Section 8.

Views of the Administrators

In one office I listened to a voice from the center of a great polished desk. My host said “Is that program still around?” In another office my host sat and talked with me at the corner of his desk stacked high with today’s attention-grabbing problem cases. The second host said “I believe in RFW and support it among my staff. Here are some examples.” It was clear that the two administrators were telling me of the importance they attached to our evaluation study. RFW training had occurred at both stations. Administrator involvement ranged from officials who professed to have had no experience with and no opinion about the training program to persons who had been Reader Focused Writing trained. Administrators from Directors and Assistant Directors to Division Chiefs and Training Coordinators were ready to share their thoughts about RFW training program issues. Individual interviews were conducted at visited sites, and a survey was mailed to administrators at non-visited sites.1

The VBA is changing as an organization. It is employing fewer people to do the same or more work in different ways. Career life in the VBA is changing. Maturing career path programs are being bought out by the Agency. Early to mid career plans are in jeopardy due to “down-sizing.” Regional Office staff members at three locations told the story: We are going down from 108 to 102; The present staff is 168, down from a high of 225; Our staff has gone from 201 to 135 in three years, while the work has actually increased.

National initiatives begin from one administrator’s, or a task force’s, own initiative. Writing improvement training has a long history in the VBA. Each of the five Regional Offices we visited has had an initiative of some type, many plans were communication-based. Some programs were

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1 This review identifies the main interview topics and presents various remarks of the Regional Office administrators. Also included in this section are the responses to the Director Survey from directors at non-visited sites.
writing improvement efforts such as RFW through Central Office, others contracted with a local college or university.

We volunteered to participate in the pilot efforts and with as many courses as were available. At the same time we were enrolling our people in a “basic grammar” and an advanced course offered by our nearby college. We found it appropriate to offer both.

VBA combined its writing initiatives into the Reader Focused Writing program.

Interviewee Views

Most supervisors expressed agreement with and support of Reader Focused Writing, especially its rationale. Praise for RFW was repeated, including: . . . the chief officers of this RO are supportive of RFW . . . I was not involved in the training, but from talking to trainees and seeing their letters, I am for it 100% . . . My experience with RFW has been favorable . . . a strong commitment to in-service training for every employee . . . I have not seen or heard any drawbacks from the training.

Drawbacks were noted by some supervisors who found the training time consuming. They said, “It is hard to break old habits, old points of view, and it does take longer to write a RFW letter.” They were hopeful that the letters would not come back for further explanation. One said, “Reality is that clarity is not the reason that letters come back.” She added, “There is lots of resistance here among staff members. They saw RFW aimed at letter writing and their letters are already written [computerized].” Some trainees murmured, “Ho hum.” For some, RFW was an especially important topic because of staff reductions at the Regional Offices.

The Regional Offices claimed their letter writers made an attempt to speak to both the written and unwritten questions of the inquiring veterans. They supported the RFW goal of moving readers through information as efficiently as possible. They said it is important for all VBA employees to work harder to understand the needs of the veterans and to help veterans understand their action options. They saw some of their colleagues as better than others at interpreting a
veteran’s needs in a letter. The skill they sought most is the ability of the letter writer to give the veteran a thorough analysis of the reasoning of the adjudication. In the late 80s, the Court of Veterans Appeals began giving notice of the importance of Agency-veteran communications that increased understanding about contested claims, particularly understanding likely to preclude court level action.

RFW was seen to be doing positive things for letter writers. The administrators said their RFW trained writers were doing a good job, often a better job. They noted that trainees were discovering that clearer letters reduced the need for reworked letters and fewer phone calls from veterans. Succinctly put by one administrator: “Cutting down reworks. Not as many calls.”

One director observed that the quality of RFW training was apparent in its emphasis on what the Agency needed to do for customers. He predicted that the improved style of letters would help veterans better understand VBA letters. One supervisor said that this type of improvement is a notch forward toward concern for “the others.” Also that it helped VBA get away from the “conformance” mentality.

We asked division heads if same-topic letters should be the same at all sites? Several speakers “debated” the extent to which writing should be standardized across sites:

Some standardization of letters is desirable, some is not. . . Cleveland and St. Paul should do it the same way we do it. But people just hate automated responses.

If we standardize, are we really focusing on the reader? That question needs to be balanced with the increasing workload to be done with a decreasing staff. Something has to give.

Uniqueness is not in regions but in education and ability to understand. Uniquenesses? Yes.

An example would be state laws and income differences which require regional editions of fiduciary program guides.
Other problems are that state laws (statutes) affecting loan guaranty differ from state to state and language references, Spanish for example, need to be included to locate offices where the claimant must go to obtain evidence or service.

Is a simple letter to a veteran possible? One official said, “In my opinion there are no situations in which, acting fully in the interests of the veteran, it is not possible to write a simple letter, of course with the appropriate back-up (enclosures) . . . We would not expect RFW to cause letters to fail to convey the complexity of the claim situation.”

Productivity versus letter quality drew a ready response such as: the emphasis in our work is on productivity, not on quality. The director says so, the load says so. What needs to be looked at is what is being found by the Court of Veteran Appeals.

Give attention to new precedents . . . give lots of training on how to rate a case.

People take the quickest way out . . . Tension does exist between production and quality.

Letter quality is not the number one problem. There are substantial errors in the awards to be looked into. An evaluation should be directed at that. More than one senior staff member asked for help to be directed toward the resolution of the letter writing issue of quality versus productivity.

Our question about how much letter writing supervision was needed drew this response: It sometimes depends on the letter writers qualifications and VBA experience. The supervisor gave an example of hiring a Ratings Specialist:

They are regularly promoted from within. They are persons with adjudicator experience, who have a good reputation for comprehensive understandings, competence, ability and knowledge. One problem is that over the years, the work has become convoluted, needing greater expertise.
This speaker thought that letter writing ought to be done by people having content experience, although conceivably “a strategy of relying more on well-trained letter writing specialists without experience might work. “

Questions about Regional Office letter review before they leave the station brought forth this response at one site: Station correspondence review, which once monitored letters, had been de-emphasized; it became a division review. Loan Guaranty reviewed letters monthly. Each division had a member reviewing outgoing mail. Not much effort was being made at present. At another site: Increased controls were occurring in signing off the letter. Authorizers looked not for “RFW effect” but for content correctness such as amount of money required, percentages noted in the letter to the proper representatives, and telling the veteran what they should know. One supervisor encouraged a VBA-wide peer review system of letters.

On questioning, senior staff members spoke of writing needs specific to the divisions. This is one example about a Compensation and Pensions Division:

The C&P division deals with benefits to vets for service connected and non-service connected disabilities. The responsibility is to help those who have served their country. And widows as well. These are cases of medical problems. Medical records are reviewed by people called Ratings Specialists. Two here have medical degrees. Benefits are determined by the extent of disability to the nearest 10%, not related to rank or pay. The veteran provides the medical records; they are reviewed by the Regional Office’s Rating Specialists. The Rating Specialist writes few letters, rather they turn over their records review to Adjudicators who do write the decision letter to the veteran.

The administrators spoke about their view of the RFW initiative and Central Office support:

The RFW initiative suffers in the field because there is little real indication that the Central Office wants it. The letters they send out don’t show it. Until management responds to the initiative, it won’t fly.
We are frustrated that letters to us from CO are not in RFW format. It is hard to adopt any procedure if you see no push from the Central Office. Some people see it as a management fad, something that will pass in time.

In Washington only a few people are requesting RFW, all in one division of the Central Office. The other divisions appear to go along with it, they participated in it, but they do not accept it as an Agency goal, sometimes oppose it. Each has its own battles to fight. When the heads of the divisions at CO talked with heads of divisions at Regional Offices, they give little attention to RFW.

The word was clear that no substantial support for RFW was required in their line. For many it was just another temporary program, a phase, not to be considered part of a restructuring of the Agency. Just another program.

Many administrators voiced the opinion that oral communication and written communication principles are the same. One explained:

In these matters we often need to build confidence in the veteran. It is easier to explain things face-to-face. We have suggested that internal communication in some divisions could be improved with RFW concepts. There still are needs for special letters.

One administrator remarked about the need to strengthen team building in their local training situation:

We try to involve everyone in a training program. Unfortunately we do not presently have a training officer so I am responsible for the matter. One of the efforts is to create teams for better quality control of work. Our efforts to build teams is not very successful. It was a part of our Total Quality Management plan but without help currently from Washington or the local chief, we are not moving ahead. So that training is essentially on hold.

At one, training was pushed by an aggressive training officer. At another there was a quiet response to whatever in-service topic was being noticed locally or nationally.
RFW training improvement suggestions included:

Get top CO management to take the introduction course and commit themselves to sending staff letters to us in RFW style. They have used the same old style letters for 50 years.

As to RFW, the employees liked it, but there wasn’t enough follow-up. The medium was a problem. The equipment didn’t work. We spent too much time getting telephone back-up...

The level of training should have been simpler. Start with the generic, go to the complex. Need more samples of good letters.

Currently, Regional Office administrators were making their own decisions about what to do since RFW training from Central Office had stopped. One administrator said:

We were fully supportive of holistic writing. Now we have our own task force. We are waiting for VBA to start [RFW training] again. Until then we will rely on our own courses. Others are simply waiting for a centralized RFW training decision to be sent to the field.

The majority of people questioned gave responses falling near the views quoted at the beginning of this section. The majority appreciated the RFW training completed, along the line:

Efforts to improve our written communication are certainly worthwhile.²

Those who were trained were eager for additional support:

The material is really too good to be limited to letter writing. Very small modules could be used for other things, perhaps adapted at the RO or followed up by additional broadcasts.³

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² Letter and attachment from Lois Mittelstaedt for Thomas M. Lastowka, Acting Director, Eastern Area to Director, Communications Staff VACO. May 5, 1997.
³ Ibid.
Those still to be trained were eager to get it:

We have not participated in the Veterans Benefits Network training program but are interested in future broadcasts.¹

Many expressed patience with the interruption in training:

I am glad to respond to your letter about the current status of Reader Focused Writing and your request for comments on its development thus far. You will see that our general impression is a very positive one, and we hope that there will be a concerted effort to continue this initiative.⁵

Director Survey

Our director survey was designed to gather perceptions of directors of Regional Offices that we would not be visiting in person. We surveyed both the RFW-participating Regional Office Directors and non-participating Regional Office Directors. In addition to queries about the RFW program, we asked the directors about professional development activities and changes in infrastructure at their stations. It was important to us to understand their perceptions of the need for training, the appropriateness of the RFW approach, and the quality of instruction provided during the Fall of 1996.

On October 3, we mailed 52 directors of VBA Regional Offices a 20 minute survey.⁷ Forty-five directors ⁸

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¹ Letter from John T. Barnes III for Robert D. Morrell, Acting Center Director, Wichita, Kansas to Director Central Area (201B). May 7, 1997.
² Memorandum from C. F. Lami For Kristine A. Moffitt, Director, Compensation and Pension Service (21) to Under Secretary for Benefits (20). May 7, 1997.
³ Regional Office Directors not sent a survey were at Boise, Denver, Indianapolis, Baltimore and St. Louis.
⁴ On October 7, we discovered two typographical errors in the survey. We then faxed a revised survey to 51 stations. We were unable to obtain an accurate fax number, despite Lee Sherrill’s assistance, from one station before the original form was returned to us. We requested the directors replace the original survey with the faxed version if they had not already filled out the survey. The purpose for explaining our error rests in the possible discrepancy between the directors responding to the question of their ability to commit time to RFW training. The original form indicated the time to be 6 hours and the new form more accurately estimated the time commitment to be
responded to our request for their perspective. In the next section, we discuss responses from the 43 directors responding directly to the questions on our survey.

**Responses.** We asked “Have there been efforts at your Regional Office to improve the writing of letters to veterans?” and “Have you seen it to be an important issue?” To both these questions, unanimously the 43 directors responded “Yes.” We asked if they had objected to participating in RFW training and 42 directors responded “No.” Also, we asked if there was opposition on their staff to participation: 14 directors checked “None;” 10 directors checked “Some;” and one director checked “Lots.”

Loosely grouping our questions #7, 8, and 9 as inquiry about the support for the RFW initiative, we saw the majority endorsing RFW. Thirty-four of the directors indicated “Yes” to our question #7, “Does the content of the RFW approach make sense to you.” We then asked in question #8, “RFW is advocated as an approach not only to better letter writing but to all VBA written communication. Does this make sense to you?” Thirty-six responded “Yes.” In question #9, we asked if they saw RFW as applicable to writings of all VBA programs. Forty directors answered “Yes.”

Contrasting this was the directors’ responses to question #12. We asked, “Has VBA Central Office support for improved writing been . . .”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>??</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>vigorous?</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>well thought out?</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>well implemented?</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The directors in this question indicated a reluctance to credit the Central Office with strong support. We asked the directors, “If ‘No’ on any, please indicate how the support has been lacking?” The following responses were non-RFW-trained Regional Office directors’ comments:

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21 hours. Given the significant difference between the times, we must pay particular attention to the results from that item.

3 Of these, 29 were the faxed version, 14 the original form version and two were neither form.
Fragmented, on and off over the years. No consistent philosophy.

More centralized support as opposed to individual station initiatives.

Computer generated letters have not been modified in years, although they are still used in a significant percentage of cases.

Not consistent or applied universally.

Where will the relief come from if production slows down during the somewhat extensive long term training?

The PCGL package needs updating on a regular basis.

Training funds have been lacking.

Looking just at director responses from Regional Offices having received the satellite RFW training the proportions of “Yes” and “No” to question #12 did not change much. However, as expected, fewer directors responded “Don’t Know.” We asked “Has VBA central office support for improved writing been . . . “

vigorous?  
7 yes  
7 no  
2 ??

well thought out?  
5 yes  
5 no  
4 ??

well implemented?  
4 yes  
6 no  
4 ??

The directors from RFW trained sites also were evenly split on the CO support given to RFW. We asked the directors, “If ‘No’ on any, please indicate how the support has been lacking?” The following responses were from RFW-trained Regional Offices:

RFW was “all the rage” for awhile then disappeared. Letter writing, while acknowledged as important, has never really been supported as a priority.

Better standardization--directly through PCGL.

There is neither focus nor follow through.
No follow up provided, not enough training provided.

Computer generated letters throughout the system have not been changed to RFW format.

Support both at VACO and ROs has been sporadic.

Reader Focused Writing was supported vigorously as shown by the high quality production and execution of the training. The scheduling, content, and presentation were all first class. Unfortunately, the training was provided over a short period of time and not institutionalized in VBA planning.

In question #10 we asked, “Do you feel that the intended changes to implement RFW are far too complex for the funding available to support it?” Nine directors marked “Yes;” Twelve directors marked “No;” and 18 marked “???.” Some of the directors responding “???” wrote in comments like “What funding?” and “Not sure what intended changes are being referenced.” That so many marked the “Don’t Know” option indicated to us that the question was not well worded.

In question #7 we asked the directors to check any of 10 ways “in which replies to veterans still need to be improved.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ways still to improve letters</th>
<th>17 RFW directors</th>
<th>26 Non RFW directors</th>
<th>All 43 directors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>easy to understand</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>avoids simplistics</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>without internal contradiction</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attentive to expressed needs</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>attentive to needs unmentioned</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clearly indicated action options</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>apologetic for federal inaction</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>not too short, not too long</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>headings, bullets, white space</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>good affect, courteous, respectful</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The directors rated comprehensibility and attending to a veteran’s needs the primary targets for continued training and
reward. Collectively, they did not show concern for avoiding simplistic language and internal contradictions, nor express a need for better apologies for federal inaction. Responses appeared the same from RFW and non-RFW stations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VBA Divisions</th>
<th>Needs it more</th>
<th>Needs it less</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Compensation and Pension</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational Rehabilitation</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loan Guaranty</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Insurance</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veterans Assistance</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We asked in question #9 if RFW was applicable to the writings of all VBA programs. If not, which programs are different? Even though 40 directors said RFW was applicable to all VBA programs, several responded to our asking which benefit divisions needed RFW more or less.

**Professional Development.** We asked a series of questions in #5 regarding in-service training efforts. The directors responded almost uniformly to all. The first in the series asked “Is continuing professional (in-service) education important? Forty-two responded “Yes” and none said “No.” Then we asked “Is it important for all or only those with special needs?” Here 40 checked “All” and only one checked “Special needs.” To the question, “Is it important for your office to provide training opportunities?” all 43 directors responding said, “Yes.” We asked, “Is it more effective just to let the individuals be in charge of their own?” and 38 directors replied, “No” with only three replying “Yes.” To our question asking how much time per month should be allotted to professional development, the median response was eight hours. As to actual allotment, the median response was four hours per month. The directors indicated they needed a day per month but were able to allot only a half a day for professional development.9

9 These Director responses differed from those of the trainees who estimated one hour (median) per month currently devoted to in-service training and five hours (median) per month as needing to be allotted to in-service training.
We asked the directors to rate the importance of training to upgrade letter writing. Given the options of high, middle and low importance, 22 checked high, 19 checked middle and 2 checked low. In an aside, Henry Greshaw of Louisville wrote, “This is like asking a drowning man if swimming lessons are important. Sure they are, but when does he have time?”

**Infrastructure.** In question #11, we asked, “Is it important to have more standardization across Regional Offices as to letter writing?” Twenty-five directors checked “Yes,” 11 checked “No” and four checked “???” More than two thirds cast a vote for further standardization. An accompanying question asked if there was uniqueness in the different regions that make local modifications of pattern letters necessary, we were surprised that 19 directors answered “No.” Fourteen answered “Yes” and 6 directors checked “???.” Of the 14 who said “Yes,” 10 provided examples of needed standardization. A few comments were:

- State laws affecting loan guaranty differ from state to state.
- English vs. Spanish.
- We include warnings regarding claims fixers (unique to Philippines.)
- Yes. An example would be state laws and income differences which require regional editions of fiduciary program guides.

Twenty-eight directors indicated they had not undertaken changes in infrastructure of the Regional Office to support RFW. Ten directors responded “Yes” and three responded “???” Thirteen of the directors indicated that changes were not needed. When we asked the trainees the same question, they were much more outspoken about changes needed, such as supervisor support for worrying more about comprehensibility. Eight directors provided examples of changes they had made, some of which were not organizational.
Additional comments. We asked the directors to add to our understanding of the value of Reader Focused Writing. Twenty-five directors wrote in comments. The comments are listed below:

Right now the cost/benefit ratio is too high to implement. Our leadership and the Congress is focused on numbers, i.e., more benefits with fewer employees. (Newark)

You must be able to show that RFW aids communication to our customers, not the quality reviewer, and it is worth the additional time and effort to avoid misunderstandings that lead to additional work for VBA. (Chicago)

Reader Focused Writing (RFW) has become too complex. It seems correspondence can/should be simplified without the extraordinary effort! (White River Junction)

RFW is necessary for our customers to understand our complicated system. We are doing nothing in the form of simplified regulations and administrative program guidance which would say the organization is committed to RFW. The one example coming from CO was a letter written to well educated RO Directors which was written for a third grader. I was insulted. We have to find a way to be clearer and more easy to read without appearing to be patronizing. (Boston)

RFW should be continuously reviewed and updated. System generated letters also need to be rewritten and some eliminated altogether! (Houston)

RFW enhances good writing skills. It does not assist those with a lack of communication skills. That is why we rely on glossarized letters with “fill in the blank” capacities. (Little Rock)

The concept is solid. More automatic applications such as through PCGL and VCET would be more effective. (Wilmington)
The question should be asked of our clients. However without basic grammar skills, RFW training does little to improve our letters. (Cleveland)

Helps reduce rework. (Philadelphia)

The ideas in RFW are good, and we’ve modified our PCGL letters accordingly. (Louisville)

All of our letters in PCGL are in RFW format (CO and local letters). Consequently, there isn’t the need for everyone to know how to write in RFW style. (St. Paul)

Our letters to veterans are lengthy--the bullets, headings, help the claimant to focus on the different aspects of a letter--decision, information needed, time limits, etc. (Sioux Falls)

In my opinion some of the letters I have seen written under RFW attempt to be so simplistic that they appear to be addressed to a child. I think we need to be clear but we can do it without this. (San Juan)

Downsizing without comparable reductions in workloads does not lend itself to training unless absolutely necessary. (Pittsburgh)

RFW has the potential to reduce the work if it is used to the maximum extent. Clearer language, well organized structure, benefits the claims process. (Lincoln)

RFW teaches us to be emphatic and to respond to veterans needs in a way they understand. With clear communications, we end up investing our resources in priority areas--timely delivery of services--not in “rework” of clarifying what we wrote about via additional correspondence or answering phone inquiries and even processing appeals. Poorly written communications give veterans a corresponding “poor” image of VA. Poor communication reinforces veterans’ perceptions of VA as “adversary” rather than as advocate. (Muskogee)

We need to be able to measure the value of RFW. Are the desired results being achieved? (Detroit)
Positive feedback on letters received from service organizations. (Manchester)

Given the investment already made in reengineering business processes, the reductions in staffing and declining resources it is essential that every communication, both written and verbal be understandable. (Waco)

Customer focus adds to what we do as a regional office and continues to promote an awareness of “customer.” (Buffalo)

It is a great tool for external communication. However, for many internal communications, the recipients feel they are “being talked down to.” (Hartford)

Better customer service through enhanced communication resulting in fewer inquiries and misunderstandings. (Phoenix)

The program requires constant reinforcement. (Atlanta)

Use RFW to help customers but also if possible use RFW to help us give better instructions to our employees (look at manuals, fast letters, etc.). (New York)

Reader focused writing is an excellent program to improve letter writing skills. As long as our customers, veterans, continue to rate our written correspondence as not meeting their needs of clarity and understandability, VBA should continue to use RFW to improve our skills. It is a program that has been measured in many ways, although the results are not compiled, the local data indicates that it is a valued training experience. (St. Petersburg)

Extra questions for RFW-participating Regional Directors. Questions #15, #16, and #17 were to be filled out by directors having staffs participating in RFW training. The following responses are reported for the 17 Regional Office directors submitting a survey. In question #15 we asked, “Who of your Regional Office staff participated in RFW training?” (Check as many as appropriate.) Two directors checked “Everyone on the professional staff;” five checked
“only those who do most of the letter writing;” five checked “volunteers only;” and 6 checked “all are obligated to participate, but not in this first round.” It was again clear that RFW was seen more as general education for the staff than as specialist training for letter writers.

In the same way we asked the trainees, we asked these 17 about the quality of the RFW videos and materials, the room environment during training, and the contribution of the on-site instructor.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RFW Program Quality</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Low</th>
<th>???</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>videos and materials</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>room environment</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>contribution of on-site instructor</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Looking for some perspective on training impact, we asked “What results have you seen from the RFW training?” The choices were:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Results reported to have been observed by Directors</th>
<th>Of 17, times checked</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I have seen many examples of improved writing</td>
<td>6*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No improvement in output is apparent</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisors are reporting that better letters are going out</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letters are simpler to read; complex topics are avoided</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Headings and white space now more important than content</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The number of “rework loops” has diminished</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Letters take longer to write, production is down</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Staff members have set higher priorities on good writing</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A higher office morale can be partly attributed to RFW</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poorer working conditions can be partly attributed to RFW</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No improvement in working conditions is apparent</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other results</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Two additional Directors changed the item to read “some examples;” then checked it.
In our interviews more than in our surveys, we found a few Directors making some attribution to RFW for a reduction in the “reworking” of letters. Here in the survey, only one Director checked that as an observed outcome. Six Directors here indicated observing many examples of improved letter writing but three saw no improvement in output. With half as many checking no improvement as checked improvement, and with the both of them being just half the respondent number, this is pretty weak indication of improved letter writing. Most were not willing to commit themselves on this criterion of effectiveness of RFW training.

The tension between letter comprehensibility and production was stressed in our interviews but, here on the survey, no Director indicated having observed a loss in production.

**Summary.** RFW enhanced communication is a high profile topic among VBA administrators and staffs. A pervasive idea among persons interviewed and surveyed is that applied RFW principles have a positive impact upon communications with veterans. Positive anticipation is high that, in some way, VBA staff members Agency-wide will be familiarized with writing improvement needs and many will be trained for work-specific RFW writing applications.

Administrators reported that persons with different amounts of actual or expected participation from the training were willing, sometimes eager, to be trained further. They said potential trainees believed that if they changed to RFW letter-writing, the result would be readers better able to comprehend the content of the first letter sent them. Supervisors and staff letter writers reported that they were faced with demanding expectations for high production. A letter needing to be “reworked” is a double frustration, a disgruntled customer and production slowed down.

Many administrators said they were taking a “wait and see” attitude about future RFW presentations. Some noted the inactivity. As one said, “Is that program still around?” Others were strong in their support. As one said, “I believe in RFW and support it among my staff.”