

Business Process Reengineering

The VBA Vision of the Future

Where We Are
Now:
*A Process That
Holds Us Back*

The Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) serves the needs of America's veterans. Its strength is its employees, who work hard to help veterans efficiently receive all the benefits they are entitled to.

Unfortunately, the processes we use often get in the way of providing high quality service. In fact, our ways of doing business have become outmoded. They frequently fail to meet the ever-increasing expectations of veterans. And because these processes have become increasingly complex, they are inconsistent with the current mandates for smaller, more efficient government.

For a conscientious team of dedicated employees like ours, this situation is frustrating and often demoralizing. That's why VBA is taking action to remedy it.

Business
Process
Reengineering

Business Process Reengineering (BPR) is a tool for identifying and transforming an organization's business processes. VBA is using BPR to

- develop new processes that will help us better serve veterans,
- reduce costs, and
- establish a framework for additional improvements in service delivery.

Rather than attempt to transform all of VBA at once, the first application of BPR is taking place in a single Service: Compensation and Pension. Here, we have used BPR to

- take a fresh look at C&Ps program goals,
 - identify obstacles to fair and speedy claims processing,
 - design a modern, responsive claims processing system, and
 - create a road map for implementing the new system.
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**Business
Process
Reengineering
Continued**

VBA began its C&P BPR project in October 1995. The C&P BPR project team consisted of personnel from the VBA BPR Office, the C&P Service, and six Regional Offices - with contractor support from Systems Research and Applications, International (SRA). The new C&P claims processing vision developed by the team was endorsed by the Under Secretary for Benefits and Secretary Jesse Brown in October 1996.

The next step in the BPR process is to make the C&P claims processing vision a reality through the BPR implementation process. This effort is just the start of a transformation that will eventually reshape every part of VBA - to the benefit of VBA employees and the veterans we serve.

**Where We Are
Going:
A New Vision**

Currently, we are establishing a new vision for processing compensation and pension claims. This is the first step toward developing better, more cost-effective methods of delivering world-class customer service to veterans. This vision is a benchmark for the type of organization VBA should be -and will be - in the months and years ahead. It has three components.

1. ***A Partnership With Veterans.*** VBA will enter into a full partnership with veterans and their representatives. We will work together to develop claims, handle benefits issues, and reach mutually satisfactory results.
 2. ***Streamlined Processes.*** VBA will simplify and streamline the core processes used to handle compensation and pension claims. Only one or two people will be directly involved in handling a claim. Employees will be highly skilled and authorized to make decisions. New information technology will save time and legwork.
 3. ***Enhanced Infrastructure.*** VBA is changing the underlying infrastructure used to manage benefits and process claims. This will include improving the following:
 - communications and information systems that supply access to benefits data,
 - organization, professionalism, and training of VBA employees, and
 - outreach efforts to veterans.
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Reengineering C&P Claims Processing

Claims Processing Principles

The principles that will guide us throughout this reengineering effort are:

- veterans' needs and expectations drive change
- proactive, frequent, and productive interaction with veterans
- identify and resolve issues at the earliest opportunity
- quality - get it right the first time
- partnership among VBA, veterans, and representatives
- increased accountability for employees, veterans, and representatives

The way we handle veterans' benefit claims will change dramatically. Our goal is to work with veterans as partners in order to make their benefit claims simpler and faster. If you are involved in processing these claims, here is what you should expect.

Processing Claims

When a claim is made under the new process, a VBA veterans service representative (VSR) will work with the veteran and his or her representative to:

- define the issues of the claim,
- complete the claim application,
- determine what evidence is necessary,
- explain how the claim will proceed, and
- point out other benefits to which the veteran is entitled.

If you are the VSR, you may be able to make a decision right on the spot. More evidence will be gathered electronically. When a medical determination is necessary, a rating-certified veterans service representative (RC-VSR) will make the rating and notify the veteran of the decision.

Resolving Disagreements

In those cases where the veteran disagrees with the decision, a knowledgeable review officer will take over the case.

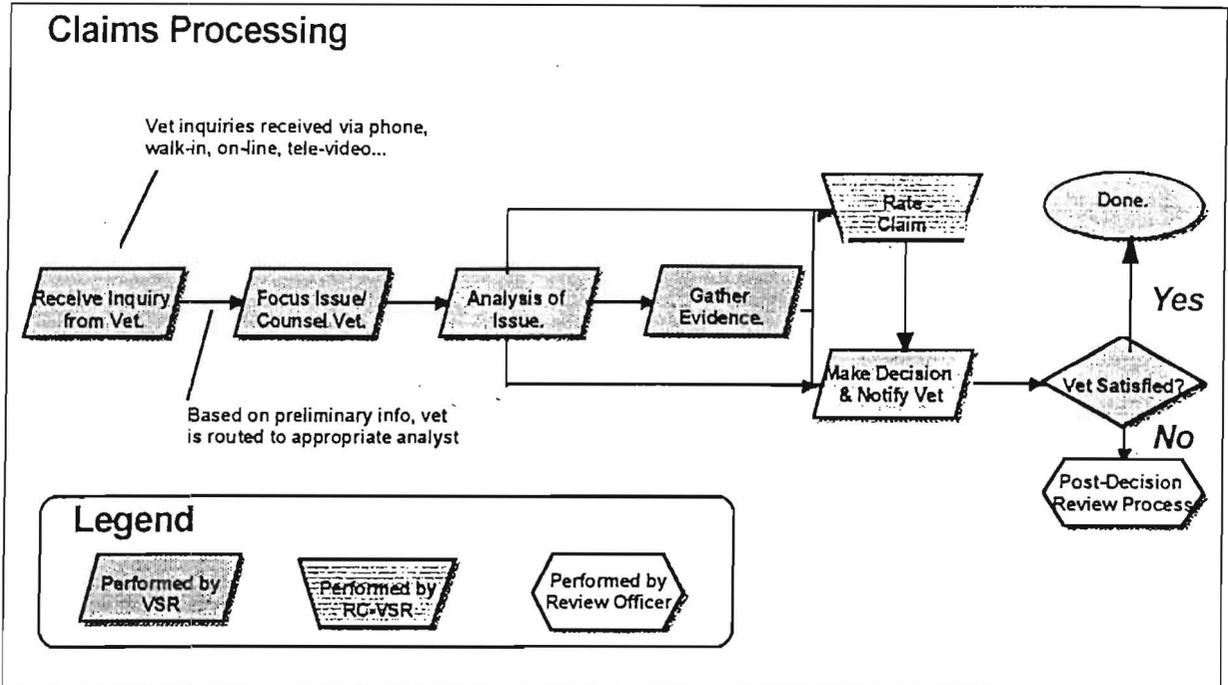
If you are the review officer, you will discuss the points of disagreement with the veteran and his or her representative. You can immediately make a new decision or gather new evidence for a new decision.

If the veteran is still unhappy with the decision, you will assist the veteran in preparing the appeal for the Board of Veterans' appeals - so everyone will understand what is being appealed and why an agreement could not be reached.

Reengineering C&P Claims Processing, Continued

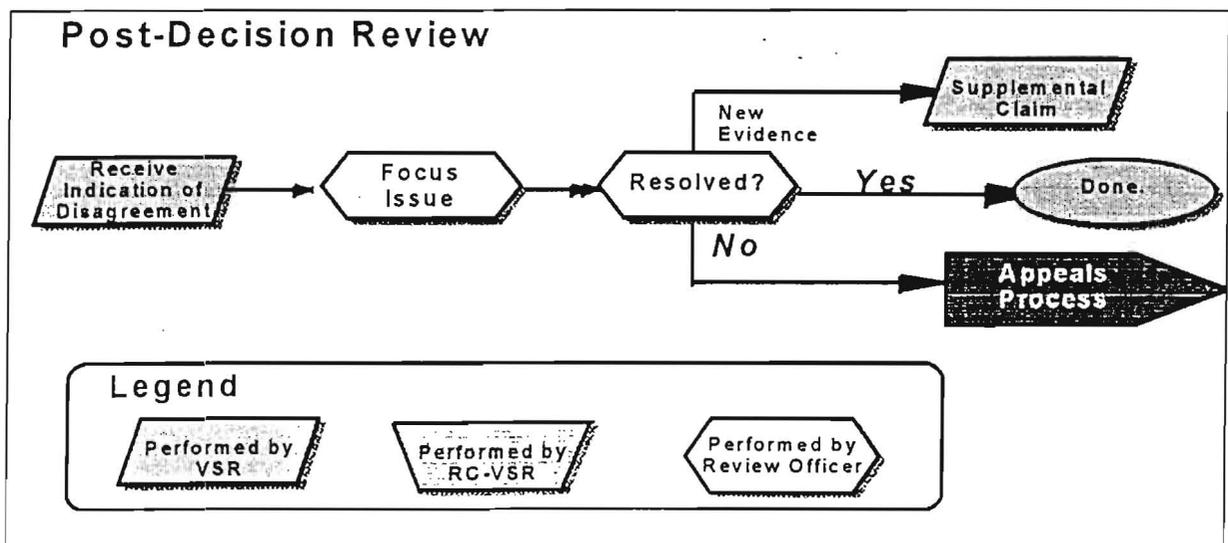
Claims Processing Diagram

The chart below will take you through the Claims Process. Pay attention to the legend which will show you the person responsible for each activity.



Post Decision Review Diagram

The chart below will take you through the Post-Decision Review Process. Pay attention to the legend which will show you the person responsible for each activity.



New Jobs for a New Claims Process

Three New Positions

Three new positions will be created to implement the new C&P claims process. Although the process will still require managerial, administrative, and support staff, these three new positions are the core professionals who will work with veterans and their representatives throughout the entire claims process.

Description of New Positions

Below is a description of the three new positions that are being created:

Title	Description
Veterans Service Representative (VSR).	VSRs will forge a partnership with the veteran and his or her representative. The new claims process concentrates decision making authority with the VSR, who in most cases will have responsibility for completing all actions related to the claim. Consulting with the veteran, the VSR will focus the issue of the claim, identify all sources of evidence, and explain the claims process. The VSR will inform the veteran about the progress of the claim. Expert systems will provide decision support to assist the VSR in this process. VSRs will gather evidence, make decisions, notify veterans, and be accountable for their actions. Routine actions will be handled quickly, often at the initial contact. Throughout the process, the VSR will ensure that the veteran receives knowledgeable, fair, and compassionate service.
Rating Certified Veterans Service Representative (RC-VSR)	More complex cases will be assigned to a RC-VSR with highly specialized skills. The RC-VSR will take ownership of claims that require a rating decision. The RC-VSR will make rating decisions and prepare the award and notification letter to the veteran, describing the decision and explaining the reasons for it. Rule-based technology will support the RC-VSR in this process to assure speedy resolution of claims.
Review Officer	Review officers will continue the partnership with the veteran and his or her representative during the post-decision review process. If the veteran wishes to pursue this process, the review officer will become the veteran's new point of contact. The review officer will focus the issue during a conference with the veteran and his or her representative. A highly skilled and trained individual, the review officer will have the authority to issue a revised favorable decision based on an independent review of the evidence. If the veteran remains dissatisfied, the review officer will either work with the veteran to develop new evidence into a supplemental claim or, if there is no new evidence, frame the issue for formal appeal to the Board of Veterans' Appeals.

New Jobs for a New Claims Process, Continued

What These New Positions Mean for VBA Staff

The new positions are the core of a highly trained professional staff, a staff possessing a higher level of skills for serving veterans. The success of the new claims process depends on these skills, which include the proficient use of new information technology now becoming available. This technology is critical to streamlining the claims process and making faster decisions. Staff will receive training to assure the quality of their skills and their ability to make the new claims process work effectively.

How These Changes Will Affect You

Commitment to employees - VBA is committed to its employees and to providing the tools and training necessary to support the new C&P claims process. This includes the effective application of information technology and simplified regulations, procedures and processes.

Far more personal contact with veterans - You will work closely with the veteran and his or her representative.

Increased responsibility and authority - You will handle more parts of the claims process, often from start to finish. Plus, you will have the authority to make decisions.

Accountability - You are accountable for the decisions you make.

New job descriptions - The new process will redefine the positions of the professionals who deal directly with veterans.

Flexibility - If you are a VBA field manager, the new process gives you the flexibility to meet the special needs of your office and community. This reengineered process states how work will be done, not where it will be done. And with only one or two VBA employees required to process a claim, it can be done almost anywhere.

Empowering VBA Employees: Tools & Training

New Tools for New Jobs

The new C&P claims process will mean greater responsibilities for every employee involved. That's why VBA will begin implementing a new information system in FY 1997 to equip you with the tools needed to meet your new responsibilities. These tools are intended to help employees - not replace them.

The tools available on the new system will enable you to enter claims, gather evidence, and make decisions during conversations with veterans. In addition, rule-based expert systems will provide decision support to help guide you through the maze of factors and provisions that affect individual cases. These expert systems will help you process claims with greater accuracy, consistency, and speed and reduce the need for rework and appeals. The new system will be linked with users within and among VBA offices, other federal agencies, service organization locations, and sites offering easy access to veterans.

VBA will also acquire a flexible, modernized telephone system to support claims applications and handle questions from veterans. It will provide a comprehensive claims tracking and information system that will allow employees to give the correct answer to questions when they are asked.

This system will give veterans a wider choice of options for obtaining information on their claims. Answers to most of their questions will be just a single phone call away.

Specifically, the new system will:

- relieve you of routine tasks, so you can spend more time making decisions and working directly with veterans and service organizations,
- help you process claims faster and with greater accuracy,
- provide you with speedier and more reliable interfaces for locating and retrieving claims-related evidence from VHA, DoD, and other federal agencies,
- give veterans greater access to claims information,
- eliminate duplicate information collection,
- minimize error-prone reentry of data,
- help to detect and quickly correct any discrepancies, and
- prevent overpayments.

Empowering VBA Employees: Tools & Training, Continued

Training Tomorrow's VBA Workforce

Together, the new C&P claims process and information system will transform your job and the skills you need to perform it. You must also be thoroughly versed in the new claims procedures and the use of the new automated tools. All of these requirements will make training crucial.

As a result, VBA personnel will receive training in both the new procedures and the use of automated systems. Although plans are still being made, this will probably include traditional classroom training, computer-based training, and interactive satellite training.

A phased, just-in-time training program will be used, one that parallels the implementation of the new claims process and information system. Pilot efforts in field offices will help test the effectiveness of different training approaches. In addition, the training program will be updated as new processes or improvements to the information system are introduced.

For employees, the new training program will prepare you to meet your new job requirements and to become certified in your job. It will provide instruction on practical, point-of-use applications that you can use immediately. And finally, the training program will supply you with a vehicle for advancing your career.

Fulfilling the Vision

Benefits to VBA Employees The sweeping changes in claims processing will offer VBA employees a wealth of exciting benefits.

<i>Increased job responsibilities</i>	Obtain more room for career development and professional growth.
<i>Real empowerment to do the job</i>	Gain authority to make decisions and be accountable.
<i>New tools</i>	Help meet enhanced responsibilities with new information system.
<i>Fewer routine tasks</i>	Free up more time for decision-making and working with veterans.
<i>Increased veteran satisfaction</i>	Produce better outcomes responsively and sensitively.
<i>Effective training</i>	Smooth the transition to the new claims process and tools.
<i>Greater job satisfaction</i>	Look forward to the gratification of enhancing your job, helping more veterans, and building your career potential.

Benefits to Veterans Veterans will gain a host of valuable advantages from the new changes.

<i>Faster decisions</i>	Enjoy a streamlined claims process.
<i>Knowledgeable assistance</i>	Receive expert guidance through the process from a highly trained caseworker who knows your case.
<i>Fewer bureaucratic hurdles</i>	Work with accountable staff who can make decisions.
<i>Early, frequent, and personal involvement</i>	Become a partner in the process.
<i>Greater access to information and records</i>	Get the facts in person, by telephone, or on-line.
<i>Simpler rules and regulations</i>	Readily learn what you are entitled to and how to get it.
<i>Skilled help for resolving disagreements</i>	Expect support with any question or appeal.
<i>Greater responsiveness and sensitivity</i>	Rely on VBA employees as veterans' advocates.

Fulfilling the Vision, Continued

**Benefits to
Veterans
Service
Organizations**

Here are just some of the benefits we see for veterans service organizations.

<i>Improved dialogue and interaction with VBA</i>	Gain greater access to information and impact on decisions.
<i>Full partnership in the claims process</i>	Depend on service organizations being key players.
<i>Streamlined decision-making</i>	Always work with highly trained, accountable VBA staff who can make decisions.
<i>Greater access to information and records</i>	Work with us in person, by telephone, or on-line.
<i>Simpler rules and regulations</i>	Encounter fewer hurdles to satisfactory decisions.
<i>Access to new VBA claims development tools</i>	Take advantage of these productivity-boosting technologies.
<i>Specialized training</i>	Participate in VBA employee training programs.

What Happens Next

Implementation of the Reengineered C&P Claims Process VBA will implement its new C&P claims process and infrastructure support in phases over the next five years. A phased implementation is needed because of the long lead-times that many of the changes require. The transition must take place as smoothly as possible - with no disruption of service to veterans.

Implementation teams are now forming to coordinate the many activities required. Their initial focus will be on pilot testing new processes and tools in individual field offices. Successful results will then be applied to all regional offices. These implementation activities will be carried out in close cooperation with service organizations and employee unions, who will be asked to provide input to help make the changes better serve their needs and those of veterans.

The implementation teams will include a senior guidance team and seven work teams. Below is a list of the implementation teams. Many regional office employees will be on these teams along with representatives from VA Central Office. Service Organization representatives and union partners will also be members of most teams.

Type of Team	Purpose
Implementation Management Team	coordinates the planning activities of other teams to ensure timely, development of an integrated implementation plan.
Case Flow and Work Design Team	designs the actual workflow of the new C&P claims process and the post-decision review process, which has three principal positions.
Customer/Employee Satisfaction Team	evaluates customer and employee desires, attitudes, and issues through the use of surveys, interviews, and other collection methods.
Human Resources Team	develops a plan for transitioning C&P staff into the new positions within the reengineered claims process and defines career progression and performance evaluation policies to properly develop, reward, and retain C&P professional staff.
Training Team	identifies training requirements, determines appropriate training approaches, and oversees their implementation.
Information Technology/ Telecommunications Team	guides the integration of the new C&P information system, automated tools, and telecommunications system into the workplace (coordinated with the new claims process).
C&P Service Rule Simplification Team	examines ways to simplify regulations and procedures; explores measures to simplify the current pension program.

What Happens Next, Continued

Reengineering Initiatives for the Rest of VBA

Business process reengineering is coming to every VBA division. Some initiatives have already begun. The rest will begin in the months ahead. Service organizations and employee unions will be involved throughout the process.

As with C&P, these initiatives will define new visions for the future of each VBA division and provide the road maps for achieving them. The transformation of C&P is the first, and probably the most visible, of the big changes you can expect to see. The lessons learned here will be applied throughout VBA.

Now we invite you to participate in the exciting work that lies ahead. We hope you will take advantage of this opportunity to expand your skills, advance your career potential, and most important of all, better serve America's veterans.
