VETS Manual Series, Volume VI

Correspondence and Records Management

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6.1 Introduction

Correspondence and records management encompasses various types of written communication within VETS. Written correspondence consists of policy directives, letters written and received by VETS staff, internal memoranda and electronic mail (e-mail). This volume is provided as a reference to assist VETS employees in the creation and management of internal and external correspondence, electronic information, and policy directives.

6.2 Policy Directives

The purpose of the VETS Directives System is to document and communicate program and administrative policy, procedures, and instructions throughout the agency and to external parties. Policy directives should provide accurate, essential and timely information and should be easily understood by all recipients.

VETS authorizes and defines the following three types of policy directives:

- ASVET Memoranda (AMs) are used to transmit major policy statements, interpretations, strategic goals and plans, program guidelines and workload or reporting requirements for programs in which VETS staff themselves are the service providers. They are signed by the Assistant Secretary, or if authorized by the ASVET, by the Deputy Assistant Secretary.
- Veterans' Program Letters (VPLs) are used to transmit program policy, interpretations, guidance, procedures, and other information to VETS staff and program service providers. Program service providers include, but are not limited to, agency grantees, sub-grantees, and other entities that provide services to veterans, transitioning service members, and other eligibles. VPLs are signed by the Assistant Secretary, or if authorized by the ASVET, by the Deputy Assistant Secretary.
- Director's Memoranda (DMs) are used to transmit internal technical information or guidance on the planning or implementation of administrative or program operations to VETS staff only. These Memoranda may be used to impose reporting requirements upon VETS staff but will not be used to disseminate policy statements or to impose workloads upon VETS' service delivery partners.

DMs are initiated and signed (depending upon the subject matter) by the:

- Director of the Office of Operations and Programs (OOP),
- Director of Compliance and Investigations, or
- Director of the Office of Agency Management and Budget (OAMB)

All policy directives are transmitted to specific recipients identified in the "MEMORANDUM FOR" or "TO" line and are numbered sequentially within each fiscal

year. Active AMs for VETS staff and the general public and VPLs can be found in the VETS Reading Room at: http://www.dol.gov/vets/usc/main.htm

All active DMs and AMs for VETS staff ONLY can be found at:

http://www.dol.gov/vets/dms/dm_directory.htm and

http://www.dol.gov/vets/ASVETMEMOS/ASVET_MEMORANDA_directory.htm

RAVET Memoranda may be issued by Regional Offices to clarify existing guidance or to transmit information and procedures specific to the Region.

6.3 Correspondence

Correspondence is any form of written communication sent or received in the course of doing business including letters, postcards, memoranda, notes, e-mail and facsimiles. It includes any letter, form or other correspondence created or received by agency staff in hard copy or electronic format.

Information on style and grammar can be found in the Style Manual, U.S. Government Printing Office, 2000 at:

http://www.gpoaccess.gov/stylemanual/index.html

General writing guidelines can also be found in the Department of Labor Manual Series, DLMS 1, Record Management, Paragraphs 155-162 at:

http://www.labornet.dol.gov/DCS_FileSystem/DLMS1RecordsManagement/dlms1_0100.htm

6.3.1 External Correspondence

External correspondence consists of all letters, reports and documentation that are addressed to individuals and/or entities outside VETS. With the exception of electronic e-mail, all external correspondence must be prepared on agency letterhead using the format provided as Exhibit 1.

6.3.2 Internal Correspondence

Internal correspondence consists of all intra-agency letters, reports, documentation addressed to individuals or groups within VETS. With the exception of e-mail, all internal correspondence must be prepared on local letterhead using the format provided as Exhibit 2.

6.3.3 Electronic Correspondence

E-mail is a form of written correspondence; it is simply correspondence in a non-paper medium. This means that it may be an official government record and all

laws, regulations and policies pertaining to records apply to it. File codes should always be used on E-mail used for official correspondence or that has long-term importance.

In general, the following applies to e-mail:

- Incoming correspondence received electronically may be responded to using e-mail;
- E-mail may be used for routine correspondence with organizations and partners with whom VETS staff maintain a close working relationship and with whom formal E-mail interchanges are routinely used;
- E-mail should not be used for replies to correspondence that are received on paper or via fax, unless specifically requested by the author;
- E-mail must not be used to subvert or avoid standard routing procedures or signature protocols;
- The sender of an official memorandum or other document should not transmit it electronically until it has been signed and he or she has the signed and dated original in hand; and
- E-mail sent to external parties must make it clear that it is from VETS and should include the sender's full name, title, affiliation, and contact information.

DOL provides more information on e-mail management at:

http://labornet.dol.gov/html/ITC/E-Mail-Management.htm

6.3.4 Controlled Correspondence

The purpose of the Privacy Act is to ensure that records containing information about individuals are publicly identified; that only information which is legally authorized and necessary is collected; and that such information is maintained in a manner which precludes unwarranted intrusions upon individual privacy. The Act is applicable to all systems of records containing information about individuals from which information is retrieved by individual name or by an identifying number, symbol or other identifier assigned to the individual.

The Privacy Act requires that records subject to the Act be maintained with appropriate administrative, technical and physical safeguards to insure the security and confidentiality of the records. During working hours, the area in which the records are maintained or regularly used will be occupied by authorized personnel, or access to the records will be restricted by their storage in locked metal file cabinets or a locked room. During non-working hours, access to the records will be restricted by storage in locked metal file cabinets or a locked room.

Whenever possible, information subject to the Privacy Act should not be stored on a computer unless it is being processed. The information should be stored on removable storage media. When not in use, this information should be stored in the

same manner as the manual records covered above. If it is not possible to remove the Privacy Act information from the computer, all reasonable steps must be taken to assure the confidentiality and integrity of the information.

Privacy Act records may be burned, shredded, or pulped within the agency or by a government contractor approved to dispose of waste paper.

For more information about the Privacy Act, see http://www.labornet.dol.gov/DCS_FileSystem/DLMS5Information/dlms5_0200.htm #223.

The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) allows for the full or partial disclosure of previously unreleased information and documents controlled by the U.S. Government. The Act defines agency records subject to disclosure, outlines mandatory disclosure procedures and grants nine exemptions to the statute.

Each Regional Office and the National Office have assigned staff to respond to requests made under the FOIA. VETS field staff should refer all such requests to the assigned specialist within their respective region.

6.4 Records Management

Records management is an active, continuing program for controlling the creation, maintenance, use, and disposition of paper and electronic records within the agency. If you create a document using a word processor, enter information into a database, file a document in a folder, answer an inquiry from the public, respond to a FOIA request, or do anything else that documents your activities for VETS, you are a records custodian. You are responsible for ensuring the safety, timely availability, and proper retention and/or transfer of information in your custody. To be able to do this, you must be able to distinguish whether the document in question is record material or non-record material.

Record material is any documentary material, regardless of media, that has documentary value when created or received in connection with VETS business. Records are preserved to document agency organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures and other activities. Record material can only be disposed of in accordance with National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) approved records disposition schedules.

Most of the material retained in VETS field offices is **non-record material** because it meets one or more of the criteria below. Non-record material includes:

- Reading file, follow-up, or suspense copies of correspondence;
- Copies of printed or processed materials other than official copies which are maintained for record purposes;
- Information copies of correspondence and other papers on which no documented administrative action is taken;

- Superseded manuals and other directives maintained outside the office responsible for retaining them;
- Working papers;
- Drafts of reports and correspondence;
- Transmittal sheets;
- Processed or published materials that are received from other activities or offices and that require no action and are not required for any kind of documentation (the originating office or activity is required to maintain record copies);
- Catalogs, trade journals, and other publications or papers that are received from government agencies, commercial firms, or private institutions and that require no action and are not part of a case upon which action is taken; and
- Correspondence and other records of short term value that, after action has been completed have no informational value.

6.4.1 Non-Record Material Filing

VETS staff may use their discretion when filing and retaining routine documents. When filing space is limited, documents that will certainly not be needed for future reference do not need to be filed. Otherwise, all non-record materials are marked and filed in accordance with a locally developed file plan using the VETS Master File Plan, provided as a template at Exhibit 3.

The VETS Master File Plan consists of a set of categories identified by a 2 or 3-letter acronym. Records should be filed in the appropriate category under sub-categories that are established to meet the individual needs in each state. File labels should list the file number, file name, and expiration date. An example of a field office file plan is provided as Exhibit 4.

When a document is filed, it should be labeled in the upper right hand corner with the file number and initials of the person filing the record. Documents that are copies of an original should be stamped with the word "**COPY**."

6.4.2 Non-Record Material Expiration

The expiration date of non-record materials is established when the document is filed. All non-record material should be destroyed, retired or transferred as prescribed in Exhibit 5, VETS Retention Schedule, within 120 days of the scheduled expiration date. Files will be removed using the proper method of destruction for the content of the file.

6.5 Information Technology

Information technology with respect to an executive agency is any equipment or interconnected system of equipment that is used in the acquisition, storage, manipulation, management, movement, control, display, switching, interchange, transmission, or reception of data or information by the executive agency. Information Technology includes computers, ancillary equipment, software, hardware, services and related resources.

Information resources management is the process of managing information resources to accomplish agency missions. The term encompasses both information itself and the related resources, such as personnel, equipment, funds, and information technology.

6.5.1 Appropriate Use of DOL Computers

VETS employees are permitted limited use of DOL office equipment for personal needs if the use does not interfere with official business, involves virtually no additional expense to the Department and does not violate the Standards for Ethical Conduct for Federal Employees. This limited personal use of DOL office equipment should take place during the employee's non-work time. This privilege to use DOL office equipment for non-official purposes may be revoked at any time as appropriate by DOL managers and/or supervisors. For more information, see DLMS 9, Chapter 900:

http://labornet.dol.gov/DCS_FileSystem/DLMS9InformationTechnology/dlms9_0900.htm

6.5.2 Computer Security Awareness Training

The DOL provides annual Computer Security Awareness and Training to keep all employees informed on how to protect the agency's information and information systems, i.e. personally identifiable information, sensitive information, mobile devices, etc. The training is designed to remind staff of the importance of computer security, of potential security threats and how to protect against them and what to do to protect sensitive information and information systems.

Extensive information on all computer security topics can be found on the DOL's LaborNet page at:

http://www.labornet.dol.gov/html/itc/ECN-DCN-Security.htm

and in DLMS 9, Chapter 400 at:

http://labornet.dol.gov/DCS_FileSystem/DLMS9InformationTechnology/dlms9_0400.htm

6.5.3 E-Mail File Retention

Agency e-mail systems are for "official use" only by authorized personnel. Before deleting any e-mail message, the author should determine whether it meets the legal definition of a record and, if so, preserve a copy of the message. Printed messages kept as a record should contain essential transmission, receipt data, and attachments. If it does not, print the message and annotate the printed copy. When e-mail is retained as a record, the periods of its retention are governed by records retention schedules.

Printed messages and essential transmission and receipt data should be filed with related files of the office. Delete messages that are not records when no longer needed. Delete messages that are records, after they have been placed in an appropriate file system.

6.5.4 Encryption

Data encryption is the process of disguising information as “cipher text,” which is unintelligible to any device that cannot access the decryption key. Encryption protects information on computers and storage devices in case they are lost or stolen. Federal agencies are responsible for safeguarding Personally Identifiable Information (PII) and other sensitive information. As part of this responsibility VETS will begin to use an encryption system beginning in FY 2008.

Once software is installed, it will automatically encrypt data stored on laptops and data saved to most portable storage devices from ECN workstations. Data sent as e-mail attachments must be manually encrypted.

For more information, see the Pointsec Frequently Asked Questions at:

http://www.labornet.dol.gov/html/itc/Pointsec-FAQs.htm

or the Pointsec Media Encryption User Guide at:

http://www.labornet.dol.gov/html/itc/Pointsec-PME-User-Guide.htm

6.5.5 IT Help Desk

The IT Help Desk is available to answer questions and resolve issues regarding hardware and installed software. The Help Desk can be reached at (202) 693-4444, or you may send an e-mail query to: ITCHelpDesk@dol.gov.

Exhibit 1 Example of External Correspondence

U.S. Department of Labor Veterans' Employment and Training Service
[Insert local address]
[Insert local address]

[Enter the date in the format: June 11, 20XX]

Ms. Jacqueline Foster
1550 Yellowstone Square
Anywhere, State 83201

Dear Ms. Foster,

It was my pleasure to meet you at the Veterans' Information Fair in Anywhere last month. I have enclosed some information regarding your question on employment opportunities with Department of Defense Schools. The first page is a copy of a website page with some valuable links that you might find useful. I printed some of the information for your use.

I hope this information will be useful for future reference. If you have any other questions regarding veterans' employment opportunities, please feel free to contact me at (123) 456-7890.

Sincerely,

[Enter your name]
[Enter your title]

Enclosure: a/s

Exhibit 2 Example of Internal Correspondence

U.S. Department of Labor Veterans' Employment and Training Service

[Insert local address]
[Insert local address]

[Enter the date in the format: June 11, 20XX]

MEMORANDUM TO: Mr. Joe Smith, Regional Administrator, Region X

FROM: Your Name, Title ***Signature***

SUBJECT: Enter a subject line pertinent to the document being transmitted

The following information for the Final Quarter, FY 20XX is provided in accordance with appropriate instructions:

- DVET Technical Performance Analysis Report
- Quarterly Report Checklist
- State Technical Performance Narrative
- SF 269A, DVOP

If there are any questions, please call me at (123) 456-7890.

Exhibit 3 VETS Master File Plan

VETERANS' EMPLOYMENT & TRAINING SERVICE
MASTER FILE PLAN

CODE	TITLE	RETENTION PERIOD
ADP	**AUTOMATED DATA PROCESSING** *Use for general and management data processing information, hardware and software documentation, operation, upgrade, and/or maintenance*	**Until superseded/rescinded**
ADS	**ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES** *--Use for activities in the management, planning and control, and general office administration*	**Until superseded/rescinded**
AUD	**AUDITS AND INVESTIGATIONS** *--Use for general correspondence and reports pertaining to audits and investigations*	**Permanent**
BUD	**BUDGET** *--Use for general budget information and budget proposal requests*	**FY**
COM	**COMMITTEES, ORGANIZATIONS, & MEETINGS** *--Use for functions, meetings, conferences, directories, minutes, reports, and related materials on committees, organizations, and associations*	**FY**
COR	**CORRESPONDENCE** *--Use for filing incoming/outgoings correspondence not filed elsewhere*	**FY**
FOR	**FIELD OPERATIONS REPORTING** *--Use for general information and reports on regional operations*	**FY**
GMT	**GRANT MANAGEMENT** *--Use for grant documentation ;grants are filed by fiscal year, then by grant number from lowest to highest, preferably in separate binders for each grant*	**FY**
LEG	**LEGISLATIVE AND LEGAL** *--Use for legislation of interest to the agency; legal opinions/determinations made pursuant to such legislation, Congressional hearings and investigations relating to agency activities, executive orders and similar subjects*	**FY**
OPM	**ORGANIZATION, PLANNING, & MANAGEMENT** *--Use for general correspondence pertaining to organization structure and planning*	**FY**
PA	**PROGRAM ACTIVITY** *--Use for general correspondence and reports related to programs of interest to or monitored by VETS*	**FY**
PER	**PERSONNEL/TIMEKEEPING** --Use for all aspects of personnel and timekeeping activities	**CY/PERM**
REM	**RECORD MANAGEMENT** *--Use for recurring report correspondence*	**FY**
TRV	**TRAVEL & TRANSPORTATION** *-- Use for correspondence pertaining to travel*	**FY**

Exhibit 4 Sample of VETS State Office File Plan

VETERANS' EMPLOYMENT & TRAINING SERVICE
[STATE NAME] FILE PLAN

ADP AUTOMATED DATA PROCESSING

ADP 1-1	General Information	Until Superseded
ADP 1-2	Hardware/Software	Until Superseded
ADP 1-3	ECN	Until Superseded
ADP 1-4	UIMS/VPIMS	Until Superseded
ADP 1-5	VOPAR	Until Superseded

ADS ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES

ADS 1-1	Administrative Policy	FY
ADS 1-2	Mailing Lists	Until Superseded
ADS 1-3	Purchases/Supplies	FY
ADS 1-4	Inventories	FY
ADS 1-5	Penalty Stamp Log	FY
ADS 1-6	Postage Inventory	FY
ADS 1-7	Fed Ex—General Info & Receipts	FY
ADS 1-8	Calendar/Schedule	FY
ADS 1-9	Email (1st Quarter)	Quarterly
ADS 1-10	Email (2nd Quarter)	Quarterly
ADS 1-11	Email (3rd Quarter)	Quarterly
ADS 1-12	Email (4th Quarter)	Quarterly

AUD AUDITS AND INVESTIGATIONS

AUD 1-1	Audits, General Correspondence	Permanent
AUD 1-2	Grant Audits	Permanent
AUD 1-3	Investigations	Permanent
AUD 1-4	Closeouts, All Grants	Permanent

BUD BUDGET

BUD 1-1	Budget, General Information	FY
BUD 1-2	Annual Travel Plan	FY

COM COMMITTEES, ORGANIZATIONS &MEETINGS

COM 1-1	Miscellaneous Organizations	FY
COM 1-2	ESGR	FY
COM 1-3	U.S. Department of Labor	FY
COM 1-4	Labor Exchange Bulletins	FY
COM 1-5	Veteran Service Organizations	FY

COR CORRESPONDENCE

COR 1-1	General Correspondence	FY
COR 1-2	Articles and Speeches	Permanent
COR 1-3	USERRA Inquiries	FY
COR 1-4	Veterans' Preference Inquiries	FY
COR 1-5	Employment Inquiries	FY

FOR FIELD OPERATIONS REPORTING

FOR 1-1	Regional Requests	FY
FOR 1-2	National Office Requests	FY
FOR 1-3	Teleconference Notes	FY
FOR 1-5	Weekly Activity Reports (National)	FY
FOR 1-5	Weekly Activity Reports (Regional)	FY
FOR 1-6	Weekly Activity Reports (State)	FY

GMT GRANT MANAGEMENT

Use GMT 1-1 through GMT 1-8 for all grants awarded in the State; use GMT 1-9 through GMT 1-12 for information as it pertains to grants in general

GMT 1-1	SGA/Annual Modification Instructions	FY
GMT 1-2	Funding Request	FY
GMT 1-3	Terms and Conditions of the Grant	FY
GMT 1-4	Grant Award(s)	FY
GMT 1-5	Notices of Obligation Authority (NOAs)	FY
GMT 1-6	Mid-Year Modification(s)	FY
GMT 1-7	Corrective Action Plan	FY
GMT 1-8	Correspondence	FY
GMT 1-9	Jobs for Veterans State Grants	FY
GMT 1-10	Competitive Grants, VWIP	FY
GMT 1-11	Competitive Grants, HVRP	FY
GMT 1-12	Competitive Grant Discretionary Funds	FY

LEG LEGISLATIVE AND LEGAL

LEG 1-1	Legislative Amendments	FY
LEG 1-2	Freedom of Information Act	FY
LEG 1-3	Privacy Act	FY
LEG 1-4	Legal Interpretations	FY
LEG 1-5	Congressional Hearings	FY

OPM ORGANIZATION, PLANNING, AND MANAGEMENT

OPM 1-1	Agreements, General	FY
OPM 1-2	Chapter 31 MOU/TAG	Until Superseded
OPM 1-3	MOU-State/USDOL	Until Superseded
OPM 1-4	MOU-TAP	Until Superseded
OPM 1-5	DOL Directives	Until Superseded
OPM 1-6	ASVET Memoranda	Until Superseded
OPM 1-7	Veterans' Program Letters	Until Superseded
OPM 1-8	Director's Memoranda	Until Superseded
OPM 1-9	RAVET Memoranda	Until Superseded

OPM 1-10	ETA Directives	Until Superseded
OPM 1-11	Draft Directives	Until Finalized

PA PROGRAM ACTIVITY

PA 1-1	Programs, Miscellaneous Information	FY
PA 1-2	Federal Contractor's Program	FY
PA 1-3	USERRA	FY
PA 1-4	Veterans' Preference	FY
PA1-5	TAP	FY
PA 1-5	VR&E	FY
PA 1-6	NVTI Training	FY
PA 1-7	REALifelines	FY
PA 1-8	Special Initiatives	FY

PER PERSONNEL/TIMEKEEPING

PER 1-1	Personnel, General Information	FY
PER 1-1-1	Personnel – Staff #1	Permanent
PER 1-1-2	Personnel – Staff #2	Permanent
PER 1-2	Employee Health & Safety	FY
PER 1-3	Health Insurance & Medical Care	FY
PER 1-4	OASAM-Focus on Benefits	FY
PER 1-5	Employee Union Information	FY
PER 1-6	Training and Career Development	FY
PER 1-7	Performance Standards/Position Descriptions	FY
PER 1-8	Personnel Awards, General	FY
PER 1-9	Time and Attendance, General Info	FY/Permanent
PER 1-9-1	Time and Attendance, Staff #1	CY
PER 1-9-2	Time and Attendance, Staff #2	CY

REM RECORD MANAGEMENT

REM 1-1	Reports and Statistics, General	FY
REM 1-2	TAP Monthly Report	FY
REM 1-3	Quarterly Report, 1st Quarter	FY
REM 1-4	Quarterly Report, 2nd Quarter	FY
REM 1-5	Quarterly Report, 3rd Quarter	FY
REM 1-6	Quarterly Report, 4th Quarter	FY

TRV TRAVEL & TRANSPORTATION

TRV 1-1	Travel, General Information	FY
TRV 1-2	Travel Budget/Per Diem Tables	FY
TRV 1-3	Travel Claims, Staff #1	FY
TRV 1-4	Travel Claims, Staff #2	FY

Exhibit 5 File Retention Schedule for VETS State Offices

Calendar Year	
Personal and office file copies of Time and Attendance source records such as leave applications and overtime authorizations	Retain 3 calendar years or until a GAO audit, whichever is sooner
Official copies of Time and Attendance source records	Retain 6 calendar years or until a GAO audit, whichever is sooner
Personnel files for current employees	Retain as long as employed + 3 calendar years
Personnel files for former employees	Retain 3 complete calendar years after departure
Fiscal Year	
Routine Correspondence	Retain 3 complete fiscal years
Agency Contracts/Agreements	Retain 3 complete fiscal years or until
Travel Vouchers/Receipts - when approving official is DVET	Retain 7 complete fiscal years
Travel Vouchers/Receipts - when approving official is RAVET	Retain 3 complete fiscal years
Audits and Investigations	Retain indefinitely
NVTI Training Files	Retain until no longer needed
Grant Files	Retain 3 complete fiscal years
Grant Closeout Letters	Retain indefinitely
E-Mail not filed elsewhere	Retain 3 complete FY quarters
Mailing lists, organization charts and agreements	Retain until superseded or rescinded
Automated data processing information	Retain until superseded or rescinded
Draft directives	Retain until release of signed directive
USERRA and VP case files	Retain in accordance with Regional Office guidance
If no regional policy exists, DM 05-06 states:	Remove from active files in FY when case is closed except where claimant has requested

All electronic versions of records will be retained only until they are printed for hard copy retention or no longer needed for reference.

All correspondence covered by the Privacy Act of 1974 will be stored in locked file cabinets and destroyed by shredding at the end of the retention period.

End