DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
Veterans Benefits Administration
Washington DC 20420

May 18, 2000

VBA Letter 20-00-15

In Reply Refer To:

Director (00)
All VA Regional Offices and Centers

SUBJ: TRIP Implementation

1. On March 24, 2000, the Compensation and Pension Service (C&P) released Fast Letter 00-24 announcing the availability of the TRIP Level 1 training package. The purpose of this letter is to provide all regional offices with guidance on implementing TRIP Level 1 training.

2. Regional offices should begin discussions with their service organization partners immediately to establish a training plan. Regional offices can only *offer* this training as it is not mandatory. Service organizations cannot be forced to participate in TRIP. Please provide a copy of your plan to your Office of Field Operations analyst by COB May 26, 2000. Stations should develop their training plans and schedules based upon available resources and current workload situations. Your plan should include, but is not limited to, the following:

- Date you plan to begin training.
- How you plan on administering the 31 hours of training. (1 day a week? Every Monday? All 31 hours in one week?)
- How many FTE you anticipate dedicating to the training.
- Where you plan on holding the training.
- The name and position of your TRIP coordinator.
- Which service organizations have expressed interest in receiving the training from your station.
- How many service officers you anticipate training for Level 1.
- Any assistance you will need from OFO or C&P in administering the training.

3. Each regional office should also keep an accurate account of the number of man-hours expended administering Level 1 training.

4. During the week of May 15, 2000, the C&P Service will be sending each regional office a hard copy of the TRIP Training Package. Regional offices are responsible for the duplication of this package to support their training.

5. In addition to providing training at your regional office, each station is encouraged to solicit interest in regionalized training at the Baltimore Training Academy for any of its service partners. Based on interest in this approach, regionalized training for large groups will be made available throughout the year.

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- Date you plan to begin training.
- How you plan on administering the 31 hours of training? (1 day a week? Every Monday? all 31 hours in one week?).
- How many FTE do you anticipate dedicating to the training?
- Where you plan on holding the training?
- The name and position of your TRIP Coordinator.
- Which Service Organizations have expressed interest in receiving the training from your station?.
- How many Service Officers do you anticipate training for level 1?
- Any assistance you will need from OFO or C&P in administering the training.

3. Each regional office should also keep an accurate account of the number of man hours expended administering level 1 training.

4. During the week of May 15, 2000, the C&P Service will be sending each regional office a hard copy of the TRIP Training Package. Regional offices are responsible for the duplication of this package to support their training.

5. In addition to providing training at your regional office, each station is encouraged to solicit interest in regionalized training at the Baltimore Training Academy for any of their service partners. Based on interest in this approach, regionalized training for large groups will made available throughout the year. There are two sessions currently

scheduled: September 5 through September 9, 2000 and November 13 through November 17, 2000. Each session can accommodate 80 participants. Service organizations will be expected to fund their own travel expenses if they choose to take advantage of this training approach. Training at the academy will be facilitated by a team comprised of C&P Service employees and field employees. Travel for field employees will be funded by the C&P Service and OFO.

6. A third avenue of training that should be made known to your service partners is the certification of designated service officers to conduct training sessions for their respective organizations. This "train the trainer" approach will work as follows: Once a service officer successfully completes a Level of training, he or she can be recommended by the parent organization as an instructor. VBA would retain jurisdiction over the post-testing and certification process.

7. As your regional office begins to implement level 1 training, your TRIP coordinator should establish and maintain an excel spreadsheet that contains the participants name, mailing address, organization, all individual lesson scores and the participant's overall score. A TRIP training report format will be provided to your regional office in the near future. Once received , this report should be used to maintain and forward results to OFO and the C&P Service. VACO will maintain a central database containing all test results.

8. Attached is document prepared by the C&P Service and OFO addressing some of the most frequently asked questions regarding TRIP. We hope this document will clarify some of the field's questions. Future documents addressing common issues and questions are planned as the TRIP initiative progresses.

9. Please refer any questions you may have regarding the training materials to the C&P Service (VAVBAWAS/CO/TRIP). Any questions you have regarding the implementation of this training or the reporting requirements should be directed to Charlie Woolford (202-273-6468) or Jon Skelly (202-273-7225) in the Office of Field Operations.

/s/

Patrick Nappi
Deputy Under Secretary For Operations

Attachment

TRIP IMPLEMENTATION

Introduction

1) What does TRIP stand for?

TRIP stands for Training, Responsibility, Involvement and Preparation of Claims.

2) What defines a TRIP claim? End Product? VITAL or non-VITAL issue?

Any claim from a participating representative can be processed under the TRIP program regardless of end product, VITAL issue, or type of claim.

Establishing the Program

1) How do I establish TRIP in my office?

TRIP is a partnership between VA and the service organizations. Your Director, VSCM and others concerned should meet with the supervisors of all service organizations affiliated with your office.

2) What does TRIP offer to VA's service partners?

Representatives will gain enhanced service to their claimants. ROs and representatives will witness improvements in accuracy, efficiency, and timeliness of claims processing.

Participants

1) Who can attend?

Any *accredited representative* who desires TRIP Training. Secretaries or other service organization support who are not accredited may attend the training at the discretion of the regional office, but cannot become certified.

2) Can I add another accredited representatives even though that representative was not selected by their organization to attend?

VA does not have a problem with additional participants. The issue of selection for participation is an internal organizational issue which needs to be addressed by each RO and service organization.

Workflow Issues

1) Does a special team handle TRIP claims in a VARO?

RO management will decide how the workload and workflow will be established at the local level.

2) What happens if we haven't merged and don't have teams?

TRIP training does not require teams. Training will occur regardless of the structure of the RO, although it is anticipated that most ROs will be in a case management environment by the end of calendar year 2000.

3) Does TRIP supersede PARDS, SOAR, or any other established RO programs?

TRIP will eventually replace all similar RO programs. Local programs should be continued until completion of Level One of the TRIP initiative.

4) How does a station convert from a RO program to TRIP?

Regional offices *must* implement TRIP training. The workflow procedure will be determined by the RO and the service organization. Service to veterans should not be allowed to suffer during the changeover.

5) What happens if TRIP efforts adversely affect workload or workflow?

RO management will address this issue within their respective Service Delivery Network. Ultimately, with resources currently used to develop claims being free to make decisions, TRIP should impact positively on workload.

6) Can TRIP cases be part of brokered work?

There is no prohibition against brokering TRIP cases.

Claims Issues

1) Do TRIP claims need special identification such as colored cover sheets?

The RO will determine such workflow mechanisms. It would seem beneficial to identify the development that has taken place by the representative in order to minimize duplicate efforts. Certain development, such as requests for service medical records and physical examinations, will remain the responsibility of the VA following Level One training.

2) Do TRIP claims have to be ready-to-rate claims?

No. TRIP claims should be fully developed claims to the extent that a service organization representative can develop the claim. Some claims may require additional RO action. The closer local staffs work with the service organization representatives, the better the product and the less additional work required. Communication and cooperation between the service organization personnel and VA RO personnel are essential to the success of the initiative.

3) What happens if a claimant changes the POA in the middle of a TRIP claim?

The claim will have been developed from the onset. A change in POA will not affect the outcome of a decision.

4) Is there a percentage of claims that have to be submitted as TRIP claims in a particular office?

No. However, VA hopes that TRIP claims will become the majority of claims received.

5) Who handles follow-up actions when screening cases? Does this depend on who initiated the development?

Any necessary development will either be handled by RO personnel or Service organization representatives. RO personnel will most likely perform this duty based on generated Work- In-Process lists. However, it is not unreasonable to expect that such follow-up could be undertaken by Service organization representatives. Remember that development actions undertaken by Service organization representatives does not relieve VA from its statutory duty to assist.

6) How long can a VSO hold onto a claim?

A service organization representative should not be holding onto claims. The TRIP Committee will review various local options and forward suggestions.

7) Can a service organization representative who develops a TRIP claim represent the claimant on the claim in a subsequent process, such as in a Decision Review Officer (DRO) format or appeal?

Yes. The function of service organization representative is to properly develop a claim for benefits so that the end result will be accurate and efficient service to the claimant. A VSO under TRIP cannot administratively disallow or render a decision on any claim. TRIP in no way affects the service organization representative's advocacy for the veteran.

8) Can TRIP claims be contract VA examination claims?

There is no prohibition to the type of examination requested or performed under TRIP.

9) Can VSOs hold claims after development?

No. Service organization representatives must fully develop a claim upon receipt and forward to the RO. Service organization representatives do not practice holding onto claims.

10) Who has the date stamp?

All claims will be date stamped by the VA. The VA date stamp establishes date of claim.

11) Will Service organization representatives use VA letterhead?

No. Service organization representatives will not use VA letterhead.

12) Will VSOs be given access to AMIE under TRIP?

Not at this time. AMIE is a VHA system and access cannot be restricted by service organization POA. Major reprogramming by VHA will be required to grant access to service organization representatives. However, service organization representatives perform duties at the medical centers and can obtain medical information directly.

13) Will service organization representatives receive sensitive level access to VA systems?

No.

14) Who updates suspense dates if service organization representatives only have inquiry access following Level One training?

VA personnel.

5.

Training Coordinator Concerns

1) Will I get the backing of management and the cooperation of National Service Officers (Service organization representatives)?

   Yes. The Under Secretary for Benefits has instructed RO management to provide TRIP training to any accredited Service Organizations that request it. Remember, regional offices can encourage participation, but can not force service organizations to participate.

2) Who handles RO personnel and service organization representative conflicts?

   RO management will be apprised of any problems. The Office of Field Operations needs to be informed of the problems that arise in order to brief the national organizations.

3) Can I train VSOs side by side with new VA hires such as Veterans Service Representative?

   Yes. When TRIP is fully implemented, all training will use the same materials. It is intended that both groups can be trained at the same time. Training classes which are comprised of both VA employees and VSOs will provide different perspectives which will be beneficial to the claims process.

4) How will we communicate with each other regarding the progress of TRIP?

   Conference calls, satellite broadcasts, or e-mail.

5) Is TRIP designed for in-house or can regional office (RO) employees travel to remote areas? Can training be set up at VA Medical Centers?

   TRIP Training was originally designed to be conducted at regional offices. We hope to develop a methodology to train outbased VSOs at a later date.

Training Schedules and Class Size

1) Is there a time limit on the completion of TRIP training?

   Not specifically. However, the RO and participating service organizations must immediately begin to develop a plan and schedule for the implementation of TRIP training. This plan should be submitted to each stations OFO analyst by COB 5/19/00.

2) Is there a limit to the amount of participants in a session held at my regional office?

No. It is recommended that the class size be kept within the 10-15 range.

3) What is the best training approach for Module 1 at my regional office?

Each participant should have their own computer to use during the training. Naturally, this depend on your station's training environment.

4) Do the lessons have to be taught in sequence?

Past experience has demonstrated that Benefits Delivery Network (BDN) System (Module 1, Lesson 1) and ARMS (Module 1, Lesson 3) should be taught first. Lessons in the development section utilize BDN and ARMS. Additionally, the first four lessons of Module 2 should be taught in order.

5) Can a service organization representative select individual lessons?

No. A service organization representative must attend all lessons.

6) Can a service organization representative "test out" of TRIP Training?

Yes. The "test out" certification test is the regular certification test. If the service organization representative scores below 70 percent, the service organization representative must sit through the formal training. This effort should be downplayed.

Training Package

1) What does the TRIP Training Package consist of?

TRIP Training package has two modules: Module 1 for Computer Systems and Module 2 for Core Development.

2) How many lessons are there?

There are five lessons in Module 1 and ten lessons in Module 2.

3) What if I find that the package needs to be updated with current laws or regulations?

Please e-mail your comments to the C&P Service's TRIP MS Exchange Mailbox at VAVBAWAS/CO/TRIP.

4) How long is the training curriculum?

Roughly 31 hours in length.

5) What happens if a service organization representative misses a lesson?

Conduct a remake of the lesson that fits your schedule as well as that of the service organization representative

Certification

1) What is certification?

A process whereby *accredited* TRIP partners who elect to receive training by VA and demonstrate gained knowledge are entrusted to share in the preparation of claims for veterans benefits and to use VA systems for that purpose.

2) When are the certification tests administered?

The certification tests should be administered after each lesson.

3) What is the score needed to become certified?

A participant must obtain a cumulative average of 70% or above. Therefore, a participant does not have to pass every lesson in order to be certified.

4) What proof do the participants receive that they are certified?

Each regional office will provide a certificate of certification for Level One of TRIP Training accompanied by a letter to each successful participant. The letter can cite the overall score and the lesson(s) in which the participant scored below 70 percent.

5) What happens to those participants who scored below 70 percent?

The participant will receive a notification letter regarding the score and the option to retake the training when it is next offered by the regional office. The participant will be afforded an opening in the next TRIP session held at the RO to retake the training. A participant may only retake the training one time.

6) What are benchmarks and reviews?

A benchmark is a tool used to judge the level of knowledge the group has and adjust the instruction to that level. A review is a tool used to judge the level of knowledge the group has acquired as a result of training. Benchmarks and reviews are not meant to be graded or used as a score for certification. Rather, these tools should be reviewed with the participants immediately after the completion of each tool. Avoid a lengthy discussion of the benchmark exercises as the material will be covered in the lesson.

7) Is the certification test open book?

No.

Record Keeping

1) How should we set up our records?

An individual manila folder or envelope should be maintained for each participant in a locked area. Each folder will contain all original certification tests. Additionally, a spreadsheet should be maintained which contains the participant's name, mailing address, organization, all individual lesson scores, and the overall score.

2) Why does VACO need electronic data?

VACO will maintain a master database of all participants who are certified for each level of TRIP Training.

3) What do we do when the TRIP training is completed?

The RO Training Coordinator will ensure that all records are accurate and forwarded to VACO for control purposes.

4) How do I report all TRIP training? Is there a specific format?

Training reports will be issued to each regional office. These feeder reports will be completed and forwarded to VACO to be included into a central database. Questions regarding the reports should be sent to the VAVBAWAS/CO/TRIP mailbox.

March 24, 2000

In Reply Refer To: (214)
Fast Letter 00-24

Director (00/21/27)
All VA Regional Offices and Centers

Subject: Training, Responsibility, Involvement and Preparation of Claims (TRIP)

1. The Compensation and Pension Service (C&P) is pleased to announce the nationwide distribution of Level One of the Training, Responsibility, Involvement and Preparation of Claims (TRIP) Training Package.

2. TRIP represents a nationwide partnership between VA and all accredited Service Officers. This program will enhance the skills of Service Officers. Successful completion of Level One through a certification protocol will permit the Service Officer to gain further access to VA programs. Serving the veteran and improving the timeliness of claims are the objectives of TRIP.

3. The attached TRIP Training Package is a self-extracting ZIP file. This training package includes the Instructor Guide, Participant Guide and Certification Protocol. **Please e-mail this training package to your training coordinator before opening the document.** Enclosure A provides the procedures for extracting the TRIP ZIP file using PKWARE. It is necessary to install PKWARE before opening the ZIP file. Attached is PKWARE for your use. Additionally, each office will receive a hardcopy TRIP Instructor Guide and TRIP Participant Guide within 30 days.

4. The Office of Field Operations (OFO) will coordinate the implementation of the TRIP training program. However, you may initiate the steps necessary to line up a training schedule that is suitable for your station. These meetings should involve your training coordinator, Service Officers, and Veterans Service Center Manager.

5. The bulk of the start up and preparation process for TRIP involves considerable time printing and photocopying the TRIP Training Package. Please afford your staff the necessary time to prepare for your training sessions.

6. Please forward all questions or comments regarding the training materials to the TRIP mailbox at VAVBAWAS/CO/TRIP. All operational and implementation questions should be directed to OFO.

7. This letter self rescinds December 31, 2000.

/S/
Robert J. Epley, Director
Compensation and Pension Service

Enclosures: TRIP Training Package
PKWare
Instructions for PKWARE

cc: Office of Field Operations (201)

Enclosure A

How to load PKWare for Windows and make the TRIP files load themselves.

1. In your e-mail select the PKWare icon. Right click and select copy.
2. Open My Computer, double click on C: drive. Then double click on User Directory.
3. Click cursor within the User Directory and right click on mouse. Select Paste
4. The PKWare icon is copied to the User Directory.
5. Click on PK263wsp.exe
6. Click on Next.
7. Change destination drive to C:\user\pkware\
8. Click on Finish.
9. Answer Yes to directory creation.
10. When completed, answer OK and then restart the computer to affect settings.
11. Reopen In Box after computer reboot. Reopen e-mail.
12. Select the TRIP Zipped file and it will self-extract itself to the C:\user\Trip directory.

OFO Letter 201-00-43

August 14, 2000

Director (00)
All VA Regional Offices and Centers

SUBJ: Teamwork Assessment

1. For the past year, we have been working on a Teamwork Assessment to support the development and evolution of the Service Delivery Network concept. We have made steady progress, and have received input from over thirty regional office directors, all of whom have assisted in the development of the teamwork assessment tool.

2. On Monday, August 14, 2000 the site which houses the Teamwork Assessment tool will be accessible to every regional office director. Prior to the end of the day today, you will receive a "launch e-mail" which will contain the address for the web-site which houses the Teamwork Assessment. This "launch e-mail" will contain additional information regarding the Teamwork Assessment tool.

3. To further supplement the nationwide rollout of the Teamwork Assessment, a list of "Frequently Asked Questions" has been developed and is provided to you as an enclosure. If you have any additional questions regarding the Teamwork Assessment and these questions are not addressed in the "Frequently Asked Questions", please contact Sandra Epps, who is the Team Leader for the Executive Performance Appraisal Team. Ms. Epps may be reached at 505-248-6690.

4. It is important that each RO Director complete an assessment for the station directors within their SDN. When completing the assessment, we encourage you to provide written commentary (as necessary) for the dimension rated. Although written comments are not mandatory they offer valuable information during the feedback sessions that will be conducted at the conclusion of this exercise.

5. Thank you for participating in the Teamwork Assessment. Your ideas and input will help us develop a tool that will serve to improve the performance of the Service Delivery Networks.

/s/

James A. Whitson
Associate Deputy Under Secretary
for Operations (East)

/s/

Michael Walcoff
Associate Deputy Under Secretary
for Operations (West)

Enclosure

Teamwork Assessment System
Frequently Asked Questions

The purpose of this document is to answer some basic questions about the Teamwork Assessment System. This document covers topics in the following areas:

- The Teamwork Assessment Instrument
- Participants in the Process
- Feedback Reports
- Ownership of the Data
- Development Plans
- Evaluation of the Process

Teamwork Assessment Instrument

What does the instrument measure?

The instrument is designed to measure behaviors associated with effective teamwork within each Service Delivery Network.

Is the same instrument used for all Directors?

Yes.

How long is the instrument?

The instrument has approximately sixty behavioral items, which are grouped into seven "dimensions", or categories:

1. Managing Performance
2. Communication
3. Respect and Openness
4. Innovation
5. Budget and Resource Planning
6. Budget Execution/Resource Sharing
7. People Development

How will items be rated?

The instrument uses a six point “effectiveness” scale, plus a “Not Observed” option.

6 = Extremely effective
5 = Very effective
4 = Somewhat effective
3 = Somewhat ineffective
2 = Very ineffective
1 = Extremely ineffective

Are written comments collected?

Yes, written comments can be provided for each dimension. In addition, there are three narrative questions at the end of the instrument: "What should this person START, STOP and CONTINUE doing to be more effective?”

Are written comments required?

Written comments are not required, but you are encouraged to provide this additional feedback.

How is the data collected?

The data will be collected via the Internet, using an external contractor called Pilat NAI. This company is based in New Jersey, and they will provide all the technology for this project.

Is additional software required for this system?

No. The system makes use of your existing e-mail and internet browser software.

Who processes the data?

HumRRO and Pilat NAI will process the data and generate all reports.

Participants

Who will participate (receive feedback) in each phase of the project?

SDNs 3 and 8 participated in the pre-test in July. The remaining SDNs will participate when the assessment tool is released nationwide on August 14, 2000. The SDNs that participate in the pre-test may elect to retake the instrument during nationwide release, but it is anticipated that they will not elect to utilize the instrument twice within a two month timeframe.

Who will provide feedback?

Each Director is requested to provide feedback for each of the Directors in his/her SDN.

Is participation mandatory?

Yes. You must complete a self-assessment and provide ratings for the other Directors in your SDN. There will be a "Not Observed" category for each item that you may use if you are not comfortable rating specific behaviors.

Are written comments mandatory?

No, but they are a source of extremely valuable feedback, and are very important to the recipient.

How long must a Director be in place to be included?

The Director must have been in the SDN long enough to have participated/attended at least one SDN meeting.

If Directors move from one SDN to another, which SDN should provide ratings?

This will be decided on a case-by-case basis. The final decision on this issue will depend on the length of time served within each SDN.

Will our managers have input?

The Associate Deputy Under Secretaries will not make ratings, but they may participate in a discussion of the results. They will lead the group discussion of SDN results and they will work with each Director on an individual developmental plan.

What are the sanctions for non-compliance?

The Associate Deputy Under Secretaries will receive reports showing the participation level for each Director. Each Director in the Service Delivery Network will receive reports that show the overall participation rate for the SDN.

How will Directors be notified that they need to provide feedback?

A launch e-mail will be sent to each Director informing him or her that the web-site is open, and giving them instructions for how to use the web-site to provide feedback. The instructions will include the web-site address and a pre-selected password to enable access.

How will Directors be reminded that they need to provide feedback?

Two follow-up e-mail reminders will be sent to Directors reminding them that their feedback has not been received. A report which shows the response rate for each SDN will be sent to the respective Associate Deputy Under Secretaries approximately one week before the web-site closes so that the appropriate follow up may be initiated.

Reports

How will the results be reported?

You will receive a report showing your score and the average of your peers' scores for each Dimension, and each Behavioral Item within that Dimension. You will also receive the written comments.

What safeguards protect the anonymity of providers?

A minimum of three peers must provide feedback in order for a report to be generated.

How are comments reported?

Comments are reported verbatim, grouped by question.

Are the comments filtered for content?

No

What aggregate data will be created?

Aggregate data will be produced. The content, format and timing of the aggregate reports have yet to be determined.

Ownership

Who receives the report or reports?

Each Director will get a copy of his/her report during the feedback sessions. The Associate Deputy Under Secretaries will also receive a copy, which will be sent directly to them via FedEx.

Is the report entered into the Director's personnel file?

No. Furthermore, the Associate Deputy Under Secretaries will destroy their copy after the completion of the feedback session. No permanent copy of the report(s) will be retained.

Who has access to the individual data?

Only the Director, plus the respective Associate Deputy Under Secretary will see the individual reports.

How will the individual reports be used?

The individual reports will be used as a tool to create a development plan for each station Director. No other decisions will be made based on this data.

Development Plans

Is each Director required to create a development plan?

Yes, each Director will be expected to create a development plan as part of his/her evaluation. Part of that development plan should be based on the results of the Teamwork Assessment.

Who identifies the content of the development plan?

Each Director should meet with his/her respective Associate Deputy Under Secretary to discuss the development plan and reach mutual agreement concerning content.

Is each Director held accountable for the creation, implementation and completion of his/her development plan?

Yes. This is within the existing framework of the evaluation process.

What resources are available to assist Directors in the creation and execution of their development plan?

In addition to the Associate Deputy Under Secretaries and their peers, the Office of Employee Development and Training (20T) and FEB may serve as useful resources for Directors.

How do we monitor the progress of the development plan?

Directors will be encouraged to identify simple ways to measure improvement in their teamwork behaviors. The midyear review will also provide an opportunity to discuss progress with their respective Associate Deputy Under Secretary.

TAS Evaluation

How will the Teamwork Assessment System be evaluated?

The evaluation will investigate three areas:

(1) After the nationwide release of the teamwork assessment tool, HumRRO will perform psychometric analyses to examine the reliability and structure of the instrument. It is possible that items will be dropped and dimensions collapsed based on the results of these analyses.
(2) You will receive a survey shortly after the web-site closes asking for your input on the technology platform, the instructions, and the items.
(3) HumRRO will examine the relationship between the teamwork assessment scores and another measure of teamwork called "Group Potency." In addition, the relationship between Balanced Scorecard measures and the teamwork assessment results will be explored.

How will the results of the evaluation be used?

The results of the evaluation will be used to refine the instrument, and to make decisions about how to incorporate the results into the performance appraisal process in future years.

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Associate Deputy Under Secretary
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Participants

Who will participate (receive feedback) in each phase of the project?

SDNs 3 and 8 participated in the pre-test in July. The remaining SDNs will participate when the assessment tool is released nationwide on August 14, 2000. The SDNs that participate in the pre-test may elect to retake the instrument during nationwide release, but it is anticipated that they will not elect to utilize the instrument twice within a two month timeframe.

Who will provide feedback?

Each Director is requested to provide feedback for each of the Directors in his/her SDN.

Is participation mandatory?

Yes. You must complete a self-assessment and provide ratings for the other Directors in your SDN. There will be a "Not Observed" category for each item that you may use if you are not comfortable rating specific behaviors.

Are written comments mandatory?

No, but they are a source of extremely valuable feedback, and are very important to the recipient.

How long must a Director be in place to be included?

The Director must have been in the SDN long enough to have participated/attended at least one SDN meeting.

If Directors move from one SDN to another, which SDN should provide ratings?

This will be decided on a case-by-case basis. The final decision on this issue will depend on the length of time served within each SDN.

Will our managers have input?

The Associate Deputy Under Secretaries will not make ratings, but they may participate in a discussion of the results. They will lead the group discussion of SDN results and they will work with each Director on an individual developmental plan.

What are the sanctions for non-compliance?

The Associate Deputy Under Secretaries will receive reports showing the participation level for each Director. Each Director in the Service Delivery Network will receive reports that show the overall participation rate for the SDN.

How will Directors be notified that they need to provide feedback?

A launch e-mail will be sent to each Director informing him or her that the web-site is open, and giving them instructions for how to use the web-site to provide feedback. The instructions will include the web-site address and a pre-selected password to enable access.

How will Directors be reminded that they need to provide feedback?

Two follow-up e-mail reminders will be sent to Directors reminding them that their feedback has not been received. A report which shows the response rate for each SDN will be sent to the respective Associate Deputy Under Secretaries approximately one week before the web-site closes so that the appropriate follow up may be initiated.

Reports

How will the results be reported?

You will receive a report showing your score and the average of your peers' scores for each Dimension, and each Behavioral Item within that Dimension. You will also receive the written comments.

What safeguards protect the anonymity of providers?

A minimum of three peers must provide feedback in order for a report to be generated.

How are comments reported?

Comments are reported verbatim, grouped by question.

Are the comments filtered for content?

No

What aggregate data will be created?

Aggregate data will be produced. The content, format and timing of the aggregate reports have yet to be determined.

Ownership

Who receives the report or reports?

Each Director will get a copy of his/her report during the feedback sessions. The Associate Deputy Under Secretaries will also receive a copy, which will be sent directly to them via FedEx.

Is the report entered into the Director's personnel file?

No. Furthermore, the Associate Deputy Under Secretaries will destroy their copy after the completion of the feedback session. No permanent copy of the report(s) will be retained.

Who has access to the individual data?

Only the Director, plus the respective Associate Deputy Under Secretary will see the individual reports.

How will the individual reports be used?

The individual reports will be used as a tool to create a development plan for each station Director. No other decisions will be made based on this data.

Development Plans

Is each Director required to create a development plan?

Yes, each Director will be expected to create a development plan as part of his/her evaluation. Part of that development plan should be based on the results of the Teamwork Assessment.

Who identifies the content of the development plan?

Each Director should meet with his/her respective Associate Deputy Under Secretary to discuss the development plan and reach mutual agreement concerning content.

Is each Director held accountable for the creation, implementation and completion of his/her development plan?

Yes. This is within the existing framework of the evaluation process.

What resources are available to assist Directors in the creation and execution of their development plan?

In addition to the Associate Deputy Under Secretaries and their peers, the Office of Employee Development and Training (20T) and FEB may serve as useful resources for Directors.

How do we monitor the progress of the development plan?

Directors will be encouraged to identify simple ways to measure improvement in their teamwork behaviors. The midyear review will also provide an opportunity to discuss progress with their respective Associate Deputy Under Secretary.

TAS Evaluation

How will the Teamwork Assessment System be evaluated?

The evaluation will investigate three areas:

(1) After the nationwide release of the teamwork assessment tool, HumRRO will perform psychometric analyses to examine the reliability and structure of the instrument. It is possible that items will be dropped and dimensions collapsed based on the results of these analyses.
(2) You will receive a survey shortly after the web-site closes asking for your input on the technology platform, the instructions, and the items.
(3) HumRRO will examine the relationship between the teamwork assessment scores and another measure of teamwork called "Group Potency." In addition, the relationship between Balanced Scorecard measures and the teamwork assessment results will be explored.

How will the results of the evaluation be used?

The results of the evaluation will be used to refine the instrument, and to make decisions about how to incorporate the results into the performance appraisal process in future years.

Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Benefits Administration
Washington, DC 20420

OFO Letter 201-00-48

August 18, 2000

Director (00)
VBA Regional Offices and Centers

SUBJ: VBA Rewards and Recognition Program for FY 2001

1. The Rewards and Recognition Program for FY 2001 has been finalized based on input received from you following the Directors' Conference in St. Louis. The Rewards and Recognition Team has prepared the enclosed power point slide presentation that contains detailed information on the two-tiered payout plan. These instructional slides also include practice exercises that will give you and your employees a better understanding of the how the program works.

2. The new Rewards and Recognition Program is not intended to replace any local employee award committees. Hence, any award money distributed from the SDN to the regional office level should be redistributed in accordance with any locally negotiated procedures.

3. We point out one change that was made subsequent to the presentation of the program at the Directors' Conference. The employees of the Insurance Center in Philadelphia are not included in this Rewards and Recognition Program because the administrative costs of the Insurance Program are funded by the Insurance Trust Fund. Therefore, salary dollars paid to Insurance employees will not be included in the formula for determining payouts.

4. To facilitate implementation of the new program, members of the Rewards and Recognition Task Team are available to make this power point presentation to each SDN. This presentation can be made in person at your next SDN meeting or by video conference, at the discretion of each SDN. We suggest that you try to schedule the presentation before the beginning of next fiscal year to give you time to also provide training for your station employees early in the year.

5. The Team members listed below have been assigned to make the presentations to the following SDN's:

   SDN 1 – Greg Mason
   SDN 2 – Barry Jackson
   SDN 3 – Jon Baker
   SDN 4 – Barry Jackson
   SDN 5 – Tom Wagner
   SDN 6 – Jon Baker
   SDN 7 – Tom Wagner
   SDN 8 – Debbie Greitzer
   SDN 9 – Debbie Greitzer

6. Each SDN should contact the assigned Team member directly to arrange for a presentation of the package. If you have additional questions, please contact Adrienne Becnel-Taylor at 202-273-7232.

/s/	/s/
Michael Walcoff	James A. Whitson
Associate Deputy Under Secretary	Associate Deputy Under Secretary
for Operations (West)	for Operations (East)