



## *Senior Agency Official for Records Management 2020 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 19, 2021, and reports are due back to NARA no later than March 19, 2021.

NARA plans to post your 2020 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 both records management program developments towards the transition to electronic recordkeeping outlined in M-19-21 through December 31, 2022, and other aspects of agency records management programs.
- 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](mailto:rmsselfassessment@nara.gov). Include the words "SAORM 2020 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: Dominic Cussatt
- Position title: Acting Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology, Chief Information Officer
- Address: 810 Vermont Ave. NW; Washington, DC 20420
- Office telephone number: 202-461-6910
- Email: Dominic.Cussatt@va.gov

**1. What agencies, bureaus, components, or offices are covered by this report and your position as SAORM and which will be reporting separately?**

*Please provide a list, and also indicate any that are new or have been changed due to reorganization or other circumstances.*

VA Central Offices and three Administrations (see list below).  
Veterans Health Administration (VHA)  
Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA)  
National Cemetery Administration (NCA)

**2. Has the COVID-19 pandemic changed any policies or practices related to records management at your agency?**

- Yes  
 No  
 Do not know

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

**3. Does your agency have an established information governance framework that connects records management, data management, and other agency information lines of business? (A relationship between CIO, CDO, SAORM, DRO/ARO, RM Staff)**

- Yes  
 No  
 Do not know

*Please provide details on what support is needed:*

**4. 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

Do not know

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

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.

Our Administrations are focusing on efforts to digitize over 35 different types of permanent records as a primary priority and then storing them in NARA Federal Records Centers with a due date of no later than December 2022.

For example, Veterans Benefits Administration (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.

**5. Has your agency made progress towards managing all temporary records in an electronic format by December 31, 2022? (M-19-21, 1.3)**

Yes

No

Do not know

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

VA has commenced efforts to digitize its analog records. For example, 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.

**6. Is your agency investing resources in IT to support the transition to electronic recordkeeping?**

- Yes  
 No  
 Do not know

*Please explain your response. If Yes: Please include specific examples of resources and how this will support records management processes. If No or Do not know: Please explain.*

VA 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 technical resource challenges; the cost of procuring a system that meets the volume and the requirements of the agency are significant. It is not cost beneficial to implement an enterprise (centralized) solution. The best-case scenario is to implement a single-solution to manage all records over multiple systems. However, given the size of VA, this approach may not be feasible. VA continues research 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.

**7. To meet the requirements of M-19-21, 1.3, related to records storage facilities, does your agency have plans to use commercial storage to replace agency-operated records centers and NARA Federal Records Centers by December 31, 2022? (M-19-21, 1.3)**

- Yes  
 No  
 Do not know

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

VA is submitting an exception from the requirement to electronically manage all temporary records by December 31, 2022, and will request consideration to continue to transfer paper records to the FRCs.

For instance, the estimated cost to transfer 1.8 million boxes of records to NARA is \$8,100,000. The majority of the 1.8 is VHA health records. This estimate does not include records stored at the NARA Federal Records Centers (FRCs). Given the paper-intensive nature of business operations and activities, along with the unanticipated demands on resources and attention that COVID-19 impacts placed on the agency, full compliance with OMB/NARA M-19-21 is unfortunately not feasible for VA by December 31, 2022.

**8. Does your agency have policies and procedures that include documentation to ensure records of newly appointed and 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
- Do not know

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

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

- Yes
- No
- Do not know

*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.

**10. Do you have suggestions for NARA to improve its engagement with you as the SAORM?**

- Yes
- No
- Do not know

*Please explain your response (include any comments on previous NARA SAORM engagements, topics for future engagements, or other suggestions):*

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.