



Preserve a potential effective date while the full claim is being prepared.

OFFICIAL FORM VA Form 21-0966	GENERAL WINDOW One year to complete the claim	KEY LIMIT An ITF is not the claim itself
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READ FIRST

An Intent to File tells the VA that a claimant plans to seek benefits. If the qualifying claim is completed within the allowed window, the ITF date can become the effective date, subject to the rules for that benefit and claim.

WHAT IT DOES

THE BASIC TIMELINE



Record the expiration date. Keep the confirmation and calculate the one-year deadline from the date the VA received the ITF.

HOW TO FILE

SUBMISSION ROUTES

WEB

Online
Begin the disability claim through VA.gov. The online application can establish an intent date under the applicable process.

TEL

By phone
Call VA at 1-800-827-1000 and state that an Intent to File for disability compensation is requested.

FORM

Paper or representative
Submit current VA Form 21-0966 through an accepted channel or have an accredited representative submit it.

WHAT IT DOES NOT DO

FOUR COMMON MISUNDERSTANDINGS

NO

It is not a completed claim
The VA cannot decide the disability request until the required application is submitted.

NO

It does not prove entitlement
The claimant still needs the evidence required for the benefit and legal theory.

NO

It does not extend every deadline
An ITF does not replace a post-decision review form or extend an appeal deadline.

NO

It does not improve BDD timing
BDD generally uses the day after separation as the effective date and has its own filing window.

BEFORE THE WINDOW CLOSES

COMPLETION CHECK

- ✓

Confirm the benefit type
An open ITF applies within the rules for the identified benefit category.
- ✓

Use the correct completed application
Most covered disability-compensation filings use VA Form 21-526EZ.
- ✓

Submit before the one-year deadline
Do not rely on a last-minute upload without preserving the receipt.
- ✓

Keep proof of both dates
Retain the ITF confirmation and the completed-claim submission confirmation.

EFFECTIVE DATES
VARY

The ITF date is not automatically the final effective date in every case. Separation rules, increases, reopened claims, liberalizing laws, and other exceptions can change the analysis.

