

Department of Veterans Affairs
Washington DC 20420

VA DIRECTIVE 6320
Transmittal Sheet
April 14, 1997

CORRESPONDENCE MANAGEMENT

1. **REASON FOR ISSUE:** To revise Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) correspondence management policy formerly contained in Chapter 10, "Correspondence," Part II, VA Manual MP- 1, "General Administrative." This VA Manual is retitled as "VA Directive 6320, Correspondence Management. "

2. **SUMMARY OF CONTENTS/MAJOR CHANGES:** This directive:

a. Streamlines the correspondence management policy;

b. Establishes the use of the latest edition of the U.S. Government Correspondence Manual (GSA) and U.S. Government Printing Office (GPO) Style Manual as the overall guides for preparation of VA correspondence;

c. Establishes policy for obtaining the signature of the Secretary, Deputy Secretary, or other officials of the Office of the Secretary;

d. Allows VA organizational elements to supplement this policy to meet their needs; and

e. Establishes Appendix A, Procedures for Office of the Secretary Correspondence, and Appendix B, Procedures for VA Titles and Abbreviations.

3. **RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** Information Management Service (045A4), Office of the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Information Resources Management.

4. **RELATED HANDBOOK:** None.

5. **RESCISSIONS:** MP-1, Part II, Chapter 10, Correspondence, dated January 29, 1991. H-70-1, VA Correspondence Handbook 199 1. Partial rescission of MP- 1, Part I, Chapter 1, Written Communications-Approval Authorities, dated August 2 1, 1991, paragraphs 2b(2) and 4.

CERTIFIED BY:

BY DIRECTION OF THE SECRETARY
OF VETERANS AFFAIRS:



Nada D. H. is
Deputy Assistant Secretary for
Information Resources Management



D. Mark Catlett
Assistant Secretary for Management

Distribution: RPC:
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CORRESPONDENCE MANAGEMENT

1. **PURPOSE.** This directive establishes policy for a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) correspondence management program. This directive will be supplemented by the latest editions of the U.S. Government Correspondence Manual and the U.S. Government Printing Office (GPO) Style Manual. Procedures for Office of the Secretary correspondence are in Appendix A. Procedures for VA titles and abbreviations are in Appendix B.

2. POLICY

a. VA's correspondence will be created in an economical and efficient manner. Style and usage of correspondence will reflect good business practices.

b. Correspondence will be used to communicate within or outside the Department. It will not be used to establish, change, or rescind policies, procedures, or instructions contained in directives.

c. All correspondence prepared in the Department should be written in concise and simple language. Special consideration should also be given to correspondence prepared for the visually impaired by using a larger print size.

d. The signature level will be based on content of the correspondence, as well as the organizational level of the addressee.

e. The Secretary, or Deputy Secretary in the absence of the Secretary, will sign all correspondence to the President and Vice President of the United States, heads of other executive departments, and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States.

3. RESPONSIBILITIES

a. **Secretary of Veterans Affairs.** Designates the senior official under the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (Public Law 104-1 3) responsible for maintaining a Departmentwide information resources management program, of which the correspondence management program is a part.

b. **Assistant Secretary for Management.** The Assistant Secretary for Management, as the designated senior official, will:

(1) Establish, coordinate, and maintain a correspondence management program with an emphasis on promoting the use of modem technologies;

(2) Establish and implement Departmentwide plans, policies and procedures pertaining to correspondence management;

(3) Maintain liaison activities with the General Services Administration (GSA) and other Government agencies on correspondence management matters.

c. Administration Heads, Assistant Secretaries, and Other Key Officials. These individuals will:

(1) Ensure that the policies set forth in this directive are implemented within their respective organizations and field activities;

(2) Periodically review their correspondence activities to ensure compliance with this directive;

(3) Supplement this policy, if appropriate, with internal policies and procedures issued by their respective Central Office organizations and provide a copy to Information Management Service;

(4) Designate at least one correspondence management representative and one alternate to serve as the point of contact on matters of correspondence management policy. By memorandum, notify the Executive Secretariat of the name, telephone number, and mail routing symbol of the representative and alternate, and all changes thereto. Provide a courtesy copy of the memorandum to the Director, Information Management Service; and

(5) Designate at least one individual who is authorized to sign controlled correspondence on their behalf. By memorandum, notify the Executive Secretariat of the name and telephone number of the designee. If the designation is limited in scope, provide a listing of the types and categories of correspondence that each designee is authorized to sign.

d. Assistant Secretary for Congressional Affairs. In addition to the responsibilities outlined in paragraph c above, the Assistant Secretary for Congressional Affairs must concur in Congressional replies relating to other than routine matters and casework.

e. Executive Secretariat. The Executive Secretariat will control and track correspondence requiring the signature of the Secretary or Deputy Secretary, as well as all White House controlled correspondence and other correspondence which has high-level interest.

OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY CORRESPONDENCE

1. **GENERAL.** This appendix supplements VA Directive 6320, Correspondence Management, and the latest editions of the U.S. Government Correspondence Manual (GSA) and the U.S. Government Printing Office (GPO) Style Manual. It describes correspondence management practices and preferences for correspondence prepared for the signature of the Secretary, Deputy Secretary, or other officials of the Office of the Secretary. All correspondence prepared for signature of personnel in the Office of the Secretary will be consistent with provisions of VA's confidentiality statutes and regulations.

2. **CONTROLLED CORRESPONDENCE**

a. **Tracking System.** The Executive Secretariat will use the current automated document tracking system to control and track Congressional, White House, and other high-interest communications requiring the signature of the Secretary, Deputy Secretary, or other officials.

b. **Timeliness.** It is extremely important that the Department be responsive to the veterans it serves, as well as to members of Congress, to veterans service organizations (VSOs), and to all other correspondents. While suspense dates may be adjusted to fit individual circumstances, the following timeliness standards generally apply to correspondence controlled by the Executive Secretariat:

| <u>Type of Correspondence</u> | <u>Final Response (workdays)</u> | <u>Interim/ Acknowledgment (workdays)</u> | <u>Turnaround for Rewrite (workdays)</u> |
|---|----------------------------------|---|--|
| White House (non-routine) | 10-12 | 0 | 1 |
| White House (routine) | 30 | 0 | 2 |
| Congressional | 12 | 2 | 2 |
| Other (includes Federal agencies/ VSOs) | 12 | 2 | 2 |

c. **Extension/Reassignment Requests.** Every effort will be made to respond to correspondence within established timeframes. In unusual circumstances when the established suspense date cannot be met, requests for extension of the suspense date will be made in writing

Appendix A

(in hard copy or via electronic mail) to the Executive Secretariat. Requests for reassignment of controlled correspondence will also be made in writing.

d. **Acknowledgments.** Executive Secretariat staff will prepare an acknowledgment upon receipt of Congressional, veteran service organization and other Federal agency correspondence requiring a reply by the Secretary or Deputy Secretary. Routine acknowledgments are not required for White House controlled communications or for other types of routine correspondence requiring reply by the Secretary or Deputy Secretary.

e. **Interim Responses.** Interim responses will be prepared by the action offices only in the unusual circumstance when the final reply cannot be prepared within the prescribed time limits. Interim responses will include all information presently available, an explanation of why a complete, timely response cannot be provided, and, if possible, an indication of when the correspondent may be expected to receive the final response. If dates are cited, be sure they are met. In all cases, VA Form 4265, Concurrence and Summary Sheet, accompanying interim replies will provide an indication of when the final reply will reach the Executive Secretariat for signature.

3. CONCURRENCES. VA Form 4265, Concurrence and Summary Sheet (See Illustration 1) is used in Central Office to request concurrences in substantially all correspondence and documents prepared for the signature or approval of the Secretary, the Deputy Secretary, or other officials of the Office of the Secretary. All appropriate concurrences will be obtained prior to submission of the document to the Executive Secretariat for signature. Only Assistant Secretaries, Deputy Assistant Secretaries, Administration Heads, or independent staff office directors, or their designees, may sign as concurring/nonconcurring officials on the Concurrence and Summary Sheet. Designations of persons authorized to sign on the Concurrence and Summary Sheet will be made in writing to the Executive Secretariat when there are changes to designated personnel or as periodically requested by the Executive Secretariat.

4. CONGRESSIONAL CORRESPONDENCE

a. **Congressional Correspondence.** Special importance is placed on prompt, succinct, and readily understandable responses to Congressional correspondence. The Office of the Assistant Secretary for Congressional Affairs (009) or the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Congressional Affairs (60) must concur in all Congressional correspondence, as well as correspondence of interest to members of Congress, before it is presented to the Executive Secretariat for signature of the Secretary or Deputy Secretary.

b. Point of Contact Information. It is often appropriate to provide a member of Congress with a VA point of contact. Point of contact information will be provided in a format similar to the following:

Example:

If you or your staff need additional information on this matter, Mr. Don Jones, Director, VA Medical Center, Anywhere, USA, would be pleased to be of assistance. He or a member of his staff may be reached at (123) 456-7890.

5. MEMORANDA AND LETTERS

a. General Format

(1) **Margins.** The right margin will not be justified (i.e., it will be uneven). Correspondence will be arranged attractively on the page with margins of approximately one inch.

(2) **Style.** The preferred format for VA letters signed by the Secretary or Deputy Secretary is indented style. In indented style, the first sentence of each paragraph is indented five spaces. (See Illustration 2.)

(3) **Type Style and Font Size.** Correspondence should be prepared in an attractive, business-like, and easily-readable **type style** (such as Times New Roman, Bookman Old Style, Arial, or Century Schoolbook) and **font size (12-14 point)**.

(4) **Backup Documentation.** Packages submitted to the Executive Secretariat for signature or approval should contain adequate backup documentation, whether in paper or electronic form, to enable the signatory authority to make a thoroughly informed decision about the appropriateness and ramifications of signing the document.

b. Memoranda

(1) Memoranda for the signature of the Secretary or the Deputy Secretary will be prepared in indented style, and the signer's name will appear five lines below the last line of text, beginning at the center of the line. (See Illustration 3.) Stylistic considerations and other general information shown in this appendix concerning preparation of letters also pertain to the preparation of memoranda.

(2) When a memorandum is not prepared for the signature of the Secretary or Deputy Secretary but requires their approval, the signature block for the approval will be prepared in the same format as for a Decision Paper (See paragraph 5b(3)).

(6) **Complimentary Close.** The complimentary close will appear on the second line below the body of the letter, beginning at the center of the line. The preferred complimentary close is "Sincerely yours," except for correspondence to the President, when "Respectfully," is used, and for correspondence to ambassadors, foreign ministers, or foreign charge d'affaires, where "Very truly yours," is appropriate.

(7) **Signature Block.** The signature block will be five spaces underneath and lined up with the complimentary close. The name will be typed with initial capital letters. Titles for Secretary and Deputy Secretary are not to be used in the signature block when appropriate letterhead is used which corresponds with the title of the signer.

Example: Jesse Brown

(8) **Initial Line.** The Secretary's or Deputy Secretary's initials in upper case and those of the preparer in lower case will appear at the left margin, two spaces below the typed name or the word "Enclosure" on letters, or "Attachment" on memoranda.

Example: JB/akr

(9) **Courtesy Copies.** Designations of "cc:" should not appear on White House, Congressional, Foreign Government, State government, or veterans service organization correspondence.

(10) **Multiple Addressee Letters.** When incoming correspondence is signed by multiple persons, each correspondent will normally receive a reply. All cosigners of Congressional correspondence will receive an individual reply unless they have requested otherwise. The opening paragraph of a multiple addressee response will contain language similar to the following, "Thank you for your jointly-signed letter concerning.. ." If the number of cosigners is small, the other cosigners may be specifically named. The final paragraph should include a statement such as the following, "A similar letter has been sent to the other cosigners." Although only one letter needs to be retained for file purposes, the action office preparing the letters should also prepare an accompanying addressee listing indicating the names and addresses of the addressees receiving the letters, as well as salutations and other necessary modifications specific to each addressee. The addressee listing should accompany each file copy.

(11) **Fact Sheet Format.** A fact sheet is a detailed document prepared to accompany a cover letter or other correspondence when the subject matter concerns a complex or technical issue or specific points of law. (See Illustrations' 6 and 7.) A copy of the fact sheet will be attached to each copy of the correspondence. The cover letter and fact sheet format **will not** be used when the correspondence constitutes a final decision on an appeal, such as Freedom of Information Act, Privacy Act, or personnel action appeals. In these cases the detailed information must be included in the signed correspondence.

6. OTHER TYPES OF CORRESPONDENCE

a. **Complimentary Correspondence.** Complimentary correspondence to the Secretary or Deputy Secretary will be controlled for-a response. A letter will be prepared to thank the correspondent with a courtesy copy sent to the appropriate facility director or supervisor. A brief letter or note of personal thanks will be prepared on Secretary's personal-size stationery to the employee complimented. When the complimentary correspondence names an individual not employed by VA, such as a veterans service organization officer, a VA medical center volunteer, a county service officer, or an employee of a state soldiers' home, an appropriate letter will be prepared to that individual, but it is not necessary to prepare a courtesy copy or letter for the supervisor of such an employee. When the correspondence is being sent to a field facility and it is to be signed by the Secretary or Deputy Secretary, the backup documentation will include the confirmed spelling and position' of the complimented individual and a statement that the facility management believes the complimentary letter from the Secretary or Deputy Secretary is appropriate.

b. **White House Correspondence.** The Executive Secretariat serves as the Department's official point of contact with the White House on all White House correspondence. When an information copy of the Department's reply is to be furnished to the White House, two copies of the acknowledgment or reply and its enclosures will be forwarded to the Executive Secretariat, with a correspondence tracking form or tracking number attached, at the same time the original reply is dispatched to the correspondent. When a draft reply is requested by the White House, the draft reply will be prepared in double-spaced format. In the lower left corner of the last page of the draft, the name, mail routing symbol, and telephone number of the writer or other person knowledgeable about the matter will be typed. A formal memorandum for the signature of the *Director, Executive Secretariat, will also be prepared to transmit the draft reply to the appropriate White House official.

c. **Correspondence Addressed to the Secretary or Deputy Secretary and Assigned for Lower Signature Level.** When responding on behalf of the Secretary or the Deputy Secretary, it is necessary to clarify that the response is on behalf of the Secretary or Deputy Secretary. The introductory sentence should include language such as, "Your letter addressed to the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs regarding' has been forwarded to me for reply." If the Executive Secretariat has requested a copy of the reply, a copy of the reply, along with the appropriate tracking identifying information should be provided promptly to the Executive Secretariat upon dispatch of the correspondence.

|  Department of Veterans Affairs | | CONCURRENCE AND SUMMARY SHEET | | | | |
|---|--|--------------------------------------|-------------|---|-----------|-------------|
| SUBJECT Briefly state subject of correspondence; e.g., "Compensation Case, Congressman Doe, VETERAN, John Q., SS 123-45-6789" | | | | NAME OF ADDRESSEE (For Correspondence Only) | | |
| TO BE COMPLETED BY EXECUTIVE SECRETARIAT (001B) | | | | | | |
| REMARKS | | | CONTROL No. | NAME OF REVIEWER | | |
| CONCURRENCES - TO BE DETERMINED BY THE ORIGINATING OFFICE | | | | | | |
| CONCUR- RENCE REQUIRE D | TITLE OR ORGANIZATIONAL ELEMENT | MAIL ROUTING SYMBOL | DATE IN | SIGNATURE | | DATE OUT |
| | | | | CONCUR | NONCONCUR | |
| X | VETERANS HEALTH ADMINISTRATION | 10 | | | | |
| X | VETERANS BENEFITS ADMINISTRATION | 20 | | | | |
| X | NATIONAL CEMETERY SYSTEM | 40 | | | | |
| X | ASSTANT SECRETARY FOR PUBLIC AND INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS | 002 | | | | |
| | DAS FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS | 80 | | | | |
| | DAS FOR INTERGOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS | 075 | | | | |
| | ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR MANAGEMENT | 004 | | | | |
| | DAS FOR BUDGET | 041 | | | | |
| | DAS FOR INFORMATION RESOURCES MANAGEMENT | 045 | | | | |
| | DAS FOR FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT | 047 | | | | |
| | DAS FOR ACQUISITION AND MATERIEL MANAGEMENT | 90 | | | | |
| X | ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR HUMAN RESOURCES AND ADMINISTRATION | 006 | | | | |
| X | DAS FOR ADMINISTRATION | 03 | | | | |
| | DAS FOR HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT | 05 | | | | |
| | DAS FOR EQUAL OPPORTUNITY | 06 | | | | |
| | DAS FOR SECURITY AND LAW ENFORCEMENT | 07 | | | | |
| X | ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR POLICY AND PLANNING | 008 | | | | |
| | ASSISTANT SECRETARY FOR CONGRESSIONAL AFFAIRS | 009 | | | | |
| | DAS FOR CONGRESSIONAL AFFAIRS | 60 | | | | |
| X | BOARD OF VETERANS' APPEALS | 01 | | | | |
| X | GENERAL COUNSEL | 02 | | | | |
| X | BOARD OF CONTRACT APPEALS | 09 | | | | |
| X | INSPECTOR GENERAL | 50 | | | | |
| X | Director, CMV | 00M | | | | |
| X | Director, CWV | 00W | | | | |
| X | Director, OSDBU | 00SB | | | | |
| X | Executive Secretariat | 00B | | | | |

ACTION BY OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY (Do NOT use for Correspondence)

| | | |
|---|-----------|------|
| ACTION TAKEN <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> APPROVAL <input type="checkbox"/> DISAPPROVED | SIGNATURE | DATE |
|---|-----------|------|

Illustration 1. VA Form 4265, Concurrence and Summary Sheet (Page 1)

