

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE VA HISTORY PROGRAM

- 1. REASON FOR ISSUE:** To establish policy, responsibilities and management direction for the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) History Program.
- 2. SUMMARY OF CONTENTS/MAJOR CHANGES:** This directive prescribes the structure of the VA History Program and outlines roles and responsibilities for the VA Chief Historian, VA Administration Historians and personnel designated or assigned duties to fulfill the VA History mission.
- 3. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** VA History Office (003C6D), Office of Construction and Facilities Management (003C).
- 4. RELATED HANDBOOK:** None.
- 5. RESCISSION:** None.

CERTIFIED BY:

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

/s/

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Acting Assistant Secretary
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/s/

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IMPLEMENTATION OF THE VA HISTORY PROGRAM

1. **PURPOSE.** The purpose of this directive is to establish policies, responsibilities and management direction of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) History Program.
2. **APPLICABILITY.** This directive prescribes the primary activities for the VA History Program and outlines roles and responsibilities for Administration Historians and personnel designated or assigned duties to preserve and document VA history. Implementation of the VA History Program shall establish Department-wide accountability for the protection and promotion of VA historical archives, artifacts and cultural resources. While Administration Historians may have duties specific to their respective Administration, the VA History Program, as addressed in this directive, describes the integrated efforts of Administration Historians and VA History Office personnel. This directive does not apply to, or supersede, existing policy related to the preservation of historic buildings (Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966; see VA Directive 7545).
3. **POLICY.** VA has an obligation to preserve and document its history to guide VA leaders and tell the Department's story to VA employees, Veterans, other Federal agencies and the public-at-large.
 - a. VA employees shall preserve and manage historic records (including those of predecessor agencies) and the collection of historical archives and artifacts.
 - b. VA leaders shall maintain a professional historical capability consisting of a formal VA History Office (VAHO) and National VA History Center (NVAHC) to document, analyze and advance an understanding of the history of the Department and its predecessors.
 - c. Administrations shall coordinate historical activities with the VAHO. The VAHO shall provide guidance in history protocols and procedures for the Administrations.
4. **RESPONSIBILITIES.**
 - a. **Office of the Acquisition, Logistics, and Construction (OALC).** OALC shall provide oversight and support of the VA History Program under the direct guidance and vision of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.
 - b. **Assistant Secretaries and Other Key Officials.** Assistant Secretaries and Other Key Officials shall:
 - (1) Preserve and account for materials related to the history, heritage and lineage of their respective organization and facilities, to include artifacts and archives associated with notable employees, researchers and Veterans served by the organization.

- (2) Ensure that archival and collections policies and procedures instituted by VAHO are implemented in VA Central Office, regional and local facilities.
 - (3) Facilitate the collection of historical artifacts and archival materials for preservation related to the response to national emergencies by VA.
 - (4) Disseminate VA History Program policy and ensure compliance within each Administration, Staff Office, program office, service and other organizational entities, as appropriate, within VA.
- c. **Under Secretaries.** In addition to the responsibilities outlined in paragraph 4b., the Under Secretaries shall:
- (1) Ensure the availability of professional historian representation (as described in the Office of Personnel Management Position Classifications Standard for History Series GS-0170) in each Administration to maintain continuity of historical processes and procedures and emphasize organizational history as a key facet of VA culture and heritage.
 - (2) Leverage Administration Historians and VAHO to develop relevant historical projects, initiatives and studies. Ensure adequate funding to support endorsed projects and to support travel and training for Administration Historians.
 - (3) Support participation of the Administration Historians in the development of NVAHC content.
 - (4) Ensure coordination with the VA Chief Historian or VAHO designee on issues related to overarching VA History initiatives and all history and archival projects, including contracted projects.
 - (5) Ensure all Administration Historians provide a periodic report to the VA Chief Historian of historical accomplishments, studies, publications, outreach, exhibits and collection activities.
- d. **VA Chief Historian.** The VA Chief Historian shall implement the Secretary's vision for the History Program and NVAHC with support and oversight from OALC. VA's Chief Historian shall also serve as the senior VA Historian, act as the director of the VA History Program, and supervise the program development and day-to-day operation of the NVAHC in Dayton, Ohio (displays, artifacts, staffing, access, hours of operation, internal building climate, etc.).
- e. **VA History Program staff (VA Central Office, Washington, D.C.).** The VA History Program staff shall:

- (1) Coordinate with the Administrations to achieve the goals of the VAHO.
- (2) Record the Department's official history.
- (3) Prepare catalogue and archive printed and digital (video, audio and other electronic formats) histories of major Departmental actions, including the history of VA predecessor agencies. Prepare pamphlets, books, monographs, articles, catalogues, chronologies, bibliographies and special studies of importance to the Department for public and stakeholder benefit
- (4) Facilitate, on behalf of the Department and in accordance with VA policy, the acceptance of material gifts and donations (such as oral history interviews, personal papers, artifacts, archival materials and ephemera) that support the Department's mission and VAHO objectives.
- (5) Produce historical studies to aid decision-makers in evaluating current and proposed policies, and provide assistance and input on Department historical, archival and historic preservation matters.
- (6) Conduct periodic oral history interviews with senior VA officials and other relevant persons associated with the Department at the discretion of a VA historian.
- (7) Establish and maintain liaisons with Administration and Staff Office leaders, internal regulatory program managers (Records Management Officers, Federal Preservation Officer, etc.), and external potential partners such as national repositories for historic materials, civilian Federal agencies' and Department of Defense history program offices, and professional and academic groups.
- (8) Provide appropriate training to VA employees assigned collateral duties related to the identification and retention of relevant historical archives and artifacts (e.g., VA medical centers and national cemeteries) and educate VA officials and managers about the value of institutional history and its preservation.
- (9) Review scope, maintain oversight and provide concurrence on all history and archival projects initiated by VA. These projects include but are not limited to the digitization of historical records, writing/publication of products with a historical focus, publishing specialized histories, curation of collections and local exhibition of historic artifacts. This may be in collaboration with VA stakeholders with overlapping responsibilities (Records Management Officers, VA Federal Preservation Officer, VA Central Office and Office of General Counsel librarians, etc.).
- (10) Coordinate with VA Records Management Officers to review materials that may be kept by VAHO for its collection and obtain copies of record schedule

- materials submitted to the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) as permanent records if they are pertinent to VA history.
- (11) Provide performance guidelines and best practices for VA enterprise or organization history programs and products, using the recognized professional conduct standards.
 - (12) Provide advice and assistance in the recruiting and hiring of professional historians and related positions that support Administration history activities unrelated to Federal Preservation Office activities.
 - (13) Maintain archaeological collections and records for the agency.
- f. **National VA History Center staff located on the Dayton VA Medical Center campus.** The National VA History Center staff shall:
- (1) Identify, collect, accession, preserve and organize digital and traditional archives. This effort is not intended to duplicate or interfere with established VA records management schedules.
 - (2) Create and maintain historic data and records searchable to researchers, writers, historians and the public.
 - (3) Assume responsibility for the reception, storage and conservation of artifacts and archival materials from VA facilities and cemeteries intended for the NVAHC collection.
 - (4) Coordinate with internal VA stakeholders to create a professional facility for the NVAHC at the Dayton VA Medical Center campus equipped with appropriate storage, research and exhibit spaces. Provide technical specifications and standards to achieve interior functions to include exhibits, research and archival storage that meet recognized standards (Smithsonian Institution, NARA, National Park Service, etc.) for facilities of this type.
 - (5) Establish a centralized archival and artifacts repository that adheres to professional standards such as those outlined by NARA, the American Alliance of Museums, and the Society of American Archivists for all historical accessions and related functions.
 - (6) Establish standards and publish guidance for the storage, exhibit, preservation and accountability of artifacts and archives at local and regional VA facilities and national cemeteries.
 - (7) Implement site development, renovations, and management in coordination with the Dayton VA Medical Center and Veterans Health Administration, which have responsibility for the NVAHC real property

- g. **Records Management Officers, Federal Preservation Officer, VA Central Office and Office of General Counsel librarians.** Records Management Officers, Federal Preservation Officer and VA Central Office and Office of General Counsel librarians shall maintain ongoing communication and coordination with the VA Chief Historian to advance the VA History program, especially in the areas of overlapping responsibilities of their offices and those outlined in this document for the VA History Program, VAHO and NVAHC.

5. REFERENCES.

- a. Secretary of Veterans Affairs Memorandum, Establishment of the VA History Office (VIEWS 2244150), dated April 10, 2020.
- b. Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) among the Department of Veterans Affairs and Partners in the Dayton, Ohio, community, signed January 21, 2017, by former Secretary of Veterans Affairs David J. Shulkin and MOA partners.
- c. [16 U.S.C. §§ 431-433. Antiquities Act of 1906.](#)
- d. [49 Stat. 666, 16 U.S.C. §§ 461-467. Historic Sites Act of 1935, as amended.](#)
- e. [P.L. 102-575. Federal Records Act of 1950, as amended.](#)
- f. [P.L. 89-665. The National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended.](#)
- g. [P.L. 93-291. Archaeological and Historic Preservation Act of 1974.](#)
- h. [P.L. 93-579. The Privacy Act of 1974, as amended.](#)
- i. [P.L. 96-95. Archaeological Resources Protection Act of 1979, as amended.](#)
- j. [P.L. 101-601. Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990.](#)
- k. [VA Directive 7545, Cultural Resources Management Procedures.](#)
- l. [VA Directive 7531, Acquisition of Artwork, Decorative Furnishings and Decorative Items.](#)

6. DEFINITIONS.

- a. **Accessions.** Items added to an existing collection ensuring accountability.
- b. **Archives.** A large collection of historical documents or records providing information about people, places, institutions, and events. Also, the place where such documents or records are stored and made available to researchers.
- c. **Archival materials.** Letters, papers, photographs, computer files, scrapbooks, financial records, diaries, and other historical records.

- d. **Artifact.** An object, either man-made or naturally formed, that is of cultural or historical interest. Examples include uniforms, weapons, tools, and decorative items. They have clearly established origins and relate to historical events or subjects.
- e. **Digital.** Records, archives, media, projects, activities, responsibilities, etc. involving or making use of computer devices, data, or media in creation, function, or preservation.
- f. **Ephemera.** Items of collectible memorabilia, typically written or printed, that were originally expected to have only short-term value or interest (for instance, pamphlets, postcards, and posters).
- g. **Historical records.** Documentary material having historical value.
- h. **Oral history.** Oral history is the collection and study of historical information about individuals, families, important events, or everyday life using audio or video recordings of interviews. Recordings are transcribed, summarized, or indexed and then accessioned in a library or archives for historical research to complement textual records.
- i. **Record schedule.** Records schedules set retention requirements for records documenting administrative and program functions common to several or all government agencies. Examples include personnel, accounting, and general administration.