



NOTES FROM VBA AND VETERAN LEADERS MEETING – JUNE 11, 2020

The call was facilitated by Michael Stoddard, VBA VSO Liaison, Under Secretary for Benefits. Stacey-Rae Simcox from Stetson, Caleb Stone from William & Mary, and Chantal Wentworth-Mullin from Syracuse represented the NLSVCC.

Introduction

- This call was set up to focus solely on VBMS and mail processing.
- This call was a logistics disaster, and it started 15 minutes late. The hosts were unwilling or unable to mute the audience, and presenters had trouble getting and staying connected.

VBMS Tutorial (Lacey Devich)

- VBMS can filter by several attributes, including “Rating Decision Complete.”
 - Devich suggested checking this filter often because decisions won’t stay in this status this long—it wasn’t clear if there’d be any power to catch mistakes and get them fixed.
 - VBMS can use bookmarks to filter claims into the “My Claims” tab.
- Any IT changes at this point will cost money and needs to be accounted for in VA’s budget.
- There was a lot of palpable frustration from VSOs about the lack of notifications when decisions are issued, among other issues.
- This presentation was difficult to follow; basically, VSOs were concerned that bookmarks and filters could affect the ability of the entire VSO to view veteran files.
- The VSO Committee may pool resources with NOVA and attempt to set up a small group meeting with VA IT personnel.

Mail Operations Update (Michael Taylor)

- This discussion is allegedly at the start of a “seven-part” conversation that will be continued monthly (until next year).
 - (This part of the call was cut short. For further information, see the slides sent with these notes.)
 - VA has been working on this project for the past six months.
 - The bottom line is that the VA is considering success to equal faster mail processing. Not necessarily better or easier for the veteran. Just faster. (The stated mantra was “faster is better.”) **THIS INCLUDES ENDING THE ABILITY TO FAX THE VA EVIDENCE INTAKE CENTER ON JANUARY 1, 2020.**
 - There is currently a lot of variance as to how long it takes mail gets into the VA portal and receive action—mail automation is trying to streamline that process.
 - VA receives around 50% of all information from veterans by paper mail.
 - To date, Mail Automation Services (MAS) has automatically processed over 250,000 mail packets.
 - MAS uses Robotic Process Automation, Advanced Optical Character Recognition, and artificial intelligence to “read” documents, verify completion, and extract information.
 - The VA is trying to get robots to take actions that claims assistants currently take in VBMS.
 - The VA is relying on the Veterans and us to submit precisely accurate, legible, and correct forms, to assist the computers’ ability to read them.



- VA is asking VSOs to take three sets of concrete actions:
 - **1. Use Direct Upload or Direct Submit**
 - As a precursor, Taylor stated that electronic submission will be much quicker than mail and that fax machines have significant problems with image quality.
 - Direct Upload registration is available for accredited VA representatives at <https://dmhs.digitalcontentservices.com/>. Direct Upload is linked to ID.me services, so registrants will need to go through the initial process to prove their identities.
 - **NOTE: It is technically possible to register under the NLSVCC banner. For now, don't do this. Register as a private attorney.**
 - **2. Double Check Form Completion**
 - Submit legible, quality documents.
 - Ensure all checkboxes are entirely filled-in.
 - If information is not applicable, leave the field blank; do not use "N/A."
 - Do not use acronyms for Veterans Service Organization names or claimed disabilities.
 - Keep handwritten notes clear with BLOCK letters written in dark ink.
 - Sign and date forms clearly with dark ink (though electronic signatures will be acceptable).
 - **3. Use the Latest Forms**
 - Starting January 1, 2021, VBA will no longer accept outdated form versions.
- **Again, starting January 1, 2021, VA will no longer be accepting fax submissions.**
 - VA's reasoning reverted to "faster is better."
 - Taylor also raised concerns about image quality problems created by bad fax machines.
 - As this is a significant issue for our members that could negatively affect our veterans, NLSVCC will be taking action to attempt to get the VA to reconsider this change.
- VA is soliciting feedback on the following issues (to be provided by COB 6/18/2020):
 - What information is needed to encourage Veterans with an internet connection to file online?
 - What information is necessary for VBA to continue encouraging Veterans to work with accredited VSOs to submit online?
 - What are other "must-have" data points to encourage Veterans to file online?
- Relevant contact information:
 - For Questions on Mail Automation Services: VBACO.MailAutomation@va.gov
 - For Questions on Accessing Online Submission Systems: VCIP.VBACO@va.gov
- **Mail Concerns (In the chatbox only—no questions were taken)**
 - VSOs were concerned about the future inability to fax documents.
 - VSOs were concerned that Direct Upload doesn't always upload documents correctly.
 - VSOs were concerned about public notification about outdated documents no longer acceptable.
 - One VSO noted that leaving fields blank on certain forms would lead to a rejection/kickback.

How to Support Automation for Faster Claims Processing

June 11, 2020



VA



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

Agenda

1. Inform + Educate: Mail Automation Recap and Overview

A. Lead: Michael Taylor

2. Inform + Educate: How VSOs can Support Automation for Faster Claims Processing

A. Lead: Michael Taylor

3. Inform + Collaborate: How to File a Claim Online Comms Campaign

A. Lead: Derek Herbert




**Important Policy Updates and
Request for Support in this Presentation**

Discussion Context

What This Discussion Is:

- ✓ Part 1 Kick Off of a 7 Part Discussion on Supporting Automation for Faster Claims Processing as it relates to Mail Automation Services and Claims Intake
- ✓ 6 month notification of new processes to be put in place by January 2021
- ✓ Collaboration opportunity to partner in supporting automation for faster claims processing for Veterans and Claimants

Month	June	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec
Update #	1 ✓	2	3	4	5	6	7
Purpose	Kick Off Discussion	Additional Information and Engagement 					

Inform:

Mail Automation Services (MAS) Recap and Overview

- 1. What:** Mail Automation Services is a software solution that moves Compensation Mail scanned into the Mail Portal to the next step. To date, MAS has automatically processed over 250,000 mail packets.
- 2. How:** Mail Automation uses Robotic Process Automation and Advanced Optical Character Recognition to “read” documents, verify completion, and extract information.



IMPACT: VSRs now have faster access to Veteran information to work on a Veteran's claim. This means FASTER delivery of benefits to Veterans.

Educate:

How VSOs can Support Automation for Faster Claims Processing

There are 3 concrete actions VSOs can take to support faster claims processing:

1. **Use Direct Upload or Direct Submit:** Digital processing is faster than paper processing- urge VSOs to submit electronically whenever possible
2. **Double Check Form Completion:** VBA receives many forms that are incomplete and without signature- this delays claims processing
 - Submit legible, quality documents
 - Ensure all checkboxes are completely filled-in
 - If information is not applicable, **leave the field blank**; do not use “N/A”
 - Do not use acronyms for Veterans Service Organization names or claimed disabilities
 - Keep handwritten notes clear with BLOCK letters written in dark ink
 - Sign and date forms clearly with dark ink
3. **Always Use the Latest Forms Version:** Available on www.va.gov/vaforms/. This is to ensure the automation can “read” the correct forms to process claims faster.
 - ✓ **IMPORTANT:** Starting January 1, 2021, VBA will no longer be accepting outdated form versions. Please work with Veterans to submit only the latest form version.
 - ✓ This is to ensure the automation can “read” the correct forms to process claims faster

Mail Automation Services (MAS) FAQs

1. How many processes are currently automated?

Automations have been deployed to process VA Forms 21-0966, 21-22, 21-526EZ, 27-0820, 21-0845, Returned Mail processes, as well as documents that provide supporting evidence to pending claims. To date, MAS has automatically processed over 250,000 mail packets.

2. Why might a mail packet not be processed by Automation?

Packets may not process due to containing documents that are not yet automated. For example, if the document is identified as an Appeals document or if the Automation cannot identify the Veteran/claimant.

3. What happens when a packet is not processed by Automation?

When a packet is not processed by Automation, it remains in the Centralized Mail Portal to be worked by a Regional Office employee.

4. How will I know if a form has been automated?

You should not be able to tell. The Automation processes were built around the same Rules, Regulations and processes used by the Regional Office employees.

5. After 01/01/2021, what if I use an outdated form(s)?

Outdated forms will be offramped from Automation and a letter will be mailed out to ensure all necessary information is collected off of the latest version of the form. Using the latest form version ensures the automation can “read” the correct forms to process claims faster.

How to File a Claim Online Communications Campaign

- ✓ **Campaign Goal:** Increase online claims submissions by VSOs and Claimants. Encourage all Veterans to connect with an accredited resource to do this.
- ✓ **Primary Audience:** Claimants and VSO Service Officers **WITH** an internet connection to submit information online
- ✓ **Rationale:** Claims submitted electronically are processed faster than paper submissions.
 - VBA still receives ~50% of all information from Veterans via paper mail
- ✓ **How VSOs Can File a Claim Online:**
 1. Direct Upload (Internal)
 2. Direct Upload: ***NEW*** Expanded Direct Upload access to ID.me, live on Access VA
 3. Direct Submit
- ☐ **Request for Support:** VBA needs help from VSOs to direct their service officers and Veterans to use electronic submission of information whenever possible
- ☐ **IMPORTANT:** Starting Jan 1, 2021, VA will no longer be accepting fax submissions. Please work with Veterans to only submit online as much as possible or via mail.

How VSOs can File a Claim Online FAQs

1. How can VSOs already submit claims online today and after 01/01/2021?

- VSOs can use a variety of electronic submission capabilities to include Direct Upload, Direct Submit, va.gov and can work with Veterans to also file their claims online through eBenefits

2. What happens if VSOs submit claims via fax after 01/01/2021?

- When received, the materials will be uploaded to the eFolder and a letter sent directing the VSO to resubmit electronically

3. How do VSOs get access to the various electronic systems?

- A. For Direct Upload: Self-registration is available by navigating directly to the site <https://dmhs.digitalcontentservices.com/> or via <https://eauth.va.gov/accessva/>
- B. For Direct Submit: Speak to your Claims Management Tool provider
 - i. Currently VetPro, VetraSpec, VA ClaimHelper, Micropact, eVetAssist, Washington County, WI and Cabarrus County, NC and Bell Data Systems. Libera's Antesto tool has been approved for production and will start in the near future.

NOTE: VBA is ready and able to provide demos and step-by-step support to any and all VSOs who need help accessing online submission systems

Collaborate:

How to File a Claim Online: Veteran-Facing Comms Campaign

VSO Input Needed

1. Veteran-facing comms campaign:
 - What information is needed to encourage Veterans with an internet connection to file online?
 - What information is necessary for VBA to continue encouraging Veterans to work with accredited VSOs to submit online?
 - Other “must-have” data points to encourage Veterans to file online?

Suspense: Please provide any feedback on the above

NLT COB 6/18 to Mike Stoddard and JP @ John.DiMartino@va.gov

Contact:

1. For Questions re: Mail Automation Services
 - A. VBACO_MailAutomation@va.gov
2. For Questions re: How to File a Claim Online Comms Campaign
 - A. John.DiMartino@va.gov and michael.stoddard2@va.gov
3. For Questions re: Help Accessing Online Submission Systems
 - A. VCIP.VBACO@va.gov