CORRESPONDENCE BUSINESS RULES AND POLICY

1. **REASON FOR ISSUE:** To revise 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 tasks, 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:**

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Assistant Secretary for Enterprise Integration

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

/\s/ Carrie A. McVicker  
Executive Secretary

**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 the 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 the 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 both internal and external to Department. 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, heads of other executive agencies and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States, unless otherwise delegated.

3. RESPONSIBILITIES.

   a. Secretary of Veterans Affairs shall:

      (1) 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 (Public Law 104-13).
(2) Sign all correspondence to the President and Vice President of the United States, Congressional Oversight Committees, heads of other executive agencies and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of the United States, unless otherwise delegated.

b. 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 the EXECSEC no later than 10 business days prior to the due date.

   a. Quality. Administrations and Staff Offices are responsible to ensure all packages are written in accordance with the most current 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://vaww.execsec.va.gov for 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, ensure a hardcopy of supporting documents and background information is placed on the left side of the folder and documents to be signed on the right side. All hardcopy packages must be stamped with the time and date of delivery at the EXECSEC front desk. (EXECSEC may change package delivery requirements based on external factors (i.e., Pandemic, lockdown, etc.)

   d. Grading Criteria. After submission, all packages will be graded on an 18-point quality and timeliness checklist to gauge the accuracy of each package. EXECSEC will compile and grade sheets each month and present the results by organization to Chiefs of Staff and each corresponding program office. The 18-point grading criteria include:

      (1) VA Form 0907 Summary and Approval VA Form. This VA Form 0907 will be graded to ensure the following 9 pieces of information are present and accurate: Name and Contact Information of Originator; Organization Acronyms; Correspondence Management System Number; Date/Due Date; Subject; Concurrences; Purpose; Discussion; Recommendation.

      (2) Acceptable formats of concurrence include:

         (a) An email from authorized signer,

         (b) Concurrence by authorized signer in Correspondence Management System; or

         (c) A VA Form 4265, Concurrence and Summary Sheet).
(3) All required Authorized Signers have provided concurrence and it is appropriately dated (no older than 60 days (exceptions will be adjudicated on a case-by-case basis).

(4) Left side of package correctly aligns with what is stated on the right side and includes Incoming Letter and/or Supporting Documentation as well as VA Form 4265.

(5) All required materials included in hard copy folder are mirrored in Correspondence Management System.


(7) Use of memo/letter is appropriate to the action.

(8) Memorandum addressee name(s) correct and in proper order and includes organization codes, as required (five lines from the top).

(9) Font size is correct (12 Point Arial).

(10) Margins are 1 inch.

(11) Page numbers included on the second and succeeding pages located one inch from the bottom center of the page in Arial 12.

(12) Sentence structure/grammar is sound and uses plain language.

(13) Spelling is correct.

(14) Acronym use is minimal and is correctly used throughout document.

(15) Memo/Letter flows well and is responsive to requirement.

(16) Lists/Bullets are uniform, formatting is consistent throughout.

(17) Signature Block (Sincerely, four lines, then appropriate name of SECVA).

(18) Timeliness of package.

2. OPENING CASES IN THE CORRESPONDENCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM. Each package is required to be created and maintained in Correspondence Management System. The case creator is responsible for ensuring each field is completed and is responsible to manage 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 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 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 Question for the Record (QFR) need to have two different Correspondence Management System case numbers.

3. CASE TASKS. Case tasks are actions taken 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 (For example, VHA 10BEXC Executive Correspondence).

(2) Do not assign case tasks to individuals belonging to other primary staff offices or sub- offices of primary departments. All VA staff offices are responsible for tasking the appropriate individuals within their purview.
(3) Afford 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 overall responsible to monitor and track all tasks pertaining to assigned cases.

c. **Closing Case Tasks.**

   (1) Case Owners – Ensure each case task is closed prior to submitting the final package to EXECSEC.

   (2) Tasked Organization/Individual – Ensure each assigned case task is closed once finished.

d. **Requesting Case Task Ownership Change.** Tasked organizations have one business day to review an assignment and determine if it was assigned appropriately to their component. If the task should be assigned to another component within VA, the tasked organization must notify EXECSEC within 24 hours (one business days) of assignment otherwise they are responsible for 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 (in hard copy or via electronic mail) to the Executive Secretariat. Requests for reassignment of controlled correspondence will also be made in writing.

4. **CONCURRENCE.**

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

      (1) EXECSEC will only accept one of the following proof of concurrences:

         (a) VA Form 4265.

         (b) Email printout from an authorized signer.

         (c) Case Task printout in the correspondence management system showing concurrence by an authorized signer.

      (2) The only concurrence types EXECSEC will accept are:

         (a) Concur.
(b) Concur with Comments.

(c) 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 concurrence or review comments must be consolidated at the organizational level prior to EXECSEC submission. Correspondence Liaisons are responsible for consolidating all comments from subordinate assignees. 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 edits/comments and concurrence/approval.

(2) All Other Letters and Internally-Generated Correspondence: All VA Administrations and Staff Offices are responsible for and shall obtain, 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 Chiefs of Staff within 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 packages are closed in accordance with the published policy.

6. **CHANGE CONTROL BOARD (CCB).**

a. **General.** The CCB is a committee that consists of Subject Matter Experts (SME, e.g., Super Users, VIEWS Office Coordinators, etc.), who decide whether to implement proposed changes to the Correspondence Management System. The main objective of a CCB is to ensure the client accepts the project. Factors affecting a CCB's decision can include the project's phase of development, budget, schedule and quality goals. The board consists of a Chair, Vice Chair, Administrative Officer, 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 (AKA Bugs) they may encounter to the Digital Transformation Center (DTC) Help Desk at the following website: [https://vacommunity.secure.force.com/helpdesk](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 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 AND CORRESPONDENCE TRAINING

1. TRAINING. Multiple training requirements are available 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). After accessing VA IT campus, the training videos can be found by searching for the Application Course listed below. This course is 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).

2. Action Officer Training. As per COSVA order, EXECSEC provides Action Officer Training for all subject matter experts and all Correspondence Management System users who are responsible for correspondence signed by the SECVA, DEPSECVA and COSVA. Request for training can be submitted to VA EXECSEC Action Officer Training.

   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 met deadlines. Training focuses on:

      (1) Correspondence Process.

      (2) Templates.

      (3) How to build a correspondence package.

      (4) How to determine appropriate timeline.

      (5) Coordination / Concurrence Process.

      (6) Top 10 most common errors.

      (7) Keeping Correspondence Management System status up-to-date.
b. **Quarterly Training.** The Office of Information and Technology (OIT) partnered with Correspondence Management System Developers offer training on a quarterly basis both in person and virtually. The dates and times of the quarterly training is 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 users accounts will be deactivated after 90 days of inactivity. All inactive users will be required to take the quarterly training upon re-activation of that individuals account.

(4) Special requests will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

c. **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 someone is unable to attend the required training, they should contact their VIEWS Office Coordinator immediately to reschedule or they risk suspension of the user’s Correspondence Management System account. Rescheduling a Correspondence Management System user for a no-show will require written justification and request for rescheduling from an authorized signer within their respective organization.
APPENDIX C - REFERENCES AND DEFINITIONS

1. REFERENCES.

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 Salesforce, 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: An organization’s acceptance 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.
   e. Correspondence: Correspondence is the inclusion of digital media, emails, text messages, documents exchanged through social platforms and digital agreements. Correspondence Management System: The Correspondence Management System is an electronic system used to receive, process, record and track all the incoming and outgoing business 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 (VIEWS CCM).
   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. **Executive Correspondence:** Executive correspondence is correspondence addressed to the Secretary, Deputy Secretary and Chief of Staff.