



# U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

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## Comprehensive Plan for Processing Legacy Appeals and Implementing the Modernized Appeals System Public Law 115-55, Section 3

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### VA's Mission

To fulfill President Lincoln's promise, "To care for him who shall have borne the battle, and for his widow, and his orphan."

**February 2018 Update**

## Table of Contents

Executive Summary .....	3
Comprehensive Plan.....	6
Implementation Plan Requirements .....	6
Section 3(a)(1) – Processing of Legacy Appeals.....	6
Section 3(a)(2) - Implementing the New Appeals System .....	8
Section 3(a)(3) – Timely Processing Under New Appeals System .....	10
Section 3(a)(4) – Monitoring Metrics and Goals of New Appeals System .....	12
Section 3(b)(1) - Resource Requirements .....	15
Section 3(b)(2) - Personnel .....	16
Section 3(b)(3) - Legal Authorities for Hiring and Removing Employees .....	18
Section 3(b)(4) - Estimated Time For Hiring Employees.....	18
Section 3(b)(5) – Higher-Level Adjudicator Training and Experience Requirements .....	19
Section 3(b)(6) - Estimated Percentage of Higher-Level Adjudicators Who Were Decision Review Officers.....	20
Section 3(b)(7) - Decision Review Officer Functions in New System.....	20
Section 3(b)(8) - Training Identification and Timeline .....	21
Section 3(b)(9) - Costs of Training .....	23
Section 3(b)(10) - Modifications to Information Technology Systems .....	23
Section 3(b)(11) - Estimate of Office Space by Phase.....	31
Section 3(b)(12) - Projections for the Productivity of Individual Employees .....	31
Section 3(b)(13) - Outreach Plan .....	33
Section 3(b)(14) - Timeline for Policy Updates .....	34
Section 3(b)(15) - Timeline for Promulgating Regulations .....	36
Section 3(b)(16) - Outline of “Opt-In” Circumstances.....	37
Section 3(b)(17) - Key Goals & Milestones for Reducing Legacy Appeals.....	38
Section 3(b)(18) – Risk Factors.....	40
Section 4 - Pilot Program to Test Assumptions .....	46
Appendix A – Master Project Schedule .....	51
Appendix B – Training Requirements .....	65
Appendix C – Outreach/Communications Activities .....	71

## Executive Summary

This is the second in series of periodic reports satisfying the requirements of Section 3, of the Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017 (Appeals Modernization Act), *Comprehensive Plan for Processing of Legacy Appeals and Implementing the New Appeals System*.

In addition to overhauling VA's current appeals process and providing Veterans, their families, and their survivors with increased choice in handling disagreements with VA's decisions, the Act sets forth specific elements that must be addressed in VA's comprehensive plan. The main topic elements required for this report include the processing of appeals of decisions on legacy claims that the Secretary considers pending; implementing the new appeals system; timely processing, under the new appeals system and monitoring the implementation of the new appeals system, including metrics and goals. VA has made every attempt to provide the highest level of detail and specificity as possible, as guided by Congress and the Comptroller General.

### LEGACY PROCESSING

Key goals and milestones for reducing the number of pending legacy appeals are detailed below. VA's plan to process legacy appeals is multifaceted. It includes plans to evaluate ways to increase efficiencies, and for modeling that will be completed once VA has received statistically valid data from testing the new process during implementation.

For the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA), increased efficiencies, additional resources requested in the fiscal year (FY) 2019 President's Budget, in conjunction with the Rapid Appeals Modernization Program (RAMP) will be used to draw down legacy appeals. While progress has been made in implementing RAMP, VA will be reassessing outreach and marketing to achieve a greater participation rate. Further, the realignment and increased accountability for appeals under the Appeals Management Office (AMO) has resulted in improved performance. For VBA's non compensation legacy appeals, plans for legacy processing include establishing separate work teams, increased training, developing and disseminating internal policy, new monthly workload reports, and increased status updates.

For the Board of Veterans' Appeals (Board), reducing legacy appeals in fiscal year (FY) 2018 is a priority, and the Board is on pace to reach an historic output goal. Additionally, innovations in faster adjudication include: the testing and early rollout of a new interactive decision template; a specialty case program; and the exploration of a Board pilot program under the law. The Board is completing its hiring plan in FY 2018 and is enhancing training and employee engagement for all staff. The Board is also working with a VA Program Management team and VA OIT and United States Digital Service (Digital Service) to re-engineer processes and implement technological upgrades promoting increased decision production.

Finally, the National Cemetery Administration (NCA) and the Veterans Health Administration (VHA) are both continuing to participate in the enterprise-wide appeals reform implementation governance structure.

## IMPLEMENTING THE NEW APPEALS SYSTEM

VA has made progress in implementing the Appeals Modernization Act in all areas since the last report. A draft of the proposed regulations is currently undergoing internal review at the Department. VA continues to make progress in creating training materials, standard operating procedures, and drafting requirements for IT system updates. Moreover, VA continues to collaborate with Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs) and other stakeholders and receive their feedback on VA's implementation of Appeals Modernization.

VBA continues to expand RAMP and as of February 2018, it is rolling the program out to additional regional offices. The Board is supporting RAMP through ongoing dialogue with VSOs, advisory groups, and Congress.

One of the main changes since the November 2017 report is that, as a result of implementing RAMP, the appeals reform implementation governance workgroup proposed that VA discontinue plans to implement the early applicability provision of Section 2(x)(3) of the Appeals Modernization Act and focus agency efforts on RAMP, preparing for full implementation, and processing of legacy appeals. The rationale behind the decision, which is discussed in more detail in Section 3(b)(16) of this report, is that RAMP provides the immediate benefits of early resolutions for Veterans, which is inherent in the Appeals Modernization Act. Additionally, offering both RAMP and early applicability at the same time, to overlapping groups of claimants and appellants, would create a confusing and frustrating experience for Veterans. This proposal was approved by leaders at VBA, VHA, NCA, and the Board.

In addition, the Board, VHA, and most of VBA's lines of business have created separate Appeals Modernization integrated project teams. Enterprise-wide efforts, led by the Board and AMO, will ensure the inputs, activities, and timelines from the individual project teams are incorporated into VA's Master Project Schedule, which is included in Appendix A of this report.

## TIMELINESS OF NEW APPEALS SYSTEM

As for timeliness, VA is tracking RAMP's progress in order to collect data from processing the higher-level reviews and supplemental claims to test particular facets of the new process, make refinements based upon actual data that support or disprove assumptions, make adjustments based upon identified problems prior to full implementation, and allow for forecasting. At the Board, an average processing time goal of 365 days has been established for appeals where the Veteran does not request a hearing or request to submit additional evidence. The Board is working with VBA, VA program management professionals and Digital Service on timeliness for the other two lanes in the new process and gathering data to determine how a pilot may focus this study.

## MONITORING IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NEW APPEALS SYSTEM

VA continues to work towards better monitoring of overall implementation and has improved VA's enterprise-wide Master Project Schedule by supplementing it with individual project plans from VBA and the Board. This action provides oversight, clarifies risks and allows VA to make plans for mitigation. As VA's internal communication has improved, so has increased oversight of the implementation process. For full implementation, the focus will be on the following indicators: rulemaking status, lessons learned from RAMP, and information technology (IT) development.

Draft regulations to implement the Appeals Modernization Act are currently undergoing internal VA concurrence, and VA is working to ensure expedited internal review. Risks and dependencies are clearly delineated in this report and the detailed Master Project Schedule is a protection against the negative consequences of delays in implementation.

Testing of the new appeals system and reviewing results is ongoing. Through RAMP, VBA is studying the new process from intake to issuance of a decision and focusing on creating a model to test capacity based on RAMP election rates which will assist with determining resource requirements. The Board is monitoring RAMP as it pertains to appeals, and exploring the option of piloting the three Board lanes in the new system.

VA recognizes that the sooner more information is provided to Congress, stakeholders and the public, the better the system will be and has attempted to be as specific and detailed as possible in this report. VA will continue to work collaboratively with VSOs, advocacy groups, congressional staff, and other key stakeholders to ensure VA's implementation of the Appeals Modernization Act meets the needs of Veterans.

# Comprehensive Plan

## Implementation Plan Requirements

### **Section 3(a)(1) – Processing of Legacy Appeals**

(a) PLAN REQUIRED.—*Not later than 90 days after the date of the enactment of this Act, the Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall submit to the appropriate committees of Congress and the Comptroller General of the United States a comprehensive plan for—*

*(1) the processing of appeals of decisions on legacy claims that the Secretary considers pending;*

VA remains committed to addressing the pending inventory of legacy appeals. At the end of January 2018, VA had 468,716 legacy appeals pending. At that time there were 311,369 appeals with VBA and 157,357 appeals with the Board. In FY 2017, Veterans waited on average 3 years for resolution of their appeal by VA and, on average, 7 years from the date they initiated their appeal by filing a notice of disagreement (NOD) until resolution by the Board. Compensation legacy appeals comprise the vast majority of the appeals workload at the regional offices. In November 2017, VA initiated RAMP to provide Veterans and appellants with a Compensation legacy appeal pending the choice to opt into the benefits of the new decision review framework. As of January 31, 2018, 50,587 RAMP opt-in letters have been sent to Veterans and approximately 3 percent have elected to participate. As noted below, VA is currently increasing its outreach and marketing campaign regarding RAMP through onsite visits, collaboration with VSOs, and ongoing dialogue to increase the participation rate. Also, starting in February 2018, VA will open the program to newer appeals, which will allow it to test whether the age and stage of a pending appeal impacts the election rate. In addition, VA will review whether it can develop processes that allow more Veterans to opt-in.

Beyond implementing the RAMP initiative, and the work that VA is doing to develop sound monitoring and workload tracking practices for the new appeals process, VA continues to closely monitor the existing legacy appeals workloads. As previously reported in the November 2017 report, VBA realigned its administrative appeals program under the AMO. The realignment, and increased accountability for appeals performance, helped increase VBA appeals production by approximately 24 percent, decrease its appeals inventory by 10 percent, and increased its appeals resolutions by 10 percent during 2017. Appeals teams at regional offices will continue to process legacy appeals with oversight from the AMO. VBA continues to evaluate ways to increase efficiencies. For instance, during the third quarter of FY 2018, VBA intends to initiate a national brokering plan of the legacy inventory. The goal of the brokering plan is to redistribute and balance the pending legacy appeals workload across regional offices, minimizing regional capacity discrepancies, and will result in timelier decisions to claimants who have been waiting the longest. Furthermore, as discussed more in detail in this report, the FY 2019 President's Budget request includes an additional 605 Full Time Equivalents (FTE) for VBA dedicated to processing legacy appeals.

In order to address the appeals inventory at the Board, the Board is prioritizing resources to address this pending legacy inventory throughout fiscal year 2018. As discussed later in this plan, the Board is on pace to reach the goal staffing level of 1,050 FTE by the end of the fiscal year. To date, the Board is on pace to adjudicate over 81,000 decisions this fiscal year, which is an historic high output for the Board, and an increase of 28,000 over FY 2017. The Board set

quarterly output goals for FY 2018 to ensure the Board remains on pace to reach this historic goal. The Board is required under the current law to work cases in docket order and the Board prioritizes cases by docket as they are activated at the Board.

The Board is pursuing efficiency improvements in adjudication of legacy appeals. On Jan 30, 2018, the Board piloted a new interactive decision template to draft all decisions, which will increase efficiencies for decision-drafting attorneys and assist Veterans Law Judges in their review. This interactive template automatically pulls specific data points from the Board's case management software and allows attorneys to prepopulate important law specific to the issues on appeal into the decision. This new template simplifies administrative elements and focuses attorney time on legal elements. This will result in less preparation time and more consistency across Board decisions. More importantly, this template will also make it easier for Veterans to understand the decisions they receive from the Board. Depending on pilot results, the Board plans to release this interactive decision template to all Board staff in March 2018.

Also in March, the Board will begin to roll out a specialized case program. Under this new program, cases dealing with certain specialized areas of law will be adjudicated by a dedicated group of attorneys. The number of specialized attorneys will be based on the percentage of the specialty cases which come before the Board. This specialization will allow these highly trained attorneys to more efficiently adjudicate unusual or difficult cases, and will allow for more consistent treatment of these specialized issues. The specialized attorneys will also continue to handle cases dealing with more common areas of law.

As discussed in the previous report, after implementation, the Board will prioritize reaching timeliness goals in the new system, and devote all remaining resources to processing legacy appeals. Caseflow Queue, discussed in more detail in section 3(b)(10), will assist VA in management and distribution of appeals in all dockets after full implementation. The Board is working with our Digital Service partners to ensure that Caseflow Queue functionality includes the ability to adjust the case distribution ratio between all Board dockets based on the rate of Veteran election in each docket, and the rate at which Veterans with legacy appeals opt into the new system.

The Board's goal is to provide resolutions for all Veterans with pending legacy appeals. Given the complex, non-linear legacy process, it is difficult for VA to project when all legacy appeals will be resolved, or provide timeliness goals for legacy appeals. Moreover, the rate at which legacy appeals may be adjudicated depends largely on personnel resources, which is contingent on future appropriations. The Board is working with program management staff and our Digital Service partners to develop milestones for the reduction of the legacy inventory, considering such dependencies as the opt-in rate from RAMP and statutory mechanisms, current resource levels, trends in adjudication of legacy appeals at the agencies of original jurisdiction, and any increases in productivity resulting from the strategies discussed above.

Beyond the plan to handle Compensation legacy appeals, VBA is also taking the following steps to address all legacy appeals pending in VBA:

VA Insurance Service has established a work team to focus on processing the legacy appeals in its inventory prior to implementation of the Appeals Modernization Act in February 2019 and anticipates processing the vast majority of these appeals by fourth quarter of 2018.

Loan Guaranty Service intends to expand the number of employees trained to process legacy appeals. Currently, the only employees trained to process legacy appeals are located in the

Atlanta Regional Loan Center. In an effort to expand workload capabilities, Loan Guaranty Service intends to provide additional training to other Regional Loan Centers.

In second quarter of FY 2018, Pension & Fiduciary Service (P&F) anticipates the final publication in the Federal Register of its Fiduciary Appeals regulations, and the internal publication of its procedural manual chapter shortly thereafter, which will address legacy appeals processing. P&F anticipates training fiduciary hub employees on this chapter in March of 2018. The fiduciary hubs will process most legacy fiduciary appeals prior to the final publication of VA's regulations implementing the Appeals Modernization Act. Thereafter a portion of the appeals processing personnel will be retained to address any legacy appeals that will remain in the system. In addition, P&F Service will retain part of the current legacy appeals adjudication teams in each Pension Management Center (PMC) in order to continue processing any pending legacy appeals that will remain in the system following implementation of the Appeals Modernization Act.

Education Service expects to begin issuing reoccurring monthly workload reports to its regional processing offices (RPO) by end of second quarter of FY 2018 on any outstanding Education legacy appeals. RPOs will be tasked with reviewing and providing updates to Education Service on the status of those legacy appeals. In addition, Education Service is utilizing bi-weekly workload management meetings with the Education Officers from each RPO to develop strategies for reducing the legacy appeals workload.

Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) Service will begin working with the VR&E offices at each regional office to review any outstanding VR&E legacy appeal and request an update and/or resolution of the appeal. VR&E Service expects these requests to be sent to the field offices during the second quarter of FY 2018, with a request to provide an update to VR&E Service within 30 days of receipt of the request. VR&E Service will request priority be given to the oldest legacy appeals.

NCA and VHA both continue to participate in the enterprise-wide appeals reform implementation governance structure and collaborate with the Board in addressing their legacy appeals. Additionally, VHA has formed an Integrated Project Team (IPT) to analyze its inventory of legacy appeals. A data call has been sent to all medical centers requesting key data elements necessary to perform this analysis. Once this data is received, VHA will create an action plan to determine a data-driven process to improve accountability, tracking, timeliness of processing, and system requirements necessary to eliminate the legacy inventory at VHA.

At NCA, new notification letters, quality assurance, operating procedures, training drafts, etc., are actively being worked on; including ongoing meetings with the Board and VBA personnel to coalesce resources for efficient change management.

### **Section 3(a)(2) - Implementing the New Appeals System**

*(2) implementing the new appeals system;*

VA's enterprise-wide governance workgroup continues to meet and collaborate on implementing appeals modernization across all of VA. The workgroup has discussed significant policy concerns, made recommendations to VA leadership in order to finalize decisions, and engaged in enterprise-wide collaboration to ensure that all offices involved in claims and appeals are prepared to implement the new appeals system.



Sub-workgroups continue to make progress on implementation of the new appeals system. Since the last report, the regulations and forms sub-workgroup completed its internal review of the draft proposed regulations and forms, and initiated internal VA concurrence. The internal procedures sub-workgroup successfully proposed a policy change regarding the early applicability option in section 2, paragraph (x)(3). As will be discussed later in section 3(b)(16) of this report, the internal procedures sub-workgroup proposed that VA should focus resources on RAMP, preparing for full implementation, and processing of legacy appeals instead of exercising the early applicability option. Enterprise-wide leadership concurred with this proposal. The training sub-workgroup continues to meet regularly to collaborate on producing enterprise-wide training materials for RAMP and full implementation.

VA continues to collaborate with VSOs and other stakeholders, including obtaining their advice on VA's draft regulations, forms, decision notice and election letters, as well as draft standard operating procedures (SOPs). VA holds regular and ad-hoc meetings with the VSOs and external stakeholders to update them on the status of implementation and obtain their feedback. This collaboration allows VA to receive feedback from VSOs that will meet the needs of all Veterans and allows VA to make any necessary adjustments prior to full implementation of the new process in February 2019. VA is currently working to develop a collaborative training initiative with VSOs beginning in summer 2018.

In addition to the enterprise-wide workgroups, the Board has also created an Appeals Modernization project management workgroup comprised of all aspects of Board leadership. This group has worked closely with dedicated project management experts from VA's Office of Enterprise Integration to produce a more detailed project plan, which is incorporated into VA's Master Project Schedule (see Appendix A). This workgroup holds regular meetings to set milestones, check progress, and ensure the Board is fully prepared to implement the new appeals process by February 2019.

Beyond the work that VA has already done to implement changes to Compensation claims and appeals processing systems, VA is also taking the following steps to implement the new process for VBA's other lines of business:

For Insurance Service, higher-level reviews and supplemental claims will be processed by the same Senior Veterans Claims Examiners and/or Unit Chiefs who currently process legacy appeals. Once procedures have been finalized, Insurance Service will begin training its employees. Procedural updates will include updates to the VA Insurance Manual, internal policy and procedures, and review of performance standards and position descriptions for potential changes.

P&F Service will update its processing system for the fiduciary program, the Beneficiary Fiduciary Field System (BFFS), with functionality to process higher level reviews and other levels of review. Fiduciary Service anticipates that this update will take place in the third quarter of 2018.

VR&E Service has developed a team of subject matter experts to develop and administer an implementation plan to ensure it is prepared for full implementation. This team has completed several aspects of the implementation plan, to include a draft of proposed regulations and new notification letters. The team is actively working on the revision of VR&E policy and procedural guidance; developing a detailed training plan; reviewing position descriptions and performance standards to determine what, if any, changes will need to occur; working cooperatively across several divisions of VA to ensure that IT systems are updated; analyzing the quality assurance

standards to determine how to incorporate the new quality feedback loop; and actively participating in the development of communication and outreach plans.

Loan Guaranty Service will track the progress of the appeals system implementation via an established project schedule. Loan Guaranty Service will further evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the implementation by incorporating the new claims and appeals process as a component of its annual audit of Regional Loan Centers, and through the annual controls assessment. The Service's Quality Assurance team maintains an oversight SharePoint site where the supporting audit data, review activity, and findings are archived for additional program-level evaluation. The aforementioned ensures that Loan Guaranty Service will have the ability to monitor the metrics and goals of the new appeals system, and identify potential issues relating to implementation.

At VHA, the Appeals IPT is working with the Board to determine the system requirements necessary to adapt VHA's legacy appeals processes to the new appeals system. VHA Project Management teams are developing SOPs and a comprehensive scheduling plan to ensure the proper allocation of resources, the tracking of milestones, development of performance metrics, as well as both communication and change management planning.

### **Section 3(a)(3) – Timely Processing Under New Appeals System**

- (3) timely processing, under the new appeals system, of—*
  - (A) supplemental claims under section 5108 of title 38, United States Code, as amended by section 2(i);*
  - (B) requests for higher-level review under section 5104B of such title, as added by section 2(g); and*
  - (C) appeals on any docket maintained under section 7107 of such title, as amended by section 2(t).*

VA projects an average processing time of 125 days to complete higher-level reviews and supplemental claims under the new process. Data collected during RAMP allows VA to test particular facets of the new process, make refinements based upon actual data that support or disprove assumptions, and make adjustments based upon identified problems prior to full implementation. VA will use several internal metrics to track RAMP's progress. During this program, VA will gather data and conduct trends analyses on aspects of Veterans' behavior, to include their decision to elect to participate in the new process, the distribution of elections among the new process lanes, claims processing timeliness, and individual employee productivity. The data collected during RAMP will allow for forecasting of the reduction of the legacy appeals inventory, as well as ensure adequate resources are directed towards RAMP claims. In addition, the data will inform VA as to appropriate work credit, workload capacity estimates, and processing timeliness metrics for the new process. Appeals that are not converted to the new process under RAMP will continue to be worked under the legacy process. VA will also use the data to assist in developing future resource requirements as part of the annual budget process. VA can process RAMP claims within 125 days on average with favorable outcomes for Veterans, indicating at least preliminarily that the design works.

As to dockets maintained under § 7107, at the current time, the Board established an average processing time goal of 365 days for appeals where the Veteran does not request a hearing or an opportunity to submit additional evidence (direct review docket). The Board is working with VBA, VA Program Management Professionals and Digital Service to develop timeliness goals for appeals where the Veteran requests a hearing with a Veterans Law Judge, which includes

an opportunity to submit additional evidence (hearing docket), and appeals where the Veteran requests an opportunity to submit additional evidence, without a hearing (evidence submission docket). Average processing time for an appeal on the hearing and evidence submission dockets will be based on resource allocation, which VA will continually reevaluate and adjust. The RAMP pilot will provide better data and trend analysis for capacity modeling the resources needed for these other dockets prior to the implementation date.

The Board is exploring a pilot program that will allow VA to make predictions regarding Veteran behavior, resource allocation, and timeliness in all five options in the new system. As a first step, VA is working with its Digital Service partners to perform research with Veterans to investigate their understanding and thought processes concerning the choices the new law provides. Digital Service conducts user research in conjunction with current Caseflow development, and is able to adjust its methodology to capture specific Veteran data about the new system within this ongoing effort. User research with Veterans provides preliminary data about Veteran choices and experiences, which will allow VA to construct trend models and tests that account for uncertainty. The Board will use this data to develop a pilot program that tests all five options in the new framework in line with the type of pilot the Government Accountability Office (GAO) recommends. The goal of a Board pilot is to identify needs and concerns related to full implementation, and make predictions about timeliness and productivity in all five options.

VA is working toward capturing the metrics listed in Section 5 of the Appeals Modernization Act as to timeliness. Many of the metrics for reporting on the new appeals process require systems functionality that currently does not exist. The Board and VBA are working with Digital Service and VA's Office of Information Technology (OI&T) to ensure that all data necessary is collected to allow for reporting on the metrics required by Section 5 of the Act. VHA and NCA are working to develop metrics for tracking efficiency and effectiveness, including identifying potential risks and possible mitigation strategies.

VA will measure average Veteran wait times in the new process as one indicator of success. The metrics sub-workgroup allows data analysts from the Board, VBA, NCA, and VHA to define IT requirements and enterprise-wide policies, particularly in regard to metrics that will require cooperative reporting between the Board and agencies of original jurisdiction. Together, the Board, VBA, NCA, and VHA plan to take a Veteran-centric approach to measure the success of the new appeals process. VA held several requirements gathering sessions to ensure successful development of methods of capturing the data to accurately measure, track, and report metrics required by the Appeals Modernization Act. VBA's Office of Business Process Integration (OBPI) has brought together representatives from multiple VA entities to capture the requirements needed for development of functionality in the Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS).

VA Insurance Service is currently in the early stages of completing decommissioning of the primary mainframe system used to manage all active insurance policies and claims. Insurance Service projects that it will complete this project in FY 2021. In the interim, Insurance Service will make enhancements, as needed to its internal Insurance Appeals Tracking System (IATS) in order to capture the metrics and quality assurance information required by the legislation.

Loan Guaranty Service will establish tracking and reporting requirements and assess them on an ongoing basis to determine goals for the number of average processing days for the new process. Loan Guaranty Service intends to assess the processing timeliness for each adjudication phase to determine areas of opportunity and further assessment.

P&F Service will evaluate the results of the RAMP pilot to ascertain an expected number of higher-level reviews and supplemental claim receipts for the PMCs. Using that data, P&F Service will ensure that an appropriate number of higher-level reviewers will be utilized to process the anticipated workload. P&F Service, in conjunction with VBA's Office of Field Operations, will ensure that VBA meets the 125-day average timeliness goals for new process lanes in the PMCs and fiduciary hubs.

Education Service will identify new metrics and establish control on incoming new process claims. Education Service has identified a work flow chart for higher-level reviews and supplemental claims processing. RPOs will incorporate new appeals processing procedures into daily workload plan. Education Service, in collaboration with VBA's Office of Performance Analysis and Integrity (PA&I) and RPOs will develop tracking reports to manage new process workload and identify possible outliers while adhering to its processing goals. Education Service expects to have control systems and metrics in place by the end of the fourth quarter of FY 2018.

VR&E's current process to address requests for a review is similar to the higher-level review noted in the new claims and appeals process. VR&E refers to these higher-level reviews as administrative reviews. The reviews are completed by VR&E supervisory personnel, and in a few specific circumstances, by the Director of VR&E Service. VR&E Service plans to maintain as much of its current process as possible that complies with the Appeals Modernization Act. As a result, VR&E Service estimates an average processing timeliness of 90 days to complete higher-level reviews. Generally speaking, when a VR&E Service participant has new evidence to provide, he/she simply presents that information to his/her Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor (VRC) for review. The VRC seeks to review this new information and issue his/her response within 125 days. If that evidence does not change the original decision, the participant has the option to request a higher-level review, or an administrative review as noted in VR&E's current policy. VR&E Service believes this practice of seeking to resolve disputes at the lowest possible level is most beneficial to program participants, and is a key reason why appeals on VR&E issues represent less than 0.5 percent of VA's total inventory of legacy appeals.

VHA and NCA will continue to work with the Board in developing the process to comply with the Appeals Modernization Act. NCA is developing IT solutions, procedures, and other processes to focus all efforts on timely full implementation.

### **Section 3(a)(4) – Metrics and Goals for Monitoring Implementation of the New Appeals System**

- (4) monitoring the implementation of the new appeals system, including metrics and goals—*
  - (A) to track the progress of the implementation;*
  - (B) to evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the implementation; and*
  - (C) to identify potential issues relating to the implementation.*

VA continues to work with project management support to strengthen project plans and schedules for implementation activities across the different administrations, lines of business, and the Board, and integrating each of those project plans into VA's enterprise-wide Master Project Schedule. The Master Project Schedule, through its identified risks section, assists VA in identifying potential overarching issues relating to implementation, offers mitigations strategies in order to minimize the identified risks, and ensures timely execution for

implementation. A copy of VA's Master Project Schedule is included in Appendix A of this report.

The VA administrations, VBA lines of business, and the Board established their individual implementation project teams with representatives from senior management, program oversight, and operations elements of each organization to track implementation activities that are specific to the organization. These teams meet internally on a weekly and/or on a bi-weekly basis to track their progress with implementation, address identified issues, and make needed organizational changes to ensure successful implementation of the new appeals system. Potential issues and risks relating to implementation of the new system are identified by analysts and managers through the Appeals Modernization implementation governance sub-workgroups and/or during the monthly meetings the AMO holds with each VBA line of business to discuss implementation matters.

The Board is constantly refining and improving its portions of the Master Project Schedule to identify and pursue all activities needed for success. For example, the Board has identified and is pursuing additional opportunities for automation through Caseflow applications and has identified and is pursuing opportunities associated with a multi-faceted strategy for managing the changes associated with converting from the legacy to new appeals process. Automation for Caseflow specifically refers to the ability to manage multiple Board dockets to assist the Board in meeting its timeliness goals and the ability to assign work items to Board employees for processing of appeal-related tasks; VA anticipates it will be able to support the processing of appeals within the Caseflow environment on time, within the existing Caseflow development budget. As for managing changes, since the last report the Board has obtained contracting support to develop detailed process maps of the legacy system, and will create equally as detailed process maps of the new appeals process. Additionally, the Board is working with the Office of Enterprise Integration to obtain additional, dedicated, support from experts in change management. This effort will shape long-term policy planning and formalize procedures and processes.

In addition, VA's governance workgroup continues to meet on a periodic basis to assess any enterprise-wide impediments to implementation, discuss mitigation strategies, and make recommendations to VA senior leaders on enterprise-wide policy proposals regarding implementation.

In order to improve governance structures relating to appeals modernization implementation, VA has developed a regular reporting cadence on risks, and areas for improvement to VA leadership on several levels. VA's Deputy Secretary is briefed on a regular basis on the implementation status of appeals modernization. In addition, within VBA, appeals modernization issues are briefed at the executive governance board (EGB). The EGB is chaired by VBA's Executive in Charge and has representation of senior-level leaders from within VBA's business lines. Moreover, to discuss more granular IT risks, VBA provides updates on appeals modernization through the Benefits Portfolio Steering Committee, which is chaired by VBA's Office of Business Process Integration.

As described more in detail in section 4 of this report, during RAMP, and with feedback from Veterans, VSOs, and congressional stakeholders, VA is testing the new process from intake to issuance of a decision. This includes testing the election opt-in notice, the new decision notice that meets the requirements outlined in the statute, internal standard operating procedures and training materials, which VA will incorporate into the development of materials for full implementation. In addition, VA is testing information technology solutions for managing

Veterans' opt-in elections and capturing duty to assist error data identified during the higher-level review process. RAMP provides VA with an opportunity to receive feedback from participants, their representatives, and VA personnel that will allow for any necessary adjustments prior to full implementation of the new process in February 2019. Furthermore, the regulations sub-workgroup has completed the drafting of the proposed regulations, which are currently undergoing internal review.

VA will look at the following indicators when assessing its readiness for full implementation:

**Status of the rulemaking.** If public comments prompt extensive revisions to draft regulations, VA may need more time to make the revisions, gain stakeholder buy-in, and complete the approval process.

**Lessons learned from processing of higher-level reviews and supplemental claims in RAMP.** VA closely monitors RAMP to identify potential problems with the new processes and/or systems. VA does not anticipate encountering any significant issues that would cause delay in implementation, but VA will assess problems identified during RAMP to determine whether changes to the implementation plan are warranted.

**Status of IT systems development.** If VA encounters unanticipated delays in updating IT systems to support the new appeals framework, VA may require more time to implement. As described in more detail in section 3(b)(10), Digital Service builds the minimally viable functionality first, so as to permit the Board and VA to accomplish necessary processing tasks. Therefore, at this time, VA anticipates that the necessary updates will be completed on time. VA OIT and Digital Service provided a development and delivery schedule, attached to this report, and VA is monitoring performance against the schedule.

## Plan Elements

The following sections provide information on each element of the comprehensive plan as required in Sections 3(b) through 4(a)(2) of the Act.

### **Section 3(b)(1) - Resource Requirements**

- (1) Delineation of the total resource requirements of the Veterans Benefits Administration and the Board of Veterans' Appeals, disaggregated by resources required to implement and administer the new appeals system and resources required to address the appeals of decisions on legacy claims.*

VA will use existing resources devoted to drafting regulations, implementing IT system changes, establishing internal procedures, creating training materials, conducting training, and releasing communications and outreach products necessary for implementation of the new system. VA subject matter experts (SMEs) representing the Board, as well as VBA's program business lines, the AMO, and the Office of Performance, Analysis, and Integrity (PA&I), support OBPI's rotational planning and requirements gathering sessions to ensure that methods for capturing the data to accurately measure, track, and report metrics required by the Appeals Modernization Act are developed. In addition, to further refine the development schedule, OBPI is working with OI&T and Digital Service to ensure full integration.

Regarding delineation of the total resource requirements to administer the new appeals system and address the legacy appeals inventory, RAMP will provide better data and trend analysis for capacity modeling the resources needed; however, the current RAMP participation rate is not yielding sufficient information to make this determination. Therefore, VA is adopting additional strategies to better delineate the resources required. With new strategies, as well as continued analysis of data received from RAMP, VA will project various scenarios detailing potential resource requirements in future updates to this plan.

VA will use the data collected during RAMP to create a capacity model based upon actual data. VA will use this model to project the resources required to address the legacy appeals inventory and process supplemental claims and higher-level reviews under RAMP. During this program, VA will gather data and conduct trends analyses on aspects of Veterans' behavior, to include their decision to opt-in to the new system, employee productivity, processing timeliness, and inventory measures. Moreover, the model will account for varying RAMP opt-in rates and will help delineate the upper and lower bounds of the resource requirements to work both RAMP claims and reduce the legacy appeal inventory. VA will use that data to assist in developing future resource requirements as part of the annual budget process.

The Board believes that its existing resources will allow for successful implementation of the new system. Additionally, the Board will not require separate resources for legacy and new system appeals. The Board anticipates making adjustments to administrative procedures such as intake of appeals, routing to Veterans Service Organizations, scheduling of hearings, and dispatching decisions which will be aided by technology upgrades to assist staff in performing these duties. Similarly, attorneys and Veterans Law Judges will be well-equipped to adjudicate appeals in both systems, as the applicable law regarding Veterans' benefits does not change. Therefore, it will not be necessary to divide resources between systems. Moreover, the Board will utilize Caseflow Queue, discussed in more detail in section 3(b)(10), for the management and distribution of appeals in all dockets under the new law.

The Board is leveraging project management support from the VA Office of Enterprise Integration (OEI) and additional support from VA's Office of Performance Analysis and Integrity (PA&I), and the Office of Business Process Integration (OBPI) to develop better predictions regarding specific resource allocation between all dockets.

Additionally, OBPI has already aided the Board in identifying a tool within VBMS that utilizes an existing-contracted vendor to send the Veteran and other parties documents from the claims file. This tool creates work efficiencies for staff in that the contracted vendor physically sends non-time sensitive communications, allowing staff to work remotely. In the future, this tool may assist with FOIA requests and allow for dispatch letters to be completed. There is no added cost to the Board for this efficiency.

VA Insurance Service does not have a designated section that processes appeals. There are currently 20 full-time employees addressing legacy appeals as part of their general claims processing duties. With the new process of reviewing a supplemental claim, there will be 42 full-time employees adjudicating appeals as part of their general claims processing duties. Regarding training for the new process, Insurance Service will have 3 full-time employees preparing the training and 2 full-time employees conducting the training. Higher-level reviews and supplemental claims will be handled by current Senior Veterans' Claims Examiners and Unit Chiefs who handled appeals prior to the legislation. Under legacy appeal procedures, Senior Veterans' Claims Examiners and Unit Chiefs, who are the most experienced employees, are the primary staff members who handle appeals. Moreover, timely processing of supplemental claims will be possible as they will be processed by Veterans Claims Examiners. Insurance Service currently has 28 full-time employees under this job title. Higher-level reviews will be conducted by Senior Veterans Claims Examiners or Unit Chiefs. Insurance Service currently has 13 full-time employees under the Senior Veterans Claims Examiner job title and 7 full-time employees under the Unit Chief job title.

Education Service has not identified any additional resources needed at this time.

Both new appeals and legacy appeals will be handled by the existing NCA appeals office personnel. Additional personnel needs would be dependent on national response to the new system. However, NCA will require additional IT developments to support the new process, and is working to identify the specific IT requirements and estimated timeframe for delivery. Finally, VHA is planning to conduct a comprehensive assessment of the resources it will need to manage and process legacy claims and transition to the new system.

### **Section 3(b)(2) - Personnel**

*(2) Delineation of the personnel requirements of the Administration and the Board, including staffing levels during the—*

*(A) period in which the Administration and the Board are concurrently processing—*

*(i) appeals of decisions on legacy claims; and*

*(ii) appeals of decisions on non-legacy claims under the new appeals system;*

The Board has 676 attorneys, 83 judges, and 135 support staff, and is on pace to deliver 81,000 decisions to Veterans in FY 2018. During FY 2018, the Board plans to hire up to 1,050 FTE. These additional FTEs will include approximately 100 more attorneys, up to eight additional Veterans Law Judges, and additional support staff for Veteran facing positions. With this



staffing level, the Board anticipates handling concurrent processing of legacy and non-legacy appeals under the new system.

VBA has allocated 1,495 FTE to process compensation and pension legacy appeals. In addition, the FY 2019 President's Budget request includes an additional 605 FTE for VBA dedicated to processing legacy appeals. VBA intends to allocate field resources in an efficient manner to accomplish timely processing in the new process and will allocate all remaining resources to address the inventory of legacy appeals. RAMP inventory will be distributed in a cascading format. Processing of RAMP claims began at the AMO's Appeals Resource Center (ARC) in November 2017. Once production capacity estimates have been met at the ARC, RAMP inventory will be routed to the first of 10 RAMP processing sites. Initial estimated capacity for RAMP claims is 45 higher-level reviews per month per DRO/Higher-Level Reviewer. Moreover, estimated capacity for supplemental claims is 16.6 claims per FTE per month for VSR and RVSR. All positions are based on a 75% availability rate. The Denver Regional Office has been identified as the initial regional office site for processing RAMP claims. As each RAMP station is on-boarded, their corresponding remand inventory may be brokered to the ARC. In order to further maximize the productivity of existing resources, following implementation VBA plans to leverage technology and optimize distribution of workload and may consolidate some legacy appeals processing.

VA Insurance Service does not have a designated section that processes appeals. There are currently 20 full-time employees addressing the legacy appeals as part of their overall claims processing duties. Under the new process, there will be 42 full-time employees adjudicating claims and supplemental claims. VA Insurance Service will have 3 full-time employees preparing training on the new process and 2 full-time employees conducting the training. Higher-level reviews and supplemental claims will be handled by current Senior Veterans' Claims Examiners and Unit Chiefs who have appeals experience. Review of Performance Standards (PSs) and Position Descriptions (PDs) for potential changes, which are expected to be minimal, is currently in process. The anticipated completion date of the review is January 31, 2018. Revisions, however, of the PSs & PDs will be implemented once the training is complete.

Loan Guaranty Service will not require additional personnel to process requests for reviews of non-legacy claims under the new system while concurrently processing legacy appeals.

Education Service will utilize existing resources to review and process any legacy claims that are outstanding. Education Service established a Quality Training Specialist (QTS) position to replace the existing Training Coordinator position. The position is not being created to only process appeals, but Education Service will utilize the position for reviewing and processing all Higher Level Review (HLR) requests. Education Service expects hiring to be completed by the end of the third quarter of FY 2018. In addition, Education Service is pending confirmation from VBA's Chief Human Capital Office on whether or not position descriptions and performance standards require adjustments, to include higher level review specifics within the RPOs.

Given the small number of appeals related to VR&E issues, it is unlikely that additional staff will be required during the period in which it is concurrently processing claims and appeals in the legacy system, as well as those under the new appeals system.

VHA is planning to conduct a comprehensive assessment of personnel requirements necessary to (1) manage and process legacy claims, (2) transition to the new system and (3) train and educate staff and Veterans on the new process and automation.

Finally, NCA future personnel needs would be assessed dependent on national response to the new system (from Veterans, their families, VSOs, attorneys).

*(B) period during which VBA and the Board are no longer processing any appeals on legacy claims.*

The rate at which the legacy appeals inventory can be resolved is dependent on a number of factors, including the rate of election of claimants with legacy appeals pending who opt-in to the new process. VA intends to allocate resources in an efficient manner that will establish timely processing in the new process and will allocate all remaining appeals resources to address the inventory of legacy appeals.

The data that VA has currently collected through RAMP is too small to make statistically significant modeling of personnel required for VBA and the Board after all legacy appeals are processed. As VA gathers more data from RAMP, VA will learn more about Veteran behavior concerning in the new appeals process. As the Board receives more data regarding the rate at which decisions are appealed to the Board under the new system, the Board will be able to project the number of personnel needed after the agency would no longer be processing legacy appeals. Although VA cannot predict actual personnel requirements, VA anticipates that normal attrition will address any necessary staffing changes as a result of elimination of the legacy appeals inventory. Historically, attrition rates are 7 percent for VBA and 9.3 percent for the Board. When the last legacy appeals are adjudicated, any remaining resources dedicated to legacy claims and appeals processing will be reallocated to processing in the new system as needed.

### **Section 3(b)(3) - Legal Authorities for Hiring and Removing Employees**

*(3) Identification of the legal authorities under which the Administration or the Board may—  
(A) hire additional employees to conduct the concurrent processing described in paragraph (2)(A); and  
(B) remove employees who are no longer required by the Administration or the Board once the Administration and the Board are no longer processing any appeals of decisions on legacy claims.*

There is no substantive update to provide since the November 2017 report was completed. VA will continue to monitor resource requirements and adjust plans as necessary pursuant to applicable legal authorities as originally provided.

### **Section 3(b)(4) - Estimated Time For Hiring Employees**

*(4) An estimate of the amount of time the Administration and the Board will require to hire additional employees as described in paragraph (3)(A) once funding has been made available for such purpose, including a comparison of such estimate and the historical average time required by the Administration and the Board to hire additional employees.*

The Board is continuing its aggressive hiring strategy to meet its hiring target of 1,050 FTE by the end of FY 2018. The Board was unable to complete recruitment during the first quarter of FY 2018 due to newly implemented recruiting strategies, to include collecting and scoring writing samples from attorney candidates. This process will improve the Board's ability to select and extend offers of employment to highly qualified candidates will assist to reduce turnover in the attorney advisor positions for those hired in FY 2018. The Board expects it will require an

average of 120 days to hire attorneys. As new recruiting strategies are implemented and improved, however, the Board's goal is to hire attorneys in approximately 90 days, on average. The Board announced job openings for Veterans Law Judges in February 2018. The average time to hire Veterans Law Judges is approximately six months.

As previously reported, VBA estimates it will require the same average amount of time as it has historically taken to hire additional employees. On average, VBA requires 80 days to hire Rating Veterans Service Representatives, 53 days to hire Veterans Service Representatives, and 73 days to hire Decision Review Officers. For all VBA positions, the total average time to hire is 67 days.

VHA is planning to conduct a comprehensive assessment of personnel requirements necessary to transition to the new appeals system and eliminate the legacy inventory after the data call is analyzed. VHA will, where possible, utilize realignment to meet the personnel requirements. The historic VHA average time to hire an employee is 60 days.

### **Section 3(b)(5) – Higher-Level Adjudicator Training and Experience Requirements**

*(5) A description of the amount of training and experience that will be required of individuals conducting higher-level reviews under section 5104B of title 38, United States Code, as added by section 2(g).*

VBA has no update to provide since the initial report on the description of the amount of training and experience required by individuals who will conduct higher-level reviews of compensation and pension disability rating decisions.

For Insurance Service, Senior Veterans' Claims Examiners and Unit Chiefs, who are the most experienced employees, are currently the primary staff members who handle appeals involving both insureds applying for or amending their policies and deceased insureds, where surviving beneficiaries are the recipients of proceeds from the Veteran's insurance. Under the process, higher-level reviews and supplemental claims will be handled by the same Senior Veterans' Claims Examiners and Unit Chiefs.

For Education Service, employees who will perform higher-level reviews will be required to have served at a journey-level when processing and adjudicating Veterans' education claims. This includes all benefits (i.e., Montgomery GI-Bill, Selective Reserve, Reserve Education Assistance Program, Veterans Educational Assistance Program, Post 9/11 GI Bill, Dependent Education Benefits, Fry Scholarship, and knowledge of Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment claims). They must have knowledge of various resources to confirm and validate procedures in which to process claims (i.e., M22-4, M21-1, CFR, all training material). Next, employees will also be required to have knowledge of all Education claims processing systems. In addition, employees must also be knowledgeable with processing the various types of education claims (i.e., original, supplemental, appeals, committee on waivers, on-the-job training/apprenticeship, Flight, Chapter 35 original and supplemental, correspondence, and work study). Finally, employees will be required to have exceptional verbal and written communication skills while interacting with veterans and dependents.

As the VR&E program currently has a higher-level review currently in place, it expects minimal training on the new higher-level review process. VR&E Service will provide multiple one-hour training sessions that will include an overview of the new process; the changes to its current higher-level review to ensure compliance with the new process; and to explain tracking and

quality feedback loops. Please see attached VR&E's Training Plan, included in Appendix B. Higher-level reviews will be completed by VR&E supervisory staff. There is not a specific experience requirement to attain a supervisory position in VR&E; however, there is a statutory educational requirement, as provided in 38 U.S.C. § 3118. In addition, VA requires all Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors to obtain a master's degree in rehabilitation counseling, including an internship; or a master's degree in counseling psychology or a related field, including 30 semester hours of course work in such areas as foundations of rehabilitation counseling, human growth and development, vocational assessment, career development, job placement, case management, and medical/psycho-social aspects of disability.

VHA will work with VBA and the Board to determine if any additional training is needed for the administrations' employees.

NCA will undertake training per Appendix B for memorial specific matters, and will continue to work with the Board and VBA to identify shared functional training resources for effective training management.

### **Section 3(b)(6) - Estimated Percentage of Higher-Level Adjudicators Who Were Decision Review Officers**

*(6) An estimate of the percentage of higher-level adjudicators who will be employees of the Department of Veterans Affairs who were Decision Review Officers on the day before the new appeals system takes effect or had experience, as of such date, comparable to that of one who was a Decision Review Officer.*

VBA has no update to provide since its initial report on the estimated percentage of higher-level adjudicators who were Decision Review Officers.

VHA does not currently employ any DROs. VHA is reviewing the current organizational structure to determine the workforce composition and the skillsets that will be needed when the appeals process transitions to the new system.

All current NCA appeals personnel have experience comparable to that of DROs, including completing de novo reviews, holding informal telephonic conferences, making a decision including reversals of prior denials, making direct contact with appellants and their representatives, employee training and development, jurisdiction over appellant issues, and certification and transfer of appeals.

### **Section 3(b)(7) - Decision Review Officer Functions in New System**

*(7) A description of the functions that will be performed after the date on which the new appeals system takes effect by Decision Review Officers who were Decision Review Officers on the day before the date the new appeals system takes effect.*

As previously reported, VBA anticipates that DROs will continue to perform the same functions after the date on which the new claims and appeals system takes effect. VA will transition DROs from the legacy appeals process to higher-level review processing in a phased approach as the legacy appeals inventory is drawn down through RAMP, legacy appeals production, and implementation of the new appeals system.

NCA anticipates its employees who have experience comparable to that of DROs will be involved in conducting higher-level reviews, holding telephonic conferences, contacting Veterans, training and developing employees, ensuring quality, and working on legacy appeals.

Finally, VHA does not currently employ any DROs.

### **Section 3(b)(8) - Training Identification and Timeline**

*(8) Identification of and a timeline for—*

*(A) any training that may be required as a result of hiring new employees to carry out the new appeals system or to process appeals of decisions on legacy claims; and*

*(B) any retraining of existing employees that may be required to carry out such system or to process such claims.*

VBA has created training materials in order to train its employees on the RAMP process. VBA's AMO is utilizing the ARC in Washington, D.C., as the initial site to process the elections received for Veterans who participate in the program. VBA is expanding RAMP processing to certain regional offices as the RAMP workload grows. Designated ARC employees received instructor-led training during the month of November 2017. The AMO has utilized the feedback received during this ARC training to improve the training materials as VA expands RAMP to regional offices. VBA will incorporate the training materials developed for RAMP into the development of training materials for full implementation. See section 4 of this report for further details regarding RAMP training.

In February and March of 2018, the Board is conducting trainings on RAMP for all Board staff. The Board is working with VBA/AMO to ensure that all developments and changes to the new framework are addressed jointly.

The Board's Knowledge Management (KM) and Legislation, Regulations, and Policy (LRP) teams, in collaboration with Digital Service, are currently building training for all Board staff to provide an initial training on the new appeals process. This training will be implemented in April and May of 2018. The training will compare and contrast the legacy and the new systems, focusing on how claims are processed within VBA, when additional evidence may be submitted, how claims arrive at the Board, how remands will be handled, and how docketing of appeals will be handled.

KM is currently identifying subject matter experts (SMEs) for each phase of a claim's journey through the Board. The Board will utilize the SMEs to serve as points of contact to assist in the training of each respective office within the Board. Continuous contact between KM and LRP and the SMEs will ensure that all process-related training materials remain accurate as IT functionality evolves. KM will develop and conduct surveys to facilitate updates to training materials and determine whether additional training is needed.

The Board also plans to collaborate with Veterans Service Organizations to provide overview training on the differences between the legacy and the new system processes to service representatives and other external stakeholders in the summer of 2018.

The Board will implement in-depth training in August 2018. The Board will continue to conduct surveys and utilize the SMEs to ensure that training information remains accurate and up to date over time.

Regarding training on new IT systems being developed by Digital Service, all Caseflow applications are being designed iteratively “with users, not for them,” in accord with Digital Service values. This value captures the belief that in order to deliver products and services that provide value to users, it’s essential that those building the tools experience users’ experiences. Digital Service design practice involves:

- Spending time with current and prospective users of the service early in the project;
- Using a range of qualitative and quantitative research methods to determine people’s goals, needs, and behaviors;
- Testing prototypes of solutions with real users;
- Documenting the findings about user goals, needs, behaviors, and preferences;
- Sharing findings with the team and agency leadership; and
- Regularly testing the applications with potential users as they are being built to ensure it meets people’s needs.

Although Digital Service focuses on ensuring that all applications are intuitive for users, new tools inevitably involve changes to existing work processes. When training is required, Digital Service has training personnel on staff that work to design training presentations and materials in concert with the development of Caseflow applications. As Digital Service prepares to release applications to users, whether as part of a pilot or a complete rollout, the team coordinates with necessary stakeholders to arrange times and locations for training, both in D.C. and in regional offices throughout the country.

VA Insurance Service anticipates conducting training in January 2019 for the new appeal process. Because appeals will continue to be decided by our senior employees who handle legacy appeals, Insurance Service anticipates that two sessions will be sufficient.

Loan Guaranty Service will train all Regional Loan Centers employees involved in appeals on the new process in advance of implementation and will conduct supplemental training as required after implementation. Loan Guaranty Service is working on a more granular timeline specific to its business line.

P&F Service estimates that all fiduciary program training products will be implemented by February 1, 2019, with the following schedule:

- Create training products within 60 days of procedures publication
- 30 days for Fiduciary Program policy and procedures peer review, Chief approval, and publication to Talent Management System (TMS) and VBA Learning
- P&F Service conducts ‘train-the-trainer’ for the fiduciary hub Quality Review and Training (QRT) Specialists within 30 days of publication in TMS
- Hub QRT Specialists deliver all training to field personnel within 30 days of receiving train-the-trainer instruction

P&F Service estimates that all pension program training products will be implemented by February 1, 2019, with the following implementation schedule:

- Create training products within 60 days of procedures publication
- 30 days for Pension policy and procedures peer review, Chief approval, and publication to TMS and VBA Learning Catalog
- P&F Service delivers the training to field personnel within 30 days of TMS publication

Education Service has identified training that requires updates and revisions based on Appeals Modernization requirements. All claims involving denials, reconsiderations, waivers, delimiting

date extensions, Equitable Relief, and updated forms will be included in the new training package. In addition, Education Service National Training Team (NTT) and internal Appeals workgroup (Manual and Internal Procedures) will work in collaboration to sync training material with the M22-4 Part 3, Chapters 2 and 3 procedures manual updates to ensure consistency and accuracy based on regulations. NTT is working to ensure all claims that may result in a request for a review are identified in order to support accurate RPO processing in all aspects of the new process. The NTT has previously solicited current training material for appeals, and will work with the RPOs and their Training Coordinators (TCs) to revise, update, and develop training material that is inclusive of all the changes outlined in the Appeals Modernization requirements. Education Service will update, develop, and conduct training to all designated staff on the new appeals process by February 1, 2019.

VR&E Service will provide a series of one hour training sessions that will include an overview of the new process; the changes to the current higher level review process to ensure compliance with the new process; and to explain tracking and quality feedback loops. Please see Appendix B for VR&E's detailed Training Plan.

VHA is planning to conduct a comprehensive assessment of personnel requirements necessary to eliminate its legacy appeals inventory and transition to the new system. VHA will utilize realignment to meet many of the new personnel requirements. Once new system training materials are finalized, VHA will determine the time required to train or retrain employees, as needed.

NCA has new training planned, and will also remain in contact with the Board and VBA to assess for cross-functional training material.

### **Section 3(b)(9) - Costs of Training**

*(9) Identification of the costs to the Department of Veterans Affairs of the training identified under paragraph (8) and any additional training staff and any additional training facilities that will be required to provide such training.*

VBA and the Board do not anticipate any costs related to training.

VHA cannot estimate training cost before it determines the regulatory, policy, and process changes necessary to transition from the legacy system to the new system. VHA will determine the time and cost required to train and retrain employees after identifying necessary procedural changes. Project management staff will ensure cost and training hours required will be documented by location in both the training plan and the master implementation schedule.

### **Section 3(b)(10) - Modifications to Information Technology Systems**

*(10) A description of the modifications to the information technology systems of the Administration and the Board that the Administration and the Board require to carry out the new appeals system, including cost estimates and a timeline for making the modifications.*

Required system modifications are a joint effort between VA's OI&T, Enterprise Program Management Office (EPMO), which manages and maintains VBA IT systems, and Digital Service, which has been leading the effort to develop and implement Caseflow, which is replacing VACOLS, the primary IT system supporting the Board.

## **VBA Systems Modification Update**

Within the VBA IT systems environment, implementation of the new process will primarily require modifications to VBMS. VBMS already collects most of the data that is required to track and report on appeals as required by new law in addition to fully implementing requirements for review of compensation claims. Changes to VBMS's modules will extend tracking and reporting of claims status beyond compensation claims, where the vast majority of VA's pending legacy inventory lie, to VBA's other lines of business to ensure that all required elements can be tracked for all claims.

### **General Functions**

Modifications to core functions will enable VA to:

- Electronically differentiate between a higher-level review (HLR), a supplemental claim, a Board remand, and a Board grant based on Veteran preference to allow appropriate handing of information within the VBMS system.
- Track the following elements related to an HLR, a supplemental claim, a Board remand, or a Board grant of benefits:
  - Date of establishment.
  - Contention.
  - Date of final disposition.
  - Type of claim: (HLR, Supplemental Claim, Board Remand, Board Grant).
  - Status of final disposition (i.e., granted, denied, etc.).
- Store, format, and share claim-related data with VBA's Corporate Data Warehouse so it can be consolidated and used to issue VBA-wide reports as required under the statute.
- Map a contention to a previously rated issue.
- Automatically set the correct status for End Products (EPs) 030 and 040.
- Route claims based on routing preferences and auto-assign claims based on higher-level adjudicator role.
- Capture positive findings of fact for rating and non-rating decisions so that they are available for any future decision on the same issue/contention within eFolder.
- Add dispositions to a contention (ex: Duty To Assist, Denied, Granted).
- Retrieve a claim and disposition for all rated issues associated with the claim.
- Capture the disposition of a non-rating review.
- Support storage and handling of additional document types (ex: HLR Decision Document), and ability to create required correspondence (ex: Improved Decision Notice).

These modifications allow for increased integration with internal governmental systems, consolidation of reporting data to a single location, and improved accuracy in reporting based on data integrity.

### **Ratings**

Decision makers across all the VBA regional offices use VBMS to issue rating decisions. The Appeals Modernization Act mandates that all VA's decision notices contain seven specific elements. In most cases across VA, decision notifications do not contain all seven. Rating functionality within VBMS will be updated to enable all claims processors to track and use all seven, which include:

- Identify the issues adjudicated.



- Provide a summary of the evidence considered during the decision.
- Provide a summary of the applicable laws and regulations.
- Identify findings favorable to the claimant.
- In the case of a denial, identify elements not satisfied leading to the denial.
- Provide an explanation of how to obtain or access evidence used in making the decision.
- If applicable, identify the criteria that must be satisfied to grant service connection or the next higher level of compensation.

The System needs to:

- Provide glossary and formatting enhancements to support the new content required under the statute.
- Update to ratings glossaries and standard data.
- Deliver consistent decision notices that are compliant with the Appeals Modernization Act.

### **Correspondence**

The new review types and other rule changes contained in the Appeals Modernization Act will require that VA modify its communications with the Veteran in the following ways:

- VA must communicate to every Veteran who receives a Statement of the Case (SOC) or Supplemental Statement of the Case (SSOC) by VA of the option to “opt-in” to the new claims process.
- VA must provide the appropriate forms to Veterans who request review or appeal of a VA decision.
- Updates to language contained in notification decisions and letters and functionality to ensure Veterans understand that they may not request higher-level review of a higher-level review.

The System needs to:

- Make approximately seven new forms available in the VBMS forms library.
- Support updates to language to various VBMS letters.
- Support logic changes to the automated decision letter (ADL).
- Track elections by claimants related to the S/SOC opt-in option.

### **National Work Queue (NWQ)**

VA is obligated to provide every Veteran who receives an S/SOC after February 2019 the opportunity to “opt in” to the new process from the legacy process. The business need is for VA to be able to modify NWQ to:

- Limit the routing of HLR requests to VBA decision-makers who are authorized to perform a HLR.
- Route requests for an HLR to a station other than the station that issued the original decision, if requested by Veteran. While the default will be routing to another station, the Veteran may request that the claim remain at the station that issued the original decision.

The System needs to:

- Synchronize tracking within the Corporate Database of all individuals who opt in or stay with the legacy process from Caseflow inputs based on receipt of SOC or SSOC.
- Begin processing all Appeals Modernization Act claims at the appropriate time.

- Trigger outbound communication to Veteran as attachment or within letters that opt-in to the new process.

**Timeline**

The VBMS development team is currently in the “design” phase of system modernization. Full business epics and sub-epics have been developed documenting the necessary requirements. Based on our current projected schedule, the design phase will be followed by two “development” phases in which the business solution will be developed, tested and deployed as detailed below.

High Level VBMS Appeals Modernization Schedule			
	May 2018	Aug 2018	Dec 2018
Appeals Claims Establishment	Discovery & Technical Design Alternatives	- Establish and process appeals claims in Casflow intake - Route claims using the NWQ national routing	Enhance NWQ routing based on appeals attributes and user feedback
Appeals Processing Support	Discovery & Technical Design Alternatives	-Share information with Casflow on appeal process from Efolder and Claims disposition	Refine interactions with Casflow
Tracking & Reporting	Discovery & Technical Design Alternatives	- Track claims processing - Store metric for reporting - Include provisions for Federal Tax Information as required	-Refine data with PA&I for report creation

**Budget**

VA anticipates all necessary IT system modifications will be completed by the end of this calendar year. Total incremental costs for the required changes within VBMS are estimated at \$6M. These funds, which are identified and planned, will support changes within the VBA IT environment.

**United States Digital Service Joint VBA/Board IT Collaboration**

In order to support the new appeals system, the Board and VBA worked with Digital Service to develop Casflow Intake. This tool will act as a single entry point in the new system for cases. Casflow Intake is integrated with VBMS, and provides the ability to receive and process requests for review under the Appeals Modernization Act. The tool was developed and deployed between September 28, 2017 and October 30, 2017, and at the initial deployment, was capable of receiving and processing RAMP opt-ins (for supplemental claims and higher-level reviews). Digital Service subsequently deployed Intake functionality to receive and process notices of disagreement as Veterans re-enter the RAMP process, in addition to

supplemental claims and higher-level reviews. Caseflow Intake will continue to capture data on Veterans' lane selections through the completion of RAMP and in the new process. The data are instrumental in the satisfaction of VA's reporting and tracking requirements.

Specific Caseflow functionality is expected to include:

- the ability to establish appeals in Caseflow;
- the ability to establish EPs in VBMS for supplemental claims and higher-level reviews;
- the ability to route supplemental claim and higher-level review EPs to the National Work Queue;
- the ability to correctly track reviews in the supplemental claim, higher-level review, and appeal lanes to meet the Appeals Modernization Act tracking requirements; and
- the ability to collect and store all necessary routing data to enable VA to comply with the Appeals Modernization Act reporting requirements.

### **Modifications to Board IT Systems**

The Board's required IT modifications are being accomplished via work with Digital Service. To date, Digital Service has provided:

- *Caseflow Dispatch (March 2017)*: Caseflow Dispatch facilitates the transfer of cases back to the AOJ to improve the timeliness to issue benefits and to ensure appeals are accurately labeled and classified during the transfer between VA systems.
- *Caseflow Certification V2 (June 2017)*: Caseflow Certification V2 improves data accuracy for both Veterans' requests for hearings and their Powers of Attorney, enabling automated activation at the Board.
- *eFolder Express (continuous)*: Digital Service continues to rollout eFolder Express to new users, ever expanding its impact. eFolder Express is used to download 900,000 documents per month, and VA employees cumulatively save more than 20 years of time annually.
- *Caseflow Hearing Prep (October 2017)*: Caseflow Hearing Prep is in an active pilot. This tool is designed to streamline the work involved for judges as they prepare for hearings, improve the Veteran experience at hearings, and increase available judge time for issuing decisions.
- *Caseflow Reader (November 2017)*: Caseflow Reader makes attorney and judge review of the thousands of documents in Veterans' eFolders faster and more complete by enabling new, faster workflows for review and annotation of documents and by improving performance and reliability.
- *Caseflow Intake (October 2017)*: In light of new tracking and reporting requirements implemented by the Appeals Modernization Act, and the need to accurately capture data from the RAMP program, Digital Service developed Caseflow Intake – a front door for all VA reviews under the new framework.

In light of the Appeals Modernization Act, Digital Service directed its focus for calendar year 2018 towards building necessary functionality to ensure that Caseflow will be ready for the Appeals Modernization Act. Digital Service recognizes that in order to implement the law, at minimum, Caseflow must provide such functionality as to permit the Board and VA to accomplish necessary processing tasks. To accomplish this, Caseflow must provide the following:

### **Vets.gov Appeals Status**

- the ability to provide Veterans clear information about the status of their appeal, in both the legacy and new framework environments; and
- the ability to inform Veterans of their options and the impact of their choices under the new legislation.

### **Caseflow Queue**

- the ability to receive new framework appeals at the Board processed through Caseflow Intake;
- the ability to assign new framework appeals to the appropriate Board docket;
- the ability to manage multiple Board dockets to assist the Board in meeting its timeliness goals;
- the ability to assign work items to Board employees for processing of appeal-related tasks; and
- the ability to move new framework appeals through the Board, from beginning to end.

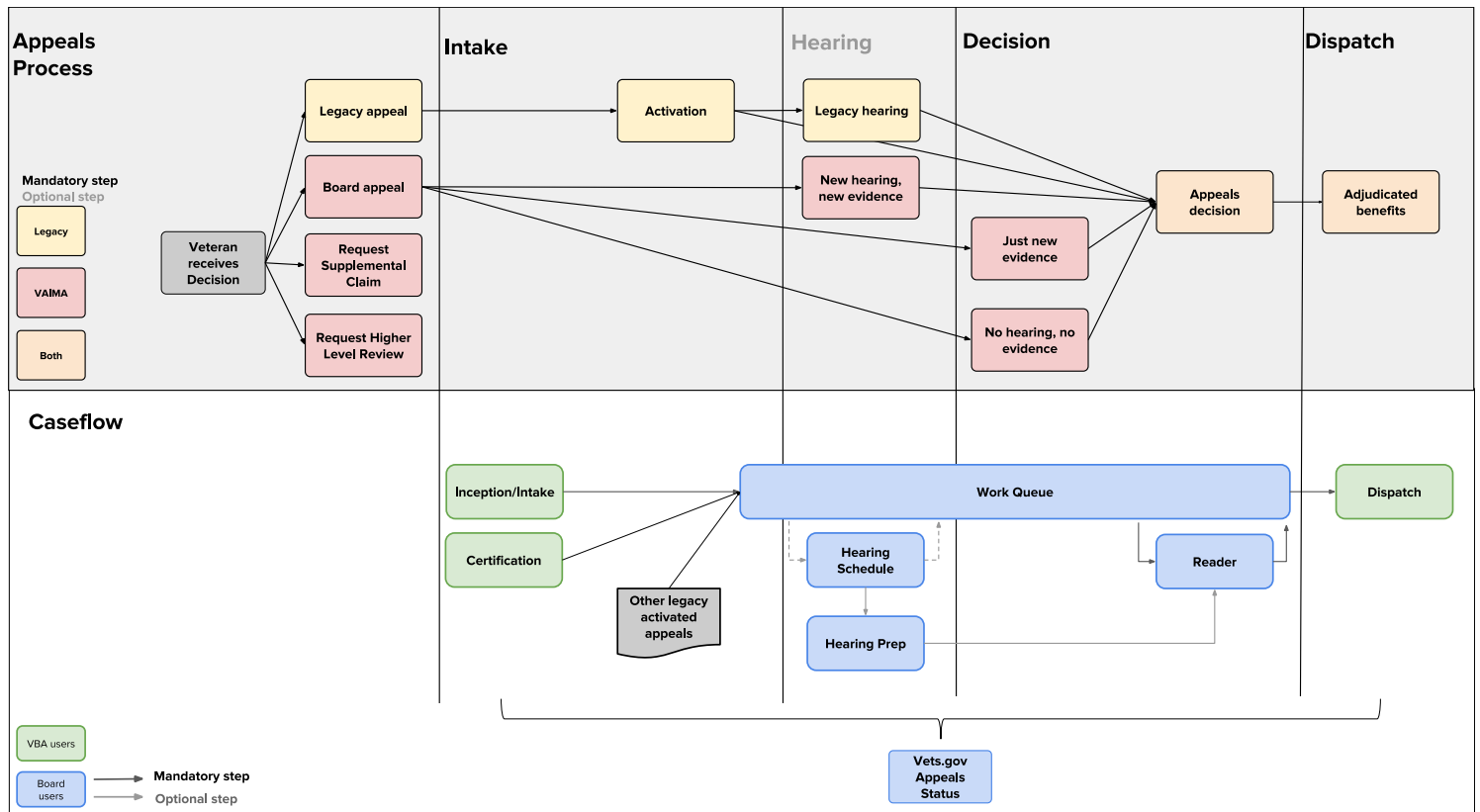
### **Caseflow Hearing Scheduling**

- the ability to support the Board in scheduling hearings to ensure readiness for managing all hearing dockets under the new framework.

Digital Service is likewise continuing to work on tools focused on increasing the Board's the accuracy and efficiency of Board decisions, including Caseflow Reader, a tool designed to provide focused, higher-fidelity claims folder review for Board judges and attorneys, which deployed to all Board legal staff in November 2017, and Caseflow Hearing Prep, designed to streamline the work judges must accomplish to prepare for Board hearings.

Additionally, the legislation tasks VA with satisfying 37 new reporting requirements. Many of these will be Board specific, and Caseflow will have to capture necessary data and provide an appropriate reporting mechanism to comply with the reporting needs. Some of the reports will require data from multiple systems, and functionality to either generate or integrate this data must exist in Caseflow or another VA system. As noted above, Caseflow Intake will serve as one of the primary tools to accomplish the necessary data collection.

## Caseflow Product Vision



## Caseflow Development Schedule

As is the practice of agency teams of the United States Digital Service, and common of leading private sector technology companies, Digital Service implements agile software development methods in developing Caseflow. Applying these methods, the team has not developed a comprehensive set of requirements prior to initiating development, but rather develops the project in 2-week iterations or "sprints." New code is continually integrated into the production environment, meaning that improvements are made available to users as frequently as every day. The contents of each sprint are informed by a schedule that is continually revised to reflect new information and shifts in external factors.

## Original Caseflow Scope

The development and incremental deployment of Caseflow is an ongoing VA IT project initially intended as a replacement for and improvement upon the legacy VACOLS system – one of VA's oldest IT systems. While Digital Service was aware of the efforts to pass legislation modifying the VA appeals system, the development work and budget prior to passage of the Appeals Modernization Act was primarily focused in two areas: deprecating VACOLS, and providing tools designed to increase efficiency and accuracy in the processing of appeals by the Board. The passage of the Appeals Modernization Act required Digital Service to expand the scope of the project, while staying within the existing Appeals Modernization schedule and budget.

## Adjustments to Product Plan

In light of the timeline provided by the Appeals Modernization Act, Digital Service created a high-level roadmap for Calendar Year 2018 that shows the development timeframes during which each of these major areas will be addressed.

- Each of these areas must culminate in a product where minimum viability is defined as the ability to process appeals according to the requirements of the Appeals Modernization Act.
- The specific functionality of each product will be continuously defined throughout the development timeframe, according to agile practice in general and of particular importance in light of evolving VA policies and procedures surrounding the implementation.

## Timeline

Caseflow Intake was launched to VBA users on October 30, 2017, prior to the first mailing of RAMP opt-in notices. Digital Service has continued to focus its development of Board-specific Caseflow functionality to be prepared in late summer 2018, to ensure there is sufficient time to adapt should unexpected challenges arise in the discovery and development process. Additionally, Digital Service is well aware that changes in the implementation plan, and the development of new VA policies surrounding the implementation, may impact VA's needs for Caseflow development.

## High-Level 2018 Calendar

Caseflow Product	Q1 (Jan-Mar)	Q2 (Apr-Jun)	Q3 (Jul-Sep)	Q4 (Oct-Dec)
Status	Finalize language; develop backend; Release Status v2	Discovery on changes required for AMA appeals	Ongoing discovery; development on changes required for AMA appeals	Ongoing discovery; development on changes required for AMA appeals
Reader	Add features based on user feedback			
Queue	Discover Attorney/Judge work flow; Release Queue mocks to attorney staff; Begin development	Release Queue functionality to initial user base; Test functionality with admin staff; Ongoing discovery & development	Release new functionality to additional users; Ongoing discovery & development	Release new functionality to additional users; Ongoing discovery & development
Intake	Ongoing discovery; Implement functionality to receive RAMP NODs	Ongoing discovery; Release reporting functionality; Integrate with NWQ	Ongoing discovery; Support processing of official forms	Ongoing discovery & development
Hearing Prep	Complete pilot with Judges	Release to all Board Judges		
Hearing Scheduling	Present development plan; Obtain FY19 scheduling policy from Board	Discovery & Development	Development; Release schedule allocation for FY19	Ongoing discovery & development focused on placing Veterans into hearing slots

Releases to users will occur throughout timeline, even if not specifically indicated; all dates and work subject to change based on evolving VA policies and processes

## **Budget**

As a result of the ability to fold implementation of the new law into the existing development plan and adjust the release of specific functionality to incorporate features necessary to implement the Appeals Modernization Act, VA will be able to support the processing of appeals within the Caseflow environment on time, within the existing Caseflow development budget.

### **Section 3(b)(11) - Estimate of Office Space by Phase**

*(11) An estimate of the office space the Administration and the Board will require during each of the periods described in paragraph (2), including—*

- (A) an estimate of the amount of time the Administration and the Board will require to acquire any additional office space to carry out processing of appeals of decisions on legacy claims and processing of appeals under the new appeals system;*
- (B) a comparison of the estimate under subparagraph (A) and the historical average time required by the Administration and the Board to acquire new office space; and*
- (C) a plan for using telework to accommodate staff exceeding available office space, including how the Administration and the Board will provide training and oversight with respect to such teleworking.*

In order to meet the space demand caused by the increase in personnel, the Board worked together with its VA and VSO partners at 425 I Street, NW. One VSO organization relocated several of its personnel and returned the space to the Board. The Board also repurposed underused space to office workstations. Additionally, the space utilization rate at the Board has increased as a result of a highly successful telework (TW) program. The Board increased its workspace density by 79, bringing its seat count from 851 to 930 total workstations. Of the 930 workstations, 167 are dedicated to telework and overflow. The Board's current TW population makes up 57.3% of the total workforce, of which 190 are currently in remote worksite status. Thus, the Board will be able to accommodate the additional hiring in FY2018. The Board is exploring opportunities to expand telework to more stall as technology upgrades allow.

VHA is working with internal stakeholders to determine additional space requirements and cost estimates. VHA has a robust telework and virtual program that could meet any additional demand if needed.

### **Section 3(b)(12) - Projections for the Productivity of Individual Employees**

*(12) Projections for the productivity of individual employees at the Administration and the Board in carrying out tasks relating to the processing of appeals of decisions on legacy claims and appeals under the new appeals system, taking into account the experience level of new employees and the enhanced notice requirements under section 5104(b) of title 38, United States Code, as amended by section 2(e).*

VA will use several internal metrics to track RAMP's progress. During this program, VA will gather data and conduct trends analyses on aspects of Veterans' behavior, to include their decision to elect to participate in the new process, the distribution of elections among the new process lanes, claims processing timeliness, and individual employee productivity. The data collected during RAMP will allow for forecasting of the reduction of the legacy appeals inventory, as well as ensure adequate resources are directed towards RAMP claims. In addition, the data

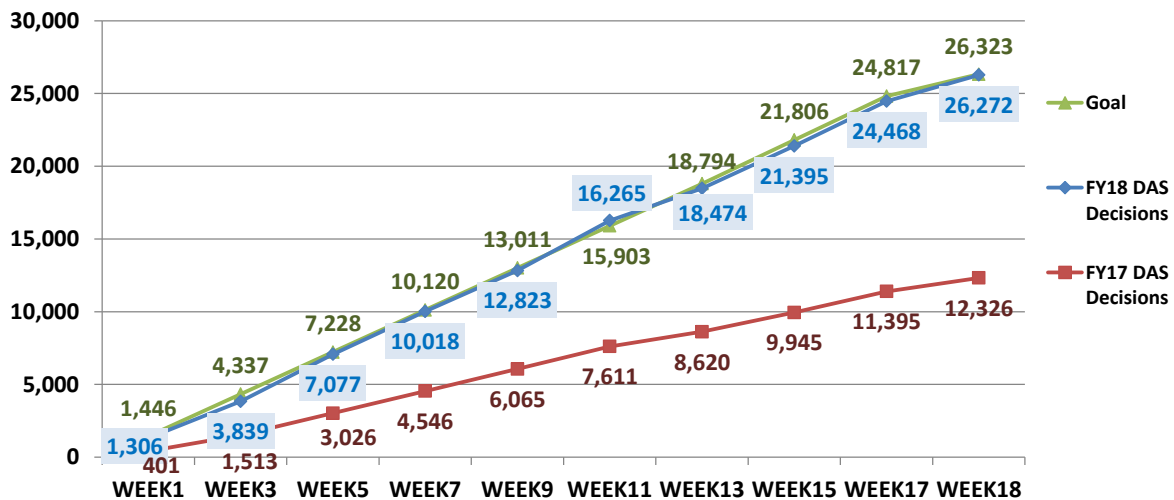
will inform VA as to appropriate work credit, workload capacity estimates, and processing timeliness metrics for the new process.

For VBA, the compensation and pension legacy appeals production projections is measured by completed actions per FTE/fiscal year rate. That number is 181 appeal actions per FTE/FY based on the FY 2017 completed actions of 271,081 and 1495 FTE. The resolution rate of legacy appeals per FTE was 81, based on 121,687 compensation and pension legacy appeal resolutions in FY 2017 and 1,495 FTE.

Through the end of the first quarter of FY 2018, the Board dispatched 17,215 decisions to Veterans and claimants with a staffing level of 924 cumulative (average) FTE, which represents 74.5 decisions per FTE on an annual basis. In terms of decisions signed by Veterans Law Judges in the first quarter, the Board signed 18,474 decisions, which is equivalent to 80 decisions per FTE annually. The current performance standard is 79 decisions per FTE per the negotiated agreement with the Union. This standard takes into consideration additional staff as well as the Board’s demonstrated decision output trends. This production standard equates to an annual average of 144 decisions per attorney with consideration of leave and holidays.

The Board has noticed significant improvement in productivity since implementation of the new attorney productivity standards, as demonstrated by the figure below. As of week 18 of FY 2018, the Board has signed 26,323 decisions, which is 13,946 more decisions compared to week 18 of last fiscal year. The Board's annual production goal for FY 2018 is set at 81,033 decisions, an increase of approximately 28,000 more decisions above FY 2017 and represents a historic high in decision output. The Board is currently at 99% of its year-to-date goal and is the margin to meet its target.

**Decisions Signed Compared to Production Needed for 81,033 Decisions**



With the efficiencies that the Board is implementing in FY18, the success of the Board’s current production plan, the addition of attorneys and Judges, and the impact of RAMP on current legacy appeals, the Board projects a strong decision output under the Appeals Modernization Act provided the Board and the Union continue to work together to deliver results to Veterans.



VA Insurance Service does not anticipate an impact to overall employee productivity due to its low volume of appellate work and the plan to have the same specialists who process appeals currently transition to the new process. As part of its ongoing IT Modernization efforts, VA Insurance Service will be implementing a new letter generation system that will support the enhanced notice requirements. This system is currently anticipated to be in place by January 2019. If the new system is not in place by the planned deadline, VA Insurance Service plans to process the enhanced notices manually, with the language for the new notice requirements expected to be prepared for use by May 2018.

Education Service will utilize the existing internal Organizational Structure and Performance Standards workgroup to identify specific EPs for each step of the appeals process based on regulatory requirements. RPOs will then use the Individual Productivity Report to calculate individual employee production. Education Service expects to have this completed by the end of the third quarter FY 2018. Education Service and RPOs will then be able to manage appeals workload and metrics through the use of The Imaging Management System (TIMS) and EPs. Education Service is currently in the process of creating a National Performance Standard to improve employee production and create an improved employee standard. Education Service expects the new standard to go into effect at the beginning of FY 2019.

VR&E plans to maintain as much of our current review system as possible, to include estimated timelines of 90 days to complete higher-level reviews. Given the unique nature of VR&E, in that it has the opportunity to serve Veterans in a one-on-one setting with each participant having an assigned Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor, VR&E Service does not expect to have supplemental claims in the way in which those are defined under the new law. Generally speaking, when a VR&E participant has new evidence to provide, he/she simply presents that information to his/her VRC for review. The VRC seeks to review this new information and issue his/her response within 125 days. If that evidence does not change the original decision, the participant has the option to request a higher-level review, or an administrative review as noted in VR&E's current policy. VR&E Service believes this practice of seeking to resolve disputes at the lowest possible level is most beneficial to its participants, and is a key reason why appeals on VR&E issues represent less than .5 percent of VA's appeals.

VHA is working with the Office of General Counsel, the Board, and VBA to determine new system requirements and metrics, as well as processes to address the legacy inventory and new system requirements. Once the revised processes and corresponding metrics are developed, an accurate estimate of productivity can be determined.

NCA will use data from the new system – once fully implemented – to develop productivity projections for processing legacy appeals in FY 2018.

### **Section 3(b)(13) - Outreach Plan**

*(13) An outline of the outreach the Secretary expects to conduct to inform veterans, families of veterans, survivors of veterans, veterans service organizations, military service organizations, congressional caseworkers, advocates for veterans, and such other stakeholders as the Secretary considers appropriate about the new appeals system, including—*

- (A) a description of the resources required to conduct such outreach; and*
- (B) timelines for conducting such outreach.*

VA submitted its original outreach plan in November 2017, which included coordination of messaging and outreach activities across VA both internally and externally. This enterprise-

wide approach was designed to provide Veterans, internal and other external stakeholders with a consistent message and understanding of how the new system works. In order to provide information on the new system, VA began to disseminate information and conduct outreach through the following venues:

- Web communication on internet sites such as VA.gov, and other VA social media sites (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube etc.),
- Communications through regular mail, email, print, and traditional media outlets,
- Outreach material such as signage, pamphlets, brochures, etc.
- Training products for external stakeholders (service organizations, congressional caseworkers, advocates for Veterans, and such other stakeholders), and
- In-person engagements such as VA town halls, and national and local outreach events.

To further support these outreach activities; VA is developing messaging and materials, which includes a strategic communications campaign. As the plan evolves, VA will look at all available forms of messaging and has included the use of videos as part of the plan. Other materials will include content for external internet sites, as well as basic information materials for use in media outreach. Public contact and clinic waiting areas will be stocked with outreach materials. Posters and signage will be displayed in all VA facilities and at outreach events. VA may also use these materials later as the basis for public education and media relations. Much of the messaging and materials developed for use at the national level can be customized to meet the needs of local offices supporting outreach initiatives and to inform VA employees of how the new system functions. To date, nearly 165,000 emails have been sent to provide an overview of the new process.

Appendix C provides a timeline of outreach/communication activities occurring during the implementation period.

The Board in the process of collaborating with Office of Modernization in VA's Office of Enterprise Integration to bring dedicated expertise in Change Management to the Board. This Change Management expert would work with the Board to create an overarching plan for outreach and training, including communication with Veterans and their families, as well as VSOs, with a target date of summer 2018. The timeline and resources required to implement this plan will be included in the next appeals modernization report.

VHA will develop and implement a comprehensive communication plan to inform Veterans, family members, VSOs, Military Service Organizations, Congressional caseworkers, Veterans' advocates and other stakeholders of the new system, its benefits, and the implementation timeline. VHA does not anticipate requiring additional resources to support outreach.

### **Section 3(b)(14) - Timeline for Policy Updates**

*(14) Timelines for updating any policy guidance, Internet websites, and official forms that may be necessary to carry out the new appeals system, including—*

*(A) identification of which offices and entities will be involved in efforts relating to such updating; and*

*(B) historical information about how long similar update efforts have taken.*

## **Policy Guidance**

VA worked collaboratively with VSOs and other stakeholders to establish standard operating procedures (SOP) for RAMP. The SOP includes policies and procedures for VBA's higher-level reviews and supplemental claims outlined in the Appeals Modernization Act. VA is currently testing these policies and procedures during RAMP. Once these policies and procedures are validated, VBA will incorporate them into the M21-1, Adjudication Procedures Manual.

While drafting the regulations needed to implement the legislation, the Board's Legislation, Regulation, and Policy team identified internal Board policy changes that will be required to fully implement the new appeals process. The Board's leadership is creating internal policies together as part of the routine meetings of the appeals modernization project management workgroup. The Board is soliciting assistance from VA's Office of Enterprise Integration to try to improve and reform its change management practices overall. This effort will shape long-term policy planning and formalize procedures and processes. This is a critical element of the Master Project Schedule and involves training, strategic communications, and stakeholder engagement.

Updates to Board policy are contingent upon several internal and external dependencies, such as potential changes to draft regulations during the notice and comment period, updates to Caseload and other IT systems, opt-in procedures under section 2 and section 4 of the Appeals Modernization Act, reporting requirements under section 5 of the Appeals Modernization Act, and the outcome of process mapping and change management efforts. Currently, the Board is working to capture these dependencies and conduct risk and mitigation analysis.

The Board acknowledges this goal is not currently on track with the timetable laid out in the previous 90 day report. However, the Board is confident all internal policies will be updated and share with stakeholders well before February 2019.

## **Forms**

VA has created an enterprise-wide standard form for requests for a higher-level review, VA Form 20-0988, Request for Higher-Level Review. VA has received feedback from internal stakeholders, as well as from VSOs and other external stakeholders on both the proposed Higher-Level Review and Notice of Disagreement Forms. VA is in the process of reviewing those comments and finalizing the proposed forms. These forms will be submitted to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) with the proposed regulatory package for publication in the Federal Register.

In January, VA shared both the draft higher level review form and the draft NOD with its VSO partners. The helpful feedback from VSOs was implemented into the draft higher level review and NOD forms. The Board also conducted limited product testing of the new form, and incorporated all feedback from Digital Service and the beta users into the draft NOD. Historically, updates to internal and external forms take anywhere from 9 to 12 months to complete. Although official approval by OMB is a dependency that is not within VA's control, VA has maintained communication with OMB to ensure that approval is expedited to the extent practicable.

As with the policy guidance, the Board acknowledges this goal is not currently on track with the timetable laid out in the previous 90 day report. However, this prior timetable contemplated finalizing updated policies well before February 2019. Therefore, the Board remains confident

that it will be able to update all relevant forms and gain approval from OMB well before February 2019.

VA Insurance Service is currently revising its Insurance Manual to reflect the changes required to implement the new law. The expected completion date for the manual rewrite is April 2018. Insurance Service is also currently revising its notification letters to comply with the new appeals legislation, including notice regarding appeal rights. As part of its ongoing IT Modernization efforts, VA Insurance Service will be implementing a new letter generation system that will support the enhanced notice requirements. This system is currently anticipated to be in place by January 2019. If the new system is not in place by the planned deadline, VA Insurance Service plans to process the enhanced notices manually, with the language for the new notice requirements expected to be prepared for use by May 2018.

Loan Guaranty Service anticipates having policy and procedures and other information in place by May 2018.

Education Service projects that it will complete its modifications of internal policy and procedures by the fourth quarter of FY 2018.

VR&E Service expects to have all policy and procedural updates, updates to any forms or letters, and information on the new process published to the VR&E inter/intranet sites by December 2018. These functions are completed by existing VR&E Service staff.

VHA's Office of Community Care is working with VBA and the Board to update appeal-specific forms that will be utilized VA-wide. VHA does not presently anticipate a requirement to update VHA-specific forms.

### **Internet Sites**

VA developed an internet web page on its outward facing website, VA.gov for the Appeals Modernization Act: <https://benefits.va.gov/benefits/appeals.asp>. This webpage was live as of November 2, 2017. The website provides detailed information on the Appeals Modernization Act as well as RAMP. This webpage also links to this report, as updated according to the new law.

Section 5 of the Appeals Modernization Act requires that certain information be posted on the internet regarding all aspects of claims adjudication. As VA is moving forward on Caseflow Dashboard with the support of Digital Service, it is assessing how these reportable metrics will be organized moving forward.

### **Section 3(b)(15) - Timeline for Promulgating Regulations**

*(15) A timeline, including interim milestones, for promulgating such regulations as may be necessary to carry out the new appeals system and a comparison with historical averages for time required to promulgate regulations of similar complexity and scope.*

The Board and VBA closely collaborated to draft proposed regulations to implement the Appeals Modernization Act. These draft regulations are currently undergoing internal VA review and concurrence.

While the proposed regulations are currently behind the schedule initially laid out in the previous report, VA is working to ensure expedited internal review. The Board and VBA worked with VA's Office of General Counsel in advance to ensure a quicker internal legal review. VA also worked with external stakeholders in preparation for the public comment period in our effort to shorten the time required to draft final regulations. Additionally, the timetable laid out in the previous report included an excess amount of time in some areas. Therefore, VA anticipates that it will remain on schedule for publication of final regulations by February 2019.

VHA's Office of Regulatory and Administrative Affairs (ORAA) is working with the Board and VA's Office of General Counsel to determine the impact of appeals modernization changes on existing VHA regulations, policies, and processes. Once this impact has been determined, ORAA will work with individual program offices to bring their existing regulations, policies, and processes into compliance with the updated requirements. VHA anticipates publishing one or more proposed rulemakings in 2018. The rulemaking process takes, on average, more than two years, and additional time may be required to update policies and other guidance following publication of final regulations.

### **Section 3(b)(16) - Outline of "Opt-In" Circumstances**

*(16) An outline of the circumstances under which claimants with pending appeals of decisions on legacy claims would be authorized to have their appeals reviewed under the new appeals system.*

Section 2 of the Appeals Modernization Act provides two opportunities for Veterans who would otherwise have an appeal in the legacy process to choose to participate in the new system instead. Additionally, section 4 establishes the authority for RAMP, as discussed in this update.

Paragraph (x)(5) of section 2 allows Veterans with pending legacy appeals to opt into the new system upon receipt of a Statement of the Case (SOC) or Supplemental Statement of the Case (SSOC) after the effective date of the law. As discussed, the current legacy system requires issuance of an S/SOC whenever new evidence is added to the claims file. This means that Veterans with pending legacy appeals will have several opportunities to take advantage of the new system. For example, when an agency of original jurisdiction conducts additional development pursuant to the Board remand, an SSOC will be issued and the Veteran will have an opportunity to choose one of the options in the new system, or to continue in the legacy system. For purposes of this opt-in, the S/SOC will be treated as the decision. This means that a Veteran will have one year from the issuance of an S/SOC to file a request for higher-level review, supplemental claim, or appeal to the Board. If the Veteran chooses an option featuring a closed evidentiary record, VA will consider all the evidence that was of record when notice of the S/SOC was received.

Paragraph (x)(3) of the Act, early applicability, allows Veterans with pending legacy appeals to opt into the new system when they receive notice of a decision in the one-year period before the effective date. As VA developed the plan for RAMP, it became apparent that offering both RAMP and early applicability at the same time to overlapping groups of claimants and appellants would create a confusing and frustrating experience for Veterans. Many Veterans would receive notice of their opportunity to opt-in via early applicability, and if they declined the opportunity, they would later receive an invitation to participate in RAMP. Furthermore, the early applicability provision requires claimants to wait until February 2019 before VA can process the opt-in election, while RAMP provides early resolution in the VBA lanes prior to February 2019. As a result, VA determined that its resources would be better used by

processing RAMP, focusing on the reduction of its legacy appeals inventory, and preparing for full implementation.

The Board is contemplating a pilot which would allow Veterans participating in RAMP to receive review of their appeal at the Board prior to February 2019.

**Section 3(b)(17) - Key Goals & Milestones for Reducing Legacy Appeals**

*(17) A delineation of the key goals and milestones for reducing the number of pending appeals that are not processed under the new appeals system, including the expected number of appeals, remands, and hearing requests at the Administration and the Board each year, beginning with the one-year period beginning on the date of the enactment of this Act, until there are no longer any appeals pending before the Administration or the Board for a decision on a legacy claim.*

VA does not have a timeliness goal that measures legacy appeals processing from the date the appeal is filed to when it is finally resolved. That is because the current legacy process has no defined endpoint; therefore, the agency cannot set a goal for appeals resolution time. The current multi-step process is too inefficient; splits jurisdiction for processing appeals between the agency of original jurisdiction and the Board; and features an open record and ongoing duty to assist. As a result, the continuous evidence gathering and readjudication prolong the ability to reach a final decision. In FY 2017, Veterans waited on average 3 years for resolution of their appeal by VA and, on average, 7 years from the date they initiated their appeal at the AOJ until resolution by the Board. Therefore, VA tracks the inventory of legacy appeals by each cycle in the process, as published in the Budget’s Annual Performance Plan.

<https://www.va.gov/budget/docs/summary/fy2018VAbudgetVolumelsupplementalInformationAndAppendices.pdf>

The rate at which the legacy appeals inventory can be resolved is dependent on a number of factors and variables, including funding made available to appeals processing through the annual budget appropriations process in future years and the rate of election of claimants with legacy appeals pending who opt-in to the new process.

Nevertheless, using FY 2017 actual data, VBA developed the following projections for legacy appeals in FY 2018 and FY 2019, based on a productivity rate of 181 completed actions/FTE and 81 appeals resolutions/FTE.

Compensation & Pension Legacy Appeals Workload	2017 Actual	2018 Estimate	2019 Estimate
Notice of Disagreement Receipts	160,144	152,579	51,053
Appeals Resolutions by VBA	121,687	133,856	147,241
Certification of Substantive Appeals to the Board*	99,190	107,529	116,639
Pending VBA Inventory	312,023	282,693	256,094

\*Certifications include both original certifications as well as remands returned to the Board for a final decision

However, these projections could be impacted further by a number of factors, including RAMP participation during implementation, and the rate of opt-ins at the Statement of the Case/Supplemental Statement of the Case after the legislation’s applicability date. In addition, VBA is in the process of initiating a national brokering plan of the legacy inventory. The goal of the brokering plan is to gain further processing efficiencies by redistributing and balancing the pending legacy appeals workload across regional offices, minimizing regional capacity discrepancies. This has the potential of resulting in increased productivity, timelier decisions to claimants who have been waiting the longest, and in a faster reduction of VBA’s legacy appeals inventory.

Using historical data, the Board has the following projections for legacy appeals in FY 2018 and FY 2019. However, these projections are for the total numbers of appeals expected. With the passage of the Appeals Modernization Act, these projections could be reduced by a number of factors, including RAMP participation and Veteran choice between the AOJ lanes and Board lanes in the new system. Further, efficiencies such as the new interactive decision template and Caseflow applications may have a positive impact on productivity per FTE. Once the Board obtains more data from RAMP and its possible pilot program, the Board will revise these projections with more accurate information.

Board of Veterans’ Appeals - Workload Estimate			
	2017 Actual	2018	2019
		PROJECTIONS	
Board Full Time Equivalent (FTE)	840	1,050	1,025
Start of Year (SOY) Appeals Inventory (from date of certification (Form 8) in field)	115,847	153,513	165,660
Appeals Received (Case Receipts)	90,327	93,180	116,639
Appeals Decided	-52,661	-81,033	-80,483
End of Year (EOY) Appeals Inventory (from date of certification (Form 8) in field)	153,513	165,660	201,816

As a result of the legacy open record process and VA’s ongoing duty to assist the Board’s remand rate for legacy appeals has ranged between 46.4% and 43.5% in the last four years, as reflected in the chart below. These returning remands of legacy appeals will also need to be adjudicated by the Board, as well as the new appeals received based on the above projections. In February 2020, one year after the last rating decision is issued under the legacy system, no further new legacy appeals will be received. As a result, legacy inventory on that date will not increase, and will decrease at a rate dependent on the factors described above.

Board Decisions*					
Fiscal Year	Decisions	Allowed	Remanded	Denied	Other
2014	55,532	29.2%	45.5%	21.5%	3.8%
2015	55,713	31.0%	46.4%	19.1%	3.5%
2016	52,011	31.8%	46.0%	18.0%	4.2%
2017	52,661	29.9%	43.5%	21.6%	5.0%

\*The historical reporting system for Board decisions with multiple issues identifies the disposition of an appeal based on the following hierarchy: allowance, remand, denial, or other (*i.e.*, dismissals). When there is more than one disposition involved in a multiple issue appeal the “reported disposition” for Board Statistical Reports will be categorized based on the disposition hierarchy noted above.

Education Service will implement a phased approach to overhaul the entire appeals process. Pending legacy claims will be reviewed and processed by the end of fourth quarter FY 2018. Education Service will establish control over remaining pending appeals based on metrics described in the Appeals Modernization Act by the end of the fourth quarter FY 2018. In addition, Education Service will amend current appeals processing procedures and implement a national higher-level review procedure by the end of first quarter FY 2019.

VR&E Service, in collaboration with the Office of Field Operations, will contact each regional office with a pending VR&E legacy appeal and request an update and/or resolution of the appeal. VR&E Service expects these requests to be sent to the field offices during the second quarter of this fiscal year, with a request to provide an update to VR&E Service within 30 days of receipt of the request. VR&E Service will request priority be given to the oldest legacy appeals.

### **Section 3(b)(18) – Risk Factors**

*(18) A description of each risk factor associated with each element of the plan and a contingency plan to minimize each such risk.*

The Department has identified the following risks and mitigation strategies:

#### **1. Resource Requirements (Section 3(b)(1))**

**Risk:** VBA cannot forecast actual Veteran behavior regarding the number of Veterans with legacy claims who opt-in to the new appeals system and which of the new process lanes Veterans will opt into and how many times. This difficulty could result in either understaffing, with risk to achieving performance objectives, or overstaffing, with risk to efficient use of resources.



**Mitigation:** As described in Section 4 of this report, VBA is conducting RAMP to validate assumptions used in planning. Through this program, VA is obtaining actual data on the percentages of eligible Veterans who opt for the new system, impact of the new notice requirements on employee productivity, processing times, resource requirements, challenges, and best practices. The phased nature of the program will allow VA to adjust its course prior to the full implementation of the Appeals Modernization Act.

**Risk:** Forecasting Veteran behavior continues to be the hindrance in the Board's ability to accurately project the total resource requirements to administer the new appeals system and address the appeals decisions on legacy claims.

**Mitigation:** The Board is working with Digital Service to gather data through their current process to provide information on Veteran behavior under the new system. The Board is making plans for an updated workload and resource projection model to be developed in the near future, and hopes to hire data scientists and or operations research analysts by the end of FY 2018 to posture for the modeling effort.

## **2. Personnel (Section 3(b)(2)-(3))**

**Risk:** Current statutes may constrain VA's ability to scale its workforce to address the growing inventory of appeals in a timely manner, resulting in risk to meeting performance goals.

**Mitigation:** VA will use any appropriate applicable legal authority to hire federal employees; therefore, the risk to VA's hiring plan from insufficient authority to hire is negligible.

**Mitigation:** VA will use any appropriate applicable legal authority to remove employees, if required as a last resort. However, because resolving the inventory of legacy appeals will be a long-term effort, VA anticipates use of more routine workforce management methods, such as normal attrition of permanent employees, to address any necessary staffing changes as a result of elimination of the legacy appeals inventory. Furthermore, VA may also reassign employees to address other workload inventories.

**Risk:** The number of appeals received under the new system surpasses the Board's ability to reduce the pending inventory of legacy appeals.

**Mitigation:** The Board will continue to monitor actual workload allocations and report to all stakeholders accordingly. The Board's strategy to reduce pending inventory of appeals is to re-engineer processes through technology and project management advice.

## **3. Estimated Time for Hiring Employees (Section 3(b)(4))**

**Risk:** As the Board's hiring practices for the attorney advisor position have been refined, overall selection numbers were initially impacted. Unintended delays may occur in onboarding additional FTE's to achieve the goal of 1,050 FTE.

**Mitigation:** The Board continues to be aggressive in advertising additional attorney vacancy announcements in USAJOBS in the second and third quarters of FY 2018. The Board's compelling mission statement and robust telework program ensures the Board continues to attract quality applicants.

#### **4. Training and Experience Required of Higher-Level Adjudicators (Section 3(b)(5))**

**Risk:** VA might not have a sufficient pool of experienced personnel to adjudicate both higher-level reviews under the new process and appeals pending under the legacy system simultaneously.

**Mitigation:** The experience and training required to conduct higher-level reviews in the new process exist already and the employees conducting the reviews will be able to perform the reviews under both the legacy and new systems with relatively little additional training. VA's RAMP will reduce the timeframe in which VA is concurrently processing appeals under the legacy process and claims under the new system. This concurrent processing will allow VA to transition more of its experienced workforce, (i.e. DROs) in a more expedient manner.

#### **5. Estimated percentage of higher-level adjudicators who were Decision Review Officers (Section 3(b)(6))**

VA has not identified any risks with this element of the plan.

#### **6. Decision Review Officer functions in new system (Section 3(b)(7))**

VA has not identified any risks with this element of the plan.

#### **7. Training Timeline (Section 3(b)(8))**

**Risk:** VA may not be able to complete required training on schedule resulting in risk to performance objectives.

**Mitigation:** VA's strategy of leveraging existing systems and processes to the extent practicable in the new appeals system avoids the requirement to conduct extensive training on an entirely new system. Training will focus on the differences in processing legacy versus new appeals, but the substance of how higher-level reviews, as well as supplemental claims and appeals to the Board, are adjudicated remains unchanged. Furthermore, training will be largely decentralized to meet the unique requirements of each line of business. This flexible, adaptive approach avoids risks associated with large-scale, top-down training development. Risk is spread to the lines of business, which allows leadership to prioritize resources to the lines of business with the greatest number of appeals, and allows senior leaders in each line of business to manage internal risks associated with training for the new appeals system.

**Risk:** Because the Board is not currently participating in RAMP, insufficient awareness of Board employees regarding the RAMP program may result in RAMP opt-in letters being improperly interpreted by the Board.

**Mitigation:** In January 2018, the Board's Knowledge Management office created training materials, including a list of Frequently Asked Questions, detailing the proper handling of all RAMP communications by the Board. The Board rolled out training on RAMP in February 2018.

#### **8. Costs of Training (Section 3(b)(9))**

**Risk:** Insufficient personnel resources for developing and delivering necessary training to support the new appeals system may result in incomplete training, which risks timely or incomplete implementation of the new appeals system.

**Mitigation:** The VA enterprise-wide appeals modernization workgroup focused on training meets routinely to ensure all offices are proactively developing training during implementation period to ensure all offices are able to have fully developed materials well before February 2019.

VA has decentralized training and existing training resources across business lines. Risk is spread to the lines of business, which allows leadership to prioritize resources to the lines of business with the greatest number of appeals, and allows senior leaders in each line of business to manage internal risks associated with training for the new appeals system. At this point, VA's assessment is that sufficient resources exist for the timely accomplishment of required training.

## **9. Information Technology (Section 3(b)(10))**

**Risk:** Delays in the development of information technology required to implement appeals modernization may prevent VA from certifying readiness in January 2019. Additionally, lack of effective coordination across all VA offices may have an adverse impact on development.

**Mitigation:** VA has worked closely with Digital Service to put all activities into the Master Project Schedule, including key milestones, to ensure all required technologies are developed by December 2018. Digital Service has a record of delivering throughout FY 2017 and continues to do so in FY 2018. All offices of VA continue to communicate and coordinate with IT personnel.

**Risk:** The lack of an existing, integrated information technology system may prevent VA from timely or fully implementing the new appeals system, or from achieving timeliness and reporting requirements.

**Mitigation:** VA has worked with Digital Service to create a single, integrated point of entry for receiving and processing review requests under the Appeals Modernization Act. This tool, Caseflow Intake, serves to integrate claims and appeals data such that a Veteran's lane selections can be tracked linearly. Further, with this functionality, all necessary data will be captured at the front end of the process, enabling VA to properly prioritize review requests to address questions of timeliness and to capture necessary data to enable VA to meet reporting requirements.

In addition to building new functionality to support intake of review requests, VBA will enhance existing infrastructure to support end-to-end processing of review requests, issuance of improved decision notices, and other claims functionality required under the Appeals Modernization Act. VBA processes 98 percent of its legacy appeals inventory in VBMS' digital environment. VBMS and other existing systems will be modified to support the new processes, procedures, and reporting requirements mandated by the law. Some of the VBA lines of business not currently using these systems will be brought into this framework. In the event all required IT updates are not available, VA can still implement the new law through manual processes in lines of business with low numbers of appeals until such time where VA IT can support the creation of functionality that will allow all Appeals Modernization reviews to be performed electronically.

## **10. Estimate of office space by phase (Section 3(b)(11))**

**Risk:** The Board's telework program is a volunteer program. If not all Board employees continue to select telework, the Board would be short workstations.

**Mitigation:** The Board's telework program has been operational for nearly 20 years, and is a strong incentive for all staff. The Board is currently exploring telework capabilities to further expand telework.

Recent space requirement projections assume telework commitments remain constant at 533 employees. As the Board grows staff size to 1,050 FTE, the Board will have 930 total seats including, 167 overflow seats. The Board will assign telework attorneys who are out of the office more than 50 percent to one of the 167 overflow seats. The Board is continuing to identify underused space and create work stations. The Board will also continue to build out additional workstations, including having recently gained VA approval to construct 38 new workstations. This project is scheduled to be completed in the 4th quarter of FY 2018.

## **11. Projections for the productivity of individual employees (Section 3(b)(12))**

**Risk:** There could be an unanticipated decrease in VBA employee productivity, leading to a risk of not meeting performance objectives.

**Mitigation:** RAMP will yield actual data that will assist VBA in creating a forecasting model, identifying best practices, and making changes to its procedures, processes and systems in order to gain efficiencies and faster adjudications. Should RAMP and subsequent full implementation of the new appeals system not yield the expected increase in productivity, VBA may consider reallocating internal resources to meet performance objectives.

**Risk:** Negotiations with labor partners over Board productivity levels may impact decision output.

**Mitigation:** The Board is committed to working with its labor partners to assist in reaching optimal solutions for productivity and delivering results to Veterans.

## **12. Outreach Plan (Section 3(b)(13))**

**Risk:** RAMP may continue to experience a lower-than-expected opt-in rate if Veterans do not receive adequate information about RAMP, if they remain confused about RAMP, or if they receive erroneous information from third party sources.

**Mitigation:** VA has set up regular meetings with stakeholders to share information and updates about RAMP progress, as well as answer any questions. VBA plans to follow-up with Veterans who have been invited to participate in RAMP via written notification through a phone call to ensure the Veteran understands RAMP. Additionally, the Board is supporting RAMP and working with an expert in Change Management to develop an overarching outreach plan. VA plans to increase its outreach efforts through digital, print, and other communication methods.

## **13. Timeline for Policy Updates (Section 3(b)(14))**

**Risk:** VA will not be able to develop and publish policy to support the new appeals system in a timely manner, thus putting the implementation schedule at risk.

**Mitigation:** As noted above, VA is taking a decentralized approach to revising internal policy to support the new appeals system, which allows for each line of business to work in parallel. As some internal procedures will be put into effect during RAMP, the overall risk of failing to update policy in a timely manner is commensurately reduced. Although VA anticipates that policy revisions will take nearly 15 months to complete (see timeline), this risk is low for the reasons specified.

#### **14. Timeline for Promulgating Regulations (Section 3(b)(15))**

**Risk:** VA will not be able to develop and publish policy to support the new appeals system in a timely manner, thus putting the implementation schedule at risk.

**Mitigation:** Each line of business within VA has implemented a plan to ensure all relevant policies are developed and published in a timely manner. The Board has made progress in preparing policy updates that will be needed even though the regulations have not yet cleared internal concurrence. This is shown through the creation of the Master Project Schedule (see Appendix A) and the Board's new partnership with OEI to reform change management practices, as well as ongoing collaboration with VSOs and Digital Service.

VHA will partner with OGC and the Board to devise interim procedures based on statutory authorities.

In the upcoming quarterly report, NCA will provide more details about analysis of the availability of staff needed to review the policies, in light of competing efforts.

VA will closely monitor the regulatory public comment and OMB approval process to expedite publication to the extent possible.

#### **15. Outline of "Opt In" Circumstances (Section 3(b)(16))**

**Risk:** There may be a low opt-in rate to the new system.

**Mitigation:** The Board has ongoing meetings with VSOs to help educate them about the benefits of the new system, answer questions and listen to feedback. The Board will also provide structured trainings to explain the new system. In cooperation with Digital Service, the Board is also using design thinking to help minimize misunderstandings with its NOD form. The Board will work with VBA to accurately communicate all aspects of the new system to all stakeholders.

As a result of early RAMP results, VBA has recognized the need for increased communications with Veterans and other stakeholders and as described in Section 4 of this report has taken actions to improve the Opt-In rate for RAMP. As VA learns more from RAMP and the results of our outreach efforts, we will refine our outreach strategy to ensure Veterans fully understand the benefits of opting in to the new system.

#### **16. Key goals and milestones for reducing legacy inventory (Section 3(b)(17))**

**Risk:** Regarding the necessary IT infrastructure and Digital Service product rollout, it's possible that IT development delays may impact deployment, reducing the ability to decrease legacy appeals.

**Mitigation:** At the Board, the rollout of Reader went fairly smoothly and has assisted with improved productivity in the adjudication of the legacy claims. In addition to technological improvements, the Board is: still working with external partners to educate them as to the potential benefits of the new system for certain claims, as opposed to the legacy system; working on internal process efficiencies such as a template update; and hiring additional staff that will assist with the adjudication of legacy appeals.

#### **Section 4 - Pilot Program to Test Assumptions**

(a) *AUTHORIZATION.—*

(1) *IN GENERAL.—The Secretary of Veterans Affairs may carry out such programs as the Secretary considers appropriate to test any assumptions relied upon in developing the comprehensive plan required by section 3(a) and to test the feasibility and advisability of any facet of the new appeals system.*

(2) *REPORTING REQUIRED.—Whenever the Secretary determines, based on the conduct of a program under paragraph (1), that legislative changes to the new appeals system are necessary, the Secretary shall submit to the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the Senate and the Committee on Veterans' Affairs of the House of Representatives notice of such determination.*

VA is using its authority under Section 4(a) of the Appeals Modernization Act to test assumptions on which it relied in development of this comprehensive plan for processing of legacy appeals and implementing the new system. With the support of its external stakeholders, VA is administering a new program to test certain facets of the new process, such as the Veteran's responses to election opt-in notice, improved decision notice templates that meet the requirements outlined in the statute, technology to support the acceptance and tracking of elections, as well as internal operative procedures. During the period during which VA will operate RAMP, VA will gather data that will inform VA as to Veterans' behavior, to include their decisions to elect to participate in the new process, the distribution of elections among the new process lanes, appropriate work credit, workload and resource capacity estimates, Veteran's preferences for resolution of disagreements, and processing metrics for the new process.

Since the launch of RAMP, more than 50,500 Veterans with legacy disability compensation appeals have been invited to opt-in to VBA's supplemental claim or higher-level review lanes in the new claims and appeals system.

As of January 31, 2018, 432 Veterans opted into RAMP, resulting in the withdrawal of 604 legacy appeals. Of the 89 RAMP decisions completed to date, VA granted more than \$2,250,000 in retroactive benefits in 36.8 days on average. In an effort to increase the opt-in election rate, VBA has employed several strategies. In mid-January 2018, VA mailed follow-up letters to those Veterans who received initial invitations, but had yet to opt-in after 45 days of the initial mailing. On January 22, 2018, VA emailed almost 8,250 Veterans messages reminding them of the opportunity to elect RAMP. VA will continue to disseminate monthly batches of letters of increased size and scope of the appellant population on a monthly basis through December 2018 to extend invitations to more than 400,000 Veterans with legacy appeals pending. While VA has received positive feedback and support for RAMP from Veterans and their representatives at the national and headquarters level, VA has identified an opportunity to conduct more deliberate outreach and communication with VSOs and other stakeholders across the nation. As such, VA is scheduled to travel to the Denver, Phoenix, San Diego, Los Angeles, Oakland and Seattle Regional Offices to conduct targeted outreach to outreach personnel,

congressional, Stats, VSO representatives, private attorneys, and claims agents on RAMP during February 2018. Travel to other regional offices will be scheduled and carried out in following months.

During January 2018, VA also released a comprehensive communications package and hosted a call with all of VBA's regional office (RO) Directors to discuss the materials that will assist with the marketing of the program through regularly scheduled local outreach events. VA is also exploring an outbound call center to make phone calls to Veterans who have received opt-in notices by mail to ensure their understanding of the material and to answer any questions. VA is also in the process of developing a strategic engagement and communications plan to support the RAMP program and later the full implementation of the new appeals process. VA is exploring the use of phased communications products that encourage transparency of the process as well as inform Veterans of their choices through educational videos, print media, updated web content, and email communications.

### RAMP Data as of January 31, 2018

Lane Selection	Pending	ADP	Completed	ADC	Total EPs	% of Total
Higher-Level Review	240	28.9	75	35.1	315	71.3%
Supplemental Claim	113	30.6	14	46.3	127	28.7%
<b>RAMP Total</b>	<b>353</b>	<b>29.4</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>36.8</b>	<b>442</b>	
<b>Total Appeal Count</b>	<b>604</b>					
<b>Distinct Appellant Count</b>	<b>432</b>					
<b>NOD to Opt-In days (Avg.)</b>	<b>1,449.3</b>					
<b>Total Amount Paid to Date</b>	<b>\$2,253,147.88</b>					

RAMP Monthly Mailing Schedule <b>Proposed Monthly Mailing Schedule</b>					
Date	Primary Batch Letters	Newly Established NODs (Estimated)	Date	Primary Batch Letters	Newly Established NODs (Estimated)
01-Nov-17	500	N/A	01-Jul-18	30,000	12,000
01-Dec-17	5,000	N/A	01-Aug-18	30,000	12,000
01-Jan-18	10,000	N/A	01-Sep-18	30,000	12,000
01-Feb-18	25,000	10,087 (Actual)	01-Oct-18	30,000	12,000
01-Mar-18	25,000	12,000	01-Nov-18	30,000	12,000
01-Apr-18	30,000	12,000	01-Dec-18	30,000	12,000
01-May-18	30,000	12,000	01-Jan-19	N/A	N/A
01-Jun-18	30,000	12,000	<b>01-Feb-19</b>	<b>Appeals Modernization Enactment Date</b>	
<b>TOTALS</b>				<b>335,500</b>	<b>130,087</b>

## **Start-Up**

VBA began by testing 500 of the oldest appellants who have a compensation-related benefit appeal pending. VA determined that compensation appeals were the most appropriate to develop modeling assumptions due to the need to test the complex workload and capacity issues involved with compensation claims. In addition, as the majority of the pending legacy appeals inventory involves compensation claims, it is critical that VA accurately forecast and develop assumptions associated with compensation-related staffing, production, and inventory.

VBA consolidated the processing of the first 500 potential responses to the ARC to facilitate data collection and rapid change management. The close proximity of the ARC to VBA decision makers allows for improved communication and response times.

During the startup phase, VBA developed and implemented processes, procedures and system updates that will not only be used during RAMP, but will support the new framework upon full implementation. Some of these developments included:

- Opt-in and decision notices;
- Caseflow Intake;
- Tracking of election responses;
- Claim labels to control higher-level review and supplemental claim elections;
- Training and outreach materials; and
- Review rights.

In developing materials for RAMP, VA worked closely with VSOs and other stakeholders to gather feedback on opt-in notices, decision notification letters, call center scripts, and RAMP standard operating procedures. As VA received feedback on the message content, structure, and readability, VA made adjustments to the material. In addition, VA worked directly with Veterans to obtain their opinions and suggestions on what VA can do to make RAMP opt-in letters clear and concise.

For certain tasks related to processing incoming elections, a new system, developed by Digital Service, Caseflow Intake will be utilized. Caseflow Intake is a semi-automated system that automatically establishes EPs and closes VACOLS records on RAMP eligible cases. The system is more streamlined than current manual EP establishment procedures and minimizes human error, and improves efficiency by reducing the complexity of analysis.

## **RAMP Training Plan**

The first initial processing site for RAMP was the ARC. ARC employees received instructor-led training on the changes in tracking and processing associated with RAMP elections and the supplemental claim and higher-level review lanes. The following is a list of mandatory courses that all employees conducting RAMP reviews are required to complete.



Course Title	Target Audience	Learning Hours
RAMP Overview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ALL</li> </ul>	0.5 Hr.
RAMP Intake Procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CAs</li> </ul>	1.0 Hr.
Caseflow Intake	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CAs</li> </ul>	1.0 Hr.
RAMP Development Actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• VSRs</li> </ul>	1.0 Hr.
Higher-Level Review Procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• DROs</li> <li>• AQRS</li> <li>• SVSRs</li> </ul>	2.0 Hrs.
RAMP Decisions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• VSRs</li> <li>• RVSRs</li> <li>• DROs</li> <li>• SVSRs</li> </ul>	1.5 Hrs.
Total Learning Hours		7 Hrs.

In addition, as part of the training requirements for RAMP, VA has established quality review protocols for tracking the accuracy of RAMP cases and data capture protocols regarding claims processing timeliness.

### Lessons Learned

VBA has already gained valuable lessons learned from the first three months of RAMP and made adjustments. Since November 2017 to end of January 2018, a total of 15,500 initial batch mailings were sent to appellants with some of the oldest appeals by stage, starting February 2018, VA will continue to mail invitations to the oldest appellants in each stage, but will also send approximately 12,000 invitations to newly established appeals. This will allow VA to test the assumption whether the age and stage of pending appeal impacts the election rate.

The average processing time is within the goal of 125 days or less. Although the sample size is small, the early success is encouraging.

VBA has been able to baseline processing times under the same framework as the new Appeals System, allowing VBA to more accurately model capacity.

While the opt-in rate has been about 2.79% as of the end of January 2018, VA recognizes that only about 5,500 Veterans have had the notices for the full 60 day period in which an election is required, although not required for RAMP processing. Based upon this data, VBA is already taking steps to understand why Veterans are not opting in at a higher rate through feedback obtained from Veterans, their representatives and VA employees, and to ensure that Veterans fully and accurately understand their options under RAMP. VBA has sent follow-up letters to Veterans invited to opt-in, is conducting outreach, is conducting follow-up phone calls with Veterans, and is working with VSOs and Military Service Organizations to inform Veterans and their representatives about RAMP. VBA is providing RO Directors fact sheets and talking points to aid in their communications with stakeholders and providing them lists of monthly opt-in letter recipients that they can share with Veterans' local representatives with Power of Attorney.

In order to increase the numbers of opt-ins, which is important to both rapidly reducing legacy appeals and validating systems, processes and procedures for the new claims and appeals

system, VBA is significantly expanding the pool of Veterans who may opt-in. VBA intends to increase the mailings from the original plan, and will encourage VSOs to act on a Veteran's behalf to elect participation in RAMP. By both expanding the number of eligible cases and improving the opt-in rate, VBA believes a positive experience for Veterans will be achieved, a meaningful reduction in legacy appeals will occur and solid data will be captured on which to continue development of the new claims and appeals system.

### **Roll-Out**

VBA is currently rolling out RAMP to additional ROs, with a target of expanding to 15 ROs by the conclusion of the program. The roll out schedule is:

- March, 2018 Denver and Phoenix.
- April, 2018 San Diego and Seattle.
- June, 2018 Stations 5,6,7,8,9, and 10.
- August, 2018 Stations 11,12,13,14, and 15.

VA intends to validate any information from the first phase that might be the result of regional variances. In addition, by rolling out the program to other ROs, VA will be able to determine how workload allocations will impact modeling assumptions.

RAMP processing site personnel will include: VSC Intake Personnel, Rating Veterans Service Representatives (RVSRs), Veterans Service Representatives (VSRs), Senior Veterans Service Representatives (SVSRs), Decision Review Officers (DROs), and Quality Review Specialists (Authorization and Rating)

### **Close-Out**

During the close-out phase, VA intends to assess the results from RAMP as they relate to Veteran behavior, work production, and inventory measures. VA intends to use this information to more accurately forecast the field resources required to implement and administer the new appeals system and resources required to address the appeals of decisions on legacy claims.

VBA is working to further refine methods for evaluating the success of RAMP and informing our efforts towards full implementation of the New Appeals System.

# APPENDICES

## Appendix A – Master Project Schedule

ID	Name	Start	Finish	In Progress
1	<b>Forms</b>	06/14/2017	02/04/2019	In Progress
2	<b>Draft Forms</b>	06/14/2017	12/15/2017	Complete
3	Determine content of form(s)	06/14/2017	09/01/2017	Complete
4	Produce Mock Up Forms	09/04/2017	09/08/2017	Complete
5	VA Form 559a- Request for New or Revised Form or Form Letter	09/11/2017	09/11/2017	Complete
6	Drafting by Publications	09/12/2017	11/10/2017	Complete
7	Corrections to Draft	11/14/2017	12/15/2017	In Progress
8	<b>OMB Public Notice, Comment, Response</b>	11/28/2017	12/14/2018	
9	Federal Register Notice drafts/Cost to Govt	11/28/2017	12/20/2017	
10	Information Collection Request (ICR) Established	12/20/2017	12/27/2017	In Progress
11	60 Day Federal Register Notice Request	12/27/2017	01/05/2018	In Progress
12	60 Day Federal Register Notice	01/05/2018	03/09/2018	In Progress
13	Respond to Comments	03/09/2018	03/23/2018	
14	30 Day Federal Register Notice Request	03/23/2018	04/06/2018	
15	30 Day Federal Register Notice Published	04/06/2018	05/04/2018	
16	OMB Review	05/04/2018	12/14/2018	
17	<b>Publish Forms</b>	12/14/2018	02/04/2019	
18	508 Compliance Check	12/14/2018	01/25/2019	
19	Notification (M21-1, VA Pulse, Bulletin updates)	01/25/2019	02/01/2019	
20	Release to Websites	02/01/2019	02/04/2019	
21	<b>Other HR</b>	08/23/2017	12/31/2018	In Progress
22	<b>Identify affected positions</b>	08/23/2017	12/29/2017	Complete
23	<b>Engage With Labor Partners</b>	12/04/2017	12/31/2018	In Progress
24	Labor engagement on position descriptions	12/04/2017	12/31/2018	In Progress
25	Labor engagement on performance standards	12/04/2017	12/31/2018	In Progress
26	<b>Position Descriptions &amp; Performance Standards for Higher Level Review Positions</b>	08/23/2017	04/27/2018	In Progress
27	<b>Evaluate/Revise current Position Descriptions</b>	10/23/2017	12/31/2017	In Progress
28	<b>Implement Revised Performance Standards</b>	04/30/2018	04/30/2018	
29	Determination of production/transaction credit for HLR review that ends with a DTA error (sent to supp. Lane)	08/23/2017	10/02/2017	In Progress
30	Determination of production/transaction credit for HLR review that ends with a grant/denial	08/23/2017	10/02/2017	In Progress
31	<b>Internal Procedures</b>	08/24/2017	12/02/2019	In Progress
32	<b>Supplemental Claim Lane</b>	08/24/2017	12/02/2019	In Progress

33	Supplemental Lane -FID	08/24/2017	10/18/2017	In Progress
34	Supplemental Lane - PEN	04/10/2018	08/28/2018	
35	Supplemental Lane - INS	08/24/2017	05/31/2018	In Progress
36	Supplemental Lane - VR&E	08/28/2017	12/15/2017	In Progress
37	Supplemental Lane - CS	08/28/2017	12/15/2017	In Progress
38	Supplemental Lane -LGY	08/24/2017	05/01/2018	In Progress
39	Supplemental Lane - EDU	08/24/2017	12/02/2019	In Progress
40	Higher Level Review	08/24/2017	01/10/2019	In Progress
41	Higher Level Review - INS	08/24/2017	05/31/2018	In Progress
42	Higher Level Review - FID	08/24/2017	01/10/2019	In Progress
43	HLR Process - VR&E	08/28/2017	12/15/2017	In Progress
44	HLR Process - INS	08/28/2017	12/15/2017	In Progress
45	Higher Level Review - PEN	04/10/2018	08/28/2018	
46	HLR Process -CS	08/28/2017	12/15/2017	In Progress
47	HLR Process -LGY	08/28/2017	03/01/2018	In Progress
48	HLR Process - EDU	08/24/2017	09/03/2018	In Progress
49	Draft Notice Letters	08/24/2017	08/28/2018	In Progress
50	Notice Letters - INS	08/24/2017	05/31/2018	In Progress
51	Notice Letters- CS	08/28/2017	02/19/2018	In Progress
52	Notice Letters - VR&E	08/28/2017	02/02/2018	Complete
53	Notice Letters -LGY	08/24/2017	05/01/2018	In Progress
54	Notice Letters - Fid	04/10/2018	06/04/2018	
55	Draft Notice Letters - PEN	04/10/2018	08/28/2018	
56	Notice Letters - EDU	08/28/2017	02/19/2018	In Progress
57	Draft Notice Letters (FID)	08/24/2017	10/18/2017	In Progress
58	Opt In Notices	08/24/2017	12/03/2018	In Progress
59	Opt-In Notices -INS	08/24/2017	05/31/2018	In Progress
60	Opt-In Notices -LGY	08/24/2017	05/01/2018	In Progress
61	Opt-In Notices - FID	08/24/2017		In Progress
62	Opt-In Notices - CS	08/28/2017	10/20/2017	In Progress
63	Opt-In Notices - VR&E	08/28/2017	12/29/2017	In Progress
64	Opt-In Notices - PEN	04/10/2018	08/28/2018	
65	Opt-In Notices - EDU	08/24/2017	12/03/2018	In Progress
66	Opt-In Procedures	08/28/2017	12/29/2017	In Progress

67	Opt-In Procedures - INS	08/28/2017	12/29/2017	In Progress
68	Opt-In Procedures -VR&E	08/28/2017	12/29/2017	In Progress
69	Opt-In Procedures - EDU	08/28/2017	12/29/2017	In Progress
70	Opt-In Procedures- CS	08/28/2017	12/29/2017	In Progress
71	Opt-In Procedures -Pen	04/10/2018	06/04/2018	
72	Opt-In Procedures -Fid	04/10/2018	06/04/2018	
73	Draft Maunual/Procedures	08/24/2017	09/03/2018	In Progress
74	Manual updates -LGY	08/24/2017	04/02/2018	In Progress
75	Manual updates - EDU	08/24/2017	09/03/2018	In Progress
76	Manual updates - VRE	08/24/2017	09/03/2018	In Progress
77	Manual updates - PEN	04/10/2018	08/28/2018	
78	Manual updates - INS	08/24/2017	05/31/2018	In Progress
79	Manual updates - FID	08/24/2017	10/18/2017	In Progress
80	Release opt-in letters	01/01/2018	01/01/2018	In Progress
81	IT	10/09/2017	10/01/2018	In Progress
82	Initial engineering projection	12/06/2017	12/08/2017	In Progress
83	Forms & Letters		10/01/2018	
84	VBMS	10/09/2017	02/26/2018	In Progress
85	Routing of VBA-Level Reviews	12/19/2017	TBD	In Progress
86	Routing of Higher Level Reviews in NWQ (BSD290)	12/19/2017	TBD	In Progress
87	Auto-establish status of EP030 to RTW/RFD (CO_UC150)	01/22/2018	TBD	In Progress
88	Add EP 030s and 040s to NWQ (CO_UC502)	01/22/2018	TBD	In Progress
89	Route HLRs to ROs from NWQ (Rating Claims) (CO_UC501)	01/26/2018	TBD	In Progress
90	Auto-Establishing Status for EP 030 (ACR788)	01/19/2018	TBD	In Progress
91	IT Impacts to VBMS Rating	12/14/2017	TBD	In Progress
92	Remove reopen claim and add HLR and Supplemental Review in the Jurisdiction Dropdown (ACR789)	02/02/2018	TBD	In Progress
93	Add "DTA Error" as selection in the Supplemental Decisions Dropdown (BSD295)	02/25/2018	TBD	
94	Capture and persist the disposition of all decisions for reporting purposes (BSD295)	02/26/2018	TBD	
95	Create functionality to capture all favorable findings of fact for ratings claims (BSD296)	02/26/2018	TBD	
96	Update all standard data fragments to include all applicable regulations (TBD)	02/16/2018	TBD	
97	Auto-establish a supplemental review upon finding of a DTA error (disposing of claim as DTA error in VBMS-R) (B)	02/26/2018	TBD	
98	Functionality to capture an additional grant of benefits (this is a reporting requirements—will need further defini	02/26/2018	TBD	
99	Tracking "favorable findings of fact (FFF)" for Rating decisions (BSD296)	02/26/2018	TBD	
100	VBMS-Awards Enhancements	02/02/2018	TBD	In Progress

101	All FF must be applied to all future decisions. (BSD294)	02/16/2018	TBD	
102	The VBMS-A application will need to be able to capture whenever there is an "additional grant of benefits" for re	02/16/2018	TBD	
103	The VBMS-A application will need to be able to capture whenever an HLR is returned due to a DTA error/reportin	02/02/2018	TBD	In Progress
104	<b>Metrics &amp; Reporting</b>	02/01/2018	TBD	In Progress
105	Improved VBA Decision Notice (Automated - VBMS)	10/09/2017	02/09/2018	In Progress
106	<b>Caseflow (DSVA)</b>	12/01/2017	05/31/2018	In Progress
107	<b>Caseflow Intake</b>	01/01/2018	12/31/2018	In Progress
108	Discovery and development	01/01/2018	12/31/2018	In Progress
109	Implement functionality to receive RAMP NODS	01/01/2018	03/31/2018	In Progress
110	Release reporting functionality and integrate with national work queue	04/01/2018	06/30/2018	
111	Support processing of official forms	07/01/2018	09/30/2018	
112	<b>Caseflow Queue</b>	01/01/2018	12/31/2018	In Progress
113	Discovery and development	01/01/2018	12/31/2018	In Progress
114	Release mocks to attorney staff	02/12/2018	03/31/2018	
115	Release functionality to initial user base, test with admin staff	04/01/2018	06/30/2018	
116	Release new functionality to additional users	07/01/2018	12/31/2018	
117	<b>Caseflow Appeals Status</b>	01/01/2018	12/31/2018	In Progress
118	Finalize language, develop backend and release v.2	01/01/2018	03/31/2018	In Progress
119	Discovery on changes required for modernized appeals	04/01/2018	06/30/2018	
120	Ongoing discovery and development on changes required for modernized appeals	07/01/2018	12/31/2018	
121	<b>Caseflow Reader</b>	01/01/2018	03/31/2018	In Progress
122	Add features based on user feedback	01/01/2018	03/31/2018	In Progress
123	<b>Caseflow Hearing Prep</b>	01/01/2018	06/30/2018	In Progress
124	Complete pilot with judges	01/01/2018	03/31/2018	In Progress
125	Release to all Board judges	04/01/2018	06/30/2018	
126	<b>Caseflow Hearings</b>	01/01/2018	12/31/2018	In Progress
127	Present development plan and obtain FY19 scheduling policy from Board	01/01/2018	03/31/2018	In Progress
128	Discovery and development	04/01/2018	06/30/2018	
129	Development and release schedule allocation for FY19	07/01/2018	09/30/2018	
130	Ongoing discovery and development focused on placing Veterans into hearing slots	10/01/2018	12/31/2018	
131	eFolder Express			Complete
132	Caseflow Certification			Complete
133	Caseflow Dispatch			Complete
134	<b>Metrics</b>	08/24/2017	04/25/2019	In Progress

135	VBA Metrics	08/24/2017	04/25/2019	In Progress
136	Metrics - EDU	08/24/2017	10/01/2018	In Progress
137	Metrics - INS	08/24/2017	06/29/2018	In Progress
138	Metrics - PEN	04/10/2018	06/11/2018	
139	CS Metrics	10/02/2017	04/25/2019	In Progress
140	(A) The average duration of each segment of the appeals process - Disaggregated by periods in which the Secretary	10/02/2017	03/13/2019	In Progress
141	(A) The cumulative number of such legacy appeals (CS)	10/02/2017	04/10/2018	In Progress
142	(B) For the Board, the Number of Appeals Pending on any Docket under 38 USC 7107 as amended by section 2(t)	10/02/2017	02/27/2018	In Progress
143	(B) The frequency by which appeals lead to additional grants of benefits - Disaggregated by whether the addition	10/02/2017	03/13/2019	In Progress
144	(B) The portion of work in the new appeals system attributable to legacy appeals opt-ins (CS)	10/02/2017	04/10/2018	In Progress
145	(C) The Average Duration for Processing (ADC) Claims AND Supplemental Claims, Disaggregated by RO (CS)	10/02/2017	01/10/2018	In Progress
146	(C) The average period such legacy claims were pending before opting in to the new appeals system and the ave	10/02/2017	04/10/2018	In Progress
147	(C) The Number and average amount of retroactive awards of benefits resulting from an appeal (CS)	10/02/2017	03/13/2019	In Progress
148	(D) The Average Duration for Processing (ADC) requests for Higher Level Reviews, Disaggregated by RO (CS)	10/02/2017	01/10/2018	In Progress
149	(D) The Average Duration from filing a legacy claim until all appeals and remands relating to such legacy claim are	10/02/2017	03/13/2019	In Progress
150	(E) The Average Number of Times claimants submit different claims with respect to the same condition, such as :	10/02/2017	03/13/2019	In Progress
151	(E) The Avg Number of Days Appeals are Pending (ADP) on a Board Docket, Disaggregated by: (CS)	10/02/2017	05/25/2018	In Progress
152	(F) With respect to the policy developed under 38 USC 7107(e) [Policy on Changing Dockets] (CS)	10/02/2017	09/27/2018	In Progress
153	(G) The Average Number of Days the duration of an appeal is extended because the Secretary secured or attempt	10/02/2017	03/13/2019	In Progress
154	(G) Total Number of Remands for an Advisory Medical Opinion under 38 USC 5109(d) (CS)	10/02/2017	01/25/2019	In Progress
155	(H) The Average Number of Days between date of Board Remand for an Advisory Medical Opinion and date on w	10/02/2017	02/27/2019	In Progress
156	(H) The frequency by which claims are reopened under 38 USC 5108 (New and Material evidence), and the frequ	10/02/2017	03/13/2019	In Progress
157	(I) The Average Number of Days between date of Board Remand for an Advisory Medical Opinion and the date At	10/02/2017	03/27/2019	In Progress
158	(i) a description of the way in which the cases are screened and the purposes for which they are screened (CS)	10/02/2017	10/02/2017	In Progress
159	(i) Appeals that include a request for a hearing (CS)	10/02/2017	06/27/2018	In Progress
160	(i) Number of cases moved from one Docket to another pursuant to such policy (CS)	10/02/2017	10/25/2018	In Progress
161	(i) of claims under the new appeals system, excluding legacy claims that opt-in to the new appeals system (CS)	10/02/2017	04/10/2018	In Progress
162	(I) Supplemental claims (CS)	10/02/2017	04/10/2018	In Progress
163	(i) Supplemental Claims Pending under 38 USC 5108 as amended by section (2)(i) of the legislation (CS)	10/02/2017	01/10/2018	In Progress
164	(I) the timeliness of the issuance of decisions by the Board (CS)	10/02/2017	10/02/2017	In Progress
165	(ii) a description of the effect such screening has on: (CS)	10/02/2017	10/02/2017	In Progress
166	(ii) Appeals that do not include a request for a hearing and include submittal of evidence (CS)	10/02/2017	07/26/2018	In Progress
167	(ii) Avg time cases pending prior to moving from one Docket to another (CS)	10/02/2017	11/27/2018	In Progress
168	(ii) of legacy claims that opt-in to the new appeals system (CS)	10/02/2017	04/10/2018	In Progress

169	(II) requests for Higher-level review (CS)	10/02/2017	04/10/2018	In Progress
170	(ii) Requests for Higher-Level Review Pending under 38 USC 5104B as added by section 2(g) (CS)	10/02/2017	01/10/2018	In Progress
171	(II) the inventory of cases before the Board (CS)	10/02/2017	10/02/2017	In Progress
172	(iii) Appeals that do not include a request for a hearing and do NOT include submittal of evidence (CS)	10/02/2017	08/27/2018	In Progress
173	(iii) The average time to adjudicate the cases after moving from one Docket to another (CS)	10/02/2017	12/27/2018	In Progress
174	(iii) the type and frequency of development errors detected through such screening (CS)	10/02/2017	10/02/2017	In Progress
175	(J) The Number of appeals granted, number remanded, number denied by the Board - Disaggregated by Docket (	10/02/2017	04/25/2019	In Progress
176	(K) The Number of claimants each year that take action {file a supplemental claim, or a higher-level review, or an	10/02/2017	04/10/2018	In Progress
177	(L) The Total Number of Times on average each claimant files under 38 USC 5110(a)(2) to protect their effective c	10/02/2017	10/11/2018	In Progress
178	(M) The average duration, from the filing of an initial claim until the claim is resolved and claimants no longer tak	10/02/2017	04/10/2018	In Progress
179	(N) How Frequently an action taken within one year to protect an effective date leads to additional grant of bene	10/02/2017	10/11/2018	In Progress
180	(O) The Average of how long it takes to complete each segment of the claims process while claimants are protect	10/02/2017	03/13/2019	In Progress
181	(P) The number and average amount of retroactive awards of benefits from the Secretary as a result of protectec	10/02/2017	10/11/2018	In Progress
182	(Q) The average number of times claimants submit different claims with respect to the same condition, such as a	10/02/2017	03/13/2019	In Progress
183	(R ) The Number of cases each year in which a claimant inappropriately tried to take simultaneous actions, such a	10/02/2017	03/13/2019	In Progress
184	(S) In the case the Secretary develops and implements a policy under 38 USC 5104C(a)(2)(D) [policy relating to sw	10/02/2017	03/13/2019	In Progress
185	(T) The Number of times the Secretary received evidence relating to an appeal or higher-level review at a time nc	10/02/2017	03/13/2019	In Progress
186	(U) The Number of Errors committed by the Secretary in carrying out the duty to assist (DTA) under 38 USC 5103.	10/02/2017	10/11/2018	In Progress
187	(V) An assessment of the productivity of employees at the regional offices and at the Board - Disaggregated by th	10/02/2017	10/11/2018	In Progress
188	(W) The Percentage of cases that are decided within the goals established by the Secretary for deciding cases - Di	10/02/2017	10/11/2018	In Progress
189	(X) Of the cases that involve a higher-level review, the percentage of decisions that are:	10/02/2017	01/10/2018	In Progress
190	(Y) The frequency by which the Secretary readjudicates a claim under 38 USC 5108 {where new and relevant evid	10/02/2017	10/11/2018	In Progress
191	(Z) In any case in which the Board decides to screen cases for a purpose described in 38 USC 7107(d) [screening o	10/02/2017	10/02/2017	In Progress
192	EDU Metrics	10/02/2017	10/02/2017	In Progress
193	LGY Metrics	02/01/2018	12/14/2018	In Progress
194	VRE Metrics	10/02/2017	10/02/2017	In Progress
195	<b>Implementation of Modernized Appeals System</b>	02/14/2019	02/14/2019	
196	<b>Legislatively Required Reports</b>	06/05/2017	01/28/2020	In Progress
197	90 Day Plan (1st Quarterly Report)	08/16/2017	11/24/2017	Complete
198	<b>Regulations</b>	06/05/2017	01/11/2019	In Progress
199	<b>DRAFT Regulations</b>	06/05/2017	02/21/2018	In Progress
200	Identify & Outline Regulatory Revisions; Convene Workgroup with VBA and OGC Partners.	06/05/2017	07/28/2017	Complete
201	Write Draft Regulations	07/31/2017	10/17/2017	Complete
202	Internal VA Concurrence	10/18/2017	01/11/2018	In Progress



203	Proposed Rule (PR) to OOREG	01/12/2018	01/24/2018	Complete
204	OGC clears PR	01/25/2018	02/07/2018	In Progress
205	OOREG submits final rule to OMB	02/08/2018	02/21/2018	
206	OMB Public Notice, Comment, Response	02/22/2018	01/04/2019	
207	OMB clears PR	02/22/2018	04/25/2018	
208	Edits Based on Public Comment (If Applicable) & Send to OOREG	04/25/2018	05/22/2018	
209	Public comment period	05/23/2018	07/19/2018	
210	CG Clears Final Rule	07/20/2018	09/20/2018	
211	OOREG Submits Final Rule to OMB	09/21/2018	10/04/2018	
212	OMB Clears Final Rule	10/05/2018	01/04/2019	
213	<b>Publish Regulations</b>	01/07/2019	01/11/2019	
214	2nd Quarterly Report to Congress	11/27/2017	02/22/2018	In Progress
215	3rd Quarterly Report to Congress	02/23/2018	05/23/2018	
216	4th Quarterly Report to Congress	05/24/2018	08/21/2018	
217	5th Quarterly Report to Congress	08/22/2018	11/19/2018	
218	Secretary's Certification	12/03/2019	01/28/2020	
219	<b>Communications</b>	08/23/2017	02/01/2019	In Progress
220	RAMP Press Release	11/01/2017	11/01/2017	Complete
221	Call Scripts	08/23/2017	10/17/2017	Complete
222	VA Pulse	08/23/2017	01/31/2018	In Progress
223	Prepare updates to VA website and internal and external facing documents	08/23/2017	11/14/2017	Complete
224	Release Updates to website and external facing documents published	08/23/2017	08/23/2017	Complete
225	Strategic Communications Plan	08/23/2017	10/17/2017	In Progress
226	Fact Sheets	08/23/2017	10/17/2017	Complete
227	Communication Toolkit	08/23/2017	09/22/2017	Complete
228	Develop Communications Schedule	11/01/2017	11/10/2017	Complete
229	BAS engagements/products	08/23/2017	08/23/2017	Complete
230	Duty First Development of Print & Video Media	01/18/2018	02/28/2018	In Progress
231	LOB meetings	09/15/2017	02/01/2019	In Progress
232	<b>Outreach</b>	06/01/2017	01/23/2019	In Progress
233	VSO Engagements	08/01/2018	08/31/2018	
234	VSO Communicators	11/29/2017	11/29/2017	Complete
235	NACVSO	10/23/2017	10/27/2017	Complete
236	VBA VSO bi-weekly (BAS)	09/01/2017	02/14/2019	In Progress

237	VFW Advanced Skills National Training	11/05/2017	11/05/2017	Complete
238	VFW/DAV meeting (hosted by VBA and Board)	10/11/2017	10/11/2017	Complete
239	AMO/Board VSO briefing	09/14/2017	09/14/2017	Complete
240	Quarterly VSO Forum (VBA)	11/07/2017	11/07/2017	Complete
241	VSO/MSO Bi-Annual Summit	01/25/2018	01/25/2018	Complete
242	RAMP Stakeholder kick off meeting	10/31/2017	10/31/2017	Complete
243	<b>Congressional Engagements</b>	09/28/2017	TBD	In Progress
244	4-Corners briefing	09/28/2017	09/28/2017	Complete
245	HVAC Hearing on Appeals Modernization	01/30/2018	01/30/2018	In Progress
246	"Sand Table" Briefing	01/30/2018	03/30/2018	In Progress
247	4-Corners briefing	01/16/2018	01/16/2018	Complete
248	HVAC Staff Visit	11/27/2017	11/27/2017	Complete
249	HVAC DAMA Discussion	11/30/2017	11/30/2017	Complete
250	GAO Exit Conference	01/17/2018	01/17/2018	Complete
251	4-Corners briefing	10/23/2017	10/23/2017	Complete
252	<b>Provide information to VSO's TO Be Used For Developing VSO Training</b>	08/21/2017	12/28/2018	In Progress
253	<b>Quality Assurance</b>	08/24/2017	06/29/2018	In Progress
254	<b>Quality Feedback Loop - FID</b>	08/24/2017	05/31/2018	In Progress
255	<b>Quality Feedback Loop - EDU</b>	08/24/2017	10/01/2018	In Progress
256	<b>Quality Feedback Loop -LGY</b>	08/24/2017	11/01/2018	In Progress
257	<b>Quality Feedback Loop - INS</b>	08/24/2017		In Progress
258	<b>Common DTA Error Definitions</b>	10/02/2017	12/29/2017	In Progress
259	<b>Quality Assurance Plan</b>	12/12/2017	01/31/2018	In Progress
260	<b>Special Focused Quality Reviews</b>	10/02/2017	01/31/2018	In Progress
261	<b>Training</b>	08/17/2017	02/14/2019	In Progress
262	<b>Assess Training Requirements and Current Training Products</b>	10/16/2017	02/14/2019	In Progress
263	Refresher Training to RO employees (as needed)	10/16/2017	02/14/2019	In Progress
264	Deliver Training to RO appeals employees	12/18/2017	01/12/2018	In Progress
265	Transition Training for IPC (National) - RAMP	10/16/2017	10/30/2017	Complete
266	Review of current training	10/16/2017	09/28/2018	In Progress
267	Assesment of LGY Training	02/02/2018	03/02/2018	In Progress
268	Call Scripts and Training (BAS) - RAMP FAQ script	08/01/2018	10/23/2018	Complete
269	<b>Tranisition Training for CA/IPC - RAMP Team Phase 1</b>	10/16/2017	10/26/2017	Complete
270	<b>Instructor led training for training National Challenge - development (CS dependant)</b>	11/15/2017	12/13/2017	In Progress

271	TRIP training for VSO (BAS)	10/16/2017	11/11/2017	In Progress
272	Transition Training for Coach/AVSCM/VSCM	10/16/2017	11/27/2017	In Progress
273	Transition Training for DRO - RAMP Team Phase 1	10/16/2017	11/07/2017	Complete
274	Transition Training for RVSR - RAMP Team Phase 1	10/16/2017	11/07/2017	Complete
275	TPPS Modules (ED&T and business line)	10/16/2017	11/11/2017	In Progress
276	Instructor led training for training Challenge (ED&T and Comp Service)	10/16/2017	11/11/2017	In Progress
277	RVSR Advisor for Effective dates (Job Aid) (ED&T)	10/16/2017	11/11/2017	In Progress
278	Transition Training for VSR - RAMP Team Phase 1	10/16/2017	10/31/2017	Complete
279	Conduct Training	08/17/2017	03/09/2018	In Progress
280	Develop & Conduct Informational Training (overall up-dates)	08/17/2017	12/08/2017	In Progress
281	Call Centers - RAMP overview (by BAS)	10/16/2017	11/03/2017	Complete
282	Develop formal training - PL 115-55	12/18/2017	03/09/2018	Complete
283	PCT team - Routing and FAQ's (nationally)	10/16/2017	11/09/2017	In Progress
284	BAS Training	09/05/2017	06/29/2018	In Progress
285	Call Centers/IRIS Response Center	09/05/2017	06/29/2018	In Progress
286	RAMP	09/05/2017	10/31/2017	Complete
287	NCC/NPCC/NIRC PCR Refresher Appeals Process	03/01/2018	03/30/2018	
288	NCC/NPCC/NIRC PCR New Hire Appeals Process	03/01/2018	04/01/2018	
289	NCC/NPCC/NIRC PCR New Hire Status of Appeal	03/01/2018	04/01/2018	
290	NCC/NPCC/NIRC PCR New Hire Understanding Rating Decisions & Notification Letters	03/01/2018	04/01/2018	
291	NCC/NPCC/NIRC PCR Refresher Status of Appeal	06/01/2018	06/29/2018	
292	Public Contact Team	09/05/2017	05/07/2018	In Progress
293	RAMP	09/05/2017	10/31/2017	Complete
294	PCT PCR New Hire Appeals Process	04/01/2018	04/05/2018	
295	PCT PCR New Hire Status of Appeal	04/01/2018	04/05/2018	
296	PCT PCR New Hire Understanding Rating Decisions & Notification Letters	04/01/2018	04/05/2018	
297	PCT PCR Refresher Appeals Process	05/01/2018	05/07/2018	
298	LOBs Plan Training	08/24/2017	06/29/2018	In Progress
299	Plan Training -LGY	08/24/2017	TBD	In Progress
300	Plan Pension - Pen	08/24/2017	01/17/2018	In Progress
301	Plan Training - LGY	08/24/2017	01/17/2018	Complete
302	Plan Training - INS	08/24/2017	01/17/2018	Complete
303	Plan Training - EDU	08/24/2017	03/02/2018	In Progress
304	Plan Training -INS	08/24/2017	01/31/2018	Complete

305	Plan Training -FID	08/24/2017	11/15/2017	In Progress
306	Plan Training - VR&E	08/24/2017	01/17/2018	Complete
307	LOBs Develop Training	08/24/2017	06/29/2018	In Progress
308	Develop Training -LGY	08/24/2017	06/29/2018	In Progress
309	Develop Training - PEN	04/10/2018	06/11/2018	
310	Develop Training - VR&E	08/24/2017	05/11/2018	In Progress
311	Develop Training - CS	08/24/2017	TBD	In Progress
312	Develop Training - VRE	02/01/2018	06/29/2018	In Progress
313	Develop Training - EDU	04/02/2018	06/01/2018	
314	Develop Training - Pen	08/24/2017	05/11/2018	In Progress
315	Develop Training - LGY	08/24/2017	05/31/2018	In Progress
316	Develop Training - INS	08/24/2017	05/01/2018	In Progress
317	Develop Training FID	08/24/2017	03/01/2018	In Progress
318	LOBS Conduct Training	08/24/2017	01/02/2019	In Progress
319	Conduct Training - VRE	07/02/2018	12/14/2018	
320	Conduct Training -LGY	08/24/2017	TBD	In Progress
321	Conduct Training - EDU	06/04/2018	12/28/2018	
322	Conduct Training - PEN	04/10/2018	05/10/2018	
323	Conduct Training (INS)	08/24/2017	01/02/2019	In Progress
324	Project Close Out	02/15/2019	03/14/2019	
325	Regulations	06/05/2017	02/28/2019	In Progress
326	DRAFT Regulations	06/05/2017	04/09/2018	In Progress
327	Identify & Outline Regulatory Revisions; Convene Workgroup with VBA and OGC Partners.	06/05/2017	07/28/2017	Complete
328	Write Draft Regulations	07/31/2017	10/17/2017	Complete
329	Internal VA Concurrence	10/18/2017	01/24/2018	Complete
330	Proposed Rule (PR) to OOREG	01/12/2018	01/24/2018	Complete
331	OGC clears PR	01/25/2018	03/26/2018	In Progress
332	OOREG submits final rule to OMB	03/27/2018	04/09/2018	
333	OMB – Proposed Rule Public Comment, Publication of Final Rule	04/10/2018	02/21/2019	
334	OMB Review of Proposed Rule	04/10/2018	06/11/2018	
335	Public comment period	06/12/2018	08/08/2018	
336	Preparation of Final Rule	08/09/2018	09/05/2018	
337	OCG Clears Final Rule	09/06/2018	11/07/2018	
338	OOREG Submits Final Rule to OMB	11/08/2018	11/21/2018	

339	OMB Clears Final Rule	11/22/2018	02/21/2019	
340	Publish Regulations	02/22/2019	02/28/2019	
341	BVA			
342	Change Management Strategy (Strat Comms, Outreach, Workforce Realign*)			
343	Create Change Management Strategy	TBD	TBD	
344	Convene workgroup to create Change Management Strategy	TBD	TBD	
345	Prepare draft of Change Management Strategy	TBD	TBD	
346	Gain concurrence on approach to Change Management Strategy	TBD	TBD	
347	Publish Change Management Strategy	TBD	TBD	
348	Execute Change Management Plan	TBD	TBD	
349	Knowledge Management (Training)	02/01/2018	02/14/2019	In Progress
350	Develop standardized training framework for training modules	02/01/2018	03/31/2018	In Progress
351	Determine objective for each training	02/01/2018	02/22/2018	In Progress
352	Determine appropriate training delivery method per module	02/23/2018	03/09/2018	
353	Determine objective for each delivery method	03/12/2018	03/30/2018	
354	Re-evaluate objectives of each training module and update based on inputs received	04/02/2018	04/16/2018	
355	Create training modules with corresponding SOPs	04/17/2018	05/01/2018	
356	Review, discuss, and edit contents of training module and SOPs with each SME	05/02/2018	05/16/2018	
357	Present staff members of each BVA branch with survey to ensure procedures memorized in training modules ac	05/17/2018	05/31/2018	
358	Train staff members on the AMA process	06/01/2018	06/15/2018	
359	Determine SME in each BVA branch	06/18/2018	06/29/2018	
360	Create training mocules with corresponding SOPs for AMA process based on the proposed regs	07/02/2018	07/31/2018	
361	Determine objective for each training	07/02/2018	07/09/2018	
362	Determine appropriate training delivery method per module	07/10/2018	07/17/2018	
363	Determine objective for each delivery method	07/18/2018	07/24/2018	
364	Highlight changes in processes and SOPs from legacy appeals process to AMA process	07/25/2018	07/31/2018	
365	Compare process mapping results with what is in the then-current version of the proposed regs and the outlinec	08/01/2018	08/08/2018	
366	Review, discuss, and edit contents of training module and SOPs with each SME	08/09/2018	08/16/2018	
367	Present staff members of each BVA branch with survey to ensure procedures memorized in training modules ar	08/17/2018	08/24/2018	
368	Begin large scale training on AMA prpcess	08/27/2018	08/31/2018	
369	Continue large scale trainings on both admin and legal staff on AMA procedures	09/04/2018	09/14/2018	
370	Create additional training materials for RAMP pilot at BVA	09/17/2018	09/28/2018	
371	Begin pilot RAMP program at BVA	10/01/2018	02/14/2019	
372	Biweekly surveys to determine any missing training guidance or update existing training guidance	10/01/2018	02/14/2019	

373	Legacy Process Modeling	01/12/2018	03/14/2018	In Progress
374	Preliminary Design Review	01/12/2018	01/28/2018	In Progress
375	Final Design Review	01/29/2018	02/14/2018	In Progress
376	Requirements Freeze	02/15/2018	02/27/2018	In Progress
377	Management Review	02/28/2018	03/07/2018	In Progress
378	Sponsor Sign-off	03/08/2018	03/11/2018	In Progress
379	Release to Production	03/12/2018	03/14/2018	In Progress
380	VETBOA Process Modeling	04/06/2018	06/20/2018	In Progress
381	Kick-off meeting	04/06/2018	04/06/2018	In Progress
382	Preliminary Design Review	04/07/2018	05/06/2018	In Progress
383	Final Design Review	05/07/2018	05/21/2018	In Progress
384	Requirements Freeze	05/22/2018	06/05/2018	In Progress
385	Release/Publication	06/06/2018	06/20/2018	In Progress
386	Enabling Infrastructure	Schedule under revision		
387	Office Space/Logistics	Schedule under revision		
388	Hiring	Schedule under revision		
389	Budget	Schedule under revision		
390	RAMP	09/05/2017	05/10/2019	In Progress
391	Mailings	11/01/2017	12/01/2018	In Progress
392	1st Mailing (500 letters)	11/01/2017	11/01/2017	Complete
393	2nd Mailing (5000 letters)	12/01/2017	12/01/2017	Complete
394	3rd Mailing (10000 letters)	01/01/2018	01/01/2018	Complete
395	4th Mailing (25000 letters)	02/01/2018	02/01/2018	Complete
396	5th Mailing (25000 letters)	03/01/2018	03/01/2018	
397	6th Mailing (30000 letters)	04/01/2018	04/01/2018	
398	7th Mailing (30000 letters)	05/01/2018	05/01/2018	
399	8th Mailing (30000 letters)	06/01/2018	06/01/2018	
400	9th Mailing (30000 letters)	07/01/2018	07/01/2018	
401	10th Mailing (30000 letters)	08/01/2018	08/01/2018	
402	11th Mailing (30000 letters)	09/01/2018	09/01/2018	
403	12th Mailing (30000 letters)	10/01/2018	10/01/2018	
404	13th Mailing (30000 letters)	11/01/2018	11/01/2018	
405	14th Mailing (30000 letters)	12/01/2018	12/01/2018	
406	Start Up	09/05/2017	10/31/2017	In Progress

407	Performance Metrics and Reporting	09/05/2017	09/28/2017	In Progress
408	Performance metrics for RAMP process	09/05/2017	09/28/2017	In Progress
409	Reports, EDW Data, and statutory reporting requirements	09/05/2017	09/19/2017	Complete
410	RAMP Intake Processing (Letter Creator Development)	09/05/2017	10/26/2017	Complete
411	End Products (EP)/Claim Labels	09/05/2017	10/31/2017	Complete
412	Identify Existing Eps - Using 682/683	09/05/2017	09/19/2017	Complete
413	Delivery of 020/030 EPs	09/05/2017	10/31/2017	Complete
414	New claim labels to control HLR and supplemental claim elections.	09/05/2017	10/27/2017	Complete
415	Stakeholder Notification	09/05/2017	10/31/2017	Complete
416	VSO Notice (Emails)-Stakeholder kick-off call	09/05/2017	10/30/2017	Complete
417	Attorney/Advocate Notice	09/05/2017	10/31/2017	Complete
418	Union Notice (21 Days)	09/05/2017	10/31/2017	Complete
419	RAMP Test Site/Tracking Requirements	09/05/2017	09/27/2017	Complete
420	Identify RAMP test sites (ARC and ROs)	09/05/2017	09/27/2017	Complete
421	Create protocol for employee credit/downtime (Phase II)	09/05/2017	09/27/2017	Complete
422	Communications	09/05/2017	10/31/2017	Complete
423	Communication for external/internal stakeholders	09/05/2017	10/31/2017	Complete
424	Fact Sheets	09/05/2017	10/31/2017	Complete
425	NCC Call Scripts/FAQs on RAMP	09/05/2017	09/27/2017	Complete
426	Training	09/05/2017	10/30/2017	Complete
427	In Person Training	09/05/2017	10/23/2017	Complete
428	Develop Training Timeline for all claims processors	09/05/2017	10/30/2017	Complete
429	Develop ARC Training Timeline	09/05/2017	10/06/2017	Complete
430	Public Contact Employees	09/05/2017	09/22/2017	Complete
431	Provide RAMP training materials to VSOs and include periodic follow-ups	09/05/2017	09/22/2017	Complete
432	Opt-in/Election Notice to Appellants	09/05/2017	10/31/2017	Complete
433	Letter explaining HLR and Supplemental Claim lanes and legal ramifications of participation in RAMP (1st Draft Cc	09/05/2017	10/31/2017	Complete
434	Determine the 500 appeals that will receive the Opt-In/Election Notice	09/05/2017	10/31/2017	Complete
435	GC Feedback	09/05/2017	10/31/2017	Complete
436	VSO Review	09/05/2017	10/31/2017	Complete
437	HINES batch processing	09/05/2017	10/31/2017	Complete
438	Mass mailing	09/05/2017	10/31/2017	Complete
439	Add 1-800 number and 60-Day response to the Opt-In/Election Notice	09/05/2017	10/31/2017	Complete
440	Caseflow Intake Development – MVP	09/05/2017	10/31/2017	Complete

441	Tracking required for election responses	09/05/2017	10/31/2017	Complete
442	Document Labels	09/05/2017	09/27/2017	Complete
443	Identify existing labels for tracking opt-in forms in eFolder	09/05/2017	09/27/2017	Complete
444	Define subject line for consistency (Update SOP)	09/05/2017	09/27/2017	Complete
445	Policy Letter/SOP	09/05/2017	10/31/2017	Complete
446	SOP/TIP Sheet with interim procedural guidance on processing elections	09/05/2017	09/27/2017	Complete
447	Draft Policy Letter explaining RAMP	09/05/2017	10/31/2017	Complete
448	Higher Level Review Decision Template	09/05/2017	10/31/2017	Complete
449	Draft Standard text for a higher level review decision (rating and notification letter)	09/05/2017	09/28/2017	Complete
450	Designate a decision label in VBMS-R for use by HLR	09/05/2017	10/31/2017	Complete
451	Draft Standard text for notification letters for DTA errors	09/05/2017	09/18/2017	Complete
452	"Review Rights" form for RAMP decisions	09/05/2017	10/27/2017	Complete
453	Letter explaining options after Veteran receives a decision under RAMP (Not required by 10/1)	09/05/2017	09/22/2017	Complete
454	Opt-in form for an appeal to the Board	09/05/2017	10/27/2017	Complete
455	Roll Out (Phase II Expansion)	02/01/2018	08/31/2018	In Progress
456	Kick Off Call with RAMP Expansion Sites	02/01/2018	02/01/2018	Complete
457	RAMP Expansion Sites Kickoff Visits	02/05/2018	02/09/2018	Complete
458	Denver and Phoenix Implement RAMP	06/04/2018	07/03/2018	
459	San Diego and Seattle Implement RAMP	03/01/2018	03/28/2018	
460	Stations 5,6,7,8,9, and 10 Implement RAMP	04/02/2018	04/27/2018	
461	Stations 11,12,13,14, and 15 Implement RAMP	08/01/2018	08/31/2018	
462	Close Out	02/15/2019	05/10/2019	
463	Assess RAMP Results	02/15/2019	04/12/2019	
464	Update Forecasts and Modeling	04/15/2019	05/10/2019	



# APPENDICES

## Appendix B –Training Requirements

The following table identifies the employees by position that will require additional training to administer the new claims and appeals system.

Business Line	Employee Position
Veterans Health Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TBD</li> </ul>
National Cemetery Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program Specialists</li> <li>• Program Support Assistants</li> <li>• Program Analysts</li> <li>• Supervisory and Administrative Personnel</li> </ul>
Compensation Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Claims Assistants</li> <li>• Veterans Service Representatives</li> <li>• Rating Veterans Service Representatives</li> <li>• Decision Review Officers</li> <li>• Quality Review Team Members</li> <li>• Veteran Service Center (VSC) Management and Administrative Personnel</li> </ul>
Board of Veterans' Appeals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Board leaders</li> <li>• Veterans Law Judges</li> <li>• Staff Attorneys</li> <li>• Administrative Personnel</li> </ul>
Insurance Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Veterans Claims Examiners</li> <li>• Senior Veterans Claims Examiners</li> <li>• Unit Chiefs</li> <li>• Section Chiefs</li> <li>• Division Chiefs</li> </ul>
Benefits Assistance Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• National Call Center Representatives</li> <li>• Public Contact Team Personnel</li> <li>• IRIS Response Personnel</li> <li>• RO Directors, Managers, and Coaches</li> <li>• Administrative Personnel</li> </ul>
Education Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Veterans Claims Examiners</li> <li>• Senior Veterans Claims Examiners</li> <li>• Administrative Personnel</li> </ul>

Pension and Fiduciary Service (Pension)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Claims Assistants</li> <li>• Veterans Service Representatives</li> <li>• Rating Veterans Service Representatives</li> <li>• Decision Review Officers</li> <li>• Quality Review Team Members</li> <li>• PMC Management and Administrative Personnel</li> <li>• PMC Coaches</li> </ul>
Pension and Fiduciary Service (Fiduciary)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Legal Instruments Examiners</li> <li>• Field Examiners</li> <li>• Program Specialists</li> <li>• Fiduciary Hub Management Personnel</li> <li>• Fiduciary Service Representatives</li> </ul>
Loan Guaranty Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Loan Specialists</li> <li>• Loan Guaranty Officers</li> <li>• Administrative Personnel</li> </ul>
Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors</li> <li>• Administrative Personnel</li> <li>• Vocational Rehabilitation Officers</li> </ul>

The following table identifies training by business line that VA will either create or update as part of implementing the new system.

<b>Business Line</b>	<b>Training Items</b>
Veterans Health Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TBD</li> </ul>
National Cemetery Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Training for Public-facing employees (including mandatory scripts)</li> <li>• Overview of PL 115-55</li> <li>• Handling of Claims and Appeals in New System Overview</li> <li>• Telephonic Conferences</li> <li>• Appeals NOD, SOC, SSOC, and Certification</li> <li>• Caseflow</li> <li>• Supplemental Claims</li> <li>• Higher Level Reviews</li> <li>• Quality Assurance</li> <li>• Developing training for each stream</li> </ul>
Compensation Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction to PL 115-55 &amp; RAMP: TMS 4411580</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• RAMP Intake Procedures: TMS 4411581</li> <li>• RAMP Higher-Level Review Procedures: TMS 4411583</li> <li>• RAMP Development Actions: TMS 4411582</li> <li>• RAMP Decisions: TMS 4411584</li> <li>• RAMP Improved Decision Notices: TMS 4411594</li> <li>• Understanding Rating Decisions &amp; Notification Letters – TMS 3729193</li> <li>• Introduction to Processing Rating Decisions – TMS 3903013</li> <li>• Effective Dates (RVSR) – TMS 3937550</li> <li>• Effective Date-General (RVSR) – TMS 4185272</li> <li>• Processing Rating Decisions – TMS 4175973</li> <li>• Understanding Clear and Unmistakable Errors and Difference of Opinion – TMS 4175764</li> <li>• Authorization Introduction – TMS 4183443</li> <li>• In-process Reviews (IPR) – Pre and Post – TMS 3893321</li> <li>• Date of Claim – TMS 1279927</li> <li>• Duty to Assist – TMS 4176475</li> <li>• VSR Overview – Stages of a claim module – TMS 3733282</li> <li>• Introduction to Ratings – TMS 61922</li> <li>• Rating Decision Requirements – TMS 4279300</li> <li>• Appeals Overview – TMS 4194306</li> <li>• Appeals DRO Review Process – TMS 4180677</li> <li>• Deferred Ratings, Partial Ratings, and Acceptable Clinical Evidence TMS 4192343</li> <li>• Non-Original Claims for Reconsideration – TMS 4183281</li> <li>• Mail Management – TMS 1279424</li> </ul>
Board of Veterans' Appeals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop and present internal processes to handle the receipt and tracking of notices of disagreement and withdrawals of appeals under the VBA RAMP pilot program</li> <li>• Developing training for broad overview of new appeals process for administrative and legal staff</li> <li>• Developing training for each appeal stream, to include legacy appeals for new hires</li> </ul>
Insurance Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Higher Level Reviews</li> <li>• Supplemental Claim Reviews</li> </ul>

Benefits Assistance Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• NCC/NPCC/NIRC PCR New Hire Appeals Process</li> <li>• NCC/NPCC/NIRC PCR New Hire Status of Appeal</li> <li>• NCC/NPCC/NIRC PCR New Hire Understanding Rating Decisions &amp; Notification Letters</li> <li>• PCT PCR New Hire Appeals Process</li> <li>• PCT PCR New Hire Status of Appeal</li> <li>• PCT PCR New Hire Understanding Rating Decisions &amp; Notification Letters</li> <li>• NCC/NPCC/NIRC PCR Refresher Appeals Process</li> <li>• NCC/NPCC/NIRC PCR Refresher Status of Appeal</li> <li>• PCT PCR Refresher Appeals Process</li> <li>• PCT PCR Refresher Status of Appeal</li> <li>• Introduction to the New Appeals System (overview of the appeals process)</li> <li>• Status of Appeals Training for Public-facing Employees (incorporating the updated process and updated mandatory scripts)</li> <li>• Introduction to Rating Decisions and Notification Letters</li> </ul>
Education Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TBD</li> </ul>
Pension and Fiduciary Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appeals Modernization Overview</li> <li>• Addressing BVA Remands Due to Appeals Modernization</li> <li>• Processing Higher-Level of Reviews</li> <li>• Processing Supplemental Claims</li> <li>• How to Use Caseflow</li> <li>• Duty to Assist (Intermediate), 1197931</li> <li>• Standardized VA Forms, Part I, Standardized Appeals Form for Pension, 3914056</li> <li>• Standardized VA Forms Part II, Standardized Appeals Form for Pension, 3914064</li> <li>• Appeals Orientation, New Appeals Procedures, 4179826</li> <li>• Appeals: SOC and SSOC New Appeals Procedures, 4179841</li> <li>• Appeals Processing: New Appeals Procedures, 4180046</li> <li>• Appeals DRO Review Process: New Appeals Procedures, 4180677</li> <li>• Introduction to Appeals: New Appeals Procedures, 4193050</li> <li>• Appeals Overview: New Appeals Procedures 4194306</li> </ul>
Loan Guaranty Service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• TBD</li> </ul>
Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How to Use Caseflow Tool: TMS 4179627</li> <li>• VR&amp;E Appeals Modernization Overview</li> <li>• VR&amp;E Appeals Modernization Notification Requirements</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• VR&amp;E Appeals Modernization Review Types and VR&amp;E Appeals Modernization Tracking Procedures</li><li>• VR&amp;E Appeals EPSS</li></ul>
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Title/Topic (suggested)	Training Development Date(s)	Concurrence Submission Date	Training Deployment Date(s)	Training Duration	Delivery Method	Project Dependencies (Please include any IT systems dependencies)	Risk(s)
How to Use Caseflow Certification Tool: TMS 4179627	VRE Service will review preexisting training.	VRE Service will review preexisting training.	August 2018	9 min	Video/TMS	(Pre-existing/Prerequisite Training)  Compensation Service training will be evaluated to see if it can be repurposed for VRE Service training needs.	VR&E Service develops Caseflow Certification Training.
VR&E Appeals Modernization Overview	February 2018	March 2018	July 2018	60 min	Webinar/TMS	N/A: VR&E Service existing employees, whose duties already include developing and/or providing training, will complete this training requirement.	N/A
VR&E Appeals Modernization Notification Requirements	March 2018	April 2018	August 2018	30 min	Webinar/TMS	N/A: VR&E Service existing employees, whose duties already include developing and/or providing training, will complete this training requirement.	N/A
VR&E Appeals Modernization Review Types and Forms	April 2018	May 2018	September 2018	90 min	Webinar/TMS	N/A: VR&E Service existing employees, whose duties already include developing	N/A

						and/or providing training, will complete this training requirement.	
VR&E Appeals Modernization Tracking Procedures	May 2018	June 2018	October 2018	60 min	Webinar/TMS	IT SharePoint: VR&E Service is developing an interim SharePoint Site for tracking. Then data will be tracked in a new case management system.  VR&E Service existing employees, whose duties already include developing and/or providing training, will complete this training requirement.	SharePoint data is manually entered vs. automatic population (increased human error).  Unknown date for data to be automatically fed into the new case management system.
VR&E Appeals EPSS	TBD	TBD	December 2018	Self-paced, independent job aid	Web Portal/Stand Alone Access	Supportive Job Aid: This is an electronic Appeals Job Aid that assists users on a "just-in-time" basis.  EDT Contractor Funds	EDT allocated funds and timeline for completion is based on the period of performance.  VR&E Service employee bandwidth with competing projects.

# APPENDICES

## Appendix C – Outreach/Communications Activities

FY-Quarter	Completed Outreach Task Date	Outreach/Communication Activities
FY2018-Quarter 1	October 23, 2017: <i>NACVSO presentation</i>	Presentation to the National Association of County Veterans Service Officers (NACVSO) on RAMP and Appeals modernization. NACVSO represents approximately 1,800 service officers from 36 states as well as Native American Tribes.
FY2018-Quarter 1	November 1, 2017: <i>Deployed call scripts to NCC</i>	Phase one of RAMP began with an initial mailing to 500 Veterans.  National Call Center (NCC) scripts and frequently asked questions were released to call center agents on RAMP and Appeals modernization.
FY2018-Quarter 1	November 2, 2017: <i>VA's Appeals Website Launched</i>	On November 2 <sup>nd</sup> VA released an appeals modernization website. Located at <a href="https://benefits.va.gov/benefits/appeals.asp">https://benefits.va.gov/benefits/appeals.asp</a> , the website, easily assessable from the Department of Veteran Affairs homepage, provides Veterans with information on various aspects of appeals modernization. Moreover, through additional links, the website provides information on the Act, VA's implementation plan, and RAMP.  To improve visibility of the site and provide better content to Veterans and other stakeholders, VA worked to make the page accessible through web based search engines (e.g. google) through various search optimization features.
FY2018-Quarter 1	November 2, 2017: <i>Social Medial Posts about RAMP and Appeals Modernization</i>	VA released a blog article, as well as Facebook and Twitter Posts on RAMP and appeals modernization  <i>VAntage Point</i> is the official blog of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. On November 2 <sup>nd</sup> , VA posted an article on RAMP and appeals modernization " <i>VA launches program aimed at providing Veterans more options in claims disagreements</i> " <a href="https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/42745/va-launches-program-aimed-providing-veterans-options-claims-disagreements/">https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/42745/va-launches-program-aimed-providing-veterans-options-claims-disagreements/</a>  With a community of over 540,000 total followers, VBA's Facebook, page is excellent platform to inform Veterans and other stakeholders of RAMP and Appeals Modernization. On November 2 <sup>nd</sup> , VA posted a message through this platform on RAMP and appeals modernization



		<p><a href="https://www.facebook.com/VeteransBenefits/">https://www.facebook.com/VeteransBenefits/</a></p> <p>With a community of over 629,000 total followers, VA's Twitter feed is excellent platform to inform Veterans and other stakeholders of RAMP and Appeals Modernization. On November 2<sup>nd</sup>, VA posted an message through this platform on RAMP and appeals modernization <a href="https://twitter.com/DeptVetAffairs/status/926162296811945984">https://twitter.com/DeptVetAffairs/status/926162296811945984</a></p>
FY2018-Quarter 1	November 3, 2017: <i>Internal communication products released to VA employees</i>	<p>VA released internal communication products tailored to inform employees about RAMP and appeals modernization. "VA Insider," is an internal informational website that is used Department wide to inform employees about important agency information. VA Insider is available to all 377,000 VA employees. On November 3<sup>rd</sup>, VA released a post designed to inform employees on RAMP and appeals modernization. "VA Launches Program Aimed at Resolving Appeals Earlier" <a href="https://myva.va.gov/va-launches-program-aimed-at-resolving-appeals-earlier/">https://myva.va.gov/va-launches-program-aimed-at-resolving-appeals-earlier/</a></p> <p>HeyVBA is an internal informational website that is used within VBA to inform employees about important administration information. HeyVBA is available to all 27,000 VBA employees. VBA released a post designed to inform employees on RAMP and appeals modernization. "VA Launches Program Aimed at Resolving Appeals Earlier" <a href="http://vaww.blog.va.gov/heyvba/?p=9461">http://vaww.blog.va.gov/heyvba/?p=9461</a></p>
FY2018-Quarter 1	November 5, 2017	<p>Presentation to the Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Service Offices, during their National Advanced Skills Training on RAMP and appeals modernization. VFW is one of the nation's largest organizations of combat veterans.</p>
FY2018-Quarter 1	November 23, 2017: <i>Internal communication products released to VA employees</i>	<p>VA released additional internal communication products tailored to inform employees about RAMP and appeals modernization.</p> <p>"VA Insider," is an internal informational website that is used Department wide to inform employees about important agency information. VA Insider is available to all 377,000 VA employees. On November 3<sup>rd</sup>, VA released a post designed to inform employees on RAMP and appeals modernization. "VA Works to Modernize Appeals Process to Meet Secretary Shulkin's Priority of Improving Timeliness" <a href="https://myva.va.gov/va-works-to-modernize-appeals-process-to-meet-secretary-shulkins-priority-of-improving-timeliness/">https://myva.va.gov/va-works-to-modernize-appeals-process-to-meet-secretary-shulkins-priority-of-improving-timeliness/</a></p>

FY2018-Quarter 1	December 14, 2017: <i>Social Media Blogs added</i>	<p>VA released additional blog content tailored to inform Veterans and other stakeholders about RAMP and appeals modernization.</p> <p><i>VAntage Point</i> is the official blog of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. On December 14<sup>th</sup>, VA posted an article on RAMP and appeals modernization “<i>VA launches program to resolve compensation appeals sooner</i>”  <a href="https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/43798/va-launches-program-resolve-compensation-appeals-sooner/">https://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/43798/va-launches-program-resolve-compensation-appeals-sooner/</a></p>
FY2018-Quarter 2	January 15, 2018	VA mailed follow-up letters to Veterans who have received a RAMP opt-in letter. The letters were mailed to approximately 5,500 Veterans from the November and December mailing cohorts.
FY2018-Quarter 2	January 23, 2018	Training on RAMP and appeals modernization provided to VBA outreach specialists at the National Outreach Training Call
FY2018-Quarter 2	January 25, 2018	Communications packages were emailed to every VBA regional office director. The packages contained updated information regarding appeals modernization and RAMP which are suitable for briefing VA stakeholders, employees and Veterans.
FY2018-Quarter 2	January 25, 2018	Presentation at the bi-annual Veterans Service Organization / Military Service Organization Summit on RAMP and appeals modernization
FY2018-Quarter 2	January 30, 2018	A conference call was conducted with all VBA regional office directors. They were asked to conduct town halls to communicate appeals modernization and RAMP to both VBA employees, Veteran Service Officers, and other necessary stakeholders.
FY2018-Quarter 2	January 31, 2018	<p>VA released an additional Facebook communication product on RAMP and Appeals modernization</p> <p>With a community of over 540,000 total followers, VBA's Facebook, page is excellent platform to inform Veterans and other stakeholders of RAMP and Appeals Modernization. On January 31<sup>st</sup>, VA posted a message through this platform on RAMP and appeals modernization  <a href="https://www.facebook.com/VeteransBenefits/">https://www.facebook.com/VeteransBenefits/</a></p>
FY2018-Quarter 2	February 5-9, 2018	<p>RAMP start-up phase is expanded to other ROs (closing out start-up phase, beginning of phase II “expansion phase”).</p> <p>Town halls were conducted with outreach personnel,</p>

		Veteran Service Officers, local congressional staff, and other stakeholders at Phoenix, Oakland, Los Angeles, and San Diego (see attached outreach schedule)
FY2018-Quarter 2	February 15, 2018	VA mailed follow-up letters to Veterans who have received a RAMP opt-in letter. The letters were mailed to approximately 10,000 Veterans from the January mailing cohort.
FY2018-Quarter 3	April 1, 2018	RAMP expansion phase will have reached all districts. Outreach includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• RO Townhalls with VBA employees (continue as necessary)</li> <li>• Social media communication such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube etc.</li> <li>• Updates to National Call Center scripts as necessary (internal)</li> <li>• Updates as necessary to VA.gov webpage on Appeals Modernization</li> </ul>
FY2019-Quarter 1	October 1, 2018	Closing phase of RAMP. Outreach includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social media releases</li> <li>• Updates to National Call Center scripts as necessary (internal)</li> <li>• Updates as necessary to VA.gov webpage on Appeals Modernization</li> </ul>
FY2019-Quarter 2	January 14, 2019	<i>Secretary Certifies that he is ready to implement.</i>
FY2019-Quarter 2	February 14, 2019	<i>Full implementation of the new law.</i> Outreach and communication includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Web communication on internet sites such as VA.gov, and other VAs social media sites (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube etc.),</li> <li>• Communications through regular mail, email, print, and traditional media outlets,</li> <li>• FAQs for National VA Call Center and Public Contact representatives (internal)</li> <li>• Town halls with VA employees</li> <li>• Presentations at community-based events such as state fairs, VA stand-downs, and other outreach activities.</li> </ul>