

## CORRESPONDENCE BUSINESS RULES AND POLICY

1. **REASON FOR ISSUE:** To revise the directive and provide a source of information for preparing and processing all official correspondence within the Department and to provide each employee with a helpful, easy-to-use, reference tool for processing correspondence Department-wide. This directive replaces procedures contained in VA Directive 6320, dated April 14, 1997.
2. **SUMMARY OF CONTENTS/MAJOR CHANGES:** This document sets forth the policies and procedures for creating, submitting and closing correspondence. This policy:
  - a. Establishes business rules for VA Correspondence Management.
  - b. Identifies rules for creating, assigning, submitting and closing cases in the Correspondence Management System.
3. **RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** The Office of the Executive Secretary (EXECSEC) also referred to as the Executive Secretariat (001B).
4. **RELATED DIRECTIVE:** VA Directive 0999, Enterprise Directives Management (EDM), dated October 9, 2018.
5. **RESCISSION:** VA Directive 6320, Correspondence Management, dated April 14, 1997.

**CERTIFIED BY:**

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

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**DISTRIBUTION:** Electronic Only

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## CORRESPONDENCE BUSINESS RULES AND POLICY

### 1. PURPOSE.

- a. This revised directive provides policy for the management of correspondence within VA, including White House Mail, Congressional Case Mail, Veterans Service Organization Mail, Miscellaneous Mail and External Mail.
- b. The Office of the Executive Secretary (EXECSEC) is the central coordinating point for all staff actions addressed to and produced by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs (SECVA), the Deputy Secretary (DEPSECVA), and the Chief of Staff (COSVA). The Executive Secretary employs executive writers who draft documents and review internal and external communications for signature by the SECVA, DEPSECVA and COSVA.

### 2. POLICY. This revised directive updates the rules for creating, assigning, submitting and closing written departmental correspondence packages within VA. The purpose of this policy is to convey Department-wide standards and to give VA leadership sufficient time to review and sign correspondence.

- a. VA's correspondence must be created economically and efficiently. Style and usage of correspondence should reflect good business practices.
- b. Correspondence must be used to communicate internally within the Department and externally to Department stakeholders. Correspondence 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 plain language.
- d. The signature level of correspondence should be based on the content of the correspondence, as well as the organizational level of the addressee.
- e. The Secretary, or Deputy Secretary, shall sign all correspondence to the President and Vice President of the United States, Congressional Oversight Committees, the heads of other executive agencies and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States, unless otherwise delegated.

### 3. RESPONSIBILITIES.

#### a. The Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall:

Appoint a senior official responsible for managing the VA enterprise correspondence management program in accordance with all applicable

laws and mandates including the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 according to P.L. 104-13.

- (1) Sign all correspondence to the President and Vice President of the United States, Congressional Oversight Committees, the heads of other executive agencies and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States, unless otherwise delegated.

**b. The Executive Secretary and Deputy Executive Secretary shall:**

- (1) Control and track correspondence requiring signature from SECVA, DEPSECVA, or COSVA, as well as all White House-controlled correspondence and other correspondence with high-level interest.
- (2) Develop and enforce all policies and procedures for executive correspondence (See Appendix A).
- (3) Create and monitor all related correspondence training platforms, excluding those delegated to offices of primary responsibility.
- (4) In partnership with the Office of Information and Technology (OIT), identify, acquire and maintain a VA-wide Correspondence Management System.
- (5) Maintain a central resource with current guidelines and reference information.
- (6) Review and update this directive, as necessary.

**c. Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries and Other Key Officials shall:**

- (1) Ensure Administrations and Staff Offices adhere to the standards and timelines addressed in this directive.
- (2) Ensure all Correspondence Management System users complete all required Correspondence Management System and EXECSEC Action Officer Training. (See Appendix B, section 1).
- (3) Appoint a Correspondence Liaison within each Administration and Staff Office.

**d. Administration and Staff Office Correspondence Liaisons shall:**

- (1) Serve as the primary point of contact regarding all correspondence within each respective organization.
- (2) Oversee the correspondence process in its entirety from creation to closure.

- (3) Receive, delegate and monitor all case tasks assigned to their organization.

## APPENDIX A - CORRESPONDENCE BUSINESS RULES AND POLICY

1. **PACKAGE SUBMISSION REQUIREMENTS:** All correspondence requiring signature from the SECVA, DEPSECVA and/or COSVA are required to be submitted to EXECSEC no later than 10 business days prior to the due date.
  - a. **Quality.** Administrations and Staff Offices are responsible for ensuring all packages are written in accordance with the most current VA EXECSEC Style Guide, properly formatted and addressed and generally free of errors. All packages not adhering to the published standard will be returned to the responsible organization for correction and resubmission. Please see <https://vawww.execsec.va.gov> for the current VA EXECSEC Style Guide.
  - b. **Exceptions.** EXECSEC may make exceptions to the submission guidelines due to time sensitivity and complexity. Exceptions will be granted on a case-by-case basis. Regardless of time constraints, all packages that require SECVA, DEPSECVA and/or COSVA signature must be submitted through EXECSEC.
  - c. **Submission.** All submissions must have all applicable documents, and concurrences have been uploaded in the Correspondence Management System. In addition, please ensure a hardcopy of supporting documents (including concurrences) and background information is placed on the left side of the folder and signature documents are placed on the right side. All hardcopy packages must also include VA Form 0907, Summary and Approval Sheet, on the front of all hardcopy packages. The VA Form 0907 shall be stamped with the date and time of delivery at the EXECSEC front desk. (It may be necessary for EXECSEC to change package delivery requirements based on external factors (i.e., pandemic, building closures, etc.)
  - d. **Grading Criteria.** After submission, all packages will be graded on an 18-point quality and timeliness checklist to gauge the quality of each package. EXECSEC will compile grade sheets each month and present the results by organization to Administration and Staff Office Chiefs of Staff and corresponding program offices. The 18-point grading criteria include:
    - (1) A completed VA Form 0907, Summary and Approval VA Form. This VA Form 0907 will be graded to ensure the following nine pieces of information are present, current and accurate: Name and Contact Information of Originator; Organization Acronyms; Correspondence Management System Number; Date/Due Date; Subject; Concurrences; Purpose; Discussion; and Recommendation.
    - (2) Acceptable formats of concurrence include:
      - a. An email from an authorized signer noting their concurrence;

- b. Concurrence by an authorized signer in the Correspondence Management System; or
  - c. A written signature on VA Form 4265, Concurrence and Summary Sheet.
- (3) All required Authorized Signers have provided concurrence, and it is appropriately dated within 60 days of submission (exceptions will be adjudicated on a case-by-case basis).
  - (4) Left side of the package correctly aligns with what is stated on the right side and includes the Incoming Letter and/or Supporting Documentation as well as concurrences listed on VA Form 4265.
  - (5) All required materials and documents are included in the hard copy folder are mirrored in the Correspondence Management System.
  - (6) The package generally conforms to the VA EXECSEC Style Guide (<http://vaww.execsec.va.gov>).
  - (7) Use of a memo/letter is appropriate to the action.
  - (8) Memorandum addressee name(s) are correct and in the proper order and includes organizational codes, as required (five lines from the top).
  - (9) The Font size is correct (Arial 12 Point font).
  - (10) Margins are 1 inch, all around.
  - (11) Page numbers are included on the second and succeeding pages located one inch from the bottom center of the page in Arial 12 Point font.
  - (12) Sentence structure/grammar is sound and uses plain language.
  - (13) Spelling is correct.
  - (14) Acronym use is minimal and is correctly used throughout the document.
  - (15) Memo/Letter flows well and is responsive to the incoming document and/or requirements.
  - (16) Lists/Bullets are uniform, and formatting is consistent throughout.
  - (17) Signature Block (Sincerely, four lines, then appropriate signature block).
  - (18) Naming Convention is correctly used in labelling all documents.

**2. OPENING CASES IN THE CORRESPONDENCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM.** Each package is required to be created and maintained in the Correspondence Management System. The case creator is responsible for ensuring each field is completed and for managing case task timelines.

**a. Mandatory Fields.** EXECSEC will not accept packages missing the following information:

- (1) **Responsible Organization** – The Responsible Organization field does not reflect case ownership. Case owners are responsible for opening, assigning, submitting and closing each case. This field is to recognize the organization with the overall responsibility to answer questions assigned in the case task.
- (2) **Subject** – Use this field as the case title; briefly describe the key takeaway for the case’s contents. Use the Case Description field to add additional information pertaining to the case, as needed.
- (3) **Due Date** – EXECSEC will not accept packages without a posted due date. Cases generated through the email function in the Correspondence Management System are also required to have a listed due date.
- (4) **Case Category** – For all packages requiring SECVA, DEPSECVA and/or COSVA signature, select the appropriate option from the Correspondence Management System case category menu. All packages meant for internal use only will be labeled “Internal.”
- (5) **Case Type** – Select the specific case type in this field. Choose “Other” if the case type needed is not an option and provide a brief description to give the reader an understanding of the package contents.
- (6) **Signature Level** – EXECSEC will not accept packages without an identified signature block/authority.

**b. When to use Separate Case Types.** Separate Correspondence Management System cases are required for information requiring different Case Type formats. For example – a written Congressional testimony with follow-on answers to Questions for the Record (QFR) will need to have two different Correspondence Management System case numbers.

**3. CASE TASKS.** Case tasks are actions required to finalize the case – such as reviewing, concurring or signing a document.

**a. Creating Case Tasks.** The case creator is responsible for creating, assigning and monitoring all case tasks. Create a separate task for every action requiring assistance on each topic the case creator cannot individually answer.

**b. Assigning Case Tasks.**

- (1) Assign tasks to an primary Staff Office or Administration (e.g., VHA 10BEXC Executive Correspondence).
- (2) Do not assign case tasks to individuals belonging to other primary Staff Offices or sub-offices. All VA Staff Offices are responsible for tasking the appropriate sub-offices and individuals within their purview.
- (3) Give organizations as much time as possible to complete each case task. All non-concurrences are required to provide the case owner with written justification no later than 48 hours prior to the due date (See Paragraph 4 for further information).
- (4) Case creators are responsible for monitoring and tracking all tasks pertaining to assigned cases.

**c. Closing Case Tasks.**

- (1) Case Owners must ensure each case task is closed prior to submitting the final package to EXECSEC.
- (2) Tasked Organizations or Individuals should ensure each assigned case task is closed once the requested action is complete.

**d. Requesting Case Task Ownership Change.** Tasked organizations have 1 business day to review an assignment and determine if it was assigned appropriately to their organization. If the task should be assigned to another Administration or Staff Office within VA, the tasked organization must notify EXECSEC within 24 hours (1 business day) of the incorrect assignment. Otherwise, they are responsible for the completing the task (i.e., obtaining the answers and packaging the response).

**e. Extension 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 (via the Correspondence Management System or via electronic mail) to EXECSEC. Requests for reassignment of controlled correspondence will also be made in writing.

**4. CONCURRENCE.**

**a. Concurrence.** EXECSEC will only accept concurrences signed by recognized officials on the Authorized Signers List.

- (1) EXECSEC will only accept one of the following forms/proofs of concurrence:

- a. A signed VA Form 4265.
  - b. Email printout from an authorized signer noting concurrence.
  - c. Case Task printout from the Correspondence Management System showing concurrence by an authorized signer.
- (2) The only concurrence responses EXECSEC will accept are:
- a. Concur.
  - b. Concur with Comments and/or edits.
  - c. Concur Subject with Comments and/or edits.
  - d. Non-Concur with Comments - All non-concurrences require that contact be made with the case owner or case owner's organization no later than 48 hours prior to the due date to attempt reconciliation in a timely manner.
- (3) All concurrences and comments and/or edits must be consolidated at the organizational level prior to EXECSEC submission. Correspondence Liaisons are responsible for consolidating all comments and edits from subordinate assignees and sub-offices. EXECSEC will return packages with incomplete responses to the parent organization.

**b. Final Concurrence.**

- (1) Congressional Letters: For complex letters, all substantive edits/changes shall be provided to the Executive Writer during Subject Matter Expert (SME) review. Extensive edits after SME review are discouraged and may be accepted during Final Approval on a case-by-case basis. The Office of General Counsel (OGC) has final concurrence for all packages, and substantive edits are not permitted after OGC has provided their final concurrence and edits/comments.
- (2) All Other Letters and Internally-Generated Correspondence: All VA Administrations and Staff Offices are responsible for obtaining concurrences from all relevant Administrations and Staff Offices, as well as OGC concurrence, on all packages submitted for SECVA, DEPSECVA and COSVA prior to submitting their folders/packages to EXECSEC for review.

- c. Expiration.** Concurrences expire after 60 days. EXECSEC will return packages containing concurrences older than 60 days. Case owners are responsible for ensuring all concurrences are up-to-date and valid prior to package submission.

- d. **Exceptions.** Certain cases will have exception to the concurrence guidelines due to time sensitivity and complexity. Exceptions will be granted on a case-by-case basis. Regardless of time constraints, all packages requiring SECVA, DEPSECVA and/or COSVA signature are required to be staffed through EXECSEC.

## 5. CLOSING CASES.

- a. **EXECSEC Responsibilities.** EXECSEC will annotate and dispatch final package contents to the case owner and applicable correspondence liaisons within 24 hours of signature.
- b. **Closure.** Case owners are responsible for closing approved cases within 24 hours of receipt after signature.
- c. **Overdue Packages.** Overdue cases will be collected by all Administrations and Staff Offices on a weekly basis and reported to the Chiefs of Staff within the Administrations and Staff Offices. All program offices with overdue cases will send an updated chart displaying each organization's current overdue packages each Wednesday in order to provide ample time to correct any deficiencies. Correspondence Liaisons are responsible for ensuring all tasks are closed in accordance with the published policy.

## 6. CHANGE CONTROL BOARD.

- a. **General.** The Change Control Board (CCB) is a committee that consists of SMEs (e.g., Super Users, (VA Integrated Enterprise Workflow Solution (VIEWS) Office Coordinators, etc.) who decide whether to implement proposed changes to the Correspondence Management System. The main objective of the CCB is to ensure the client accepts the project. Factors affecting the CCB's decision can include the project's phase of development, budget, schedule and quality goals. The CCB consists of a Chair, Vice Chair, Administrative Officer, Information Technology (IT) Officer and five Voting Members from select Administrations and Staff Offices, with identified Alternates.
- b. **Submitting Correspondence Management System Enhancement Requests.** All active Correspondence Management System users are welcome to submit enhancement requests and report any deficiencies (also known as Bugs) they may encounter to the Digital Transformation Center (DTC) Help Desk at the following website: <https://vacommunity.secure.force.com/helpdesk>.
  - (1) Enhancements - Enhancements refer to an issue a Correspondence Management System user would like to see changed or enhanced. For example, a user requested a notification every time the last open case task is closed. All users requesting an enhancement should be prepared to be contacted by the CCB Administrative Officer if further details are needed. All users submitting a request will also be invited to the next CCB

to explain their request. When making an enhancement request, please ensure the following information has been provided:

- a. Subject – What specifically needs to be changed.
- b. Description – Provide a detailed explanation for the enhancement request.
- c. Work around – Identify the various steps taken as a work around to the issue you are encountering.

(2) Bugs. A bug is a systemic deficiency found in the Correspondence Management System. For example, a Correspondence Management System user encountered an issue where they were unable to close a case task assigned to them and could not find a viable work around. When reporting a bug to the DTC Help Desk, please ensure the following information has been provided:

- a. Description – Provide a detailed description of the encountered bug.
- b. Attempts – How many attempts were made to complete an action?
- c. Work Around – Did the user find a work around to the issue?
- d. Screenshots – Please provide a screenshot of the error message.

## APPENDIX B - CASE MANAGEMENT AND CORRESPONDENCE TRAINING

1. **TRAINING.** Multiple training options are available and required for new and current Correspondence Management System users.
  - a. **Correspondence Management Application Training Video.** Access to the multiple training videos are available on the OIT VIEWS Web-based Training (<https://vaww.oit.va.gov/products/views/web-based-training>) and VA IT Campus ([www.vaitcampus.com](http://www.vaitcampus.com)). After accessing the VA IT Campus, the training videos can be found by searching for the Application Course listed below. These courses are mandatory for all potential Correspondence Management System users prior to receiving a correspondence management account:
    - (1) Introduction to VIEWS - Case and Correspondence Management (TMS ID 4527960).
    - (2) Managing Cases in VIEWS Case and Correspondence Management (TMS ID 4527958).
    - (3) Working with Case Tasks in VIEWS Case and Correspondence Management (TMS ID 4527957).
  - b. **Action Officer Training.** As directed by the COSVA, EXECSEC provides Action Officer Training for all SMEs and all Correspondence Management System users who are responsible for correspondence signed by the SECVA, DEPSECVA and COSVA. Requests for training may be submitted to the following email address: [VAEXECSECActionOfficerTraining@va.gov](mailto:VAEXECSECActionOfficerTraining@va.gov).
    - a. The purpose of the training is for Action Officers to be able to prepare packages confidently and accurately for the SECVA's signature and to help meet deadlines. Training focuses on the following:
    - b. The Correspondence Process.
    - c. Templates.
    - d. How to build a correspondence package.
    - e. How to determine appropriate timelines.
    - f. The Coordination/Concurrence Process.
    - g. Top 10 most common errors.
    - h. Keeping the Correspondence Management System status up to date.
  - c. **Quarterly Training.** OIT partnered with Correspondence Management System developers to offer training on a quarterly basis both in person and virtually. The

dates and times of the quarterly training are subject to change, but all announcements will be sent to each Correspondence Liaison and be announced to the collective Chiefs of Staff at the COSVA Council meeting.

- (1) A total of four classes will be taught in person, each class with a capacity of 25 students.
- (2) These classes will be filled on a first come-first serve basis.
- (3) Correspondence Management System user accounts deactivate after 90 days of inactivity. All inactive users will be required to take the quarterly training upon re-activation of individual account.
- (4) Special requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

**d. Note to Correspondence Management System Users.** Seats are limited in both the Action Officer and quarterly training courses, and it is highly recommended to register early. Cancellations and rescheduled training requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis. It is imperative that each Correspondence Management System user registered for training participate in the training. Every "no-show" takes an opportunity away from another Correspondence Management System user who could not make the original roster. If a user is unable to attend the required training, they should contact their VIEWS Office Coordinator immediately to reschedule, or they risk suspension of their Correspondence Management System account. Rescheduling a Correspondence Management System user for a no-show will require written justification and a request for rescheduling from an authorized signer within their respective organization.

## APPENDIX C - REFERENCES AND DEFINITIONS

### 1. REFERENCES.

- a. Office of the Executive Secretariat Correspondence Manual, [Executive Secretariat Style Guide and Templates](#).
- b. [VA Directive 0999, Enterprise Directives Management \(EDM\) Procedures](#).
- c. [Government Printing Office \(GPO\) Style Manual 2016](#).
- d. Plain Writing Act of 2010. The Plain Writing Act of 2010, October 13, 2010.

### 2. DEFINITIONS.

- a. **Case Tasks:** Case Tasks are actions taken to finalize the case such as reviewing, concurring or signing a document.
- b. **Case Owner:** When a case is created in the Correspondence Management System, the case owner is the person (or group of people) who are responsible for the outcome of a case.
- c. **Concurrence:** An organization's official acceptance of the content presented in a document and recommendation that the document be approved for signature as written.
- d. **Concurrence with Comments/Edits:** An organization's acceptance of the content presented in a document, along with additional statements that could be included in the original document or simply a comment, question or revision to the content of the original document.
- e. **Concurrence Subject to Comments/Edits:** An organization's conditional acceptance of the content presented in a document, subject to the inclusion of the comments, questions or revisions to the original document.
- f. **Non-Concurrence:** An organization's official rejection of the content presented in a document.
- g. **Non-Concurrence with Comments:** An organization's official rejection of the content presented in a document, along with additional statements that could be included in original document or simply a comment or question regarding the content of the document.
- h. **Correspondence:** Correspondence is the inclusion of digital media, emails, text messages and documents exchanged through social platforms and digital agreements.

- i. Correspondence Management System:** The Correspondence Management System is an electronic record system used to receive, process, record and track all incoming and outgoing correspondence within the organization, making it available to all application users according to their roles and access. An example is the Veterans Affairs Integrated Enterprise Workflow Solution (i.e., VIEWS CCM).
- j. Executive Correspondence:** Executive Correspondence is correspondence addressed to SECVA, DEPSECVA and COSVA. Some Executive Correspondence may be addressed to other VA leaders including the Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries and Other Key Officials.