



Senior Agency Official for Records Management 2019 Annual Report

The National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) requires Senior Agency Officials for Records Management (SAORM) to provide an annual report demonstrating how agencies are handling important records management initiatives as identified by NARA.

NARA uses the reports to determine the overall progress of the Federal Government in managing its records and the transition away from paper to digital formats, and to identify best practices and model solutions within Federal agencies.

On June 28, 2019, the Office of Management and Budget and the National Archives issued a memorandum: *Transition to Electronic Records* (M-19-21) to ensure that all Federal records are created, retained, and managed in electronic formats by December 31, 2022. This year's SAORM report provides an opportunity for agencies to report on plans and progress towards the milestones and target goals in this memorandum, as well as other important records management initiatives.

The reporting period begins on January 13, 2020, with reports due back to NARA no later than March 13, 2020.

NARA plans to post your 2019 SAORM report on the NARA website upon receipt. Please ensure that your agency's report is a publicly releasable version. This action is in the interest of transparency in Government and to promote collaboration and communication among agencies. NARA intends to list any non-responding agencies in a summary report and on the website.

Instructions for Reporting:

- This template covers records management program developments towards the transition to electronic recordkeeping outlined in M-19-21 through December 31, 2019.
- Please be brief and precise in your answers. Limit answers to each question to no more than 500 words.
- Please complete the questions/items below and send the report to rmsselfassessment@nara.gov. Include the words "SAORM 2019 Annual Report - [Agency Name]" in the subject line of the email.
- If you are responsible for records management in multiple agencies, components, or bureaus, please determine how you will submit reports to NARA. While

NARA prefers a comprehensive report, you may submit separate reports for each component.

Provide the following information (required):

- Name of SAORM: James P. Gfrerer
- Position title: Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology, Chief Information Officer
- Address: 810 Vermont Ave; Washington, DC 20420

- 1. What agencies, bureaus, components, or offices are covered by this report and your position as SAORM and which will be reporting separately? Please also indicate any that are new or have been changed due to reorganization or other circumstances.**

Please provide list:

VA Central Staff Offices and three Administrations (listed below):

- National Cemetery Administration (NCA)
- Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA)
- Veterans Health Administration (VHA)

- 2. Is your agency managing all permanent electronic records in electronic format as of December 31, 2019? (M-19-21, 1.1)**

Yes

No

Please explain your response:

Although VA is not yet in full compliance with this requirement, we are making progress towards it. VA maintains all email records in its electronic record keeping system (O365) using the CAPSTONE approach. We are in the process of converting and managing all our permanent records. It will take some time because of the volume of records.

- 3. Has your agency made progress towards managing all permanent records in an electronic format with appropriate metadata by December 31, 2022? (M-19-21, 1.2)**

Yes

No

Please explain your response (include specific goals and example metrics):

Yes. Our Administrations are taking a proactive approach by initiating programs/activities where paper files are being scanned, uploaded and converted into an electronic media format. For instance, the Board of Veterans' Appeals digitized records was processed through an agreement with private contractor, Iron Mountain. VHA has identified all permanent records and expected locations. VHA has separated the paper versus electronic records. The paper records are limited to older records such as the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA). These records will either be transferred to the Washington Record Center prior to December 2022 or be converted to PDF prior to transfer. NCA's Burial Operations Support System (BOSS) automates all manual, paper-intensive record keeping, and information and forms processing associated with interments. VBA has been converting presidential records into electronic format.

4. Has your agency made progress towards managing all temporary records in electronic format? (M-19-21, 1.3)

Yes

No

Please explain your response (include specific goals and example metrics):

VA has commenced efforts to digitize its analog records. VBA has started the effort to transition its records to electronic format. As of February 25, 2019, VBA finalized national scanning efforts of more than 1.7M files extracted from 59 locations. As of February 28, 2019, 42% of the 6.1M files located at the Records Management Center (RMC) have been scanned. VBA continues to populate Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS) as the system of record (SOR) with data from scanned files. VBA currently contracts 36 commercial records storage facilities.

After 1994, the vast majority of temporary VHA medical records originated in electronic systems therefore are already digitized. More recently with the advent of the VA "Choice" Program, Veterans can access records from their local medical providers, therefore resulting in a vast proliferation of paper records that must be processed and stored digitally. Consequently, those paper records are scanned and digitized at the local VHA Facilities level. This represents the largest amount of records which are being scanned and stored electronically by VHA.

Due to the volume of Veteran compensation-related records affected by the Robinson v. McDonald decision, there are programmatic budgetary, legal, and administrative considerations involved with implementing a 100% paperless environment. This decision forbids destruction of any compensation-related file until such time the VA Secretary has shown VA's capability to replicate, with 100% accuracy, veteran claims files.

5. Have you, as the SAORM, taken steps to ensure that your records management program complies with the Federal Records Act and its regulations through strategic plans including performance goals, objectives and measures? (M-19-21, 1.4)

Yes

No

Please explain your response (include specific goals and example metrics):

Yes. VA is currently developing strategic plans, goals, objectives, and initiatives that will enable it to comply with the December 2022 deadline. VA recognizes the importance of ensuring that records management is included in its strategic plan and as an important tool for supporting agency business processes.

The SOARM is taking steps to ensure that the records management program has the strategic direction, support and resources it needs to be successful. Examples of goals include: stream-line our current paper-based processes; reduce number of paper records submitted to NARA; research/identify modern electronic records management tool; create new practices and services to reduce the number of lost records.

6. If applicable, have you identified all agency-operated records centers and made plans to either close them before 2022, or have you submitted a request to NARA for an exception? (M-19-21, 1.3)

Yes

No

Please explain your response (include specific goals and example metrics):

VA is preparing an exception. We are awaiting details on official guidance from NARA regarding the exception process. VA has conducted a cost-benefit analysis, which revealed that the estimated cost to transfer 1.8 million boxes of records is > 8 million for VHA health records alone. The majority of the 1.8 is VHA health records. This estimate does not include records stored at the NARA Federal Records Centers (FRCs). Non-monetary costs and security risks are also associated with the transfer. For example, records will be unavailable (for FOIA requests) during a period before transportation. During transportation and upon arrival and processing. During this time the records in unavailable to both the facility and Veteran. Millions of boxes full of PII/PHI information on American highways is at risk. The freight operators will need to be vetted and will require privacy training, to ensure they know the risk for

loss of records and how to protect the records. The transit company would have to be legally bonded and insured. Trucks would need to be locked and tapered sealed

7. Does your agency have procedures that include documentation to ensure records of outgoing senior officials* are properly captured and/or processed and not improperly removed, altered, or deleted including electronic records and email?

*Senior officials are the heads of departments and independent agencies; their deputies and assistants; the heads of program offices and staff offices including assistant secretaries, administrators, and commissioners; directors of offices, bureaus, or equivalent; principal regional officials; staff assistants to those aforementioned officials, such as special assistants, confidential assistants, and administrative assistants; and career Federal employees, political appointees, and officers of the Armed Forces serving in equivalent or comparable positions.

Yes

No

Please explain your response (include specific details of procedures):

VA provides briefs to incoming and departing senior officials on their records management responsibilities and provides supporting documents and materials that identify and explain requirements regarding senior officials' records management responsibilities including documenting their public service, use of personal email, and other recordkeeping requirements. For instance, VA record officers ensure that their respective employees complete training regarding recordkeeping responsibilities and all relevant rules and regulations; strict requirements are in place regarding who may remove records.

8. Do you, as the SAORM, see challenges within your agency in meeting the goal of fully-electronic recordkeeping?

Yes

No

Please explain your response (include details of specific challenges, if applicable):

Yes. VA faces many challenges. VA is a huge enterprise. It is the second largest cabinet-level agency and supports the largest medical system in the USA. VA has over 600+ IT systems; the volume of records is in the millions. VA is faced with a significant change in terms of both technology and agency culture. Technologically, it will require an automated, electronic approach to capturing and managing its permanent and temporary records. The best-case scenario is to implement a single-solution to manage all records over multiple systems. This eliminates duplication and creates one central repository. However, given the size of VA, this approach may not

be feasible. VA is researching approaches and tools that are conducive to VA's business needs and IT infrastructure. The cultural change is just as important. The SAORM is bringing awareness to VA senior officials. Once VA has full buy-in from its senior officials, funding must be allocated and approved.

9. Do you need support from NARA to ensure a successful transition to fully-electronic recordkeeping?

- Yes
 No

Please provide details on what support is needed:

Yes. VA needs support from NARA. It would be most helpful if NARA offered a national level electronic records management keeping system/tool that can be used by all agencies; provide additional instructional training on how, when, and where to start file plans and file inventories in order to transition to a fully electronic recordkeeping environment across the department. In addition, we ask that NARA provide detailed guidance on exception regarding the closing of agency records storage centers.