### Section B. The Stakeholder Enterprise Portal (SEP) Role in the Veterans Online Application (VONAPP) Direct Connect (VDC) Process

#### Overview

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| **In This Section** | This section contains the following topics: |

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| **Topic** | **Topic Name** |
| 1 | Introduction to SEP |
| 2 | Original and Supplemental Claims for Compensation Submitted Through SEP |

#### 1. Introduction to SEP

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| **Introduction**  | This topic contains information about SEP and how the system interacts with Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) systems through VDC, including* purpose of SEP
* VDC interview process in SEP, and
* establishment of power of attorney (POA) through VDC/SEP.
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| **Change Date** | June 19, 2015 |

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| **a. Purpose of SEP** | The Stakeholder Enterprise Portal (SEP) is a secure and seamless web-based entry portal for Veterans Service Organizations (VSOs), claim agents, and private attorneys who provide services to claimants or conducts business with the Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA).Through SEP these Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) external stakeholders can* submit an original claim for compensation
* submit a supplemental claim for compensation
* submit a claim for dependency benefits
* upload supporting documentation
* search and view the payment history for clients
* search and view claim status for a client, and
* manage *VA Form 21-22*, *Appointment of Veterans Service Organization as Claimant’s Representative*, agreements received online through eBenefits.

***Note***: The *VA Form 21-22a*, *Appointment of Individual As Claimant’s Representative*, is *not* available for private attorneys and claims agents to manage online through SEP. |

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| **b. VDC Interview Process in SEP** | For claims submission, SEP utilizes the same interview process found in the Veterans Online Application (VONAPP) Direct Connect (VDC). This interview process limits omissions and misinterpretations of information requested from the claimant for adjudicating a claim.Currently, VDC contains an interview process for claimant’s representatives for the following forms* *VA Form 21-526EZ*, *Application for Disability Compensation and Related Compensation Benefits*, and supporting optional forms
* *VA Form 21-0781*, *Statement in Support of Claim for Service Connection for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)*
* *VA Form 21-0781a*, *Statement in Support of Claim for Service Connection for Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) Secondary to Personal Assault*
* *VA Form 21-8940*, *Veteran's Application for Increased Compensation Based on Unemployability*
* *VA Form 21-4502*, *Application for Automobile or Other Conveyance and Adaptive Equipment*
* *VA Form 21-2680*, *Examination for Housebound Status or Permanent Need For Regular Aid and Attendance*, and
* *VA Form 21-686c*, *Declaration of Status of Dependents*, and
* *VA Form 21-674*, *Request for Approval of School Attendance*.

***References***: For more information on * eBenefits, see the Benefits Assistance Service (BAS) website to [Learn More About eBenefits](http://vbaw.vba.va.gov/BAS/web-communications/eBenefits/learnmore.asp), and
* VONAPP, see the [*VONAPP User Guide*](http://vbaw.vba.va.gov/bl/21/Publicat/Users/docs/VONAPPuserdoc.pdf).
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| **c. Establishment of POA Through VDC/SEP** | VDC allows claimants to elect a VSO to represent them during the claims process as their power of attorney (POA). The table below outlines the process that occurs when a claimant selects a VSO as their POA in VDC. |

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| **Stage** | **Description** |
| 1 | Upon submission, the *VA Form 21-22* loads into the VSOs representation request dashboard in SEP.***Note***: The *VA Form 21-22* will*not* appear in the Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS) or Virtual VA eFolders. |
| 2 | The VSO reviews the representation request.* If representation is *accepted* by the POA, VDC automatically takes the following actions
* *VA Form 21-22* will upload to Virtual VA within 24-48 hours
* the corporate database will automatically update in real time with the newly elected POA information, and
* the Veteran will receive notification of the POA’s acceptance in the eBenefits message center.
* If representation is ***rejected*** by the POA, the Veteran is notified via eBenefits message center.

***Important***: Any automated POA established through SEP is valid for VA purposes and not subject to the requirements of paper *VA Form 21-22* processing.***Notes***:* The signature blocks on the *VA Form 21-22* will contain the signature text as indicated by
* //es// First Initial + Last Name of Veteran, and
* //es// First Initial + Last Name of the VSO Representative.
* Due to a technical issue, *VA Form 21-22s* submitted through SEP/VDC between March 22, 2015, and May 3, 2015, do not show an electronic signature of the Veteran. The forms without an electronic signature from this period remain valid for VA purposes.
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| ***References***: For more information on* Virtual VA, see the [*Virtual VA User Guide*](http://virtualva.vba.va.gov/training/guides/virtualvauser.pdf), and
* VBMS, see the [*VBMS User Guide*](http://vbaw.vba.va.gov/VBMS/Resources_Technical_Information.asp).
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#### 2. Original and Supplemental Claims for Compensation Submitted Through SEP

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| **Introduction** | This topic contains information regarding submission of original claims for compensation through SEP, including* overview of original claims submission through SEP
* uploaded personalized signature page method
* personalized signature page validation procedure
* developing to the Veteran for a valid signature page for SEP claims
* subsequent receipt of signature page for SEP claims
* the checkmark solution
* identifying original claims submitted using the checkmark solution
* signature page characteristics for supplemental claims submitted through SEP
* electronic Section 5103 notice through eBenefits for claims submitted through SEP, and
* system annotations on claim documents submitted through SEP.
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| **Change Date** | June 19, 2015 |

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| **a. Overview of Original Claims Submission Through SEP** | Through SEP, representatives holding POA can submit original claims for compensation benefits. However, submission through SEP must comply with all policies regarding original claims. POAs submitting original claims can comply with the signature requirements in M21-1, Part I, 1.B.1 via the* uploaded personalized signature page method, and/or
* checkmark solution.

***Note***:POAs will be prompted to complete one of these two methods for original claim submission. The POA is required to do one or the other and *not* both. |

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| **b. Uploaded Personalized Signature Page Method** | A personalized signature page download is available to POAs during the VDC interview process in SEP.The personalized signature page contains* the Veteran’s name
* the claims file number, and
* Section V: Claim Certification and Signature from *VA Form 21-526EZ*.

Upon completion, the *VA Form 526EZ* and personalized signature page are uploaded into VBMS. The personalized signature page will appear in VBMS with the document type label *Signature page VDC submitted 21-526EZ*. |

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| **c. Personalized Signature Page Validation Procedure** | Follow the steps in the table below to validate the personalized signature page for an original claim for compensation benefits. |

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| **Step** | **Action** |
| 1 | Open and review the *VA Form 21-526EZ.*Is this an original claim for compensation benefits according to the guidance found in M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, 2.B.1?* If *yes,* proceed to Step 2.
* If *no,* process as a supplemental claim with no need for a signature to be substantively complete.
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| 2 | Review *VA Form 21-526EZ*.Does block 22A contain an “X” followed by the Veteran’s typed name and block 23A contain the electronic signature of a POA with an OGC number?* If *yes*, the claim is signed using the checkmark solution. Update the claim with the Veteran’s Fully Developed Claim (FDC) choice found in box 21 of the signature page and process the claim.
* If *no,* proceed to Step 3.

***Reference***: See M21-1, Part III, Subpart i, 4.B.2.f, for more information on the checkmark solution. |
| 3 | Review the VBMS eFolder for a document labeled *Signature page VDC submitted 21-526EZ* corresponding to the claim at issue.Is there a document in the VBMS eFolder labeled *Signature Page VDC submitted 21-526EZ*?* If *yes*, proceed to the next step.
* If *no*, proceed to Step 5.
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| 4 | Open the VBMS eFolder document labeled *Signature page VDC submitted 21-526EZ*.Is the image a *VA Form 21-526EZ* signature page with the appropriate imaged wet signature belonging to the claimant? * If *yes,* update the claim with the Veteran’s FDC choice found in box 21 of the signature page and process the claim.
* If *no,* proceed to the next step.
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| 5 | Use the table below to determine the proper course of action when an original claim submitted through SEP fails to meet the signature requirements for a substantially complete claim.

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| **If the date of receipt is ...** | **Then ...** |
| prior to March 24, 2015 | consider the application an informal claim for benefits and take the following actions* change the EP to an EP 400
* develop to the claimant for a valid signature page as outlined in M21-1, Part III, Subpart I, 4.B.2.d, and
* upon completion of development to the Veteran, clear EP.

***Reference:*** For more information on informal claims, see M21-1, Part III, Subpart ii, 2.D.1. |
| on or after March 24, 2015 | consider the application *not* substantially complete and take the following actions* develop to the claimant for a valid signature page as outlined in M21-1, Part III, Subpart I, 4.B.2.d, and
* return a printed copy of the application from VBMS to include the signature page.
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| **d. Developing to the Veteran for a Valid Signature Page for SEP Claims**  | When developing for a signature page for original claims submitted in VDC without a valid signature page or signature, take the following actions* send the Veteran a copy of the *VA Form 21-256EZ* signature page, and
* in the development letter include the language below.

*We have received your online application for compensation benefits submitted by your power of attorney, (insert POA name here), through the SEP (Stakeholder Enterprise Portal). However, the claim submitted did not include (insert reason signature page is not valid).* *Please sign and return the enclosed signature page. You have one year from the date of this letter to return a signed signature page to preserve any potential effective date based on your initial claim submission.**We will take no further action on your claim until we receive a signed signature page.* |

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| **e. Subsequent Receipt of Signature** **Page for SEP Claims** | When VA receives the signature page within one year of the date of the signature page development letter* consider the claims substantively complete
* re-establish the rating end product with a date of claim matching the receipt of the completed signature page, and
* use the receipt date of the *VA Form 21-526EZ* as the effective date for the claim.
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| **f. The Checkmark Solution** | During the SEP interview process, POAs can choose the checkmark solution to satisfy the signature requirements in M21-1, Part I, 1.B.3 by taking the following actions* in the presence of the POA, the Veteran checks a box affirming the information found on the *VA Form 21-526EZ*, Section V: Claim Certification and Signature, and
* the POA checks a box affirming witness to the Veteran providing the claim certification and signature as outlined in the previous action.
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| **e. Identifying Original Claims Submitted Using the Checkmark Solution** | To identify claims submitted using the checkmark solution, open the *VA Form 21-526EZ* to page 10 and verify the following* block 22A contain an “X” followed by the Veteran’s typed name, and
* block 23A contain the electronic signature of a POA with an OGC number.
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| **f. Signature Page Characteristics for Supplemental Claims Submitted Through SEP** | Supplemental claims submissions by POAs through SEP * do not require claimant or POA signatures, and
* may result in a blank signature block on the *VA Form 21-526EZ*.

***Note***: Although not required, the POA may choose to use the checkmark solution or upload the signature page. |

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| **g. Electronic Section 5103 Notice Through eBenefits for Claims Submitted in SEP** | eBenefits provides a generic electronic Section 5103 notice to the claimant for every claim filed by a POA in SEP. A sample of the notification letter sent to the claimant is shown below.  |

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| From: <VONAPPDirectConnectdonotrelplyemailbox@va.gov>Date: Sunday, July 20, 2014Subject: Application for Compensation Benefits submittedTo: JoeVeteran@gmail.comDear Veteran,Disabled American Veterans, your representative for VA Claims, has successfully submitted a Compensation Benefits Application on your behalf.Your confirmation number is **XXXXXXX**. Your submission includes the following documents:* VA Form 21-526: Application for Disability Compensation

We have provided a copy (PDF) of the **Notice to Veteran/Service Member of Evidence to Substantiate a Claim for Veterans Disability Compensation and Related Compensation Benefits** in response to your Compensation Benefits Application. The document provides you with useful information about how your compensation claim will be decided by VA.Please [download](https://www.ebenefits.va.gov/ebenefits-portal/downloads/VA_Compensation_Notice-What_the_Evidence_Must_Show.pdf) and print the document for your records. This download link will expire approximately one year from the date of your claim. |

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| ***Note***: Claims processors must review the claim to determine if a supplemental Section 5103 notice is needed. |

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| **h. System Annotations on Claim Documents Submitted Through SEP** | Claim documents submitted through SEP receive annotations on the top left corner of all pages on the *VA Form 21-526EZ*, showing* a date/time stamp with a notation that the claim was electronically submitted
* a statement noting the claim was submitted by the POA, and
* a statement that the a Section 5103 notice was emailed/messaged to the Veteran.
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