show compliance with established workload management procedures.

Local management will be responsible for creating and communicating a workload management plan that will identify the types of work to be completed.

Indicators

* VETSNET Operations Reports
* Local Tracking Reports
* Supervisory Observation

**ELEMENT 3 – OUTPUT (Critical)**

Fully successful: VSRs process a minimum cumulative average number of outputs per day. Outputs will be counted as follows:

* Development (Initial Development, Subsequent Development, and Ready for Decision including rating Eps, EP 930s, administrative decisions, appeals, non-rating Eps, and EP 600s) – **.7**
* 1-2 contention claim development (Initial Development, Subsequent Development, and Ready for Decision including rating Eps, EP 930s, administrative decisions, appeals, non-rating Eps, and EP 600s) – **.5**
* Telephone development – **.1**
* Process award/decision (generate award, clear end product) – **.7**
* Authorize award – **.33**

**Note 1:** Subsequent development includes any actionable item, which moves the claim forward and is subject to quality review.

**Note 2:** Telephone development requires contact with claimant, representative, or medical facility to further the development of the claim. Credit for telephone development may be taken in addition to development credit.

**Note 3:** VSRs performing Post-Determination authorization duties will receive an additional .5 weighted action for more complex cases involving out of system payments or retroactive effective dates preceding 1982 (earliest generate line in VETSNET).

**Successful Level**

GS-7: 4

GS-9: 5

GS-10: 5.5

GS-11: 6

**Indicators**

* VOR
* ASPEN

There will be no output element expectation for 90 days following the completion of challenge training regardless of entry grade.

Duplicate credit will not be allowed for self-correction of a VSR’s error.

Leave, union time, and special projects or assignments pre-approved at the discretion of the supervisor are considered deductible time. Unmeasured time, such as informal training, was considered in developing the successful level and is not reportable deductible time.

**ELEMENT 4 – TRAINING (Critical)**

VSR will stay abreast of current laws and regulations, work processes, policies and procedures and computer applications in order to provide optimum service to our Veteran population.

Employees are encouraged to actively participate in self-developmental activities.

Performance for this standard will be mitigated when the VSR’s supervisor has not allotted sufficient time for VSR to complete training requirements or if the VSR is not provided a schedule of available training and the deadline they are to complete.

It is the responsibility of supervisors to provide VSRs with a training schedule in advance so they can complete their training requirements.

**Successful Level**

GS-7/9/10/11: Timely completion of nationally mandated training hours to include core requirements and mandated local training during evaluation period within assigned deadlines with no more than 1 violation during evaluation period.

**Indicators**

* TMS
* Supervisory Observation

**ELEMENT 5 – ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT (Non-critical)**

VSR functions as a team member to enhance resolution of claims and customer service contacts by work actions. VSR maintains professional, positive, and helpful relationships with customers by exercising tact, diplomacy, and cooperation.

Performance demonstrates the ability to adjust to change or work pressures, to handle differences of opinion in a businesslike fashion, and to follow instructions conscientiously. As a team member, contributes to the group effort by supporting fellow teammates with technical expertise and open communications and by identifying problems and offering solutions. Performance also demonstrates the ability to effectively communicate in a courteous manner with customers during the personal or telephone interview process.

**Successful Level**

GS-7/9/10/11: No more than 3 instances of valid complaints or incidents\*

**Indicators**

* Verbal and/or written feedback from internal and/or external customers
* Observations by a supervisor with the complaint documented

*\*A valid complaint or incident is one where a review by the supervisor, after considering both sides of the issue, reveals that the complaint/incident should have been handled more prudently and was not unduly aggravated by the complainant. Disagreeing, per se, does not constitute “discourtesy.” Valid complaints or incidents will be determined by the supervisor and discussed with the employee.*