INTERNET AND INTRANET SERVICES

1. **REASON FOR ISSUE:** This directive establishes the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) minimum Internet and Intranet Services policies, procedures, and guidelines.

2. **SUMMARY OF CONTENTS/MAJOR CHANGES:** This revision redefines Internet and Intranet services to include all planning, design, maintenance, support, and any other functions related to the creation and administration of Websites, Web-based applications, Web-based services, and other applications that use Web technologies (e.g., mobile applications) on behalf of VA regardless of where they are hosted. It also establishes an online repository (https://www.va.gov/web/) that provides additional official guidance for content management, technical management, best practices, standards, and requirements for VA Internet Websites.

3. **RESPONSIBLE OFFICES:** Assistant Secretary for the Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs (002) and Assistant Secretary for the Office of Information and Technology Office (005).

4. **RELATED HANDBOOKS:** VA Handbook 6102, Internet/Intranet Services and its related Website (https://www.va.gov/web/) where implementation detail can be found.

5. **RESCISSION:** VA Directive 6102, Internet/Intranet Services dated July 15, 2008.

CERTIFIED BY:

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

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INTERNET AND INTRANET SERVICES

1. **PURPOSE AND SCOPE**.

    a. This directive sets forth policies and responsibilities for the planning, design, maintenance, support, and any other functions related to the creation and administration of Websites, Web-based applications, Web-based services, and other applications that use Web technologies (e.g., mobile applications) regardless of where they are hosted. This directive applies to all organizational elements in the Department.

    b. This policy applies to all individuals designing, maintaining, or providing oversight to Internet and Intranet services and assets on VA's behalf, including but not limited to, full-time and part time employees, contractors, interns, and volunteers. Internet and Intranet services and assets are defined as Websites, Web-based applications, Web-based services, and other applications that use Web technologies and have a VA designed or managed, publicly available client interface such as a mobile app, or Web-based application. This does not include third-party applications such as database management systems. This policy applies to all VA Internet and Intranet domains and servers that utilize VA resources on va.gov and on other domains which have received specific permission granted by the Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology to operate on a domain other than va.gov that operate on VA's behalf or with VA funding.

2. **POLICY**.

    a. VA promotes the secure and effective use of Internet services to improve access to and delivery of information and services to Veterans, their families, and the general public. VA also promotes the secure and effective use of Intranet services to improve access to and delivery of information to VA employees, contractors, interns, and volunteers. Information will include the policies, programs, activities, and objectives of VA. Internet services will also be used to obtain information from public and private organizations consistent with applicable legal requirements. Internet and Intranet services will be used as a means of empowering employees in their work.

    b. VA has established an online repository that provides additional official guidance for content management, technical management, best practices, standards, and requirements for VA Internet Websites. This online repository (https://www.va.gov/web/) will be updated as Federal regulatory or policy, departmental policy, or standards change. The guidance contained in the online repositions is an extension of the associated handbook and shall be considered with the same authority.

c. Organizational use of Internet and Intranet services must reflect the mission of VA, and support VA's goals and objectives. These services must support legitimate, mission-related activities of VA and be consistent with prudent operational, security, and privacy considerations. Organizational use of Government office information technology (IT) (equipment, peripherals, etc.) should be consistent with the provisions of any applicable VA Directive. VA Internet services should be focused first on Veterans and service members as the primary audience and subsequently on secondary audiences including caregivers, current and prospective employees, and the general public.

d. VA Internet and Intranet services operating on behalf of VA must be designed to support the widest range of potential users and computing platforms and must be compliant with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act.

3. **RESPONSIBILITIES**.

a. **Secretary of Veterans Affairs.** The Secretary has designated the Chief Information Officer (CIO) as the senior agency official responsible for the Department's IT programs, and the Assistant Secretary of Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs (AS/OPIA) as the senior agency official responsible for Web content and presentation.

b. **Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology (AS/OIT)/Chief Information Officer (CIO).** The CIO is responsible for the effective use of VA's Internet, Intranet and other IT resources, and for agency-wide directives and policies governing the use and implementation of Internet and other IT resources. The CIO shall:

(1) Provide technical support consistent with existing CIO responsibilities.

(2) Establish policy and procedural guidance for establishing, operating, and maintaining VA IT services, including those operated by non-VA entities for VA.

(3) Maintain liaisons with Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries and Other Key Officials, to ensure effective dissemination of VA information via Internet and Intranet services.

(4) Review and approve additions and changes to IT policy and procedures as suggested by the VA Web Governance Board.

(5) Provide recommendations on IT services and risk management issues.

(6) Ensure the monitoring of all VA-wide systems for compliance with security and privacy statements contained in the respective Privacy Act Impact Assessments (PIAs).

(7) Provide access to internal and external infrastructure resources to host approved VA Websites, Web-based applications, and Web-based services. Ensure compliance with all Federal laws, regulations, and Department-wide policies and requirements regarding IT operational and developmental standards.

(8) Maintain liaisons with Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries and Other Key Officials to ensure effective dissemination of VA information via the Internet.

(9) Support and manage VA's Internet and Intranet presence to ensure Office of Information Technology (OIT) offices support of VA's Internet and Intranet services and ensure compliance with all Federal laws, regulations, mandates, and guidance, as well as Department-wide policies, requirements, and initiatives regarding IT operational and developmental standards.

c. **Assistant Secretary for the Office of Public and Intergovernmental Affairs (AS/OPIA).** The AS/OPIA manages communications with Veterans, the general public, and VA employees. This responsibility includes coordination and distribution of the information VA communicates to its audiences, especially to the general public through traditional and online media, and the provision of public affairs policy guidance for the Department. The AS/OPIA shall:

(1) Work with the CIO, Office of General Counsel, Web Communications Offices, and content managers, to ensure that all public affairs concerns are addressed regarding the use of externally facing Web assets.

(2) Provide guidance on acceptable content for externally-facing Web assets and direct removal or alteration of content that does not meet Departmental policy and guidance.

(3) Work with the CIO to develop an external online strategy ensuring the guidelines set forth within this policy adheres to Federal guidelines.

(4) Serve as the office responsible for providing organizations throughout the Department with content standards for the use of online communications.

(5) Review and approve or disapprove branding, format, and layout of Department's externally-facing Web assets in coordination with recommendations from the Web Governance Board.

(6) Work with the appropriate VA records officers and the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) to establish a Records Control Schedule (RCS) for VA records generated via VA's externally-facing Web assets that are not covered by an existing RCS.

(7) Establish the Department's Web interface, look and feel, and major design elements as approved by the Web Governance Board and obtain funding to secure the development and implementation of the interface for the enterprise.

(8) Publish Department-wide materials of significant events and initiatives.

d. **VA Web Governance Board (WGB).** The WGB will include designated representatives from Administrations and key Staff Offices across VA and <u>membership</u> will be limited to VA staff only. This group will serve as the principal entity which acts on the Secretary's behalf with respect to VA Web policy, procedures, and guidance. This group shall:

(1) Act as the final authority on all Web-related content outlined in VA directives, policies, and standards.

(2) Establish VA Web policies, procedures, and best practices as appropriate.

(3) Report to the VA CIO on Web-related technology priorities and the AS/OPIA on all matters pertaining to the dissemination of information and the effectiveness of VA's Web communications.

(4) Make recommendations on the use of the Internet and Intranet services within VA to the VA CIO. Coordinate Web efforts between entities and organizations across the enterprise.

(5) Escalate requests to the VA CIO for non-va.gov domains and use of non-VA business. Raise issues and request input and guidance from the CIO for issues beyond the scope of the VA WGB.

(6) Monitor VA Web registry certifications.

(7) Promote shared training resources and planning across Administrations and Staff Offices. Maintain liaisons with Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, Web Communication Officers, and other key officials, to ensure effective dissemination of VA information via the Internet and Intranet.

(8) Meet quarterly at a minimum; more frequently as needed to provide timely collaboration regarding emergent issues.

(9) Provide communications oversight to Web activities within their respective organizations as established in this directive and as designated by their respective organizations.

(10) Develop and maintain Internet and Intranet Websites that provide additional Department-wide guidance for content management, technical management, best practices, standards, and requirements for VA-funded Websites.

(11) Ensure the uniform application of the requirements, mandates and recommendations discussed in related VA directives, handbooks, and associated guidance.

(12) Conduct periodic reviews of external-facing Web assets to ensure alignment with Department messaging, common look and feel, and priorities, and certify that those assets may continue to operate after audits are conducted.

e. **Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, and Other Key Officials.**

(1) These officials will ensure the implementation of VA Internet and Intranet services policies within their respective Administrations and Staff Offices. These officials will also ensure that VA information and information resources are protected from unlawful and unauthorized use, access, tampering, destruction, and unauthorized release of sensitive information, which is defined as information that requires protection due to the risk and magnitude of loss or harm that could result from inadvertent or deliberate disclosure, alteration, or destruction of the information. The term includes information whose improper use or disclosure could adversely affect the ability of an agency to accomplish its mission, proprietary information, records about individuals requiring protection under the Privacy Act, and information not releasable under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

(2) Administrations and Staff Offices will establish more restrictive guidance for use within their respective organizations when deemed necessary. This guidance will be reviewed by the respective authoritative, responsible office/group to ensure there is no conflict with Department-wide guidance.

f. **Web Communication Offices (WCO).** This title refers to the offices/individuals responsible for Internet or Intranet Web communications. The WCOs shall:

(1) Serve as the liaison for Web and social media related inquiries and requests to OPIA, CIO, and other entities in VA.

(2) Communicate and enforce Web policy issues as outlined by VA Handbook 6102 and associated online repositories for Internet and Intranet, and other supplemental guidelines which may be issued by the Administrations.

(3) Approve the creation of new Websites and the major modification of existing Websites, Web-based applications, Web-based services, and other social Websites within their jurisdiction.

(4) Review and analyze Web data and metrics and recommend improvements as necessary.

(5) Ensure that Web assets focus on helping the target audience efficiently find the services and information they seek from VA. VA Web pages must help

visitors access the content they need with minimal complexity. Content must be intelligible without excessive text or graphics.

(6) Ensure that Web hyperlinks are directing visitors to the authoritative source for content and are not duplicated or recreated on the non-authoritative source Web asset.

(7) Conduct periodic audits of Web content and branding for compliance with VA Handbook 6102, associated online repositories for Internet and Intranet, and ensure needed corrective action is taken. WCOs may enact additional content standards and review cycles or remove content or Web pages deemed not compliant with this policy or supplemental policy or guidelines set forth by the WCOs.

(8) Serve as Web management and social media management subject matter experts for their organization.

(9) Communicate guidance, policy interpretation, recommendations and other feedback to ensure effective practices by Web Managers.

g. **Program Office and Facility Site.** The lead (e.g., Chief Officer, Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA) Regional Office Director, VBA Program Office Director, Veterans Health Administration (VHA) Program Chief Officer, Veterans Integrated Service Network Director, key official, Staff Office Director) of each program office or facility with a Web asset shall:

(1) Be responsible for the content of the documents posted on the service or Website (including papers, studies, forms, pictures, and graphics), ensuring that information posted on the identified Internet or Intranet Website is current, accurate, factual, relevant to the VA mission, and spell-checked and grammatically correct.

(2) Ensure that VA Internet and Intranet services and Websites operating on VA's behalf conform to Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended.

(3) Ensure that Internet and Intranet service Website server environments under their purview are secured as outlined in VA Handbook 6500, Risk Management Framework for VA Information Systems - Tier 3: VA Information Security Program, and will coordinate with security personnel issues material to the environments that fall within the purview of the Office of Information and Technology.

(4) Appoint an individual for each Program Office/organization with an official Internet or Intranet service or Website to provide management oversight to maintain the Website(s). This individual must provide technical management to maintain the Website(s) and must be knowledgeable about the technical issues regarding the publishing of a Web page, including navigation,

branding, page formats, metatags, graphics, and other attributes that provide the framework and corporate appearance for publishing content.

(5) Designate an individual for each Program Office/organization for the service or Website who will be accountable for the information disseminated by a particular service or Website that meets the mission of their respective program or organization. This individual must be knowledgeable of VA's communications and public affairs policies, procedures and organization messages and shall be accountable for the information disseminated by a particular Website that meets the mission of their respective program or organization. Ensures that Web page content is current, accurate, factual, relevant to the VA or Program Office mission, and spell-checked and grammatically correct.

(Note: While it is advised that different people serve in the roles described in (4) and (5) above, they may be combined if suitable.)

h. **Web Manager.** The Web Manager may include the designation of a Web Content Lead or Web Technical Lead. In this role, the Web Manager (or Web/Technical Lead) must be a Federal employee and be knowledgeable of VA communications and public affairs policies, procedures, and organizational messages. They are accountable for the information published by a particular Internet or Intranet asset that meets the mission of their respective program or organization. The Web Manager must ensure all content is current, accurate, factual, relevant to the VA or program office mission, spell-checked, grammatically correct, and compliant with Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Public Law 93-112.

(1) The Web Manager (or Web/Technical Lead) must also be knowledgeable about the technical issues regarding the maintenance or management of the Internet or Intranet asset to include its branding, navigation, page formats, graphics, or other attributes that provide the framework and corporate appearance. The Web Manager may work alone or with a consortium of IT professionals, to design, publish, and maintain its asset.

(2) The Web Manager (or Web/Technical Lead) must maintain and certify Web Registry (vaww.va.gov/webregistry) entries annually or as changes occur for each asset with an assigned Uniform Resource Locator (URL) on the va.gov domain, and other domains that have received permission from the AS/OIT to operate on VA's behalf or with VA funding.

4. **REFERENCES**.

a. <u>VA Directive 0023</u>, Tier 1 Graphic Standards.

b. <u>VA Directive 6001</u>, Limited Personal Use of Government Office Equipment Including Information Technology.

c. <u>VA Directive 6008</u>, Acquisition and Management of VA Information Technology Resources.

d. <u>VA Directive 6300</u>, Records and Information Management.

e. <u>VA Directive 6500</u>, Information Security Program.

f. <u>VA Directive 6502.3</u>, Webpage Privacy Policy.

g. Office of Management and Budget (OMB) <u>Memorandum M-99-18</u>, Privacy Policies on Federal Websites.

h. OMB <u>Memorandum 00-13</u>, Privacy Policies and Data Collection on Federal Websites.

i. OMB <u>Memorandum M-17-06</u>, Policies for Federal Agency Public Websites and Digital Services.

j. <u>Title 5 Code of Federal Regulations Part 2635</u>, Ethical Conduct for Employees of the Executive Branch.

k. <u>Title 5 United States Code Section 301</u>, Departmental Regulations.

l. <u>Public Law 105-220, Section 504</u> of the Rehabilitation Act – Privacy.

m. <u>Public Law 105-220, Section 508</u> of the Rehabilitation Act – Electronic and Information Technology Regulations.

n. <u>Public Law 115-336</u>, 21st Century Integrated Digital Experience Act (IDEA) or the 21st Century IDEA.

5. DEFINITIONS.

a. **Accessibility:** An accessible information and communication technology product or service is one which can be used by all its intended users, taking into account their differing capabilities. A person's ability to use technology may be impaired due to various physical, sensory, emotional or cognitive disabilities.

b. **Internet:** A global digital infrastructure available to the public that connects millions of computers. It is a global network of networks, with cross-platform compatibility, using the Internet Protocol (IP) to communicate between computers.

c. **Intranet:** A private Website or portal, secured or password-protected, specifically designed for workers in an organization to conduct internal business (within the VA Intranet, URLs typically begin with vaww). An Intranet is fully comparable to and interoperable with the Internet, but is not readily available to

the public. Intranet access may be limited to an entire organization or to an Administration or Program Office.

d. **Program Office:** Any component instrumentality of the VA organization for which a station number or routing symbol exists.

e. **Section 508:** A law that must be followed by Federal agencies when they purchase, develop, maintain or use information communication technology (ICT). Section 508 provides a set of technical and functional standards that must be met to enable access by people with disabilities. Compliance with Section 508 standards allows people with disabilities to have access and use of information and data. This includes information which enables people to be informed, perform work, receive Government benefits, and conduct business.

f. **Usability:** Refers to how well users can learn and use a product to achieve their goals and how satisfied they are with that process. Usability measures the quality of a user's experience when interacting with a product or system – whether a Website, a software application, mobile technology, or any user-operated device.

g. **Web-Based Applications:** Interactive Websites that allow Website users to complete transactions or view information that may change often or automatically, also referred to as dynamic, through the use of a standard Web browser without the need of an additional software application. Traditional Web-based applications include Web mail, online banking and other similar services.

h. **Web-Based Service:** A Web-based service, or Web service, is a way of integrating Web-based applications using standard Internet protocols. This allows Web-applications to connect to and interact with other applications that serve as the system of record or provide capabilities not inherent in the application. Some common uses include statistical data, location information, authentication, or financial processing.

For additional definitions and updates, refer to the VA Web Governance Website (https:/www.va.gov/web).