(VSR VIP Post-D) Introduction to Personal Computer Generated Letter (PCGL)

Trainee Handout

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Objectives

* Identify the general requirements for decision notices and special requirements for visually impaired Veterans
* Complete the specific requirements for decision notices involving rating and authorization decisions
* Recognize steps for accessing and configuring PCGL
* Demonstrate the steps to generate notices in PCGL

References

* [38 CFR 3.103](https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=a53d7497f68e6696011cd45ddf48f89c&mc=true&node=se38.1.3_1103&rgn=div8), Procedural due process and other rights
* [38 CFR 3.104(c), Binding nature of decisions.](https://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?SID=ad275643432556b9dda942343fb89296&mc=true&node=se38.1.3_1104&rgn=div8) *Favorable findings*.
* [M21-1, Part 1, 2, B.1](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014072/M21-1-Part-I-Chapter-2-Section-B-Notice-of-Proposed-Adverse-Action), General Information on Notice of Proposed Adverse Action
* [M21-1, Part I, 2, D.1](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014074/M21-1-Part-I-Chapter-2-Section-D-Contemporaneous-Notice), General Information on Contemporaneous Notice
* [M21-1, Part III, Subpart v, 2.B](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014231/M21-1-Part-III-Subpart-v-Chapter-2-Section-B-Decision-Notices), Decision Notices

* [M21-1, Part III, Subpart v, 4.B.5.c](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014245/M21-1-Part-III-Subpart-v-Chapter-4-Section-B-Recoupment-of-Separation-Benefits%22%20%5Cl%20%223), **Preparing a Decision Notice After Commencing the Recoupment of Separation Benefits**

* [M21-1, Part III, Subpart v, 5.B.1.i](https://vaww.vrm.km.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_kanew/help/agent/locale/en-US/portal/554400000001034/content/554400000014256/M21-1-Part-III-Subpart-v-Chapter-5-Section-B-Preparing-and-Adjusting-Awards-in-Military-Retired-Pay-MRP-Cases), Notifying a Veteran of His/Her Eligibility for a Tax Exemption
* [Approved Language for Favorable Findings – Dependency](https://vba-media1.vbatraining.org/VBA_Learning_Catalog/Comp_Svc/Add_Ref/4491295_Add_Ref%282%29.pdf)
* [National Work Queue (NWQ) Phase 1 & 2 Playbook](https://vaww.vashare.vba.va.gov/sites/OFOPlaybooks/Shared%20Documents/NWQ_Phase_1and2_Playbook.pdf), Non-ADL Letters – p. 38-39
* [PCGL User’s Guides](https://vbaw.vba.va.gov/bl/21/publicat/Users/Index2.htm%22%20%5Cl%20%22vet), PCGL Documents (includes links to the Beginner’s User Guide, as well as individual letters)

Topic 1: Overview of Notification Requirements

VSRs must use the Personal Computer Generated Letter (PCGL) system to generate decision notices when the Redesigned Automated Decision Letter (RADL) is unavailable or incorrect within VBMS-A, or when letter creator cannot be used. Users must adhere to the notification requirements provided in *M21-1, Part III, Subpart v, 2.B*. when preparing decision notices. PCGLs should always be customized to address the recipient’s particular situation.

**Rules for Preparing a Decision Notice**

When preparing a decision notice

* use
	+ clear and concise wording, and
	+ a customer-friendly and compassionate tone
* provide complete and accurate information concerning the issue(s) addressed, and
* avoid using VA jargon, to include
	+ abbreviations with no accompanying definition, and
	+ phrases such as
		- “service connection not found”
		- “disability not due to service,” or
		- “wanton and reckless disregard of the probable consequences.”

**Decision Notice Requirements**

VA is required to provide claimants and their representatives (Power of Attorney and/or fiduciary) with timely notice of any decision made by VA that affects benefit eligibility or entitlement.

According to *M21-1, Part III, Subpart v, 2.B*, award and denial decision notices must:

* Inform the claimant of the issues adjudicated
* Summarize the:
	+ Evidence VA considered (See *M21-1, Part III, Subpart v, 2.B.1.f-g*, regarding evidence)
	+ Laws and regulations applicable to the claim, and
	+ Applicable review options the claimant may use to seek further review of the decision
* Explain how to obtain or access evidence used in making the decision
* Identify, if applicable, the criteria required to grant service connection (SC) or the next-higher level of compensation, and/or
* Identify
	+ For denied claims, the element(s) required to grant the claim that were not met, and
	+ A listing of findings that are favorable to the claimant under *38 CFR 3.104(c)*, if applicable

If the enactment of a decision resulted in the creation of an overpayment in a beneficiary’s account notify the beneficiary of the overpayment and his/her right to:

* Request a waiver of the overpayment, and/or
* A repayment plan

When VA grants entitlement to a benefit, or makes an adjustment to a running award, the decision notice must also notify the claimant of

* The monthly rate of payment
* The effective dates of entitlement and payment
* The amount of any benefits VA is withholding and the reason for the withholding, and
* Information about any additional benefits to which the claimant may be entitled

*Decisions Including Retired Pay*

Whenever the decision being processed involves withholding for military retirement pay, the decision notice must include the following additional paragraphs:

* Military Retired Pay Withholding
* Concurrent Receipt of VA Compensation and Military Retired Pay (a.k.a. the “Retired Pay Addendum”)
* Tax Exemption Eligibility (*M21-1, Part III, Subpart v, 5.B.1.i*)

Additionally, if service connection is granted for disability/disabilities related to Agent Orange (AO) the decision notice must also include notification of possible entitlement to Combat-Related Special Compensation (CRSC) for service-connected AO-related disabilities. (*M21-1, Part III, Subpart v, 5.A.7.d*)

*Decisions Including Recoupment of Separation Benefits*

If the decision processed includes recoupment of separation benefits (i.e. disability severance, separation pay, special separation benefit), the decision notice must also inform the Veteran of:

* The pre-tax amount of his/her separation benefits
* The gross amount of his/her monthly award of compensation
* The amount of compensation VA is withholding for recoupment of separation benefits
* The net amount of his/her month award of compensation, if any, and
* VA will continue withholding compensation until recoupment is complete

*Note:* Choosing the correct paragraph, when prompted, in PCGL will include the above information (see *M21-1, Part III, Subpart v, 4.B.5.c*). Also see the preceding reference for additional language that must be added to the decision notice if VA is withholding all compensation to recoup separation benefits.

**Providing Review Rights**

When notifying a beneficiary or claimant of a decision on a claim for disability compensation VSRs must ensure the following language appears under the heading “What You Should Do If You Disagree with Our Decision”:

If you do not agree with our decision, you have one year from the date of this letter to select a review option to protect your initial filing date for effective date purposes. You must file your request on the required application form for the review option desired. The table below represents the review options and their respective required application form.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Review Option** | **Required Application Form** |
| **Supplemental Claim** | VA Form 20-0995, *Decision Review Request: Supplemental Claim* |
| **Higher-Level Review** | VA Form 20-0996, *Decision Review Request: Higher-Level Review* |
| **Appeal to the Board of Veterans’ Appeals** | VA Form 10182, *Decision Review Request: Board Appeal (Notice of Disagreement)* |

***Please note:*** You **may not** request a higher-level review of a higher-level review decision issued by VA.

The enclosed *VA Form 20-0998,* *Your Rights to Seek Further Review of Our Decision*, explains your options in greater detail and provides instructions on how to request further review. You may download a copy of any of the required application forms noted above by visiting <www.va.gov/vaforms/> or you may contact us by telephone at 1-800-827-1000 and we will mail you any form you need.

You can visit [www.va.gov/decision-reviews](http://www.va.gov/decision-reviews) to learn more about how the disagreement process works.

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.va.gov.

*Note:* The VSR is responsible for ensuring the current review rights paragraphs with language regarding *VA Form 20-0998* are included in the PCGL and for ensuring the form is in the list of enclosures (though it should populate automatically). The above language was extracted from an RADL, however sufficient language for PCGL use can also be found in *M21-1 III.v.2.B.5*.

**Providing Centralized Mail Information**

In the box below the heading “If You Have Questions or Need Assistance,” ensure that the following information is provided to the Veteran in the decision notice, should the Veteran want to contact VA:

* “Use the Internet” – replace the default IRIS web address with <https://iris.custhelp.va.gov>, and all remaining instances in the letter.
* “Write” – replace the default language with:

VA now uses a centralized mail system. For all written communications, put your full name and VA file number on the letter. Please mail or fax all written correspondence to the appropriate address listed on the attached *Where to Send Your Written Correspondence*.

*Note***:***Where to Send Your Written Corresdpondence* must be manually added to the list of enclosures and sent to the claimant.

**Maintaining Jurisdiction of Claims with a PCGL**

When a PCGL is created, the draft copy of the notice will not be available to users in another regional office. Therefore, the *Non-ADL Notification Letter* special issue must be applied to one contention on the claim to maintain jurisdiction of the claim associated with the PCGL. VSRs must follow locally established procedures to notify the authorizing employee of the PCGL and pending award.

**Visually Impaired Veterans**

When corresponding with or processing a decision made on the claim of a Veteran with visual impairment (SC or non-service-connected) that is at least 70% or more disabling, or a Veteran that has requested special accommodations due to visual impairment, ensure the following actions are taken (see *M21-1 Part III subpart v 2.B.2.a*):

* add the *Blind Veteran* flash to the Veteran’s corporate record in SHARE, and
* prepare the correspondence/decision notice using an 18~~-~~point font
* reverse file *VA Form 21-0178, Visually Impaired Veteran*, in the center section of the Veteran’s *paper* claims folder, if one exists.

At the time the notice is finalized and mailed, VA must make a minimum of three attempts to contact the Veteran by telephone to explain the substance of the decision. The VSR or authorizer responsible for disposing of the associated EP must:

* provide a general summary of the decision(s) made
* inform the Veteran that
	+ the decision notice is forthcoming, and
	+ any additional questions concerning the notice’s content may be directed to the National Call Center, and
* document
	+ successful telephone contact on [*VA Form 27-0820, Report of General Information*](http://vbaw.vba.va.gov/bl/20/cio/20s5/forms/VBA-27-0820-ARE.pdf), or
	+ unsuccessful attempts to contact the Veteran as a contact note in VBMS.

Topic 2: Notification of Rating and Authorization Decisions

**Notification of Rating Decision**

**Requirements**

When a decision is the result of a *rating*, the body of the PCGL does *not* need to:

* Summarize the:
	+ Evidence VA considered
	+ Laws and regulations applicable to the claim,
* Identify, if applicable, the criteria required to grant service connection (SC) or the next-higher level of compensation, or
* Identify
	+ For denied claims, the element(s) required to grant the claim that were not met, and
	+ A listing of findings that are favorable to the claimant under *38 CFR 3.104(c)*, if applicable.

Instead, attach a copy of the rating decision n*arrative* document to the letter, as it already includes all of the above notification requirements. Do NOT attach a copy of the rating decision *codesheet*.

**Additional Benefits and Entitlements**

If we grant service-connection (SC) for a new medical condition or increase the percentage for a previously granted condition, we must notify the Veteran of any additional benefits to which they may be entitled.

Denials or confirmed and continued (C&C) do not prompt any potential entitlement to additional benefits. Therefore, notification should not be included if these are the only decisions.

*Note:* Additional benefits paragraphs & enclosures do *not* apply to authorization decisions, such as dependency adjustments.

*Additional Benefits Selections*

The table below lists additional benefits to which a claimant may be entitled, and the form required for applying for each benefit.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Combined Evaluation** | **Additional Benefits** | **Corresponding Enclosures** |
| **0%** | None (all appropriate Additional Benefits information included automatically) |  |
| **10%-20%** | Veteran Readiness & Employment Service\* | * VA Form 28-1900
* VA Form 28-8890
 |
| **30%-90%; No IU** | * Veteran Readiness & Employment Service\*
* Dependency Solicitation
 | * VA Form 28-1900
* VA Form 28-8890
* VA Form 21-686c
 |
| **100% or IU; NOT P&T (Basic Eligibility to DEA)** | * Veteran Readiness & Employment Service\*
* Dependency Solicitation
* Insurance Waiver of Premium
 | * VA Form 28-1900
* VA Form 28-8890
* VA Form 21-686c
 |
| **100% or IU P&T (Basic Eligibility to DEA)** | * Veteran Readiness & Employment Service\*
* Dependency Solicitation
* Insurance Waiver of Premium
* CHAMPVA
* Dependents’ Educational Assistance (DEA) - only on initial grant of DEA\*\*
 | * VA Form 28-1900
* VA Form 28-8890
* VA Form 21-686c

\*\*Always delete VA Form 22-5490 & VA pamphlet 22-73-3 from enclosures list when populated |

*Note*: \*For Veteran Readiness & Employment Service benefits, you will need to choose “Voc Rehab & Employment Services,” in PCGL and update the name in the paragraph (see Attachment A and the PCGL master letter). While the division name has been updated, it has yet to be reflected in PCGL, the form names, and the *M21-1, Adjudication Procedures Manual*.

In addition to the Corresponding Enclosures above, the following should be included in the enclosures list of every PCGL generated based on a rating decision:

* Rating Decision
* *Where to Send Your Written Correspondence*
* VA Form 20-0998

*Note****:***

* For additional information about these benefits, see the list of references provided in *M21-1, Part III, Subpart v, 2.B.1.k*
* Information about entitlement to healthcare is automatically generated in the PCGL when service connection is granted, or an increased evaluation is assigned
* Dependency Solicitation language is not required in decision notices when
* one of the issues decided was entitlement to additional benefits for (a) dependent(s) or
* the decision notice includes development for additional information/evidence to establish entitlement to additional benefits for (a) dependent(s).

\*\* When applicable, replace the default DEA paragraph with the following:

Your dependents may be eligible for Dependents’ Educational Assistance (Chapter 35). For more information on this program, please visit the following website: https://www.vets.gov/education/gi-bill/survivors-dependent-assistance/ or call 1-888-GIBILL-1 (1-888-442-4551).

**Notification of Authorization Decision**

**Requirements**

Unlike the PCGL for a rating decision, the PCGL for an authorization decision (such as dependency) *must*:

* Summarize
	+ The evidence VA considered
	+ Laws and regulations applicable to the claim
* Identify
	+ For denied claims, the element(s) required to grant the claim that were not met, and
	+ A listing of findings that are favorable to the claimant under *38 CFR 3.104(c)*, if applicable

You will learn more about specific favorable findings language that applies to authorization decisions in subsequent lessons.

**Enclosures**

The user will always need to modify the enclosures. “Rating Decision” will always populate in the list and will need to be ***removed*** any time the notification is *not* based on a rating decision.

The user will need to *manually* add the *Where to Send Your Written Correspondence*, enclosure every time.

Topic 3: Accessing and Configuring PCGL

**Accessing and Exiting PCGL**

Often, before the VETSNET Data button will be available in PCGL, the user will have had to open up VETSNET C&P Awards (smiley face), at least once on that computer, prior to attempting to use PCGL. You should only have to do this before the very first time you use PCGL on a computer, even if someone else has used it on that computer.

Complete the following steps prior to using PCGL for the first time on your current computer, or simply type “C&P Awards” in the Search bar and click the application to run:

1. Click “Start” button
2. Navigate alphabetically and click on “VBAPPS” folder
3. Click “C&P Awards T11”
4. Log in using your PIV card
5. Allow the program to load
6. Click on the “OK” button once it’s available
7. Close the program and proceed to opening PCGL

|  |
| --- |
| **Starting/Exiting PCGL: Regular Desktop or Citrix Desktop** |
| ***Start PCGL from the initial Windows screen*** | 1. Click “Start” button (window pane in task bar)
2. Navigate alphabetically and click “VBAPPS”
3. Navigate alphabetically to PCGL and select

Or1. Click “Search” button (magnifying glass next to the “Start” button in the task bar)
2. Click inside the Search Box
3. Type in “PCGL”
4. Click on the PCGL program to run
 |
| ***Exiting PCGL*** | There is a “Cancel” button only on the initial few screens. This will be the only time you will be able to go back to the previous screen. Each screen has an “Exit” button. To exit PCGL, or the current PCGL:1. Click “Exit”
2. When asked to confirm your choice, click on “Yes” to exit PCGL
 |

**Configuring/Customizing PCGL**

Configuring PCGL is easy. Just follow the steps below and PCGL will run the way you want it, every time, until you change it. Configurations don’t always hold in the Citrix Desktop environment, from use to use. The term “BUTTON” is used to designate “radio buttons” which have a space for showing choices.

To customize PCGL, do the following from the Environment and Configuration screen:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Step | Action | Sample |
|  | Click **“Exit”**  |  |
|  | Click **“Yes”**  |  |
|  | Click on Add-Ins at the top of the Word document then Click on the **“Configuration”** button at the top left of the Word document to access the PCGL Defaults screen.  |  |

*PCGL Defaults Screen*



| **Block Title** | **Guidelines** |
| --- | --- |
| Letter Type | Click on CP as the default. This is the most common type most VSRs will use. If you need a different type, you can always choose it during the letter-building process. |
| Section ID | Whatever you type here will print on your PCGLs in the reference lines along with the file number and stub name. We suggest that you follow local station guidelines. While in training, ask your Course Coordinator and/or Instructor what to use. |

*Note: If you do not want to change the defaults, click "Cancel" to return to the PCGL WORD DOC screen.*

|  |
| --- |
| **Additional PCGL Add-Ins Tab Options** |
|  | Start PCGL: Click on this button to go the "Environment and Configuration" screen to start a new, standard PCGL. |