

VETERANS BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION
COMPENSATION AND PENSION SERVICE

PROJECT MANAGMENT PLAN
For the

VIRTUAL VBA

Electronic Claims Folder (ECF) Project

March 1999

3-29-99 — talked to Jack & went over my notes & my interest in adding details about our development, emphasizing importance of proper file indexing - segmenting the record. Jack had already reached the conclusion that more detail it needed & had begun.

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PROJECT MANAGEMENT PLAN (PMP)

SECTION 1- OVERVIEW

This document describes a project under consideration for national deployment by the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) and is being managed by the Compensation and Pension (C&P) Service Program staff. This Project Management Plan describes the actions, controls, and objectives for implementing the Virtual VBA (Electronic Claims Folder) project.

1.1 Project Identification

1.1.1 Project Description:

By the end of FY 99, the Virtual VBA (Electronic Work Environment EWE) prototype at the Washington Regional Office will be fully incorporated into the prototype team's daily work environment. Contract analysis as well as the project management oversight detailed in this report will define the cost benefits of, and risks associated with, phased implementation. End user feedback will also outline the functional enhancements required for providing optimum user acceptance. With full implementation, electronic (digitally imaged) claims folders will provide the following benefits:

- Incremental (yearly) reductions in the costs associated with creating, maintaining, and storing paper records,
- Drastic reductions in the costs associated with preparing, and shipping brokered work,
- The complete elimination of the time required to physically search for claims folders

By providing simultaneous user access to a veterans electronic claims folder, VBA will also increase our level of professionalism by providing real-time, consistent answers to our customer's claim related or general correspondence questions. While actual studies have not been conducted, we believe that full implementation will also drastically reduce the challenges associated with privacy act requests. Through a minimal amount of keystrokes, the user can highlight and print the requested documents without spending countless hours at a copy machine.

Virtual VBA is not the ultimate solution for all of the challenges encountered in processing claims for benefits. It may actually have a negative impact on other aspects of the claims process. The initiative is envisioned to compliment other claims processing applications such as CAPS, SHARE, and VETSNET as our organization moves in stride with the concept of Virtual Government.

1.1.2 Project Name:

Virtual VBA (Electronic Work Environment EWE)

The project was formerly referred to as Highway 1, which is the trademark name of the private industry consortium, sponsoring Phase 1 of this project.

need John's

1.1.3 Project Contact List (Work in Progress)

VIRTUAL VBA Contact List				
Position	Name	Telephone	E-mail	Division
Project Sponsor(s)	Jack Hudson Ruth Whichard	(202) 273-7203 (202) 273-7265		C&P Service
Project Manager	Frank Kush	(202) 691-3006	VSCFKUSH@ VBA.VA.GOV	C&P Service
Technical Manager	Bill Hutson			VBA Info. Systems
Test Site Contact	Cheryl Deegan			
Prototype Team Contact	Jeryle Dorsey	(202) 691-3200 ext. 3209		Washington Regional Office

1.2 Project Requirements

In September 1996, VBA published *Re-engineering Claims Processing: A Case for Change*. This document indicated that “streamlining” the claims process depends heavily of capitalizing on advances in information technology. Information systems that VBA will utilize will result in better management of claim-related data.

The July 1997 document entitled *Blueprint for Change: Implementation Plan for Reengineering Claims Processing* specified that in the long term, VA must make the transition from a paper intensive system to an electronic environment characterized by the movement of data. This transition will be critical if VA will capitalize upon the “modernizing” of other government agencies into a “virtual” environment. The *Blueprint for Change, Tab 3: Information Technology Team Report* indicated that where possible, information will be moved electronically to reduce the delays and “hand-offs” associated with today’s paper intensive process.

In July 1998, Joseph Thompson, The Undersecretary for Benefits, and The National Performance Review initiated a meeting with a consortium of private industry companies to discuss how the Veterans Benefits Administration could utilize Information Technology to improve the quality and timeliness of claims processing.

The group identified opportunities for improvement in the following areas:

- Management of red-rope folders (paper records)
- Utilization of commercial, off-the-shelf (COTS) software

1.3 Project Overview (Historical Perspective)

Through Business Process Re-engineering, the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), has been taking gradual steps in improving the processing of benefits for veterans and their dependents. Advances and modifications in office infrastructure (the combination of claims counselors and examiners into service representatives, the evolution of the Hearing Officer into the Decision Review Officer (DRO)) combined with advances in Information Technology (AMIE II, PIES, CAPS), have been vital first steps in improving the service we provide. However, from the beginning VBA realized that no single initiative would revolutionize the claims process. As a result, several applications addressing specific steps in the claims process were developed independently to achieve their targeted goal (see project risks). While all of the initiatives made strides in improving the claims process, no application focused on transitioning away from maintaining paper records.

The Personnel Information Exchange System (PIES) made huge strides in streamlining the process VBA had to go through to request information from the National Personal Records Center (NPRC). 90% of the request procedure was automated. Where possible, information requests were answered electronically. However, service medical records (smrs), are a critical element in completing claims for disability compensation. While status responses are automated, the end result is the shipment of the actual paper records.

While paper records are often easier to review when making claims determinations, they represent extensive challenges in facilitating other areas such as case and file management. The COVERS file tracking system provided a means of tracking the actual physical location of the hard copy folder. However, its success was directly dependent on the recipient of the folder updating the computer system. As a result, the information in COVERS is not always real-time, and folders are still misplaced, resulting in delays for veterans.

When veterans and their dependents call with claim inquiries, the veterans service representative (VSR) is often unable to immediately locate the physical claim folder to provide an answer determining claims status. In many instances, an inquiry (VAI) is taken, and a return call must be made to the veteran days later. A search for the folder must then be conducted, so a comprehensive review of the claims folder can be completed.

While most associates are highly motivated to provide quality service to our nation's veterans, their morale often diminishes when they are not provided with adequate tools and resources to complete their job.

After a kick-off meeting in July 1998, the Highway I (Virtual VBA) initiative was established to facilitate VBA's advances in information technology. Under an agreement with the Under Secretary for Benefits, Highway I board members, comprised of representatives from Computer Sciences Corporation (CSC), Kodak, Eastman Software, Microsoft, Radian, Cisco, and IBM, agreed to work on a pro bono basis to re-engineer business practices at the Washington Regional Office (WRO). A pilot system was developed to prove the concept that it is possible to create an electronic claims folders in a workstation environment, where folders are easily accessible to associates within that environment. Where possible, opportunities for streamlining the claims process within the scope of the pilot would be identified and implemented.

The scope of the pilot was limited to implementing changes within the VBA prototype team at the WRO. The prototype team was an eight person Case Management Team that was responsible for processing 20% of the office's workload. While the initial goal was to establish additional out-based team members at the VA Medical Center (VAMC), the technical challenges associated with this goal would have greatly extended the scope of the project.

The proof of concept phase was to be completed by December 1998.

Test Process:

The private industry consortium conducted an evaluation of claims processing operations and information technology systems. They quickly identified an ambitious goal: eliminating paper from the claims process.

This led to the development of the Electronic Work Environment (ECW) concept. Under this concept, paper records are scanned into an electronic claims folder. All members of the prototype team have access to electronic claim folder data when they need it. The initial test phase of the pilot focused on original claims for disability compensation (010/110) with a limited folder size (two inches).

As with most disability compensation claims, service medical records are the bulk of the paper handled by regional office employees.

After an extensive evaluation of the Regional Office claims process, the Highway I group devised the following plan which incorporated their proposed technology into the existing claims process:

- A member of the Case Management Team enters an Application for Compensation and Pension (Form 21-526) electronically using a template designed by Highway 1 staff. The pilot project identified opportunity for the claim application to be entered by the veteran over the Internet, or by dial-in fax. However, this was beyond the scope of Phase I.
- Service verification requests (only) are sent by e-mail to the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) in St. Louis, Missouri. The Certificate of Release or Discharge from Active Duty (Form DD214) is then scanned and e-mailed back to the Washington Regional Office (WRO). Service Medical Record requests are sent to the Records Management Center (RMC) where they are scanned and electronically sent back to the WRO. The pilot project identified opportunity to request additional information such as facts and circumstances, and morning reports, however these enhancements were deemed to be beyond the scope of phase I.
- For original claims received at the WRO, the entire claims folder including service medical records, are prepared and scanned into the system. Veteran Service Representatives, including Rating specialists review the records electronically to determine what additional development is required. All of the information is accessible electronically to the prototype team at all times. The pilot project identified the opportunity to place the electronic claims folder in the same environment as the all other VBA applications (BDN Shell, AMIE, COVERS, RBA, PCGL) however, technical challenges encountered were deemed to be beyond the scope of phase I.

- The scope of the pilot project also identified opportunity for Virtual VBA workstations to be placed at the VA Medical Center in Washington DC, to test the feasibility of medical doctors reviewing electronic records as part of the C&P examination process. Technical challenges eliminated this element from the scope of phase I.
- Phase I also promised to provide Virtual VBA access to Service Organizations as part of their review process. It was later identified that this was beyond the scope of Phase I.

Hardware/ Software

Prior to the conclusion of the test of concept phase (December 1998) most hardware and software was provided at no cost to the government (not including workstations, servers, and printers. At the conclusion of the test, most equipment was purchased by VBA to further test the concept.

Hardware

- Pentium server: 300 MHz processor, 256 MB RAM, 40 Gigabyte hard drive, 100/10 MBPS NIC, CD-ROM reader, floppy drive, and high capacity backup capability (Microsoft Certified)
- Two Kodak 7500 Duplex scanners: 100 pages per minute, capable of handling various paper types and sizes
- Laser printer: black and white, 8 pages per minute
- Pentium Workstations: 200 MHz to 350 MHz processors, 64 MB RAM, 2 Gigabyte hard drive, 100/10 MBPS NIC, CD Reader, high resolution monitors (21 inches for rating specialists, rating technicians, and imaging technicians, 17" for other team members)
- Catalyst 2924 switch

Software

The Highway 1 consortium provided the majority of the software for the test concept phase.

Microsoft

- Windows NT Server Version 4.0 + SP3
- Windows NT Workstation version 4.0 + SP3
- Microsoft Office 97
- Outlook 98 (major operating platform for Virtual VBA)
- Microsoft Exchange Server Version 5.5
- Microsoft Certificate Server

Eastman Software

- Eastman Workfolder Version 1.1 for Microsoft Exchange
- Eastman Software Document Manager Version 1.0 for Microsoft Exchange
- Imaging for Windows Professional Edition Version 2.0

Radian Systems

- Worldscan
- Image Enhancement Server
- Worldscan Distributed Object Management System

It is important to note that the Virtual VBA system was established in a closed environment, on a Local Area Network (LAN), independent from the Washington Regional Office's network. The Virtual VBA server and each end user's workstation were configured to work specifically with all electronic claims folder components. Therefore, all standard VBA applications operated off a separate LAN and end user workstation.

Computer Sciences Corporation (CSC) provided project management, systems engineering, and integration for the project.

The "pro bono" phase of Virtual VBA proved the concept that it is possible to convert red rope folders into an electronic work folder, where folders are easily accessible to all associates within the environment. The initiative shows potential at evolving into a case management tool that can reside and function in the same environment as other VBA applications. The full scope of existing hardware and software must be documented before an implementation plan can be determined.

Currently, Virtual VBA is under a maintenance contract only. System enhancements and/or redesign are prohibited. Maintenance of the system has been a challenge. Several glitches still prohibit the application from being 100% functional.

As of February 25, 1999, approximately 325 folders have been established in Virtual VBA. Many of the established folders do not fit the profile of (original claims, 2 inches in thickness) as defined in the scope of the project. This occurred when system contractors needed to increase the volume of scanned documents to complete system performance analysis. The folders that were placed into the Virtual VBA environment represent less than 6% of the office's total pending workload. Phase II of the project will identify and document all considerations for national deployment and will identify the most effective implementation plan.

User acceptance testing is ongoing. In addition to the prototype team's continued use of the application. Associates from Regional Office's nationally will be brought in to actually work in the electronic work folder environment. Their feedback will be vital in identifying additional opportunities for improvement, risks for further deployment, and system potential.

The introduction of any new application into the workplace forces us to re-evaluate, and sometimes re-engineer the business practices associated with the integration of the new application. It has been identified early in the process that the electronic conversion process is extremely time consuming. The conversion process includes: preparation of the documents to be scanned, i.e. removal of staples, sorting of records, etc., scanning of documents, and quality assurance (QA) monitoring of the scanned folder. Early results indicate that it takes an experienced associate over one hour to convert a one to two inch red rope folder into an electronic file. Further analysis (to be completed in Phase II), including contract supported cost benefit studies will identify the most effective procedure for incorporating the scanning process into existing work procedures and practices.

Future Claims Process: The claims processing vision as outlined in the BPR model published in the *Blueprint for Change* states that information technology will facilitate the accurate and timely collection of evidence. Virtual VBA proposes an electronic folder system, which acts as a warehouse for the data collected. E-mail capability allows direct communication with other government organizations such as NPRC. As the electronic work folder is integrated with the standard VBA network, Virtual VBA will serve as an easily accessible location for claims information, interfacing with case management tools such as CPS, and CAPS, and claims processing tools such as RBA and VETSNET.

Conclusion of Project: Virtual VBA is dynamic. The project's continued growth and evolution will be determined on the data collected and enhancements completed in Fiscal Year '99. Phase II of Virtual VBA will conclude when:

- Funding is obtained for national implementation, and a national implementation plan is identified,
- User feedback determines and upper management concedes that electronic claims folders (digital imaging) impedes the enhancement of other areas of claims processing,
- The Contractor cost benefit analysis reveals that Virtual VBA is not cost effective,
- The Contractor cost benefit analysis reveals a more cost effective method of evolving towards the electronic work environment.

SECTION 2- PROJECT MANAGEMENT

2.1 Project Managers Role

The role of the project manager will be to provide oversight to the development of Virtual VBA as detailed in this plan. Initially, the manager will spend extensive time with prototype team members identifying and documenting workflow, system shortcomings, and technical challenges. The project manager will gather information from the technical manager on dealings with and accomplishments made by contract support. The project manager will facilitate meetings identifying project team members, roles, and responsibilities, and will routinely report to the project sponsors on the health of the initiative. The project manager will also assist the project team in the development of self-managed team skills needed for success in Phase II of the project. The project manager will also act as a liaison with all parties regarding, but not limited to system enhancements, initiative demonstrations, and project planning.

2.1.2 Project Manager Objectives and Priorities

The over-all objective for the management of the project is to ensure that the initiative is developed to meet the VA's needs. The project will be driven by business needs and will strive to provide a quality end result. Prototype team members and visiting end users will be an integral part of all phases in the project life cycle to ensure that the system's functionality meets the needs of the end user, in regards to the project's goal.

2.1.3 Assumptions, Dependencies, and Constraints

- Phase I proved the concept that it is possible to create an electronic claims folder. Phase II will test the technical and end user impact of full production within the specific digit range and end product definition.
- Phase II will serve as an opportunity for continued analysis, documentation, and implementation planning.
- Implementation will be incremental. A specific implementation plan is dependent upon the results of the cost benefit analysis to be conducted in Phase II, and the continued analysis of end user feedback.
- As identified in early testing, Virtual VBA will not enhance associate productivity. Future enhancements focused on increasing system functionality may offset additional time that this adds to the claims process. The goal of the project is to reduce the costs associated with creating, maintaining, and working in red rope (paper) folders.
- Contract support will stabilize the existing environment in Phase II of the project. The technical manager will document milestones and lessons learned.
- Phase II will document needed enhancements, and make material improvements where necessary.
- Long term implementation strategy will focus on interfacing Virtual VBA with other VBA systems and applications including but not limited to: CAPS, COVERS, RBA. TARGET
- As the electronic folder is essentially a “warehouse” or storage facility for electronic information, the electronic claims folder will have file storage compatibility non-VBA organizations such as ~~organizations~~ as the Department of Defense, the Social Security Administration, and the Veterans Health Administration.
- Virtual VBA will continue to function on an independent server. Phase II will identify all requirements for moving the electronic claims folder onto the VBA platform.
- Prototype team members will be dedicated to Virtual VBA during 100% of each workweek. (associates dedicated 50% of their time or less, in the past)

Not the only goal - free us from physical restrictions; improve record reliability

2.2 Project Resources and Organization

Virtual VBA will utilize the software applications developed by the Highway I consortium and will be operated by the prototype team at the Washington Regional Office. March 15th through April 15th, will be critical testing time in developing user acceptance and system analysis data to OMB, the Information Technology Investment Board (ITIB), and other interested stakeholders.

While the end benefits Virtual VBA provides are not in improving the timeliness of claims processing, many associates ask the fundamental question, “Can this system be used to work C&P claims and what will the impact be on productivity?” This question is extremely important. The

further evolution of the initiative may be contingent on the positive or negative impact that Virtual VBA has on the actual claims process.

Data gathering will be a vital part of this task.

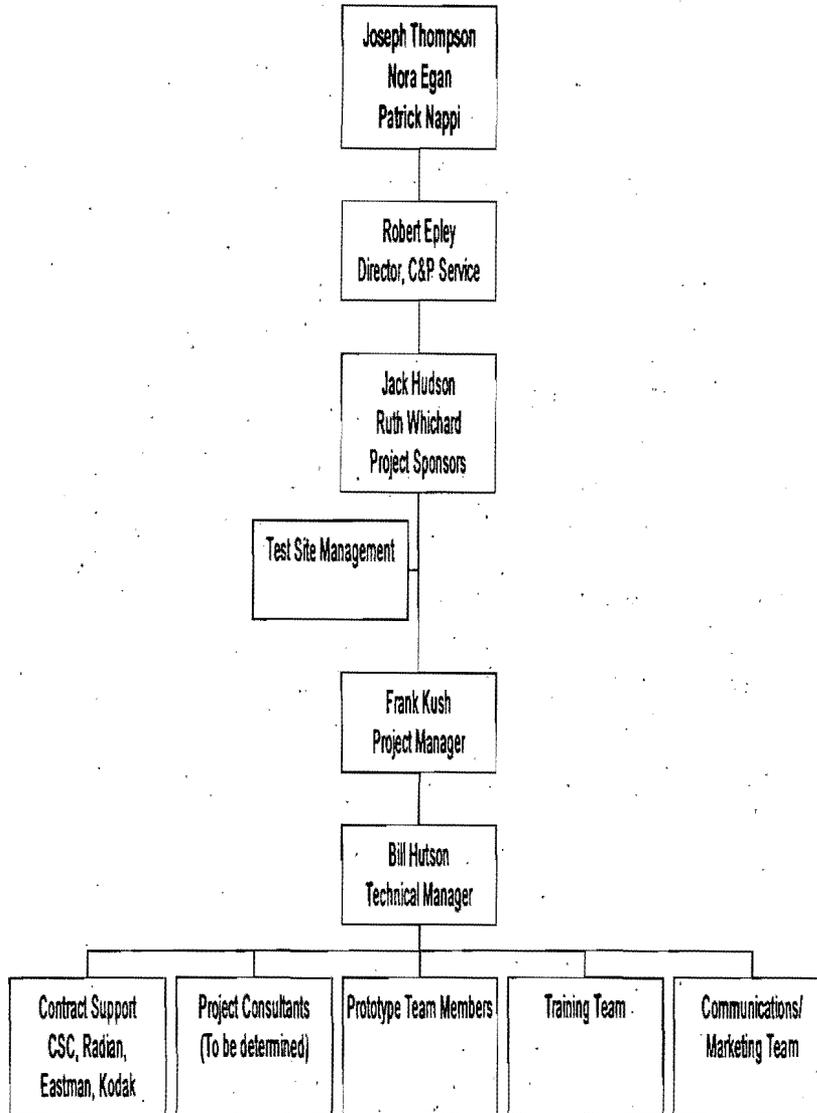
User feedback surveys, developed by the project manager will be utilized in obtaining end user analysis of the Virtual VBA initiative. A Virtual VBA awareness letter is also being developed to fully inform veterans whose claims will be processed in the electronic environment.

Bi-weekly status reports written by CSC contractors will be utilized in the development of over-all project status reports for the C&P Sponsors.

A PowerPoint slide show was developed by the Project Manager to facilitate the dissemination of historical information during initiative presentations.

Organizational Structure

Virtual VBA Organizational Structure



add me & John

2.2.3 Organizational Roles and Responsibilities

Individual and Organization	Responsibilities, Duties, Major Functions
Jack Hudson, Ruth Whichard Project Sponsors	Main VBA contact point for project. Responsible for providing guidance and support to Project Manager, and maintaining budget, and keeping stakeholders apprised of initiative's development
Frank Kush Project Manager	Contact Point for Project Responsible for implementation coordination including all plans, schedules, and risk management. Responsible for reporting project status to project sponsors
Bill Hutson Technical Manager	Responsible for monitoring technical elements of initiative, coordinating report times of contractors, and documenting technical milestones and lessons learned directly to the Project Manager.
Roland Christian Cheryl Deegan Test Site Management/ Project Champions	Provides resources and test cases for prototype effort.
Patricia Hoover Contract Officer	Responsible for securing contract support where identified and needed through Statements of Work written by the project team submitted through the project sponsor

The following positions will be identified in Phase II of the project:

- Project Communications and Marketing Director
- Project Training Director
- Work Processes Coordinator
- Project Consultants

As the scope of the project expands, it is possible that other positions may be identified and selected. Each identified element may serve as the lead point of contact for identified project team members to support the creation of deliverables identified in future meetings.

For example, John Doe may represent a 4 person training team responsible for creating user manuals, and developing a training implementation plan.

2.2.4.1 Support

Project Support (team members) will be identified as objectives and milestones of Phase II are completed. Currently, a project consultant team has been identified to share perspectives from their area of expertise on the project. Their insight will be necessary in identifying the best practices and lessons learned of similar initiatives.

Project consultants include:

1. Scott Happel, St. Louis Regional Office
2. Chuck DeCoste
3. Joe Pfau

4. Yvonne White
5. Patti Sanford
6. Eleanor Hunter
7. Don Williams

2.3 Objectives, Schedule, and Milestones

Objectives

The following objectives will be achieved as part of Virtual VBA, Phase II.

1. DEVELOPMENT OF PROJECT MANAGEMENT PLAN

2. **100% Production on Virtual VBA by Prototype Team-** The permanent members of the Virtual VBA pilot team are located at the Washington Regional Office. In Phase I, team members dedicated only 50% of their time to the initiative. The balance was dedicated to processing claims in the traditional environment. The volume of work actually placed into the electronic work folder environment was substantially lower than the estimated number of claims input to support Phase I testing. 100% production in the Virtual VBA environment is required to identify opportunities for improvement and to properly evaluate system performance and technical stability. In recent meetings with the Director of the Washington Regional Office, the prototype team was assigned to the Virtual VBA initiative on a permanent basis.

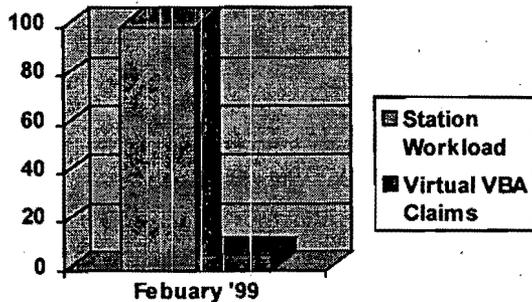


Chart "A" compares the number by percent of C&P claims (excluding appeals) currently being processed in Virtual VBA versus the total number of WRO claims.

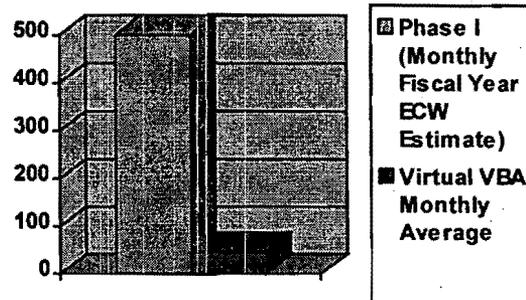


Chart "B" compares the Phase I (fiscal year) monthly Virtual VBA productivity estimate (prepared by CSC) to the actual monthly average. (Note: This comparison does not take into account down time due to system malfunction, and contract support negotiations.)

3. **Application Training/Team Building Training for Prototype Team-** The Virtual VBA Prototype team expressed concerns that they have not received training on functioning and evolving into an employee managed team. Many of these skills are vital to achieving success in a "virtual environment," that mirrors the Business Process Reengineering concept. The team also identified the need for application training in the following areas: PIES, BDN Shell, Windows Functionality, AMIE, VITAL.
4. **Identification and Establishment of Segmented Work Area for Virtual Team Members-** As Virtual VBA has gained extensive national attention, Virtual VBA team members continuously face challenges in maintaining productivity. A closed test environment would minimize the daily distractions of a "busy" work environment and allow the team to focus on the tasks ahead. This environment would also

provide a more professional environment to conduct concept demonstrations, and team meeting. This effort is being conducted in cooperation with the Washington Regional Office Director and his staff.

- 5. Additional evaluation of system functionality by establishing additional "Virtual" team members -** The number one question asked by many associates is "Can this system be used to work C&P claims and what will be the impact on productivity?" Additionally, critics of "test" initiatives often argue that results are often specific to the already established business practices of the designated test site. To offset all of these challenges, a sampling of rating specialists and veterans service representatives will act as "virtual" team members, by processing claims in the system. In addition to completing a participant survey, they will share enhancement feedback with the work group. "Virtual" Team members will come from a variety of sources including: C&P Service (this is in step with the C&P Director's goal of C&P associates maintaining a "from the field" perspective), the LEAD Program, and various regional offices.

A second option (in step with a possible redistribution of workload at WRO) would be to establish remote Virtual VBA workstations for Rating Specialists at Regional Offices in Baltimore, MD and Roanoke, VA. While this would expand the technical scope of Phase II, it would test the system's ability to send folders remotely and may identify possible technical challenges involved with the process. If this option is chosen, technical assistance will be required.

- 6. Creation of Virtual VBA End User Survey-** Allows group to obtain valuable end user perspectives using a structured metrics.
- 7. Development and documentation of established work flow-** This will be accomplished through the direct input of the prototype team, C&P Service, and the project manager. The establishment of an effective workflow in the Virtual VBA environment will require unconventional thinking and a major change in our business practices. This will be a dynamic process open to continuous analysis and refinement.
- 8. Technical analysis of system performance with full prototype production-** This study will be critical in identifying the effectiveness of the Virtual VBA server configuration, software performance, error coding, etc. This task will be completed by the Technical Manager with the assistance of contract support and project consultants.
- 9. Optimization of current Virtual VBA Hardware-** These tasks will be completed by CSC contractor and technical program manager. Preliminary assessments by the CSC contractor revealed several shortcomings in the physical set-up of the environment. This objective includes but is not limited to: the physical relocation of the Virtual VBA server to a secure, climate controlled, environment equipped with UPS power supply, and technical adjustments. As the project is dependent upon various types of software, we need to ensure that the hardware is configured for optimum performance.
- 10. Contract support developed Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA) Virtual VBA-** This analysis will be the foundation of the project's future direction. The CBA will evaluate the cost effectiveness of making the transition to the electronic work folder environment. The study will cite the costs associated with the transition including but not limited to: fiscal savings in the space required to store paper records, the costs associated with infrastructure/architecture upgrades to support national implementation, etc. This report will make compare the Virtual VBA environment to existing VBA imaging initiatives (TIMMS), and one other cite one other alternative. The CIB, along with other pertinent documentation prepared by

the Virtual VBA project team, will be presented to the Undersecretary for Benefits, who will make a final determination on Phase III of the project.

- 11. Research/Visit other Privates/Federal organizations utilizing digital imaging technology and report findings-** As Virtual VBA is very much a work in progress, we will continuously compare our initiative to existing imaging projects in both the public and private sectors. Planned contact includes but is not limited to TIMS, St. Louis Regional Office, CHAMPVA, Denver, CO, Veterans Health Administration (as identified in the VA Secretary's ONE VA IT Vision), Met Life, Blue Cross, Blue Shield, and Edge Systems. Findings and opportunities will be identified and shared with the project team. The Project Sponsors, and the Project Manager will complete this task.
- 12. Organize and Develop meetings with Virtual VBA Advisory Group and assign tasks as appropriate-** participants have been identified by the Undersecretary for Benefits, C&P Service, WRO, and the Project Manager. As the project evolves, additional participants will be identified. The advisory group will make up the brain trust of the Virtual VBA initiative, making recommendations for contract support, initiative development, and will help to ensure project success.
- 13. Organize and Develop "initiative-tie-in" meetings with other C&P IT initiatives-** In the past, VBA has developed several IT initiatives independently of one another to achieve a specific objective. While the products are developed well, the functionality and data structure is often different, resulting in extensive, redundant task time added to the end user's work day (i.e. entering a veterans military data in PIES, CPS, AMIE). This initiative will seek to evolve "in-step" with other VBA initiatives. As all IT initiatives evolve, summit meetings will document high level functional comparisons and identify opportunity for data sharing and information exchange.
- 14. Establish all VBA applications in Virtual VBA Environment (Windows NT) and document challenges encountered-** Currently, Virtual VBA resides on a separate Local Area Network (LAN). Most VBA applications, BDN Shell, RBA, PCGL, will not function in the NT environment. Merging all applications into one environment will be essential in conducting meaningful technical analysis and forecasting the challenges and costs associated with national implementation.
- 15. Develop functional requirements assessment of Virtual VBA-** Most, if not all of the work completed in Phase I was completed at an extremely fast pace with minimal documentation of the product's evolution. There was never a functional requirements document created as part of the "pro bono" effort. The CSC project plan highlighted the functional elements of the product but failed to verify user acceptance. This task will be necessary in identifying the functional scope of the project. Meetings may be required with Eastman software to verify the full potential of their product.
- 16. Develop Project Report citing findings, risks, and recommendations based on project evolution -** This document will be prepared cooperatively by the project team. This will be one of the core documents submitted to the Undersecretary.

2.3.2 Schedule and Milestones

Work Breakdown/ Objective	Start Date	End Date	% Completed
DEVELOPMENT OF PROJECT MANAGEMENT PLAN	03-01-1999	03-12-1999	90%
100% Production on Virtual VBA by Prototype Team	02-24-1999	03-05-1999	99%
Application Training/Team Building Training for Prototype Team	03-05-1999	Ongoing	2%
Additional evaluation of system functionality by establishing additional "Virtual" team members	02-22-1999	Ongoing	5%
Identification and Establishment of Segmented Work Area for Virtual Team Members	03-10-1999		10%
Creation of Virtual VBA End User Survey	02-19-1999	02-19-1999	100%
Development and documentation of established work flow	03-15-1999	Ongoing	0%
Technical analysis of system performance with full prototype production	03-15-1999	10-01-1999	0%
Optimization of current Virtual VBA Hardware	03-08-1999	04-01-1999	20%
Contract support developed Cost Benefit Analysis (CBA) Virtual VBA	03-15-1999		0%
Research/Visit other Privates/Federal organizations utilizing digital imaging technology and report findings	02-05-1999	10-01-1999	25%
Organize and Develop meetings with Virtual VBA Advisory Group and assign tasks as appropriate	02-22-1999	Ongoing	25%
Organize and Develop "initiative-tie-in" meetings with other C&P IT initiatives	TBD	TBD	
Establish all VBA applications in Virtual VBA Environment (Windows NT) and document challenges encountered	02-15-199	Ongoing	25%
Develop functional requirements assessment of Virtual VBA	TBD	TBD	
Develop Project Report citing findings, risks, and recommendations based on project evolution		09-01-1999	

Project Dependencies

As stated in the objectives listed above, Phase III of the project is dependent upon the findings and recommendations cited in the Cost Benefits Analysis, Project Report, and system testing results.

Budget

THIS SECTION NEEDS WORK/HELP ☺

Status Reports/ System Demonstrations

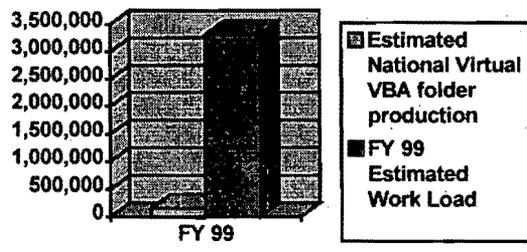
Both the technical manager and project manager on a biweekly basis will develop status reports. The project manager's status reports will offer a high level summary of tasks accomplished, barriers encountered, and will forecast tasks to be accomplished.

Due to the extensive external marketing of the Highway I phase of Virtual VBA, the project team continues to receive numerous requests for system demonstrations from a variety of sources in the public and private sectors. To reduce the down-time required when system demonstrations are conducted, the team has organized the presentation schedule and format. Demonstrations will be held twice monthly and conducted by the Project manager and prototype team members. Request for demonstrations will be coordinated and scheduled through the project sponsors. Demonstrations requested outside of normal scheduling time will be prioritized by project sponsors and conducted on an "as needed" basis.

Risk Identification/ Analysis

1. **Virtual VBA operates on Windows NT workstations. VBA currently operates in a Windows'95 environment.** This is a risk associated with merging Virtual VBA into the standard VBA environment. Currently, several applications including RBA and PCGL will not function in the NT environment. The team needs to asses what operating system VBA envisions operating under, and Virtual VBA may need to be configured for that environment. Microsoft has begun preliminary marketing of Windows 2000, which is believed to mirror much of the functionality of the NT operating system. Scope creep may be unavoidable if Virtual VBA has to be converted to operate in a different environment (Phase III risk).
2. **As it is currently designed, Virtual VBA may not be conducive to C&P Work Flow.** Fiscal year '99 projections show that VBA faces 3,320,000 C&P claim decisions. Early analysis indicates that an experienced Virtual VBA technician can enter between 8-10 claims per day in the Virtual VBA environment. Assuming that each Regional Office had one high volume scanner (which may not be financially feasible), VBA would only be able to create an estimated 150,000 claims folders yearly. Therefore, implementation would have to be incremental. Initial end user review estimates that working with electronic claims may have a negative impact on productivity, especially in the area of rating decisions.

*original
claims
only?*



3. **The CIB, and the decision of the Undersecretary will define the future direction of the Project.** While VBA has identified that digital imaging and an electronic work folder will play a key roll in the enhancement of information technology, we are still uncertain of the best medium to utilize. Simply stated, Virtual VBA may not be the most efficient progression to make. A large part of the initiative's future will be dependent upon the recommendations detailed in the cost benefit analysis and most importantly, the decision of the Under Secretary.

- pull this out
4. **Beware of the unknown: The infamous Y2K Bug.** While all hardware and software manufacturers claim that Virtual VBA products are Y2K compliant, most experts agree there is no way to be 100% certain that errors may not occur. IT technicians will monitor the web pages and technical journals of the companies providing software for Virtual VBA for the identification of Y2K bugs and implement identified fixes.
 5. **Technical integration of independently developed applications is no easy task.** The goal of the Virtual VBA team is to share data with all other developing IT initiatives in VBA. Interfaces are a relatively simple task to complete, however, data sharing (system integration) can be extremely complex. An additional challenge with Commercial Off-The-Shelf (COTS) software is that the configuration of data is often hard to identify. True integration of system applications may result in extensive scope creep.
 6. **Electronic Data vs. Electronic Files.** Opponents of Virtual VBA will argue that the true future of the electronic age resides in data sharing and not data imaging. Currently, 99.9% of all VBA claims folders in the country consist of service medical records written on paper. No current technology can convert these records into electronic "text" data. Digital imaging of this information is the only way to place this information into an electronic file. As other organizations, such as the Department of Defense, make the transition to electronic data, Virtual VBA will be ready. The core of Virtual VBA is the creation of the electronic claims folder (ECF). The ECF is capable of storing any type of electronic file (Microsoft documents, imaged files, text files, etc.). If DOD creates medical documents in a standard format (.doc, .txt), Virtual VBA will be compatible in storing and opening the information. Realistically, imaged records will be an intricate part of the electronic work environment. With time, we will evolve to an electronic data environment.
 7. **The VBA issued Y2K moratorium on IT initiatives may halt system development.** Understandably, all IT resources will be focused on insuring veterans still receive their benefits in the year 2000. If the IT moratorium includes Virtual VBA team members, the project may not reach identified milestones and objectives.
 8. **Magnetic storage of electronic records may not receive security acceptance.** Currently, all Virtual VBA documents are stored directly on the Virtual VBA Server. While the data is routinely backed up to a magnetic tape system. Most files can be permanently erased at the stroke of a few keys. The project team is exploring the feasibility of transitioning the electronic information to a database or "juke box" CD-ROM environment. This enhancement has not been identified in any scope document and may require additional cost benefit analysis.

2.4.1 Risk Tracking

As additional risks are identified, they will be shared through bi-weekly status reports, e-mails, and project team meetings. The project team will mitigate additional risks as they are identified, and will brainstorm the most efficient corrective action.

2.5 Contractor Management

Project sponsors and team members with the most expertise will develop statements of Work (SOW). All contract requests will be coordinated through Patricia Hoover. The project team will identify the contract support required to accomplish project tasks, coordinate the bidding process, and complete resource acquisition.

The technical leader directly through the project manager will direct technical contract support. Issues relating to contractor performance will immediately be reported to the project manager for dissemination to the project team.

Solicitation of non-contacted vendors will be referred to the VBA acquisition staff.

2.6 Virtual VBA Interaction with "ONE VA" IT Vision

Recently, Togo West, the Acting Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs, announced his "One VA" vision, to effectively link IT architecture. While the architecture standards have not yet been defined, Virtual VBA will make every attempt to evolve in step with this vision.

The electronic claims folder is versatile and will be able to store almost any electronic file type. As VBA continues to look outside themselves to share and exchange information, Virtual VBA will be the ideal transition tool. As an electronic claims folder, the system has the flexibility of storing virtually any type of electronic file.

While future meetings with identified participants will solidify our "virtual" partnership, preliminary research indicates that the electronic claims folder is directly in step with other "One VA" data exchange initiatives including:

- *Electronic Imaging, Indexed Storage, VA-wide Retrieval On Demand of Claims Folders and Medical Records-* On a limited basis VHA currently creates scanned images of hard copy medical records to support health care claims. As the transition is made to either an imaged based file system or data driven medical transcription, Virtual VBA will have the flexibility of storing this information in the electronic file. Phase I attempted to test the feasibility of establishing Virtual VBA in the Washington Veterans Medical Center so physicians would have the flexibility of reviewing veterans service medical records on-line. While it was later omitted from the scope of Phase I, it is still technically feasible to accomplish this task.
- *Robust Electronic Exchange of Veteran Personnel and Medical Data with DOD and other Government Agencies.* As stated earlier, the electronic work folder is capable of storing virtually any type of electronic file. While the work group will explore methods of modifying information exchange, this basic principle is a sign that our organizations are headed in the right direction. Additionally, almost all government organizations utilize e-mail to communicate with one another (VHA and VBA utilize the same platform, Microsoft Exchange), this connectivity alone increases the ease at which government organizations can exchange data.
- *Paperless Data Exchange with Commercial Partners-* In the future, VBA may implement the concept of contract physician examinations with private sector health care practitioners. As Virtual VBA utilizes an e-mail based platform, the exchange of examination requests and electronically transcribed examinations, would be easy to accomplish.

- *VHA is evolving to Windows NT workstations.* Conference calls with the Chief Information Officer's, Training and Education Division for VHA, have identified that all VA Medical Centers are making the transition to Windows NT servers and work stations. This is in perfect step with the Virtual VBA configuration.

SECTION III MISCELANEOUS INFORMATION

Forecasting the Future of Virtual VBA (Phase III)

The future of Virtual VBA revolves around the principle that we will evolve to an electronic environment and digital imaging will play a vital role in that transition. The exact role of digital imaging may be refined. After the basic principle is taken into consideration, our scope is fairly broad. The Project team has several options to consider:

1. **Expansion of Phase II (beta testing)-** Options include expanding the test sample size (digit range, end product types) within the Washington Regional Office, or expanding beta to an additional Regional Office.
2. **Enhancing Virtual VBA to Meet Functional Requirements of End Users.** Simply stated, improve the functionality of the existing system to make it more "user friendly."
3. **Re-engineer Technical Workflow to Minimize Impact on End Users-** The preparation, scanning and quality assurance process is time consuming and somewhat labor intense (an average of one hour to enter one case into Virtual VBA. The Project Team would explore the feasibility of establishing scanning centers to complete the "preparation" tasks.
4. **Redesign Entire Virtual VBA Program-** The existing technological design may not be feasible for national implementation. The project team would explore alternatives and make a determination based on the information gathered and analysis completed in Phase II. COTS software may be too limited to facilitate the complexity of VBA claims processing.

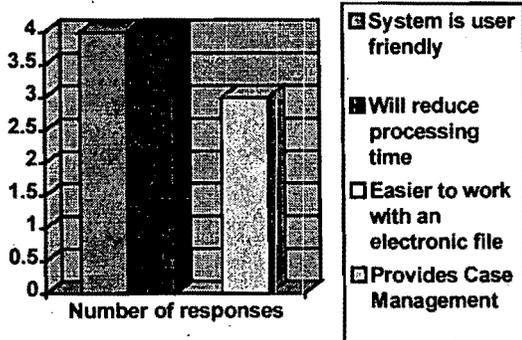
Each option has extensive considerations and risks ranging from business changes to high dollar cost issues that the Project Team must mitigate under the direction of the Undersecretary. As stated earlier, our future direction will be dependent upon the findings of the Cost Benefit Analysis and other pertinent data collected in Phase II of the Virtual VBA project.

3.1 Initial Analysis of End User Feedback

An end user survey of the prototype team was recently conducted by the project manager. While a more detailed analysis will follow, preliminary results are listed below.

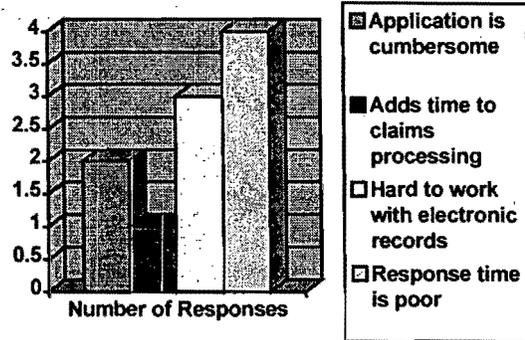
What do you like best about Virtual VBA?

A total of six participants answered this question.



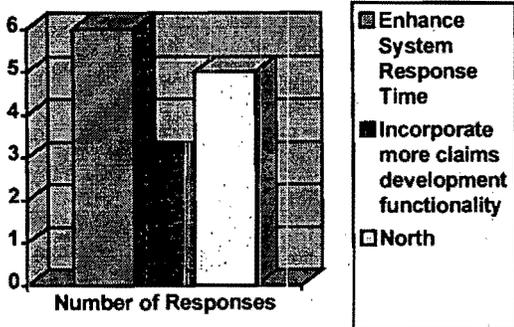
What do you like least about Virtual VBA?

A total of six participants answered this question.



How Can Virtual VBA be improved?

A total of six participants answered this question.



Will an electronic claims folder be efficient with all claims?

A total of six participants answered this question.

