

FORMS, COLLECTIONS OF INFORMATION, AND REPORTS MANAGEMENT

1. **REASON FOR ISSUE.** This directive establishes the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) policy for managing forms, collections of information, and reports. This directive replaces policy contained in MP-1, Part II, Chapter 4, Forms Management, dated October 1991; MP-1, Part II, Chapter 26, Reports Management, dated October 27, 1983; MP-1, Part II, Chapter 28, Interagency Reporting, dated September 24, 1985; and OI-1, Part VI, Chapter 3, Controlling and Monitoring Congressional Reporting Requirements, dated September 11, 1985.
2. **SUMMARY OF CONTENTS/MAJOR CHANGES.** This directive sets forth policy and responsibilities for VA's Forms, Collections of Information, and Reports Management Programs.
3. **RESPONSIBLE OFFICE.** Information Management Service (045A4), Office of the Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology.
4. **RELATED HANDBOOKS.** VA Handbook 6310.1, Forms Management Procedures, VA Handbook 6310.2, Collections of Information Procedures, and VA Handbook 6310.3, Reports Management Procedures.
5. **RESCISSIONS.** This directive replaces policy contained in MP-1, Part II, Chapter 4, Forms Management, dated October 1991; MP-1, Part II, Chapter 26, Reports Management, dated October 27, 1983; MP-1, Part II, Chapter 28, Interagency Reporting, dated September 24, 1985; and OI-1, Part VI, Chapter 3, Controlling and Monitoring Congressional Reporting Requirements, dated September 11, 1985.

CERTIFIED BY:

**BY DIRECTION OF THE SECRETARY
OF VETERANS AFFAIRS:**

/s/
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FORMS, COLLECTIONS OF INFORMATION AND REPORTS MANAGEMENT**1. PURPOSE**

a. To provide a service to our customers by establishing policy and responsibilities for Government Printing and Binding Regulations published by the Joint Committee on Printing, United States Congress; managing forms, collections of information, and reports used within the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). This directive is supplemented by VA Handbooks 6310.1, Forms Management Procedures, 6310.2, Collections of Information Procedures, and 6310.3, Reports Management Procedures, that provide guidance, procedures, and detailed instructions on processing, controlling, and preparing forms, collections of information, and reports.

b. This directive provides policy for:

- (1) Managing VA's forms, including letterhead stationery;
- (2) Clearing all collections of information through the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and submitting VA's information collection budget to OMB; and
- (3) Managing internal, interagency, Congressional, and White House reports, and reporting systems used in producing and using these reports.

c. The relevant authorities and requirements governing Forms, Collections of Information, and Reports Management Programs are:

- (1) Executive Order 12291, Federal Regulation;
- (2) Executive Order 12862, Setting Customer Service Standards;
- (3) Executive Order 13011, Information Technology Management Reform Act of 1996;
- (4) OMB Circular A-129, Managing Federal Credit Programs (nonstatutory guidance); and
- (5) Public Law 103-283, Section 207a, Legislative Appropriations Act;
- (6) Public Law 104-106, Division E, Department of Veterans Affairs Act;
- (7) Public Law 100-527, Section 4(d), Department of Veterans Affairs Act;
- (8) Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA) of 1995, as amended (44 U.S.C. Chapter 35);
- (9) Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Section 508 of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998.
- (10) Title 5, CFR, Part 1320, Controlling Paperwork Burdens on the Public;

- (11) Title 5, U.S.C. Section 552, Freedom of Information Act;
- (12) Title 5, U.S.C. Section 552a, Privacy Act of 1974, as amended;
- (13) Title 38 U.S.C. Sections 310, 5701, 5705, and 7332, Veterans Benefits;
- (14) Title 44, U.S.C. Public Printing and Documents, Chapters 5, 11, 29, 31, 33;

2. POLICY

a. Forms and Reports Management Programs will be coordinated with other management programs, such as automated systems, records management and directives management. The developer of a form or report (or the individual in Central Office processing a field facility submission) and staff personnel responsible for these programs must maintain a close working relationship.

b. Forms and reports must be easy to read, use, process, transmit, and retrieve. Forms will display an authorized form number and issue date, a title or subject and one of VA's identifiers (the official VA seal or logo). Exceptions to these provisions are permitted and will be determined by the appropriate Forms Officer as dictated by the design of the form. Reports will display a reports identifier. Each form and report will be governed by directives approved by the Secretary or Deputy Secretary, an Administration Head, Assistant Secretary, or Other Key Official. The originating office will document the purpose, justification, and costs for developing and using the form or report.

c. Forms and reports will be coordinated with all affected VA organizations and will have the concurrence of all program officials who will provide support or incur administrative responsibilities. Standardized format and style should be used to reduce costs and improve productivity as outlined in VA Handbooks 6310.1, Forms Management Procedures, and 6310.3, Reports Management Procedures.

d. Forms and reports formats will be electronically designed whenever possible to comply with the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and Section 508 of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, for ease of interpretation, completion, transmittal, processing, and retrieval by persons with disabilities.

e. Use of electronic transmission of data, automated systems, and electronic forms and form letters should be used, when appropriate, to reduce and control the paperwork burden. This burden includes: collections of information from individuals, businesses, and other private entities, and State, local, and tribal governments. The electronic technology should also be used to reduce VA's administrative and program operating costs.

f. Standard forms software used in creating or modifying electronic forms will be determined by the Forms Officers within their area of responsibility.

g. All electronic forms must be cleared through the appropriate Forms Officer for adherence to current Public Laws and Department forms standards before being placed on either the World Wide Web (www), Local Area Network (LAN), or any other electronic medium with the ability to disseminate to one or more people with the intentions to provide or collect data.

h. Data already available in electronic files or other format will be used as extensively as practical, rather than imposing an additional reporting burden on others. A report should never be required merely as a device to verify the accuracy of another report.

i. Approved forms and reports will be periodically evaluated for continued effectiveness and for adequacy, design, and economy of preparation and use. Organizational forms and reports programs will also be evaluated periodically for effectiveness and compliance with Federal regulations. Unnecessary forms and reports will be eliminated.

j. VA stationery will be of a uniform format that properly reflects the dignity and mission of the Department. Special slogans or graphics will not be used on Department letterhead stationery or form letters, without the appropriate approval from the Director, Information Management Service.

k. Individualized letterhead stationery is authorized for use by the Secretary, Deputy Secretary, Administration Heads, Assistant Secretaries, Other Key Officials, Deputy Assistant Secretaries, and each field facility assigned a separate station number.

l. A VA facility located in a remote area removed from its parent facility, that uses more than 1,000 sheets of letterhead stationery annually, may request permission to use individualized letterhead from the Director, Information Management Service, through the appropriate Publications Control Officer.

m. Individualized personal-size letterhead stationery is authorized for use by the Secretary, Deputy Secretary, Administration Heads, Assistant Secretaries, Other Key Officials, and Deputy Assistant Secretaries.

n. General-purpose letterhead stationery will be used by Central Office and field facilities that are not authorized individualized letterhead stationery.

o. The use of carbon sets will be eliminated whenever possible. Converting carbon sets to chemical transfer sets, where appropriate, or changing from impact to non-impact or laser-printing systems should now be the preferred method.

p. White House reports are subject to the reporting requirements of this directive only when feeder reports are required from more than one organizational source.

q. VA will establish and maintain a Collection of Information Program as required by the PRA of 1995.

r. Only information essential to the implementation, conduct or management of VA programs will be collected.

s. A collection of information will not become effective until OMB has assigned a control number. A currently valid OMB control number will be displayed on the information collection instrument unless OMB determines it to be inappropriate.

t. Continued use of any collection of information is not authorized or enforceable after its expiration date. Respondents will not be subject to any penalty for failure to comply with any collection of information that has expired.

u. Collections of information will be evaluated annually to achieve burden hour reductions.

v. When evaluating existing collections of information and considering new collections for approval, VA will support the goals established by 44 U.S.C., Section 3505(a)(1).

w. VA will conduct a series of qualitative and quantitative surveys to determine the kind of services its customers need, as well as to determine customer levels of satisfaction with existing services in accordance with Executive Order 12862, Setting Customer Service Standards.

x. Customer satisfaction surveys will be used to determine the kinds of services the customer needs, as well as the customer's levels of satisfaction with existing services.

3. RESPONSIBILITIES

a. **Chief Information Officer.** Administers the Department-wide Forms, Collections of Information, and Reports Management Programs that include:

(1) Developing and recommending to the Secretary policies and directives concerning Forms, Collections of Information and Reports Management Programs in VA;

(2) Serving as the senior official and the primary coordinator in the implementation and accomplishment of goals under the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (PRA), (44 U.S.C. Chapter 35);

(3) Designating an individual to serve as VA Forms Officer; VA Reports Coordinator and VA Clearance Officer; and

(4) Providing consolidated statistical data on the Forms Management Program to the Secretary.

b. **Associate Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy and Program Assistance.** Recommends to the Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology and carries out the Department-wide policies, plans, procedures, and directives pertaining to the Forms, Collections of Information, and Reports Management Programs that include:

(1) Ensuring compliance with OMB Circular A-129 on information collections for Federal financial assistance;

(2) Designating the **Director, Information Management Service** to:

(a) Serve as the principal VA liaison with OMB, the General Services Administration (GSA), other government agencies, technical organizations, and private firms on the overall Forms Management Program;

(b) Ensure the submission of VA's Information Collection Budget (ICB) to OMB;

(c) Obtain OMB approval for all collections of information and reporting or recordkeeping requirements;

(d) Prepare *Federal Register* notices announcing VA's intention to collect information and to seek OMB approval;

(e) Assign blocks of VA form numbers to the Administrations and staff offices' Forms Officers for forms promulgated by the Department and maintain an accounting log for such assignment;

(f) Assign reports control identifiers to the Administrations and staff offices' Reports Coordinators for reports promulgated by the Department and maintain an accounting log for such assignment, with the exception of congressionally mandated reports;

(g) Ensure the development of VA's annual report on the Forms Management Program;

(h) Serve as VA's Clearance Officer who will certify requests for OMB review under the PRA;

(i) Serve as VA's and Interagency Reports Coordinator and notify GSA of the person designated to this position;

(j) Maintain the Department's inventory of current approved recurring internal and external reports;

(k) Ensure the Department's compliance with the Interagency Reports Management Program. Coordinate with GSA to obtain approval of reporting requirements that VA imposes on other agencies. Report to GSA any reporting requirements imposed on VA by other agencies that have not been approved through the Interagency Reports Management Program;

(l) Provide advice and assistance on the Forms (including letterhead stationery), Collections of Information, and Reports Management Programs to program officials and coordinators within the Department; and

(m) Serve as VA's Forms Officer.

c. **Assistant Secretary for Management.** Maintains a tracking system that lists and monitors VA action on Congressional Appropriations Committees reporting requirements. The Office of Budget is responsible for coordinating VA's submission to the Appropriations Committees.

d. **Deputy Assistant Secretary for Acquisition and Materiel Management.** Maintains responsibility for forms design for the Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs, Assistant Secretaries, and Other Key Officials.

e. **Administration Heads, Assistant Secretaries, and Other Key Officials.** Establish and administer the Forms, Collections of Information, and Reports Management Programs in the offices and field facilities under their jurisdiction, as appropriate. The responsibilities are:

(1) Developing and issuing internal policies and procedures to implement provisions and policies of this directive. This includes procedures for issuing any special instructions concerning reporting and recordkeeping requirements, reporting procedures, or reviews, if needed;

(2) Reviewing and coordinating all matters concerning forms and reporting requirements within their respective organizations and ensuring that all related activities are in compliance with the provisions of the laws, regulations, policies, and processes in this directive;

(3) Coordinating activities relating to forms management policies and procedures; clearance of collections of information; and preparation of data for the annual ICB with the Director, Information Management Service;

(4) Ensuring that all collections of information have OMB approval; display all information required by 5 CFR 1320.8(b), including a currently valid OMB control number with, if appropriate, an expiration date and advise respondents that they are not required to respond to the collection of information unless it does; display the estimated average burden hours per response; and an appropriate respondent burden statement allowing public comment to VA;

(5) Ensuring that all information collections for Federal assistance include a statement as to the applicant's delinquency status on Federal debts and include examples of debts, definitions of delinquency, and defaults in accordance with OMB Circular A-129;

(6) Having authority over matters pertaining to control, determination of essentiality, coordination, and final approval of all forms and reports controlled by their organizational element;

(7) Encouraging the use of the most economical processes for printing and reproduction (including photocopying), stock replenishment, distribution and the use of locally reproduced forms that have one-time or limited usage;

- (8) Evaluating their respective programs for economy and effectiveness;
- (9) Ensuring that approved forms and reports are reviewed. This includes: reviewing organizational forms and report programs for effectiveness and compliance with Federal regulations; reviewing VA directives that establish or continue forms or reporting requirements to ensure the clearance and control of all such forms and reports; ensuring that modifications recommended as a result of reviews are implemented; that unnecessary forms and reports are eliminated; and VA's forms and reporting activities comply with the Federal regulations;
- (10) Ensuring that Central Office letterhead stationery requests are submitted to the Director, Information Management Service for compliance with letterhead specifications as established by the Joint Committee on Printing;
- (11) Designating an official and alternate to serve as Reports Coordinator and the Information Collection Coordinator. Report the names, mail routing symbols, and telephone numbers of the designated coordinators to the Director, Information Management Service. Notify that office of all additions, changes, and deletions in a timely manner;
- (12) Ensuring that officials are designated in each VA field facility to serve as the facility Reports Management Coordinator and the Information Collection Coordinator. These individuals are responsible for assisting the facility director in ensuring that the facility is in compliance with the provisions of this directive;
- (13) Assigning reports control identifiers to new recurring and nonrecurring reports promulgated by their organization, maintaining an accounting log for such assignments, and requesting additional blocks of numbers from Information Management Service when necessary.
- (14) Assigning Computer Output Identification Numbers (COIN) to automated reports generated from automated systems or applications under their jurisdiction, and maintaining an accounting log of such assignments;
- (15) Exempting nonrecurring reports from the reports clearance process when it is determined by the approving official that time constraints are such that control and clearance by the organization's Reports Coordinator would interfere with the operations of their programs;
- (16) Approving revisions to previously approved recurring reports, any related directives and report forms;
- (17) Establishing a system to monitor Congressional and White House reporting requirements; notifying the Executive Secretariat, General Counsel, and the Office of Congressional Affairs of any Congressional reporting requirement not previously identified; notifying the Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology of any reporting requirements received from the Appropriations Committees or that arise during consideration of VA appropriations requests; and notifying the Executive Secretariat of any White House reporting requirement not previously identified;

- (18) Providing VA's Reports Coordinator with a copy of the approved directive and justification that contains the reporting requirements;
- (19) Obtaining the approval and concurrence of all organizations affected by any proposal to initiate, change, or cancel a recurring or automated report;
- (20) Submitting to the Interagency Reports Coordinator all documentation to initiate, revise, or extend any interagency reporting requirement for which the organization is responsible, whether the report is imposed on or imposed by VA;
- (21) Notifying the Interagency Reports Coordinator of any unauthorized interagency reporting requirement imposed on their office by another agency and refraining from responding to such requirements;
- (22) Ensuring timely and complete responses are made to reporting requirements imposed by Congress, OMB and other Federal entities on behalf of Congress, and other Federal agencies through the Interagency Reports Management Program;
- (23) Gathering and submitting information required by agencies, organizations, or individuals outside VA for the programs that the primary office is responsible, including reviewing, approving and dispatching statistical and narrative reports that have been approved through the established clearance process;
- (24) Submitting Record Control Number (RCN) 72-0192, Annual Inventory of Recurring Reports;
- (25) Ensuring that a historical case file is maintained for each of their controlled forms and reports; and
- (26) Ensuring that the required notice is given with requests for Social Security Numbers, and that a Privacy Act statement appears on each applicable form or accompanying instruction sheet collecting information that is going into a Privacy Act system of records (see 5 USC 552a(e)(3)).

f. **The Under Secretary for Health, Under Secretary for Benefits, and Deputy Assistant Secretary for Acquisition and Materiel Management** will:

(1) Designate an official and alternate to serve as Forms Officer. Report the names, mail routing symbols, and telephone numbers of designated officials to the Director, Information Management Service. Notify that office of all additions, changes, and deletions in a timely manner;

(2) Adhere to the forms design and specifications for forms under their jurisdiction and the responsibilities outlined in this directive;

(3) Assign form numbers to new, nonrecurring, and test forms originating from their organization, maintain an accounting log for such assignments, and request additional blocks of numbers from the Director, Information Management Service;

(4) Ensure that exceptions to standard and optional forms are submitted to the Director, Information Management Service for obtaining approval of the exceptions from the originating agencies;

(5) Submit RCN 72-0406, Annual Report on the Forms Management Program; and

(6) Maintain official history files for forms under their area of responsibility.

g. **Office of Congressional and Legislative (OCLA)** will maintain a tracking system that lists and monitors VA action on congressional reporting requirements (other than those from Appropriations Committees). OCA is responsible for coordinating VA's submission of these reports to Congress. OCA will initially review and identify any congressional reporting requirements in legislation, committee and subcommittee reports (other than those from Appropriations Committees), and testimony transcripts and advise the Executive Secretariat and the responsible office(s) of these requirements.

h. **Office of the General Counsel** will notify the Director, Information Management Service of collections of information contained in proposed rules and of any changes or pending modifications to existing collections contained in current rules.

i. **Office of the Executive Secretariat** will control White House reports and Congressional reporting requirements through the Department's automated control and tracking system.

4. DEFINITIONS

a. **Burden.** The total time, effort, or financial resources expended to generate, maintain, retain, or disclose or provide information to or for a Federal agency (see 5 CFR 1320.3(b)).

b. **Collection of Information.** Except as provided in 5 CFR 1320.4, means the obtaining, causing to be obtained, soliciting, or requiring the disclosure to an agency, third parties or the public of information by or for an agency by means of identical questions posed to, or identical reporting, recordkeeping, or disclosure requirements imposed on, 10 or more persons, whether such collection of information is mandatory, voluntary, or required to obtain a benefit (see 5 CFR 1320.3(c)).

c. **Electronic Form.** A category of machine-readable forms in which the information is represented by electronic impulses or a magnetic medium, such as magnetic tape, disk, or diskette, and which requires the use of specialized equipment to convert the information to human-readable.

d. **Feeder Report.** A report that provides part or all of the data needed to prepare another report.

e. **Form.** A fixed arrangement of captioned spaces designed for entering and extracting prescribed information, including Federal Information Processing Standards (any organized combination of equipment that is used in automatic acquisition, storage, manipulation, management, movement, control, display, switching, interchange, transmission, or reception of data or information) forms, regardless of media. The forms may be categorized as: internal, created by and used within VA; interagency, used to collect information by VA from one or more other Federal agencies; information collection, used for gathering information from 10 or more members of the public or "persons" (individuals, partnerships, associations, corporations, business trusts, legal representatives, organized groups of individuals, and States, U.S. Territories, and local governments or their components); standard, forms prescribed by a Federal agency and approved by GSA for mandatory use throughout the Federal Government; optional, developed for use in two or more agencies and approved by GSA for nonmandatory use.

f. **Information.** Any statement of fact or opinion, regardless of form or format, whether in numerical, graphic, or narrative form, and whether oral or maintained on paper, electronic or other media (see 5 CFR 1320.3(h)).

g. **Interagency Report.** Any reporting requirement imposed by a Federal agency on one or more other Federal agencies. Interagency reports require GSA review and clearance and are subject to the provisions of 41 CFR Part 101-11.204. Interagency reports that also require collection of information from the public, or State or local governments will also require OMB clearance.

h. **Recordkeeping Requirement.** A requirement imposed by or for an agency on persons to maintain specified records, including a requirement to:

(1) Retain such records.

(2) Notify third parties, the Federal government, or the public of the existence of such records.

(3) Disclose such records to third parties, the Federal government, or the public.

(4) Report to third parties, the Federal government, or the public regarding such records (see 5 CFR 1320.3(m)).

i. **Report.** Data or information requested from two or more sources and transmitted in response to a current directive for use in determining policy, planning, controlling, and evaluating operations and performance; making administrative determinations; or preparing other reports. The data or information may be in narrative, statistical, graphic, or other form, and may be on paper, magnetic tape, or other media.

j. **Reports Control Identifier.** A symbol consisting of letters and numbers used to identify a report that has been reviewed and approved for use within the Department by a reports control office.

k. **Reporting System.** Any organized, systematic method, either manual or automated, used to collect, organize, transmit, and retain data or information.