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Medicare Part A Cost Report New Bulk e-Filing Feature Webcast

Moderated by Diane Maupai
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Operator: Hello. And welcome to today's Medicare Learning Network ® Event. My name is Sara, and I will be your web event specialist. We're using webcast technology today. We recommend streaming the audio live through your computer speakers. All lines have been placed on mute to prevent any background noise. Please note that today's event is being recorded. If you'd like to see the presentation in a full-screen view, click the full-screen button on the lower right-hand corner of your screen. Press the escape key on your keyboard to return to your original view. For best viewing and participation, please disable your popup blockers.

After the presentation, we'll have a question-and-answer session. You can ask a question at any time by clicking the green Q&A icon on the lower left-hand corner of your screen, type your question in the open area, and click submit.

We'll also take questions via the phone line. And instructions on how to do so will be given later on.

And finally, if you need technical assistance, please refresh your browser. If that does not fix the problem, please click on the support option in the upper right-hand corner of your screen for next steps.

It is now my pleasure to turn today's program over to Diane Maupai. Diane, the floor is yours.

Announcements & Introduction

Diane Maupai: Thank you. This is Diane Maupai from the Provider Communications Group at CMS. And I'm your moderator today. Welcome to this Medicare Learning Network Webcast on Submitting your Medicare Part A Cost Report using the New Bulk e-Filing Feature.

Before we get started, there are a few things I'd like to cover. You can download a copy of today's slide presentation by clicking the blue files button at the bottom left side of your screen.

This webcast is open to everyone. If you're a member of the press, you're welcome to listen but please don't ask any questions during the Q&A session. Send your inquiries to press@cms.hhs.gov.

I'll now turn the call over to Owen Osaghae, a Technical Advisor in the Division of Provider Audit Operations in CMS.

Owen Osaghae: Hi. Good afternoon everyone.

My name is Owen Osaghae. My division, the Division of Provider Audits Operations, is responsible for assessing and processing Medicare cost reports.

**Post-Call Clarification—this should read, "My name is Owen Osaghae. My division, the Division of Provider Audits Operations, is responsible for receiving and processing Medicare cost reports."

Today, we'll be talking about the Medicare cost report e-filing system with the new bulk e-filing feature. If you have any questions at the end of this presentation, there will be a mailbox address where you can send in your questions that we may not get to today.

Thank you. I'll now hand over to Jolene Nguyen who's going to present most of the slides today.

Jolene Nguyen: All right. Thank you. Good afternoon everyone. My name is Jolene Nguyen. And I'm a senior consultant for CGI Federal, who are the system maintainer for the PS&R and MCReF systems.

Welcome to today's webinar, which covers the new bulk e-filing feature for Medicare Part A cost report in MCReF.

If we go to slide 2. This slide just has a list of acronyms that may be said throughout the presentation today. And it's for your reference when accessing these slides at a later time.

Moving to slide 3. Today, we're here to talk about how MCReF functionality has expanded.

So, we have this existing system, MCReF, which you may have used in the past to e-file your cost report and track the status of your cost report. And now we're excited to announce that MCReF supports the ability to e-file in bulk for multiple cost reports simultaneously.

Going to slide 4. For today's agenda, we've already started with introductions. Next, we'll provide a little bit of business background and overview so that we know what part of Medicare we're talking about that MCReF deals with.

And then we'll provide a high-level overview and walkthrough of MCReF itself. Going through the latest updates, as well as the typical e-filing process, followed by general outreach efforts, and finish with a live question-and-answer session.

Moving to slide 5. We know there are a large number of participants on the line with a variety of different backgrounds and expertise. So, we just want to make sure we're all on the same page as to what MCReF is all about, and that's the Medicare cost report.

In general, the Medicare cost report is used to determine Part A provider's annual Medicare reimbursable cost. And providers use a large number of sources to create their cost report, including CMS's existing Provider Statistical and Reimbursement System, otherwise known as PS&R.

There are approximately 50,000 cost reports submitted each year, which account for over $200 billion worth of Medicare reimbursement. And, so, providers themselves have a regulation-driven deadline for submitting an acceptable cost report to their Medicare Administrative Contractor. And then MAC have a policy-guided requirement for receiving, accepting, reviewing, auditing, and finalizing cost reports.

Going to slide 6. When looking at the history of how cost report submissions were handled, previously, providers would create their MCR package and mail or hand deliver it to their MAC, with the majority of cost reports being sent in that way. And maybe a few being transmitted via portal website made available by some MACs.

Once MCReF went live in May 2018, providers still have the option to mail or hand deliver their MCR package. But with MCReF, they were now universally able to electronically transmit or e-file their MCR.

Since that go live, we've had over 40,000 MCRs submitted via MCReF. And, so, back in April 2020, MCReF was updated to allow for tracking of user's cost report statuses throughout the settlement process.

Now, as of roughly 2 weeks ago, we've expanded even further on the MCReF functionality to allow for bulk e-filing, which is what we'll be primarily talking about today.

Going to slide 7. In general, CMS's goal is to expand usage of MCReF by making it easier for users and adding value to the system by making it provide more information you need.

One of the most common pieces of feedback we received was that the current system wasn't great for people filing multiple cost reports, along with people who maybe didn't like clicking rounds multiple times for their cost report material.

Going to slide 8. So, to achieve CMS's goals to make MCReF easier to use, we've expanded on the systems functionality with organizations that need to file for multiple facilities in mind. The overall idea being that there is a single zip file upload with all your cost report materials for different providers and FYE, regardless of MAC, named a certain way that can be uploaded with just a few clicks and process in a few seconds.

Even though we primarily had organizations who file multiple CRs in line for this functionality, many aspects may be useful to those who only deal with one cost report per year.

For example, some who currently file individually may prefer to file in this new way. Or may benefit from being able to see the confirmation details for previous successful submissions as we'll see shortly.

Before going any further, just a reminder that MCReF usage is still entirely optional. And all new and existing functionality will continue to be accessible to EIDM PS&R security officials, and a backup security official, and also MCReF approved cost report filers designated by the security officials.

Moving on to slide 9. Even though MCReF is optional, there are many advantages to using it.

In general, MCReF is very easy to use and it provides one process for all Part A providers to follow, regardless of MAC, via one official submission portal, which ultimately reduces confusion, delays, and time you may spend on administrative processes.

The other thing that MCReF provides is a direct response regarding the receivability of your cost report submission. So sometimes you'll mail in your submission and it will take several days for it to get to your MAC. And then they'll make a determination as to whether it's received or not.

With MCReF, the moment you click the submit button, the system starts processing. And you'll either get an immediate response when filing individually or get a response on each bulk filing as the system finishes processing them.

Another thing we're seeing with filings made via MCReF is that they are tentatively settled faster. On average, a tentative settlement determination is made 10 days sooner.

And with the tracking functionality in MCReF, providers have greater transparency through live insights on the status of your cost reports as they go through each stage of the MAC settlement process.

Going to slide 10. Now we'll walk through the updated system and discuss what's new and what's unchanged.

MCReF Walkthrough – Bulk e-file

Going to slide 11. MCReF is still accessible at the same site via the URL listed on the slide at mcref.cms.gov.

Access to MCReF is controlled by CMS's Enterprise Identity Management System and right now is restricted to EIDM PS&R security officials, backup security officials, and MCReF-approved cost report filers as designated by security officials.

Anyone that has the existing PS&R SO or BSO role will, by default, have access to MCReF. So, you won't have to do anything to change your role. You'll just be able to access the URL and log in.

Any organization that doesn't have access to PS&R will have to enroll a PS&R SO within EIDM in order to access MCReF.

One thing that's particularly important, if you do want to use MCReF, is to keep your EIDM account in good standing. This includes updating your password per CMS's policies and procedures and the timely replacement of your security officials due to turnover or changes in staff.

Any issues with your EIDM account, your credential, or being able to log in will not be a valid reason for filing your cost report late, because you can always drop your cost report in the mail as you do today.

So, assuming we've got our EIDM accounts all squared away, let's take a look at what logging into the system would be like.

Going to slide 12. When you first navigate to mcref.cms.gov, you'll get the EIDM terms and conditions page. Here, you'll review the terms and then click the "I Accept" button at the bottom of the screen.

Going to slide 13. Here, you'll enter in your EIDM user ID and click the next button at the bottom of the page.

Moving on to slide 14. Here, you would enter in your password corresponding to the EIDM user ID that you had entered on the prior screen, and then click the login button.

Going to slide 15. As a reminder, for anyone who has watched the last MCReF webinar, or used the system in the last 6 months, this is what MCReF looks like up until about 2 weeks ago.

We had a dashboard view showing the status of your cost report across all providers and FYEs with the ability to navigate to see cost report details and to e-file for a given provider and FYE.

If all of this functionality is new to you, we'll be touching on all of it briefly today. But if you'd like more information, you can find the slide and recording of the April MLN webinar, which discussed this new dashboard in depth on the Med Learn Network website.

Going to slide 16. Now we have a new, slightly updated MCReF homepage with new navigation.

You can see we have the same dashboard information as before but it's now within a home tab. We do have a few changes to the homepage related to the updated functionality that we'll come back to later in the presentation.

The second tab, as shown on the screen here, is called bulk e-file. And that's where the new functionality is located.

These tabs are always present, allowing users to navigate between the two major areas of MCReF, as needed.

Next, we'll discuss the functionality within the bulk e-file tab.

So, when a user selects the bulk e-file tab, the first thing that they'll see is the bulk upload page where users can upload a single ZIP file containing many cost reports. On this page, you would browse, attach the ZIP file, and complete your upload into MCReF by selecting the acknowledgment checkbox and submitting.

Cost reports uploaded via the bulk e-file screens are subject to the same receivability criteria as cost report submissions done on the individual e-filing page, which we'll discuss in more detail during the individual e-filing walkthrough later in the presentation.

Bulk does have some additional requirements related to the naming and arrangement of folders and files in the ZIP file, which we'll talk about now.

Going to slide 18. For the ZIP file itself, we have an example of what that structure may look like in the image to the left.

Overall, the upload must be in a single ZIP file that can be named however the user likes. If planning multiple bulk uploads, users may want to name the ZIP file with information that helps differentiate it from the others as this filename will be visible on the e-file history and upload detail screens, which we'll cover shortly.

The only restrictions on the number of cost reports that you can include in a single zipped file is that the total compressed file type cannot exceed one gigabyte. And you should never encrypt or password protect the ZIP file or any of the files within.

The system is a secure portal for transmission of your cost report materials, including safe transmit of your PII and PHI. Password-protected or encrypted files may result in errors or in cost report rejections by your MAC.

Within the ZIP file, there should be folders where each folder represents a single CR submission for a provider and FYE. There is a required naming scheme for all folders within the ZIP file that I'll go through now.

The folder name has three different parts, starting with the provider ID or the CCN, without any dashes, followed by the fiscal year end date which includes hyphen, and end with the Medicare utilization, which can be full, low, or no.

Each part of the folder name should be separated by an underscore. If a user doesn't include the Medicare utilization, then the system will assume it's a full Medicare utilization submission.

Each of these folders should contain all of the cost report materials supporting a complete submission. And before we talk about how these files need to be named, we'll briefly discuss what we mean by cost report material.

Going to slide 19. This table describes the different styles which MCReF expects might be included with a cost report submission.

First is the ECR, which is the Electronic Cost Report file that was generated from your CMS-certified ECR vendor software.

Then we have the Print Image, often referred to as the PI file, which is the file that is generated from your vendor software that starts with a PI.

Then we have the Signed Certification Page, which is generally a file from your vendor software, which includes encryption codes, the e-signature checkbox, and your signature.

Next is IRIS, this is the Intern and Resident Information System files required for teaching hospitals claiming GME and IME fulltime equivalent on their cost report.

The Cover Letter describes the nature of your submission, or if there is anything in particular that you want to address upfront to your MAC about the submission you're making.

Finally, we have Other, which is essentially where all other items go that you may normally submit in the mail to your MAC but don't fall into any of the previously discussed categories.

We'll discuss each type of material in more detail, including which are expected for different types of facilities or Medicare utilization levels during the individual e-file walkthrough portion of the training. But for now, we'll focus on how each of these types of files needs to be named when e-filing in bulk.

Going to slide 20. The image on the left shows an example of how the overall zipped file structure may look with each of the submission folders and files within them.

For the system to know which files are which, users will need to pay extra attention when naming files.

For the ECR print image and IRIS files, these should be easy since MCReF is relying on the same naming schemes that the ECR and IRIS vendors already follow.

For the Signed Certification Page and Cover Letter, we have special bulk naming name. The Signed Certification Page should be named just like the Print Image, except to begin with the letters SC instead of PI. The Cover Letter file only needs to begin with the term cover letter without any spaces.

And then for anything that should be treated as other, just make sure they aren't named in a way that makes them look like any of the rest of the file or place them in a subfolder.

In general, for all of the naming conventions discussed over the last few slides, they are not case sensitive. Meaning capitalization does not matter.

So again, these naming standards are only if you want to bulk e-file in MCReF. Nothing is changing about how you need to name your files for mailing in, hand delivery, or filing individually in MCReF. They are only needed if you would like to use the bulk e-file functionality.

And all of this information is documented in the user manual if you would like to review the information at your own pace. And the user manual is located under the help link in the upper right of every MCReF screen.

Going to slide 21. Once users select their ZIP file, they will need to select the checkbox and then hit the submit button, which will initiate the transmission of the ZIP file upload to the provider's MAC.

As mentioned earlier, a bulk upload can be done for providers and FYEs across various MACs. And MCReF will automatically send the cost report materials to the correct MAC for each provider.

If any issues are encountered which prevent the upload from proceeding, the system will report this back immediately as errors. One example of a possible error at this stage, maybe if a user attempted to upload a file that is not a good file.

If no issues are encountered which prevent the upload from proceeding, the bulk upload screen will refresh to display a success message at the top of the screen, which indicates that the file has been uploaded and processing has begun.

It's important to note this does not mean that any of the cost reports in the upload has been received yet. This just means that the upload is in a queue to be processed by the system.

Users can see the status of the upload itself, as well as the status of any submission within it, on the e-file history page once the system processes each.

Going to slide 22. The e-file history page has a table of information where users can see the status of their upload and the details of all of their bulk e-filing submissions. Users will also be able to see any successful e-filings that were done through the individual e-filing process.

Every upload starts off with a single row in the table representing the primary zipped file. And each cost report within the ZIP file is processed and additional rows added to the table to track that specific cost report.

The upload pending row goes away once every submission within the upload has its own results. Each cost report from within the primary ZIP will share the same upload ID and upload filename. But they will have their own unique e-filing ID.

And you can see on this example that upload ID 447 has four different submissions that were included in that upload, and each one has its own line and status within the table.

Going to slide 23. Looking a little closer at the data within the table, the first column is for the upload ID, which is a unique number assigned to each upload.

Each value under the upload ID column is a link that will direct users to the upload details page, which we'll touch on a little later.

The second column is the upload filename, which is the name of the zipped file the users submitted on the bulk upload screen.

For rows on the table that are for individual e-filing, like the second to the last in the slide, the upload ID and the upload filename will be blank since they wouldn't apply.

Going to slide 24. The next column is the e-filing ID, which is the system's unique number for a cost report submission.

This is the same e-filing ID that's displayed on the individual e-file cost report materials confirmation screen and can be referenced in communication with your MAC regarding the submission.

After that, we have the submission folder name, which will display the name of the submission folder that was within the upload. If the submission folder name is empty, that might mean the system hasn't finished processing any folders yet, as shown in the first row here. Or that these files were found outside of the folder, as shown in the second example.

For individual e-filing, this can communicate that information by saving individual e-filing page, as seen in the second to last row.

Going to slide 25. The next column is for the upload date and time, which will have the time stamp of when the users file upload or individual e-filing submission completed transferring to MCReF. We also have the uploaded by column, which will identify the uploader either by their name or by their user ID.

Going to slide 26. The next two columns reflect the provider number and FYE the user attempted to e-file for. If these are blank, it may be because the system hasn't finished processing any folders yet as in the first row. Or because the system wasn't able to get them from the submission folder name, either because it was missing or mislabeled.

Going to slide 27. The next column is the load status, which tells the users the status of each submission starting off as pending for the files that were just uploaded. Then moving on to success, error, or warning, depending on what happens with each submission.

Other than pending, all of the statuses are for the submission, not for the upload. If one submission and an upload had a problem, it will not affect the rest of the submission in that same upload.

In the example, upload 447, we have one file which had two submissions with errors, one submission which went through successfully, and one that encountered a warning.

In scenarios where a submission encountered a warning or an error, the next column provides shortened versions of those warning or error messages. More detailed information for both of these things can be found on the status details page via the link in the load status column, which we'll cover next.

Going to slide 28. So, let's say for an upload that I just submitted, if you navigate to the e-file history page, immediately following that, you may see that upload in a pending status, which means the system is working on the upload but it doesn't have any results for any of the submissions within it yet. As submissions from the upload are processed, we'll see those as separate rows in the table with their own statuses.

Going to slide 29. The next submission is a successful one from an upload that was already processed by the system. And we can take a look at the details for that if we were to click on the success link in that column.

Going to slide 30. Here, we see the status details page for a successful submission.

At the top of the page, we have some of that same identifying information seen from the e-file history page, such as the upload ID and the upload filename.

Once the submission finished processing and the system did not have any errors, we see that it received an e-postmark date as well.

Following that, we have the list of files the system found in the submission folder, along with the file types that were identified based on the filename.

Then at the bottom, we have a success message detailing what happened with the submission and what is to be expected next.

For any of you who have used the e-filing system before, the content should look familiar to the information shown on the current individual e-filing confirmation screen.

Going to slide 31. So that was an example of a success status details page. Going back to the e-file history page, we see that other submissions within the upload encountered an error and can see that shortened message next to it. So, let's take a look at how the status page would look in this scenario.

Going to slide 32. For the status details page here, we can see that the load status is error. Since the submission encountered an error, there is no e-postmark date.

Next, just like the success status details page, you can still see the list of files and the file types assigned by the system.

At the bottom, the messages table gives the full text of the error that was summarized on the previous page, explaining that the submission was unsuccessful because a Signed Certification Page was needed but none was found in that uploaded folder.

In order to address this issue, I would need to re-upload all of the cost report materials for this one specific submission. It can include the Signed Certification Page. And, assuming there are no other issues, then it goes through successfully.

That re-upload attempt could be performed via individual e-file or bulk e-file, whichever the user prefers.

If you encounter an error and you're not sure how to proceed based on the message on the screen, the user manual has a troubleshooting section with additional information and instructions on what you need to do to resolve a given error.

Going to slide 33. Now we'll see an example of how the warning status details page would look like.

For this example, we'll see that the shortened message at a high level, based at the cost report, will be deemed late. So, I'll go ahead and select the warning link from the load status column on the e-file history page.

Overall, since the submission encountered a warning, there's no e-postmark date yet. And users are directed to review the messages below to proceed. Within that messages section, we have the full content of the warning message the submission received.

Since this is in a warning status, users will also have the option to acknowledge warnings and proceed. Users will only have 21 days after uploading to MCReF to acknowledge warning. After those 21 days, the warning will expire, and users will need to re-upload the submission if they wish to try again.

Once a warning is acknowledged, MCReF will continue processing the submission and may encounter further error for warning.

As with the initial bulk upload, continue checking in on submissions after acknowledging a warning to address any subsequent system finding. So, the system will not provide an e-postmark date until you've addressed any errors or warnings that may come up.

Going to slide 35. There may be instances where users are filing for many providers and FYEs in the same scenario.

For example, if they happen to be filing many cost reports after their due date. Instead of going to each individual load status page, users can click on the "Address All Warnings" link on the e-file history page to be taken to the submission warnings page.

Going to slide 36. On the submission warnings page, users will be able to see all of their warnings across different uploads, providers and FYEs, and submission, then choose to acknowledge one, multiple, or all at the same time.

All users would need to do is check one or more boxes in the acknowledge column, or the checkbox at the very top with the header to check all of them at once. Then you click the submit button to acknowledge all checked warnings and allow those submissions to continue processing.

Once you've dealt with your errors, acknowledged your warnings, and made sure each of your submissions has reached a status of success, then your bulk upload is complete and ready for your MAC to take the next steps.

Going to slide 37. If I wanted to see the summarization of all of the items related to an upload, I can go click on the link for that upload ID and be taken to the upload details page.

Going to slide 38. At the top of the page, we have the high-level upload information, and then we have a table below.

This screenshot is an example of what the page would look like if everything within the upload was made correctly. The table would have a full list of all of the files within the upload associated to the provider and FYE information from the folder and then have the associated e-filing ID.

The link within this e-filing ID column would take you to the same status details page that we saw earlier via the load status link on the e-file history page.

Moving to slide 39. Now let's take a look at another upload ID example.

As we saw earlier, upload ID 447 had a few different submissions within it, where a few ran into some errors. So, if we click on any of those 447 upload ID links, you'll be taken to the upload details page for that day.

Moving to slide 40. We can see another version of how this page may look.

So, if there were issues where the system couldn't identify the provider and FYE for files within your upload, that is illustrated in the first table at the top. For this particular scenario, the upload included files that were not in folders, which is why the folder name column is blank.

Other scenarios where this table might occur would be if the folder name was just named improperly to not include the provider and FYE format needed. Otherwise, the rest of the information in the second table are first submission that the system could identify the provider and FYE for.

Moving on to slide 41. So far, we focus on the information for the uploads and submissions in the table. Depending on how many cost reports you work with, and how many years of history you're dealing with, the table might get pretty big. So now we'll talk about some of the functionality around the table that helps define what you're looking for.

At the top left, we have two radio buttons that control how many rows can come back for each provider and FYE you're responsible for.

When users first come to the page, the default selection will be to include the most recent per provider and FYE only. This means that the information shown on the e-file history page will only display the most recent bulk e-filing attempt and successful individual e-filings for each provider and FYE.

If you ran into errors with a tricky bulk upload submission once or twice, and got everything right on your most recent try, this option will just show that successful third try so that you're not distracted by the old error that you already fixed.

Users can opt to select the "All History" radio button, which would expand the information on the e-file history page to include all the bulk e-filing attempts, as well as successful individual e-filing for each provider and FYE.

Going to slide 42. Underneath those radio buttons, we have the various filter options to help users narrow down and search for any specific uploads or submissions they may be looking for, such as by the upload filename, the provider number, or by some other date range filters. Users can also choose to filter the results by selecting the different load status option.

Users can mix and match these different filters to find submissions they're looking for without scrolling through every page.

As users navigate to any of the sub-links within the e-file history, the filters will be retained unless they select the "Clear Filters" button or navigate to the other MCReF tab.

Going to slide 43. At the top right of the table, users have additional action they can take related to the data on the page.

First, there's the "Export to Excel" button, which when clicked, will export the data from the e-file history screen to an Excel file. The exported file will include everything based on the current filters, even if records span multiple pages.

Next to that is the "Refresh" button, which will reload the e-file history page with the latest information.

So that covers all of the updated functionality under the bulk e-file tab. Now I wanted to circle back to the MCReF homepage and review changes made there. And to get there, I would click on the "Home" tab.

Going to slide 44. Since the homepage is where everyone starts off after logging in, the system now includes alerts for recent bulk e-filings which encountered errors or warnings which haven't been addressed yet.

The providers and FYEs with bulk e-filing errors or warnings get an error or warning symbol next to their cost report status. And the new bulk e-filing issues filter allows users to easily see just the providers and FYEs with those types of problem.

Even if no such alerts are visible on the first page of results, the account next to each option in the filter on the left lets you know how many are present overall.

The system will only alert users of these issues for errors or warnings that occurred within the last 60 days.

Going to slide 45. In addition to those updates, we've also added the same "Export to Excel" feature on the homepage, where users can select this button to export the data shown on the home screen for the various providers and FYEs to Excel.

MCReF Provider Testing

Going to slide 46. Overall, that covers all of the new updated bulk e-file functionality that has been added to the system. Prior to going live with this functionality, we had several provider organizations volunteer to come in and test out the new functionality, speak out their thoughts and feedback.

Going to slide 47. Some of that testing we got really positive feedback. Some of which I wanted to call out here regarding the ease of use and the timing for the bulk upload process, and how it will help with their workload.

MCReF Home Page

Going to slide 48. Now we'll be switching gears a little to cover other aspects of MCReF that you may have heard in previous training, starting with the MCReF homepage.

Going to slide 49. In general, the information you'll see on the homepage represents sort of the entirety of the universe of what you have access to.

The providers that will be shown here are the ones you have registered in EIDM, which have also been entered and stored. And the FYEs for those providers will be the ones from 2010 and onwards that have already elapsed.

In general, the only thing that will be here are facilities expected to file a cost report. Any sub-units of primary facilities, or any FQHC/RHC facilities filing consolidated under another cost report, will not be present in this table as no cost report is expected for them.

Going to slide 50. If you don't see a row for a provider and FYE that you are expecting, please confirm proper registration with EIDM. If you confirm that everything on your end is done correctly, and you still don't see it in the system, then you can contact your MAC.

OK. So now focusing on the action column on the homepage. If you click on any of the e-file CR link, under that column, you'll be taken to the individual e-file cost report material page.

Going to slide 51. As a reminder, this is what the individual e-file cost report materials page looks like, where you'd browse for each of the cost report materials needed for the specified provider and FYE and submit. And we'll be talking more about this process in depth during the individual e-filing portion of the training.

Going to slide 52. On the homepage, we have the cost report status column, which essentially contains the cost report status for a given provider and FYE, which represents the overall status of where user's cost reports are in the settlement process. If I click on one of those links, I could see more information for that cost report on the view details page.

Going to slide 53. This is the view details page, where you can see the more detailed information for your cost report.

And just a reminder, the tracking isn't just limited to MCReF submission but also deals with ones done via mail or hand delivered. And the information on this page is refreshed throughout each day.

Starting at the top of the view details page, there will always be a blue banner, which includes the overall cost report status on the right-hand side, as well as the jurisdiction and MAC the provider is assigned to on the left-hand side.

Next, we have a status tracker shown that reflects the major spaces that a cost report can go through, including the four that most cost reports undergo – submission, tentative settlement, review, and NPR. Additionally, we have phases for any reopenings or revised NPRs and appeals, when applicable.

In this example, we can see the relevant information in each of the sections below from submission through NPR.

Going to slide 54. Here's an example with both a reopening and an appeal, just to give a sense of the types and scope of information that is made available.

Going to slide 55. Now that we've covered the bulk e-filing updates, as well as given a reminder of the homepage functionality, we will go through the details of the individual e-Filing process.

MCReF Individual e-file

Going to slide 56. We have not made any changes to the individual e-Filing process. And as mentioned before, all of the requirements described in the section for receivability are the same as would be applied for bulk uploads, with a few exceptions we'll point out.

If you are going to e-file from the individual screens, you would've selected who you want to e-file for by clicking on the e-file link from the dashboard homepage. And you'll be taken to the e-file page with those values displayed and preselected at the top.

Going to slide 57. From there, you'll select the Medicare utilization level of the cost report that you're filing, and you'll confirm your first cost report submission status. What's displayed is what the system knows about your submission status. If you think what's displayed is accurate, then you're ready to proceed.

Going to slide 58. Next, you'll go ahead and upload all of your cost report materials. The materials which are required will vary based on your facility type and the Medicare utilization being filed and will be indicated by the red asterisk to the left of the field.

To upload anything for a particular row, all you have to do is click the browse button to the right corresponding to that row. And then navigate to the location either on your network drive or your work computer for that file. You select it. And then you'll see the path in the file upload column for that row.

The system expects that you only upload one file per row. So, if you have multiple files that you submit as part of your supporting documentation, that would all go into a ZIP file or another archive file type in the "Other" slot.

As noted on the screen just above the table, just as with bulk, you should never encrypt or password protect any of the files, either the main file that you submit or files within the file.

The system is a secure portal for transmission of your cost report materials, including base transmit of your PII and PHI. Password-protected or encrypted files may result in errors or in cost report rejections by your MAC.

Once you have attached all the materials needed to complete your submission, you need to read the acknowledgement statement at the bottom of the screen acknowledging that this is your official submission to CMS and your MAC.

Once you indicate your acknowledgment of the statement by checking that box, that's when the submit button will become activated. So, if you notice right now, the box is not checked, and the submit button is disabled.

Once you select it and that submit button is enabled, at that time when you click submit, then the system will perform specific validations just to make sure that it's a valid submission.

Moving on to slide 59. This screenshot is an example of what an error would look like. In general, when you submit and there's an error encountered, you will get a message at the top of the page that notifies you and tells you how to correct it.

In this case, the user did receive an error message. Since you received an error, nothing went through, and your MAC won't see anything about this e-filing. However, the "Errors Message" section pops up on the screen and essentially gives you an error code that you can have for your reference to look up within the user manual or for referring to in communication with your MAC, if needed.

In this example, the error tells you there's a mismatch for the fiscal year-end date between what's on the screen versus what was uploaded in the ECR. Once you fix either the selected year or the ECR to resolve the issue, if no other errors or warnings are triggered, the user will be presented with a success message. And that's what we'll see next.

Going to slide 60. Here, we show the success message at the top of the screen. It informs you that for the provider and fiscal year-end that you file for, your cost report has been electronically postmarked with CMS as of the date and time, in Eastern time, that you made the submission.

The system will also give you a unique e-filing ID for your reference, if you need to discuss this cost report or for your record in general. And all of this information, you'll be able to look up on the e-file history page that we reviewed earlier. Users then will have the option to either log out or return back to the search results on the homepage to continue e-filing other FYEs or track the status of their cost report.

Moving on to slide 61. Overall, we've mostly talked about what each of the fields are on the individual e-filing page. This slide has each of those fields listed out with their descriptions within the table for your reference when accessing these slides at a later time.

Going to slide 62. We have each of the different types of cost report materials which I'll briefly touch on a few key things for these items. But the rest of the information is here for your reference and is also available in the user manual.

First is the ECR, which is the Electronic Cost Report file that was generated from your CMS-certified ECR vendor software that is not a PDF, a ZIP file, or another archived file type.

Then we have the Print Image, often referred to as the PI file, which is the file that's generated from your vendor software that starts with a PI.

Then is the Certification Page, which is from your vendor software that includes encryption codes and the selected checkbox with your signature on it. And we'll discuss more about the e-signature in a moment.

Moving on to slide 63. Next is IRIS. This is the Intern and Resident Information System files required for teaching hospitals claiming GME and IME fulltime equivalents on their cost report.

For individual e-filing, this is going to be an unencrypted ZIP file containing a single set of master and assignment DBF files. That's the MNA file. Whereas for bulks, we had the IRIS files as two separate documents in their submission folder.

Then is Other, where essentially all other items go that you may normally submit in the mail to your MAC but don't have a dedicated slot, whether that's a single ZIP file or a ZIP file.

Finally, we have the Cover Letter which describes the nature of your submission or if there's anything in particular that you want to address upfront to your MAC about the submission you're making.

Going to slide 64. In general, the system will perform specific receivability validation to confirm that your cost report submission is fundamentally sound. If the cost report submission fails any of those checks, the error will be communicated to you on the screen, as we saw in the previous screenshot.

If an error is displayed, that cost report will not have been received by your MAC. So, you'll have to resolve that issue and then resubmit successfully to get a received cost report to your MAC. These are not considered rejections and will not follow CMS's formal cost report rejection process.

If your submission passes all the receivability validation, you'll get a message that your cost report was received and will give you an electronic postmark date, in Eastern time, and a unique e-filing ID for your reference.

Going to slide 65. You can also encounter warnings in the system as well. When you encounter a warning after you click submit, a popup screen will display, and the system will describe what the warning is. When you get a warning, you can either cancel out or choose to proceed forward.

To submit your cost report timely, you'll need to make sure you do so by 11:59 Eastern time on the date of your due date.

As I mentioned, when we look at the cost report materials table, you should never encrypt or password protect any of your files. The system itself is a secure portal, in particular, for transmitting your PII and PHI.

If you submit a duplicate submission, regardless of method, the first one received will be the one that your MAC actually uses as your cost report submission. The second one will be rejected the moment the MAC notices that it's a duplicate.

Going to slide 66. Since January 2nd, 2019, there are only two CMS-approved methods of cost report submission – electronic submission via MCReF, via bulk or individual as we discussed today, or physical submission via mail or hand delivery.

If your cost report is perfectly valid but just too large for MCReF to handle; for example, one is more than 300 MB of supporting other documentation, then it should be sent through the mail or hand delivered.

And then the last bullet here essentially deals with, if for some reason, the system is down for maintenance, or you're not able to use it based on login reasons, you will not be given an extension for system issues preventing you from e-filing. Essentially, you can always fall back on mailing your cost report. And so there really is no excuse for being late due to the system itself.

Going to slide 67. So, diving in more to electronic signature, which was briefly discussed earlier. In August 2017, CMS issued the 2018 IPPS Final Rule, which authorized providers to file with an electronic signature of their Worksheet S effective for fiscal year end on or after 12/31/2017.

This final rule didn't change who is allowed to sign on the signature line of the Worksheet S, but just dictates that electronic signature is allowed based on when that was effective.

CMS has updated all of the transmittals to support e-signature for every MCR form except home offices. So, for everyone, except home offices, all you need to do is electronically sign and check the box on the Worksheet S. And then you upload that file to the signed certification page row when you do your MCReF submission.

If you want to use MCReF but are filing on the Home Office 287-05, which doesn't support e-signature, then you must do both of the following.

You need to upload a scanned copy of the Schedule A Certification Page to the Signed Certification Page slot when you made your submission in MCReF. And then you need to mail or hand deliver a hard copy with a signature signed in ink to your MACs, which must be received by your MAC within 10 days of that MCReF submission to be acceptable. And just to note, CMS is working on supporting e-signature for home offices in the future.

Going to slide 68. The next few slides essentially cover valid and invalid uses of e-signature. And this isn't an exhaustive list of what's possible for valid and invalid e-signature. For specifics, you should definitely reference the 2018 IPPS Final Rule for guidance on electronic signature. But we wanted to just go over a few examples of what is valid and what is invalid.

Going to slide 69. This is an example of a valid use of e-signature. And this came to what CMS has done is on Worksheet S page. They've added a checkbox which essentially says that you're agreeing that your electronic signature is your legally binding equivalent of your original signature. So, to use electronic signature, you have to check that box.

And then in this case, the officer of the provider has chosen to type their first and last name into the signature line. This is an acceptable form of electronic signature.

Going to slide 70. This is also an acceptable form of electronic signature. In this case, the officer of the provider that signed the Worksheet S has printed Worksheet S. They've hand checked the box saying that their electronic signature is their legally binding equivalent of their original signature and they've hand signed the signature line.

They then scanned that document to make it an electronic file. And then they could use that to upload to the Signed Certification Page row when they did their MCReF submission. So, this is also an acceptable use of e-signature.

Going to slide 71. The next two cases we'll go over are invalid cases.

In this case, I talked about the importance of this new checkbox that CMS added. The checkbox has to be checked for it to be considered a valid use of e-signature. Here, since the checkbox is not checked, this is considered an invalid use of electronic signature and would be rejected by your MAC.

Going to slide 72. This is also an invalid use of e-signature. In this case, the officer of the provider has checked the box appropriately electing for e-signature, but they haven't provided a first and last name. They've just provided X123, which is not a valid first and last name or signature. So, this would be an invalid use of e-signature.

Going to slide 73. That takes us through the updated MCReF functionality, as well as the e-filing process. Next, we wanted to discuss some general feedback we've received from providers on their experience using the MCReF system.

MCReF Provider User Experience

Going to slide 74. Since MCReF go live in 2018, we've had over 40,000 submissions submitted via MCReF, each taking about 3.1 seconds to complete. And given the ease and instant response of the system, many users were able to correct any errors without needing extra correspondence with their MACs. The systems timing has also led to faster timing of tentative settlement payment.

In terms of the current year to date, we've had about 40 percent of all MCR submissions being e-filed through MCReF. Overall, providers have really responded positively with MCReF and the process for e-filing.

Going to slide 75. In general, this webinar is just one part of a larger effort to communicate information to the group. So, we're going to touch on some other resources for outreach and education.

Ongoing Outreach and Education

Going to slide 76. Listed on the slide, you can look back at Change Request 10611 for more information on e-filing as well as an article link there. Additionally, you can always go to the CMS website as a resource to learn more information as well.

Going to slide 77. MCReF itself, the new cost report tracking functionality earlier this year, and now the addition of bulk upload, are all the result of feedback and requests CMS received from the provider community.

Through previous feedback sessions, including these webinars, CMS has continued to gather input and suggestions about how to further improve the provider cost report experience.

Here you have a number of ideas that CMS is currently evaluating for future improvement. As you can see, this includes enhancements such as additional information and documentation within MCReF.

These recommendations have been noted. And we'll be working closely with CMS to analyze and consider them for potential future enhancements. So, keep an eye out for future webinars as we roll out additional capabilities in the future.

Going to slide 79. That brings us to the end of our presentation. Now, we wanted to open it up for the Q&A portion of the session where I'll be turning it over to Diane from CMS.

Question & Answer Session

Diane Maupai: Thank you, Jolene.

We'll now take your questions about the bulk e-filing feature. Throughout the Q&A, we'll ask you for feedback. Remember to disable your popup blockers for best results.

We'll begin our session by answering a few questions from webcast participants, and then take a few questions from the phone.

Operator, please prompt the telephone users and begin to compile the Q&A roster.

Operator: To ask a question, press "star" followed by the number "1" on your touchtone phone. To remove yourself from the queue, press the "pound" key.

Remember to pick up your handset to ensure clarity. Once your line is open, state your name and organization.

Please note your line will remain open during the time you're asking your question. So, anything you say. or any background noise. will be heard in the conference.

If you have more than one question, press "star" "1" to get back into the queue. And we will address additional questions if time permits.

Please hold while we compile the Q&A roster. Please hold while we compile the Q&A roster.

Diane Maupai:	Okay. And while you compile the roster, we'll start taking questions from the webcast.

And our first one is, can you use MCReF for home office cost reports? If yes, since they do not have PS&Rs, how do you get set up MCReF for a home office?

Geoff Kuhn: Hi. This is Geoff Kuhn with the System Maintainer Team. I can address this.

So, one, yes, absolutely, you can use MCReF to do home office cost reports. We support the 287-05. And whatever new forms come up from home office in the future, we'll also support.

The fact that home offices do not have PS&R generally means that you've never needed to set up a home office organization in the past. But it's still tied to the same organization structure in EIDM.

So, if your home office operates under the same TINs as your providers, you should be able to add it to your existing profile. It won't mean anything on the PS&R side, but it will make it available to you in MCReF.

If your home office is operating as an independent taxable organization, then you would register an organization in EIDM just like you would for any other provider, following the same process that you would to set up a security official for the home office, and then be able to e-file for the home office that way.

Diane Maupai: Thanks, Geoff.

Our next question. I didn't currently have access to EIDM and the person that determined access doesn't work at my company anymore. I've tried to request access unsuccessfully several times in the past. How do I get access to EIDM in that instance?

Geoff Kuhn: I can take this one as well.

The – for EIDM overall, maintaining a security official is an important step – and we kind of highlight that earlier on because this is a little bit trickier to do.

But there is definitely still a process. If your security official is gone, and you don't have a backup security official, you need to call the EUA or the EUS helpdesk. And I believe we have that contact information on within the slides for reaching their website and what their phone number is.

When you call them, you can let them know that that's what happened. The security official registered for your organization is no longer with the organization and you need to work to replace them with someone else.

If you have a backup security official, that is a fairly quick process. When you do not have a backup security official, it's a bit more involved. But they have that whole process laid out for how to go about that.

So again, it's definitely not as easy to do. But it's absolutely something that you can accomplish by working with the EUS helpdesk.

And the fact that it's not easy to do is just a reminder for everybody why it can be beneficial to try and get backup security officials established for all of your organizations. So that if and when this does occur, it's a little bit smoother.

But you're definitely not locked out. It will just – it will take some doing with the helpdesk.

Diane Maupai: Thank you, Geoff.

Operator, let's take a question from the phone.

Operator: We have a question from the line of Heather Kahai.

Heather Kahai: Hi. This is Heather Kahai from AACI.

We have – we're an FQHC and we have two MACs. Can we use – I just want to verify that we can use the bulk e-File option to file for both MACs in the same submission? Or do we need to go through the homepage?

Geoff Kuhn: This is Geoff with the maintainer again.

So absolutely, you can use bulk e-File. You can put all of your cost reports in the same upload. And the system will route them to the appropriate MAC based on that.

The same way as when you're doing an individual e-filing, you don't need to specify which MAC it's going to. When you're doing them in bulk, the system will take care of that routing for you. All of it can be in one upload as long as it's within – as long as your total upload when compressed is within that one gig limit.

Heather Kahai: Okay, okay. Thank you very much.

Diane Maupai: Our next question comes from the webcast.

On slide 18, it states that ZIP file size limit is one gigabyte. For bulk submission, this thing is rather low for such a large number – rather low for such a large number of files. Have others commented on this as well? And are there plans to expand this? Thank you.

Geoff Kuhn: For this one, I think that segues nicely from the previous question.

There is the one – the current one gigabyte limit. Based on what we've seen of prior cost report submissions, on average, they're not very large in terms of total file size. Depending on the type of facility, they can be – have a lot more supplemental documentation and be a lot larger. But we would expect several hundred cost reports to go in a single bulk upload of size.

That being said, we are starting with the one gigabyte limit and keeping an eye on how that goes. And if you find yourself frequently having to divvy things up into multiple files, and if it were just one-and-a-half or two gigs, then it would work for you 100 percent of the time. You can let your MAC know or let OFMDPAOQUESTIONS know that that's a limitation you're frequently running into.

We can see, in terms of overall performance and how everyone's networks are going if we can increase that file size without contributing to an overall degradation experience. Because we also want to make sure that it's a file size where the transfer from your end will complete successfully. And it's not something where the network is dropping out halfway through from you to us and you have to start the whole thing over. So, we're trying to balance those two things.

But definitely, it's where it is right now. We will be monitoring it and certainly considering if we're able to increase it in the future.

Diane Maupai: Thank you, Geoff.

Our next question comes from the web.

When a tentative settlement or NPR is issued, will be the PDFs be available through MCReF?

Geoff Kuhn: I think we touched on this briefly as part of the enhancement slide. Right now, they will not be there. But we've heard this request from multiple sources. And, so, it's something that CMS is absolutely considering and think about how they might go about amongst the list of other enhancements to the system.

So, it's in the queue to be thought about and see what we can do in the future. As of right now, you will only see the dates. But those dates will maybe let you know you should be looking for something in the mail right now, especially if you have different offices, or you know they get sent somewhere other than where you work. You can see the current system as a trigger to know to go look for that mailing. And then hopefully in the future we'll be able to expand to make that delivery more direct.

Diane Maupai: Thank you, Geoff.

The next question, if I owe money back with my cost report, can I still use MCReF?

Geoff Kuhn: In general, yes. You can still use MCReF, but you need to follow the guidance that your MAC has given you for where to send the money or the check to go along with your payment. And that needs to be received in concert with the cost report within the certain amount of time.

All of that, it varies somewhat MAC to MAC as to where those payments are submitted. But that's something that is definitely compatible with using MCReF.

And just as a side note, it's also has been requested to look at how to be able to incorporate those payments into MCReF directly to make it one place instead of having to do two things, but also something that we're looking at in the future.

Diane Maupai: Thank you Geoff.

Operator, do we have any questions on the phone?

Operator: We are currently showing no audio questions.

Diane Maupai: OK. Thank you very much.

Here's another one from the webcast.

Does the other file naming convention include the CCN? And can it be a ZIP file when filing bulk?

And then the second is, does the MCReF system include info about whether or not the MAC has accepted the MCReF cost report submission?

And three, while MCReF helps with uploading files, are we also working on downloading files like NPR, TFS, et cetera?

Geoff Kuhn: This is Geoff. I will take those kind of one at a time.

For the first one, does the other file naming convention include the CCN?

So, for bulk uploads, the main naming convention is for the folder. And then everything within that folder is part of the submission.

For Other, the other files can be named whatever you want to name them, as long as they can't be confused with the ECR or the Print Image or the Cover Letter. Otherwise, there's no other naming requirement for the other files beyond that.

As long as they're in the folder, they clearly identify for this provider, and this year, for this submission. And they aren't confused with the other files, we'll say this is obviously other.

You can put that in a subfolder. You can put that in its own ZIP file within, whatever those files are within. As long as they're not confused with the others, it's fine.

Addressing the second question, does MCReF include whether or not the MAC has accepted the cost report?

As of the enhancement that we did in April, as part of the tracking functionality that we briefly reviewed today, the system will let you know if your cost report has been accepted. It's still something that generally happens.

You submit through MCReF. MCReF will say upfront, this has been received or not received, based on the errors you encountered. But once it's received it goes to the MAC. They make the acceptability determination.

But once they have done that, if you go look at the tracking status, you can see, when you go to the status details page, this submission I made on this day has now been accepted. And then you know, as it moves to the next steps, when it goes to review, when it goes to tentative settlement, you can see the progress that it's going through.

There is no notification at present. It's more so you have to come back and check on to see how it's going with the process. But it's definitely information to which you have access if you log in and check on the tracker.

And then for the third question, with the downloading of files like the NPR, or – I'm not sure what the TFS is, if that's the Tentative Settlements or not. But the NPR letter issuance, we talked about it before, that it is a feature that we're considering and have been requested by others. But there are no like firm plans at this point.

Diane Maupai: Okay. Thank you. Thank you, Geoff.

And that is the last question. We don't have any questions on the phone, and we don't have any questions online.

So, I'll give you guys a minute. And then we're going to end our call.

Additional Information

So, it looks like we're good to go.

If you think of any additional questions, you can find resources on slide 76 and also contact information on slide 80.

On slide 81, you'll find a link to evaluate today's webcast. We'll also push the link to our webcast participants right now. Evaluations are anonymous, confidential, and voluntary. We hope you'll take a few minutes to evaluate your experience.

An audio recording and transcript will be available in about 2 weeks at go.cms.gov/mln-events.

I'd like to thank our speakers and everyone who joined us for today's Medicare Learning Network webcast. Have a great day everyone.

Operator: This concludes today's call. Presenters, please hold.