

Highlights of [GAO-10-1029T](#), a testimony to the Subcommittee on Disability Assistance and Memorial Affairs, Committee on Veterans' Affairs, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

GAO was asked to present its views on the training requirements and procedures for VA personnel responsible for processing compensation and pension claims. This statement is based primarily upon an April 2010 GAO report on VA's training for experienced disability claims processors ([GAO-10-445](#)) and includes information on actions VBA says it has taken in response to our recommendations. This statement focuses on (1) experienced disability claims processors' views regarding training, and (2) VBA's efforts to monitor and assess training for experienced disability claims processors.

What GAO Recommends

In its April report, GAO recommended that VBA (1) adopt procedures for routinely monitoring and ensuring compliance with annual training requirements, including more fully using its Web-based learning management system to ensure training requirements are met, (2) develop clear written guidance on the types of activities all regional offices should and should not count toward completion of annual training requirements, and (3) develop and implement a written strategy for systematically assessing the appropriateness of the training regional offices provide to experienced claims processors. VA concurred with these recommendations and has taken some actions in response.

View [GAO-10-1029T](#) or [key components](#).
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VETERANS' BENEFITS

Training for Experienced Disability Claims Processors

What GAO Found

Experienced claims processors had concerns about the amount of training they were required to complete and their ability to meet that requirement. In addition, they had mixed views on the amount of training received on specific topics, the way in which training was delivered and the timing of training. GAO's survey results indicated that 60 percent of experienced claims processors found it difficult to meet the 80 hour annual training requirement given their workload. In addition, based on its survey, GAO estimates that 45 percent of supervisors of experienced Rating Veterans Service Representatives (RVSRS) and 53 percent of supervisors of experienced Veterans Service Representatives (VSR) thought that only some or few, if any, of the experienced staff they supervise need 80 hours of training annually to perform their job duties effectively.

Many experienced staff also thought they received too little training on some topics and too much on others. For example, 47 percent thought they received less training than needed in how to develop appeals and remands and 34 percent thought they received more than enough training on records management. Finally, opinions varied on how helpful the various modes of training were. Nearly all claims processors, in general, considered on-the-job experience to be the method of training best suited to their needs. An estimated 39 percent of all experienced claims processors, in general, felt that the training they received was delivered too late, suggesting that regional offices may not always deliver the training needed by experienced claims processors in a timely manner.

According to *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, federal agencies must have control mechanisms in place to help ensure that all employees receive appropriate and consistent training. Under its current annual training requirements, VBA delegates considerable responsibility for training experienced claims processors to each of its 57 regional offices. In particular, regional offices are responsible for ensuring that claims processors complete annual training requirements. Each office also determines what topics are covered for half of the required training hours, what material to provide on each of these topics, and how and when the training should occur. Regional offices also have considerable discretion in determining what activities qualify as training. However, at the time of GAO's review, VBA lacked controls to ensure that regional offices deliver required training and record completed training in a consistent manner, and did little to assess the appropriateness or consistency of all training for experienced claims processors. During the course of our review and in response to our recommendations, VBA has taken steps to improve its monitoring and assessment of training. VBA reports that they are developing guidance on what activities qualify as training, have begun to require staff to complete course evaluations for some training and are exploring the feasibility of requiring evaluations for all training.