

## INTERNET/INTRANET SERVICES

- 1. REASON FOR ISSUE:** This Handbook revises Department-wide procedures for the establishment and administration of Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Internet/Intranet sites, and sites operating on behalf of VA, and non-VA entities contracted to operate for VA, and/or related services. This Handbook implements the policies contained in VA Directive 6102, Internet/Intranet Services.
- 2. SUMMARY OF CONTENTS/MAJOR CHANGES:** This Handbook provides procedures relating to the establishment and administration of a VA Internet and/or Intranet site, and/or site operating on behalf of VA, and/or related service; it also provides procedures for publishing VA information on the World Wide Web (www). It defines the organizational responsibilities for all Web activities that are related to posting, editing, maintaining, and removing files to or from the Internet and Intranet. Important modifications to this handbook are the enhanced emphases on privacy-related issues, security requirements, accessibility requirements, the utilization of Web applications and tools for enhanced performance, and new technologies developed for use with Web browsers, including but not limited to, all applications, content management systems, audio and/or video broadcasts, blogs, and other types of browser-based social media. It addresses the establishment of the VA Chief Information Officer's (CIO's) Office of Enterprise Development (OED), Resource Management Information Technology Development (RMIT (005Q)), as the entity which will have enforcement authority over all VA Web activities. This Handbook also establishes that failure to comply with the requirements could result in serious consequences, including the immediate removal of Web pages and/or VA Web sites from publication for serious breaches of security, privacy or other significant failure(s), or removal of Web pages or Web sites within 30 days as determined by the responsible administrations.
- 3. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** Assistant Secretary for Information & Technology (005), Office of Enterprise Development (005Q).
- 4. RELATED DIRECTIVES:** VA Directive 6102, Internet/Intranet Services and VA Directive 6001, Limited Personal Use of Government Office Equipment Including Information Technology, VA Handbook 6300.1, Records Management Procedures ,VA Handbook 6300.5, Procedures for Establishing and Managing Privacy Act System of Records, and VA Handbook 6310.1, Forms Management Procedures.
- 5. RESCISSION:** VA Handbook 6102, Internet/Intranet Services, dated January 30, 2006.

**CERTIFIED BY:**

/S/

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

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## INTERNET/INTRANET SERVICES

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## INTERNET/INTRANET SERVICES

### Chapter 1. OVERVIEW

#### 1. PURPOSE

a. This document provides federal and agency mandates and requirements for establishing and administering Internet and Intranet Web sites for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs. It applies to all full-time and part-time employees, contractors, interns, and volunteers who design, maintain and/or oversee VA Internet and Intranet Web sites. This policy applies to VA Internet and Intranet Web sites on the “va.gov” domain, and other domains that have received permission from the VA Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology to operate on VA’s behalf or with VA funding. This policy also may apply to Web-based applications, collaborative tools, or other Web-based technologies depending on the manner in which such tools and technologies are employed.

b. VA promotes the secure and effective use of Internet services to improve access to and delivery of information to veterans, their families, and the general public; VA also promotes the secure and effective use of the VA Intranet to provide access to and delivery of information to VA employees. Information on the Internet/Intranet 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.

c. Organizational use of Internet and Intranet services must support VA’s mission, goals, and objectives. These services must support legitimate, mission-related activities of the VA and must 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.

d. VA Internet and Intranet Web sites and sites 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.

#### 2. General Requirements of VA Web Sites

a. A host of requirements and mandates have been identified in this Handbook and must be implemented on all VA Internet and Intranet Web sites and sites operating on behalf of VA. In addition, this Handbook contains a Web site Checklist that provides an itemized list of requirements for Web site compliance, along with a brief synopsis of each requirement and its application to the Internet and/or Intranet as appropriate. Additional Information on each item can be found by clicking on the applicable hyperlink, if any, displayed in the checklist for that item. References that provide information and links to other documents and Web sites with additional information can be found at <http://www.usa.gov/webcontent/index.shtml>.

b. The intent of this Handbook is to ensure a consistently high quality product recognizable as coming from VA, with a VA “look and feel”, and which complies with all federal mandates and agency requirements. In addition to this Handbook, a separate document named the “VA Web Best Practices Guide” is also available to provide guidance to VA Web managers. The VA Web

Best Practices Guide should be used with this Handbook, and includes recommendations about technical, interface, branding, usability and content attributes of VA Web pages and the use of electronic collaboration tools such as SharePoint and Groove. The VA Web Best Practices Guide can be found at <http://vawww.va.gov/6102/>.

### 3. RESPONSIBILITIES

a. Secretary of Veterans Affairs. The Secretary has designated the Department's Chief Information Officer (CIO) as the senior agency official responsible for the Department's IT programs.

b. Chief Information Officer. The CIO is responsible for the effective use of VA's Internet, Intranet and other IT resources, and for Department-wide directives, and policies governing the use and implementation of Internet, Intranet and other IT resources. The CIO shall:

- (1) Establish policy and procedures for VA Internet and Intranet Web sites, including sites operated by non-VA entities for VA;
- (2) Maintain liaisons with Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries and Other Key Officials, to ensure effective dissemination of VA information via the Internet and Intranet;
- (3) Provide technical support consistent with existing CIO responsibilities;
- (4) Review and approve additions and changes to Internet and Intranet policy and procedures as suggested by the VA Web Management Governance Board and the VA 6102 Advisory Board;
- (5) Provide recommendations on Internet and Intranet services and risk management issues.

c. VA Office of Enterprise Development, Resource Management IT, VA Web Solutions and VA Web Operations (005Q3) shall support and manage VA's Internet and Intranet presence and ensure compliance with all federal mandates and guidance, and department-wide policies and requirements.

d. VA Web Management Governance Board. The VA Web Management Governance Board will include representatives from administrations across VA; membership will be limited to VA staff only. This group shall:

- (1) Make recommendations on the use of the Internet/Intranet and the associated Web sites and services within the VA to the VA CIO;
- (2) Provide advice, guidance and information to the VA 6102 Advisory Board as necessary and/or as requested by the VA 6102 Advisory Board;
- (3) Meet quarterly at a minimum; more frequently at the direction of the CIO. Provide advice, guidance and information to the VA 6102 Advisory Board as necessary and/or as requested by the VA 6102 Advisory Board.

e. VA 6102 Advisory Board. The VA 6102 Advisory Board will include staff members from administrations across VA who provide Web communications oversight to their respective organizations; membership will be limited to VA staff only. This group shall:

(1) Provide oversight to Web activities within their respective organizations as established in this Handbook and as designated by their respective organizations;

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

(3) Ensure the uniform application of the requirements, mandates and policies in this Handbook.

(4) Raise issues and request input and guidance from the VA Web Management Governance Board for issues beyond the scope of the VA 6102 Advisory Board.

f. Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, and Other Key Officials. These officials will ensure the implementation of VA Internet and Intranet 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 various confidentiality provisions such as the Privacy Act and the HIPAA Privacy Rule, and information that may be withheld under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA).

g. Program Office or Facility Site. The head of each Program Office or facility site (e.g., VBA Regional Office or Center, VHA facility such as a VA Medical Center, NCA facility such as a cemetery) with an official VA Internet/Intranet site shall:

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

(2) Ensure that VA Internet and Intranet services conform to section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Pub. L. 93-112;

(3) Ensure that Internet and Intranet site server environments are secured as outlined in VA Handbook 6500, Information Security Procedures, and/or will coordinate with security personnel on issues dealing with securing the server environments on which their respective sites reside.

(4) Each Program Office/organization with an official Internet and/or Intranet site will appoint a Webmaster who provides management oversight to maintain the Web site(s).

(5) Each Program Office/organization will designate a content manager for the Web site(s) who will be accountable for the information disseminated by a particular Web site that meets the mission of their respective program or organization.

(Note: While it is preferred that different people serve as Webmaster(s) and content manager(s), these roles may be combined if appropriate.)

h. Webmasters and Content Managers: The Webmaster is an Internet and/or Intranet service administrator who possesses the skills, knowledge and ability to work alone, or with a consortium of IT professionals, to design, publish, and maintain Web sites that provide a variety of information services to the public and to VA employees. The Webmaster provides technical management to maintain the Web site(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. The content manager must be knowledgeable of the VA's communications and public affairs policies, procedures and organization messages and is accountable for the information disseminated by a particular Web site that meets the mission of his/her respective program or organization. The content manager must also ensure that Web page content is current, accurate, factual, relevant to the VA and/or Program Office mission, spell-checked and grammatically correct. Webmasters and content managers may also be referred to collectively as Web managers in this Handbook when responsibility for specific activities overlap or may be shared.

#### **4. HOW TO USE THIS HANDBOOK**

a. This Handbook contains a compilation of legal mandates, regulations, and VA requirements that govern all VA Internet and Intranet Web sites and Web sites operating on behalf of VA, and Web pages displayed on those Web sites. This Handbook contains links to specific information relevant to each requirement.

b. Many of the requirements covered in this Handbook apply differently to Internet and Intranet Web sites. All items are marked to show if they apply to the Internet, the Intranet, or both.

c. Mechanisms are in place that automate the compliance monitoring of many of these requirements. Non-compliance with the standards put forth in this document may result in the removal of individual Web pages or entire VA Web sites until they are deemed compliant with VA Directive 6102 and this Handbook.



## CHAPTER 2. WEB SITE REQUIREMENTS & PROHIBITIONS

**1. WEB SITE REQUIREMENTS CHECKLIST.** The following checklist provides a listing of the Web site requirements and also shows whether the requirements apply to the Internet, the Intranet or both. The first column is for Webmasters to use to check off their Web site's compliance with each item; the second column is the checklist item number, the third column is the requirement or specific issue (issues may be represented by hyperlinks that link to more specific reference information on that topic); the fourth column is the synopsis of the requirement; the fifth and sixth columns state if the requirement pertains to the Internet, the Intranet or both as indicated by checkmarks.

### WEB SITE CHECKLIST

|  | # | Issue                                                                                                        | Synopsis of Requirement                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Internet Sites                                                                        | Intranet Sites                                                                        |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                   | 1 | <a href="#">Use Government Domains</a>                                                                       | VA Web sites must use the va.gov domain. Permission to use any other domain (e.g. .com, edu, or org) may be granted only by the Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology. Establishment of a new .gov domain requires a formal request to GSA for approval, requested by the Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology. Similar permission must be obtained to use an alias address to redirect to va.gov Web sites. See "VA Mandatory Guidelines" section for more information about domains. |    |    |
|                                                                                   | 2 | <a href="#">Show U.S. Sponsorship</a>                                                                        | All VA Web pages must display "U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs" prominently on the top of all Web pages to ensure that Web site customers know that they are still in VA while navigating through the pages of all VA Web sites. See VA Web Best Practices Guide at <a href="http://vawww.va.gov/6102">http://vawww.va.gov/6102</a> for more information.                                                                                                                                                     |  |  |
|                                                                                   | 3 | Use <a href="#">VA Web Request</a> to initiate the creation of, or make significant changes to, VA Web sites | The VA Web Request form must be used to record and obtain permission to create a new VA Internet/Intranet Web site and/or to make a significant change to an existing VA Internet or Intranet Web site; this mandate applies to both production and development Web sites. See VA Web Request section for details and/or click on the hyperlink to view the VA Web Request form at <a href="http://vawww.va.gov/webrequest/">http://vawww.va.gov/webrequest/</a> .                                                |  |  |

|  | # | Issue                                                                                                                           | Synopsis of Requirement                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Internet Sites                                                                                      | Intranet Sites                                                                        |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                   | 4 | Register VA at Web sites on the <a href="#">VA Web Registry</a>                                                                 | VA Web sites and outsourced Web sites in production must be registered in the VA Web Registry database; Web managers annually must certify compliance with 508 Accessibility and Privacy mandates. Other information must also be recorded and updated in a timely manner as necessary. See VA Web Registry section of Handbook and <a href="http://vawww.va.gov/webregistry/">http://vawww.va.gov/webregistry/</a>                                                   |                  |    |
|                                                                                   | 5 | <a href="#">Establish Priorities and Schedules for Posting Content</a> ; obligation of Records Management Service (RMS) in VACO | VA must develop an inventory of information published on its agency Web site and post that information on an established schedule. See this information at <a href="#">Web Content Inventory and Publication Schedule</a> which routes to <a href="http://www.va.gov/webinventory/">http://www.va.gov/webinventory/</a> .                                                                                                                                             | <br>VA mgmt duty |                                                                                       |
|                                                                                   | 6 | <a href="#">Apply Principles in OMB Circular A-130: Mgmt of Federal Information Resources</a>                                   | The A-130 memorandum is a broad mandate for all federal agencies to perform their information resources management activities efficiently, effectively, and economically, and ensure that all citizens are provided with optimal methods for the electronic communication of federal government information. Click on item 6 hyperlink to view A-130 Circular.                                                                                                        |                  |    |
|                                                                                   | 7 | <a href="#">Implement Security Controls to Protect Information</a>                                                              | VA Web sites must comply with Section 207(f)(1)(B)(iv) of the E-Government Act of 2002, Pub. L. 107-347, which requires all federal organizations to have security protocols to protect information provided by and collected on all agency Web sites and security for all hardware and software, as applicable. When encryption is required, VA requires that it be a NIST FIPS certified encryption product/algorithm. See Handbook sections on Security and Links. |                |  |
|                                                                                   | 8 | <a href="#">Ensure Continuity of Operations During Emergencies</a>                                                              | VA Web managers must collaborate with the appropriate emergency preparedness officials at their respective locations regarding issues and activities relevant to the maintenance of the Web site during emergencies and must be knowledgeable about and familiar with any emergency plans that affect the Web site.                                                                                                                                                   |                |  |

|  | #  | Issue                                                                                   | Synopsis of Requirement                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Internet Sites                                                                        | Intranet Sites                                                                        |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                   | 9  | <a href="#">Provide Common Access for a Broad Range of Visitors</a>                     | VA Web sites must be designed, developed, and tested for a broad range of visitors, including those with lower-end hardware and software capabilities, i.e., browsers that are one version older than current version. See the “VA Web Best Practices Guide” at <a href="http://vaww.va.gov/6102/">http://vaww.va.gov/6102/</a> .                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |    |    |
|                                                                                   | 10 | <a href="#">Organize Content Based on Audience Needs</a>                                | VA Web sites should be organized in a logical and useful way by subject (topic, tasks, services, life events), by audience group, by geographic location, or any combination of these factors as the primary navigation. See the “VA Web Best Practices Guide” at <a href="http://vaww.va.gov/6102/">http://vaww.va.gov/6102/</a> for details. Also see information at <a href="http://vaww.va.gov/webops/">http://vaww.va.gov/webops/</a> for VA Web page templates and other “How To” tips.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |    |    |
|                                                                                   | 11 | <a href="#">Write and Organize Home pages from the Viewpoint of the Target Audience</a> | VA Web sites must focus on helping the Web site’s target audience(s) to efficiently find the services and information they seek from VA. VA home pages must help Web site visitors to get to the content they need and want most, with minimal complexity of navigation and the fewest drilldowns. Content must be easy to read and without excessive text and/or graphics. Web content managers must ensure that all VA Web content is spell-checked and grammatically correct prior to posting that content. See the “VA Web Best Practices Guide” at <a href="http://vaww.va.gov/6102/">http://vaww.va.gov/6102/</a> for details and recommended methods for VA Web managers.                                                                    |    |    |
|                                                                                   | 12 | <a href="#">Write in Plain Language</a>                                                 | VA Web managers must ensure that all home pages, all major entry points, and all navigational elements of their VA Web sites are written in plain language, which is language designed so that the Web site’s typical visitor can easily understand the material presented in one reading. Internet Web pages should be written at a 7 <sup>th</sup> grade level whenever possible; all Web pages must be written at the most elementary level of understanding for the subject matter presented to the Web site’s target audience. VA Web page content should be spell-checked and grammatically correct prior to posting that content. See the “VA Web Best Practices Guide” at <a href="http://vaww.va.gov/6102/">http://vaww.va.gov/6102/</a> . |  |  |

|  | #  | Issue                                                                | Synopsis of Requirement                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Internet Sites                                                                      | Intranet Sites                                                                      |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|----------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                   | 13 | <a href="#">Use Basic Common Content, Terminology, and Placement</a> | VA Web sites must include common terminology and placement where specified, using wording that is simple, straightforward and concise to optimize the understanding of the content of VA Web pages and to make the use of navigational pathways easier for Web site visitors. Pages must share common branding attributes such as agency logos, official seals, and other recognized attributes that identify the Department through the look and feel of those pages. Material relevant only to the Intranet must not appear on Internet pages; e.g., non-public information about VA employees, Intranet links on the Internet, links to internal VA resources. See Prohibited Practices section and also the “VA Web Best Practices Guide” at <a href="http://vawww.va.gov/6102/">http://vawww.va.gov/6102/</a> for additional information.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |  |  |
|                                                                                   | 14 | <a href="#">Ensure Information Quality</a>                           | VA Web sites must comply with Section 515 of the Treasury and General Government Appropriations Act for Fiscal Year 2001, Pub. L. 106-554, as provided in the VA Final Information Quality Guidelines, 67 Federal Register 61726 (Oct. 1, 2002), and VA Directive 6361, Ensuring Quality of Information Disseminated by VA. All information disseminated by a federal agency must be accurate to the maximum extent possible. Reports of inaccurate information posted on any VA Web site(s) must be investigated immediately by the Web site content manager by checking with document authors, if possible, with appropriate subject matter experts, the Section 515 Data Quality staff in VACO (see Who To Contact section in Appendix A) and/or other appropriate authoritative sources. Content that is determined to be inaccurate must be removed from the Web site and replaced with corrected information as quickly as possible or must be removed entirely from the Web page(s). If the same inaccurate information is found elsewhere on any other VA Web site, Web content managers must notify the content manager of that other Web site. See guidance by clicking on item 14 hyperlink. |  |  |

|  | #  | Issue                                                                            | Synopsis of Requirement                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Internet Sites                                                                        | Intranet Sites                                                                        |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                   | 15 | Post required warning notices on VA Web sites.                                   | Warning notices are required for all VA Internet and Intranet services and systems to help protect those systems and aid in investigating and/or prosecuting misuse or unauthorized use of those systems. Web managers must post warning notices on their VA Web sites that are in addition to any privacy or other notices on a specific Web site. Specific wording that applies to Internet, Intranet, application and restricted access Web sites is provided in the Approved Warning Notices section of this Handbook.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |    |    |
|                                                                                   | 16 | <a href="#">Avoid Publishing Information for Employees on Internet Web Sites</a> | VA Internet Web sites should not be used to convey information for VA employees unless appropriately justified; examples of appropriate justifications include but are not limited to: emergent events, access to and dissemination of forms and/or training materials. Any employee-specific information posted to the Internet must be clearly labeled as such. For instructions regarding Non-Veteran Focused Internet Web sites, see Handbook Chapter 6, Section 2.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |    |                                                                                       |
|                                                                                   | 17 | <a href="#">Avoid Duplication of Existing Content</a>                            | VA Web sites should avoid duplicating or re-creating content that already exists on a federal Web site; links to identified authoritative content sources should be utilized. Before creating new information on a particular topic, Web content managers must determine if the same or comparable information already exists on another VA Web site by using VA's Internet search engine (or Intranet Web site when applicable). Web content managers should also check other federal public Web sites and cross-agency portals such as the usa.gov Web site for information to which VA can provide a link. Web content managers may also use any other trusted sources to provide the necessary information to assist in this process. See checklist items #18 and #60 re: requirement for usa.gov link. |  |  |

|  | #  | Issue                                                          | Synopsis of Requirement                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Internet Sites                                                                        | Intranet Sites                                                                        |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|----------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                   | 18 | <a href="#">Collaborate in Developing Cross-Agency Portals</a> | VA organizations must collaborate in developing cross-agency portals to ensure that they provide the breadth of information and services available across government to the target audience. Web managers and/or VA management officials who wish to develop cross-agency portals must seek prior approval from and coordinate all activities with the VA Web Management Governance Board to ensure that they meet a defined business need, include all appropriate organizations, do not duplicate existing portals, and have sufficient resources to be sustainable. Sponsoring organizations should have a strategic plan to ensure cross-agency portals can be effectively managed over time. See checklist items #17 and #60 re: required link to usa.gov.                                  |    |                                                                                       |
|                                                                                   | 19 | <a href="#">Use Consistent Navigation</a>                      | VA Web pages must be navigable from their homepages to ensure that the hierarchy of pages above and below a Web page are organized logically and afford easy navigation pathways for Web site visitors. Common items appearing on every organization page should, whenever possible, be in the same location and have the same appearance and wording on each page. Navigation items of the same type must also look and behave the same way. For guidance, see "VA Web Best Practices Guide" at <a href="http://vaww.va.gov/6102/">http://vaww.va.gov/6102/</a> .                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |    |    |
|                                                                                   | 20 | <a href="#">Inform Your Visitors about Major Changes</a>       | When a significant VA Web site change occurs, e.g., a redesign, url change to a frequently visited page, major navigational changes, VA Web site managers must provide information to Web site visitors about the changes to minimize confusion and ease the transition for Web site visitors. Ways to inform the public about significant changes include posting notices about the change(s) on appropriate Web pages that provide sufficient information and/or instructions regarding the change, and/or using redirected links. The Webmaster at usa.gov must also be notified if a change affects the information in their government domain directory or their search engine by utilizing their Contact Us link on the usa.gov Web site. Click on item 20 hyperlink for more information. |  |  |

|  | #  | Issue                                                                               | Synopsis of Requirement                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Internet Sites                                                                      | Intranet Sites |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|
|                                                                                   | 21 | <a href="#">Comply with Policy on Cookies</a>                                       | The use of persistent cookies on VA Internet Web sites is prohibited. An exception may be requested from the Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology if there is a documented "compelling need" and a detailed justification for a specific persistent cookie or cookies. All exceptions must have prior written approval before use on any VA Internet Web sites. Session cookies are permitted on the Internet without seeking approval to do so. VA Intranet Web sites are permitted to use both persistent and session cookies without prior approval and consistent with applicable legal requirements, e.g., the Privacy Act. See Handbook Glossary for definitions of persistent cookies and session cookies; see Prohibited Practices section of the Handbook Chapter 6, paragraph1h, and <a href="http://www.va.gov/privacy">http://www.va.gov/privacy</a>                                                                                                                                                                                  |  |                |
|                                                                                   | 22 | <a href="#">Evaluate Web sites by Measuring Customer Satisfaction and Usability</a> | VA must evaluate customer satisfaction and the usability of their VA Internet Web sites on a regular basis (annually at a minimum), and use those assessments to improve those respective VA Web sites. The feedback received from Web site visitors provides valuable information to ascertain how well VA Web sites are meeting the needs of their Web site visitors. These assessments must be utilized to make VA Web sites more efficient and more useful to all of VA's Web site visitors. Improvements should be made to enhance those VA Web sites when clear patterns of requested enhancements can be determined and those requests are compatible with VA's look and feel. For guidance on implementing Department-wide and/or individual customer satisfaction surveys on VA Web sites, contact the appropriate Point of Contact listed in the Who To Contact section in Appendix A of this Handbook. Also see the OMB Approval section of this Handbook for information about the rules that govern the collection of information from the public. |  |                |



|  | #  | Issue                                                                                                                | Synopsis of Requirement                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Internet Sites                                                                        | Intranet Sites |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|
|                                                                                   | 23 | <a href="#">Provide Access for People with Limited English Proficiency (LEP)</a> ; May apply on a case-by-case basis | VA must comply with existing requirements of Executive Order 13166, "Improving Access to Services for People with Limited English Proficiency," based on Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which bans discrimination on the basis of national origin. VA Web content managers must follow this guidance by determining if any documents on their VA Web sites require translation by basing this determination on a discernable pattern of recurring, specific requests from the public to provide a translated version of a specific document or documents posted to their respective VA Web sites. When high demand indicates that a document requires translation and its translation will serve VA's mission, the Web content manager should take the necessary steps to provide and post a translated version of the document(s) on the Web site. Note: the <a href="#">Español</a> link on the VA home page links to the VBA Benefit Facts Sheets Web page that lists benefit pamphlets and provides links to benefits information in both English and Spanish. Click on item 23 hyperlink for more information. |    | N/A            |
|                                                                                   | 24 | <a href="#">Comply with the Government Paperwork Elimination Act (GPEA)</a>                                          | VA Web sites must comply with the Government Paperwork Elimination Act (GPEA, Pub. L. 105-277), which requires that, when practicable, federal organizations use electronic forms, electronic filing, and electronic signatures to conduct official business with the public. The Act focuses on records management issues involving records created using electronic signature technology. The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) has issued guidance for agencies to implement the GPEA, as well as implementing other National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) guidance. VA Web managers must ensure that any electronic forms, filings, and/or electronic signature capabilities utilized by or on their VA Web sites meet the full range of security, OMB, and other requirements; they must also obtain all appropriate permissions prior to deployment and use. Click on item 24 hyperlink for more information.                                                                                                                                                                                          |  |                |



|  | #  | Issue                                                       | Synopsis of Requirement                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Internet Sites                                                                        | Intranet Sites                                                                        |
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|                                                                                   | 25 | <a href="#">Provide Dates and Ensure Content is Current</a> | A date stamp must appear on all VA home pages, all major entry point pages and all individual documents posted to the Web site to show visitors that the content is current and has been reviewed within the past 12 months at a minimum (see Best Practices Guide at <a href="http://vaww.va.gov/6102">http://vaww.va.gov/6102</a> ), or that the material viewed is an historical or archival document. Obsolete archived content must be removed in compliance with Agency records management schedules (unless required to be on a Web site by law or regulation). See the “Who To Contact” section in Appendix A for VA’s Record Management Service (RMS). All non-archival Web pages must display a Reviewed/Updated Date in the required date format, which is: Reviewed/ Updated Date: month day, year (i.e., May 5, 2005) Note: Pages that display dynamic content are exempt from this requirement; for example, it is preferable to exclude a date on a search engine form page because it does not represent the currency of the content in the search index. (There is also a date stamp requirement for metadata; these requirements are separate from each other and should be considered individually.) Archival/historical pages must be placed in clearly marked folders whose labels must include the words “archival” or “historical” so that documents contained in those folders will not be flagged because the dates on those documents are not sufficiently current. See Handbook Chapter 3 for more information on this subject and the Glossary for definitions of static and dynamic content. |    |    |
|                                                                                   | 26 | <a href="#">Incorporate Metadata Requirements</a>           | VA Web pages must incorporate standardized metadata requirements to ensure uniformity in method and presentation of VA Web pages. See “Metadata” section of this Handbook for mandated metadata elements and also see detailed guidance and tutorial information that is linked from the <a href="http://vaww.va.gov/6102">http://vaww.va.gov/6102</a> Intranet Web site and also the <a href="http://vaww.va.gov/vawebsearch">http://vaww.va.gov/vawebsearch</a> Intranet Web site. This metadata information must be checked periodically as standards and tutorial materials continue to be developed and posted.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |  |  |

|  | #  | Issue                                                                             | Synopsis of Requirement                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Internet Sites                                                                        | Intranet Sites                                                                        |
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|                                                                                   | 27 | <a href="#">Comply with Digital Rights, Copyright, Trademark, and Patent Laws</a> | Most federal Web site content is in the public domain and must not include copyright or other intellectual property notices. When information from the private sector is used as part of an information resource, product or service, VA must ensure that property rights of the private sector source are adequately protected. Protections apply to any posted material, i.e., documents, graphics, or audio files. Consent must also be obtained to use the picture and/or voice of any individual in VA materials (VA Form 10-3203). Prior to posting, documents and Web pages must be reviewed by content managers to ensure compliance with copyright, trademark and other laws. Click on item 27 hyperlink for more information.              |    |    |
|                                                                                   | 28 | <a href="#">Comply with NARA Web Records Management Requirements</a>              | VA is required to manage its Web records properly per NARA Web records management requirements that govern federal government record-keeping practices, the management and disposition of records, risk mitigation, and other issues attendant to the creation, accumulation, integrity and disposition of Web records. Web records include: documents that record information about the Web site itself: Web site management and operations records; Web content records; and Web management and operations records that provide context to the Web site. Click on item 28 hyperlink for specific details.                                                                                                                                          |    |    |
|                                                                                   | 29 | <a href="#">Comply with Records Management Rules</a>                              | a) VA Web sites must comply with existing laws and regulations related to the management of all public Web records. Requirements apply to IT staff and web/content managers.<br>b) VA organizations must implement applicable policies and standards to implement the Section 207(e) of the E-Government Act, "Public Access to Electronic Information". The E-Government Act of 2002 provides information, guidance and requirements that apply to a variety of subjects, including the categorization of information, public access to electronic information, standards for agency Web sites, usability, and the preservation of government information,<br><a href="http://www.archives.gov/about/laws/">http://www.archives.gov/about/laws/</a> |  |  |

|  | #  | Issue                                                          | Synopsis of Requirement                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Internet Sites                                                                      | Intranet Sites                                                                      |
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|                                                                                   | 30 | <a href="#">Comply with The Paperwork Reduction Act (GPRA)</a> | <p>VA Web sites must comply with the Paperwork Reduction Act (PRA)(44 U.S.C. Chapter 35) to ensure that information collected from the public minimizes burden and maximizes public utility. Web managers must ensure that specific rules are followed when collecting information from Internet Web site visitors, and, when applicable, from Intranet Web site visitors. (OMB rules may apply to information collection activities on the Intranet under certain conditions; contact your OMB liaison for more information.) The requirement also applies to copying all or part of a form previously approved by OMB for use, and using all or part of that collection form as a new collection of information on another Web site. Collections of information on VA Web sites that have not received all necessary approvals prior to posting the collection tool (customer entry form, survey form or other collection mechanism) must be removed from the Web site until required approvals are sought and obtained. See OMB Approval section of the Handbook and also Prohibited Practices.</p> <p>In addition, any VA IT systems that collect, maintain, or disseminate information on the public totaling at least ten individuals must complete an annual Privacy Impact Assessment (PIA) and submit that assessment to <a href="mailto:vaprivacy@va.gov">vaprivacy@va.gov</a> by September 1<sup>st</sup> of each year for review and subsequent submission by VA Privacy to OMB. See Privacy section of this Handbook and Handbook 6502.2 which can be found at <a href="http://www.va.gov/vapubs">http://www.va.gov/vapubs</a> for more information on PIAs.</p> |  |  |

|  | #  | Issue                                              | Synopsis of Requirement                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Internet Sites                                                                      | Intranet Sites                                                                      |
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|                                                                                   | 31 | Comply with VA Forms Requirements                  | All forms, including electronic forms and OMB-approved forms (see checklist item 30), fall under the purview of VA's Forms Management Program. This includes forms requiring collections of information; internal, administrative and operational forms; standard, optional, and other government agency forms and includes forms that collect information from the public as approved by OMB. All forms posted to VA Web sites must conform to requirements as stated in VA Handbook 6310.1, Forms Management Procedures at <a href="http://vawww.va.gov/vapubs/">http://vawww.va.gov/vapubs/</a> . Approval must be obtained from forms managers at each administration and from VA Forms Managers before posting to a VA Web site. Contact VA Forms Managers at <a href="mailto:VAFormsManagers@va.gov">VAFormsManagers@va.gov</a> for more information. Also see Who To Contact and the Prohibited Practices sections. |  |  |
|                                                                                   | 32 | Comply with requirements regarding draft documents | Draft documents posted to VA's Internet and/or Intranet must have a clear "draft" annotation on each page. The purpose for posting any draft document must be for obtaining comments from a Web site's visitors during an established comment period, or to provide preliminary information to Web site visitors prior to the issuance of a final document. Draft documents must be superseded by final copies or removed from VA Web sites when their content becomes obsolete. Web site content managers must review periodically any draft documents posted to their VA Web sites to ensure that obsolete documents have been removed or replaced by final document copies. Special accommodation regarding the "draft" annotation must be made to meet Section 508 Accessibility requirements. See Prohibited Practices and the Section 508 Accessibility section for details.                                         |  |  |

|  | #  | Issue                                                                   | Synopsis of Requirement                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Internet Sites                                                                       | Intranet Sites                                                                       |
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|                                                                                   | 33 | <a href="#">Obey Lobbying Restrictions</a>                              | VA Web sites are prohibited from being used for direct or indirect lobbying and/or any endorsements; VA Web sites must not endorse the content of non-federal Web sites or the sponsors of those non-federal Web sites. VA Web managers must review the relevant law to ensure that their VA Web sites meet all requirements. Web pages that display content that is or may be construed to be direct or indirect endorsements, or are or may be construed to represent a direct or indirect lobbying effort must be removed immediately from a Web site and may not be restored until the inappropriate content is removed from those Web pages. Questions about the acceptability of posting specific types of information on a VA Web site should be addressed to appropriate VA officials (see Who To Contact section in Appendix A) prior to posting. See the Prohibited Practices section of this Handbook.                                                                      |   |   |
|                                                                                   | 34 | <a href="#">Follow Standards of Organizing and Categorizing Content</a> | VA Web sites must comply with policies and standards to implement section 207(d) of the E-Government Act, based on recommendations from the Interagency Committee on Government Information's (ICGI's) Categorization of Information Working Group. Categorization of information relates to the classification and organization of information (e.g., thesaurus, taxonomy) so that VA's Web site visitors can find the information that they seek and which is available online. Web content managers must obtain guidance by utilizing the information and recommendations from ICGI. Click on the link below to access ICGI documents regarding the definitions of government information, open interoperable standards for searchable identifiers, and standards for categorizing government information. ICGI recommendations and other information on these topics may be found at <a href="http://www.cio.gov/documents/icgi.html">http://www.cio.gov/documents/icgi.html</a> . |  |  |

|  | #  | Issue                                                                                            | Synopsis of Requirement                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Internet Sites                                                                        | Intranet Sites                                                                        |
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|                                                                                   | 35 | Conform to W3C HTML/XHTML Markup Language Requirements and Cascading Style Sheet (CSS) Standards | All VA Web pages created in hypertext markup language (HTML) shall conform to the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) Specifications and Standards. Where Section 508 accessibility is concerned, Web managers must ensure that the content and technical standards of all Web pages and any documents made available on VA Web sites, collaboration tools, and/or other Web-based media conform to Section 508 and the U.S. Access Board's accessibility standards, specifically the requirements of Web-based Intranet and Internet Information and Applications (1194.22). See Handbook 6221, Chapter 6 at <a href="http://www.va.gov/vapubs">http://www.va.gov/vapubs</a> and links to other information on this subject at <a href="http://www.section508.va.gov">http://www.section508.va.gov</a> .                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |    |    |
|                                                                                   | 36 | <a href="#">Use VA Enterprise Content Management System (ECMS)</a>                               | VA Web sites must manage content by utilizing VA's Enterprise Content Management System. See the Enterprise Content Management section of this Handbook; also periodically check the Intranet Web site <a href="http://vawww.va.gov/cms/">http://vawww.va.gov/cms/</a> for specific details and Frequently Asked Questions.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |    |    |
|                                                                                   | 37 | <a href="#">Provide Appropriate Access to Data by Using Appropriate File Formats</a>             | VA Web sites that provide material and data for downloading by the user for off-line analysis or manipulation must provide the data in open, industry-standard formats or in <a href="#">alternative formats</a> that do not impose a burden on the intended audience and that permit the data to be manipulated and organized. The choice of a format must include the intended use of the data by Web site visitors, the expected frequency of use by Web site visitors, the accessibility of the format to the Web site's visitors; and the level of effort and time required by the organization to convert the data to the file format. In general, industry standard formats such as HTML and XML provide the greatest flexibility for visitors and should be the primary formats for documents on VA Web sites. Click on the two links listed in the Issue column for information on these related items and also see the "VA Web Best Practices Guide" at <a href="http://vawww.va.gov/6102/">http://vawww.va.gov/6102/</a> . |  |  |

|  | #  | Issue                                                        | Synopsis of Requirement                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Internet Sites                                                                        | Intranet Sites                                                                        |
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|                                                                                   | 38 | Ensure that Web pages are “browser neutral”                  | VA Internet Web pages must be “browser neutral”, which is to say that they must not be written to meet the standards of a single browser such as Internet Explorer or Netscape. Presenting documents in open, industry-standard formats allows every person with a browser to read the documents and makes them easily retrievable using Web search engines. VA Intranet Web pages must be browser-neutral to the maximum extent possible; specialized applications on the Intranet may require specific browser versions to function correctly. Coding in HTML 4.01 Transitional or XHTML Transitional 1.1 will, in most circumstances, meet the need to be browser-neutral. Note: the use of plug-ins required to access specific documents and links to those plug-ins are required and may not be browser-neutral. See the VA Best Practices Guide at <a href="http://vaww.va.gov/6102/">http://vaww.va.gov/6102/</a> and 1194.22(m) of Section 508 for more information. |    |    |
|                                                                                   | 39 | <a href="#">Provide Required Web Site Policies and Links</a> | VA's Internet Web sites must have a page for Web site policies and important links; the link to this page must be posted to all Internet Web pages. The recommended location for a link to this page is at the bottom of every page. VA's link is <a href="#">Web Policies &amp; Important Links</a> . For a summary of the links that are permitted to appear on this page, see the Links section of the Handbook.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |  |  |
|                                                                                   | 40 | <a href="#">Provide Online Services</a>                      | VA Internet Web sites must offer easy access to online services to enable rapid access to all of those services by displaying links to those services on the VA homepage and all appropriate Web site home pages that provide the specific services. Click on item 40 hyperlink and see Managing Content for more information.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |  |                                                                                       |
|                                                                                   | 41 | Provide Mandated Links on designated Web pages               | All VA Web pages must cite links mandated for use on the Internet and/or Intranet on all appropriate Web pages; see Links section of this Handbook for detailed information on mandated links for Internet and for Intranet sites, the pages on which those mandated links must appear, and also the mandated labels for links when naming conventions apply.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |  |  |



|  | #  | Issue                                                                     | Synopsis of Requirement                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Internet Sites                                                                        | Intranet Sites                                                                        |
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|                                                                                   | 42 | <a href="#">Follow Basic Common Linking Practices</a>                     | VA Web site visitors must be notified when they are leaving the Web site for a non-federal government Web site. VA Internet Web sites must disclaim responsibility for the content and privacy policies of non-federal government Web sites and must not endorse the content of a non-government Web site or its sponsor. Intranet links must never be used on Internet pages; internal hyperlinks must be removed/redacted prior to external publication. Links must be reviewed by Webmasters and/or content managers on a regular schedule to ensure their integrity. See Links section.                                                                                        |    |    |
|                                                                                   | 43 | <a href="#">Comply with the Government Performance Results Act (GPRA)</a> | VA Web sites must comply with the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 (GPRA), which requires organizations to make their department's annual performance plans readily available to the public. VA's link is <a href="#">Annual Performance and Accountability Report</a> ; this link must be posted on the VA home page and on all major entry point pages. See Links section of this Handbook.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |    |                                                                                       |
|                                                                                   | 44 | <a href="#">Link to the Home page</a>                                     | All VA Internet pages must have a link to the VA Home Page; in addition, each individual Internet Web site must also have a link to its own home page on all of its Web pages. Intranet pages must have a link to the VA Intranet home page (or to their organizational Intranet home page) on all Intranet Web pages; VA Intranet Web sites must also have a link to its own home page on all its Web pages. VA's home pages can be accessed at <a href="#">VA Home</a> (Internet) and <a href="#">VA Intranet Home</a> (Intranet). Links to individual Web site home pages should be labeled to distinguish them from the VA Home and VA Intranet Home links. See Links section. |  |  |
|                                                                                   | 45 | <a href="#">Provide Access to Forms and Publications</a>                  | The VA Web site homepage must post the <a href="#">VA Forms</a> link to the department's home page to provide easy access to agency forms and publications. The page to which it links must also provide links to other federal portals that offer forms and publications for the public. Click on item 45 hyperlink for more information.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |  |                                                                                       |
|                                                                                   | 46 | Display Link to <a href="#">White House</a>                               | The VA home page is required to have a link to the <a href="#">White House</a> (mandated by the White House in July 2002).                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |  |                                                                                       |



|  | #  | Issue                                                               | Synopsis of Requirement                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | Internet Sites                                                                        | Intranet Sites |
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|                                                                                   | 47 | <a href="#">Comply with The Small Business Paperwork Relief Act</a> | VA Internet Web sites must comply with the Small Business Paperwork Relief Act of 2002, Pub. L. 107-198, that requires organizations to designate a single point of contact for small businesses, and to post the contact information on the VA home page and all major entry point pages. A link to this information must also be displayed on the page linked to by the <a href="#">Contact VA</a> link VA's link is <a href="#">Small Business Contacts</a> which links to VA's Office of Small & Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU). See Links section for more information.                                                                                                    |    |                |
|                                                                                   | 48 | Display Link to <a href="#">USA Freedom Corps</a>                   | The VA home page is required to have a link to the <a href="#">USA Freedom Corps</a> per White House mandate in February, 2002. The USA Freedom Corps is an organization created to help more Americans engage in volunteer service; its Web site provides information about and links to volunteer and other donation opportunities. Click on item 48 hyperlink for more information.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |    |                |
|                                                                                   | 49 | <a href="#">Post Links to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)</a> | VA Internet Web sites must comply with applicable regulations and directives that relate to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). VA Web sites must have a page that includes content required by the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), 5 U.S.C. §552.<br>The VA home page must have a stand-alone link to the FOIA, or to a page that links to FOIA and also to an electronic FOIA reading room; VA's link is <a href="#">Freedom of Information Act</a> . In addition, this link must appear on the Web page linked to by <a href="#">Web Policies &amp; Important Links</a> page and must also appear on the page linked to by the <a href="#">Contact VA</a> link. See Links section. |  |                |
|                                                                                   | 50 | Provide a link to VA facility listings                              | All VA Internet Web pages must have a link to VA's <a href="#">Facility Locator</a> , which provides detailed information about all VA medical facilities, regional offices, and cemeteries throughout the country, an interactive US map, an area office map, a gravesite locator, and key staff information. See Links section.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |  |                |

|  | #  | Issue                                                                     | Synopsis of Requirement                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Internet Sites                                                                      | Intranet Sites                                                                      |
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|                                                                                   | 51 | <a href="#">Have a Search Engine</a>                                      | VA Internet Web sites must provide a link to the department search engine on every page, allowing visitors to search all files on the Web site that are intended for visitor use. Search results must be in an easy-to-read format, set minimum service level standards for their search capabilities, and monitor how well they are able to meet those standards. VA's Internet search engine is found at <a href="http://www.index.va.gov/">http://www.index.va.gov/</a> by clicking on <a href="#">Search</a> . Local Webmasters may also display links to a search capability that applies to their own VA Internet Web sites; that Web site's link label must distinguish it from the VA's department search link. The VA Intranet search capability is found at <a href="http://vawww.index.va.gov/search/">http://vawww.index.va.gov/search/</a> ; this link must be posted to the VA Intranet home page. See Links section for further information.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |  |  |
|                                                                                   | 52 | <a href="#">Provide Access for People with Disabilities (Section 508)</a> | VA Web sites must comply with the requirements of Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act, Pub. L. 93-112, to make online information and services fully available to individuals with disabilities. VA's link to Section 508 information is <a href="#">Section 508 Accessibility</a> which appears on the page linked to by <a href="#">Web Policies &amp; Important Links</a> . The Intranet link for Section 508 Accessibility must appear on all Intranet home and major entry point pages. VA Web managers must ensure that their Web sites comply with VA Directive 6221 & VA Handbook 6221 "Accessible Electronic and Information Technology (EIT)", found at <a href="http://www.va.gov/vapubs/">http://www.va.gov/vapubs/</a> . Webmasters must post only accessible Web pages, files and documents to their VA Web sites, collaboration tools and/or other media that posts files and documents. Webmasters also must certify their compliance with section 508 requirements annually on the VA Web Registry, and must follow special requirements pertaining to the posting of draft documents to VA Web sites to inform sight-impaired Web site visitors that the information they are viewing is in draft and not final copy. See Links and the Section 508 Accessibility sections. Also see Prohibited Practices and the Who To Contact section in Appendix A for information and testing assistance for Section 508 issues. |  |  |

|  | #  | Issue                                       | Synopsis of Requirement                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Internet Sites                                                                      | Intranet Sites                                                                      |
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|                                                                                   | 53 | <a href="#">Provide Jobs Information</a>    | VA's Internet Web site must include information about jobs at VA, including what jobs are available and how to apply for them, information about working at VA, special jobs programs, such as internships and work-study, and other jobs-relevant information. The VA Job Opportunities Web site is <a href="http://www.va.gov/jobs/">http://www.va.gov/jobs/</a> . A link to <a href="http://www.usajobs.gov">usa.jobs</a> at <a href="http://www.usajobs.gov">http://www.usajobs.gov</a> must appear on the VA Jobs Web site home page so that the public can find information about jobs from across the federal government. See Links section.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |  |                                                                                     |
|                                                                                   | 54 | <a href="#">Comply with the No Fear Act</a> | VA must post on its Internet Web site summary statistical data relating to equal employment opportunity complaints filed by agency employees or by former agency employees, or applicants for employment with VA. VA must comply with the existing Notification and Federal Employee Anti-discrimination & Retaliation of 2002 (No Fear Act) Public Law No.107-174. The No Fear Act link on the Internet, <a href="#">No Fear Act Data</a> , must be posted as a stand-alone link on the VA Job Opportunities Web site home page and must also be posted to the Web page linked to by <a href="#">Web Policies &amp; Important Links</a> that must appear on all Internet Web pages. This link goes to <a href="http://www.va.gov/orm/NOFEAR_Select.asp">http://www.va.gov/orm/NOFEAR_Select.asp</a> . Another No Fear link to VA's policy and grievance process for VA employees must be posted to the Intranet homepage and to all major entry point pages on the Intranet. This Intranet link, labeled <a href="#">No Fear Act</a> , goes to <a href="http://vaww.va.gov/ohrm/EmployeeRelations/grievance.htm">http://vaww.va.gov/ohrm/EmployeeRelations/grievance.htm</a> and should not be confused with the Internet link which has a slightly different label. See the Links section of this Handbook for details. |  |  |

|  | #  | Issue                                                        | Synopsis of Requirement                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Internet Sites                                                                      | Intranet Sites                                                                      |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|--------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                   | 55 | <a href="#">Provide a link to Frequently Asked Questions</a> | VA's <a href="#">Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)</a> link must appear on the VA home page and every major entry point page, using the title of the page(s) as the link text. The linked page or pages must provide answers to questions the agency and/or the VA Web site receives most often. VA's link routes to the IRIS (Inquiry Routing & Information System) FAQ Knowledge Base at <a href="https://iris.va.gov/scripts/iris.cfg/php.exe/enduser/std_alp.php">https://iris.va.gov/scripts/iris.cfg/php.exe/enduser/std_alp.php</a> which indexes with VA's search engine to provide an optimal return of information. See Links section.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |  |                                                                                     |
|                                                                                   | 56 | <a href="#">Apply and Post Privacy Requirements</a>          | VA Internet Web sites must protect the privacy of the American people as they interact with their government by complying with all privacy requirements, including:<br>Conducting privacy impact assessments; Posting and/or linking to privacy policies on the agency's principal Web site, all known major entry points to their sites and any Web page that collects substantial information in identifiable form; Posting a "Privacy Act Notice" that tells visitors about the organization's legal authority for collecting personal data and how the data will be used on all appropriate Web pages;<br>See <a href="http://www.usdoj.gov/oip/04_7_1.html">http://www.usdoj.gov/oip/04_7_1.html</a> , The Privacy Act of 1974, 5 U.S.C. § 552a (e)3 for specifics;<br>Translating privacy policies into a standardized machine-readable format.<br>OMB Guidance for Implementing the Privacy Provisions of the E-Government Act can be found at: <a href="http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/privacy/Web_site_privacy.html">http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/privacy/Web_site_privacy.html</a><br>There is also a separate Privacy Policy that applies to the Intranet. Each policy has a link to its own url: <a href="#">Privacy Policy</a> (Internet) and <a href="#">Intranet Privacy Policy</a> (Intranet). The appropriate Privacy policies must be posted to VA Web pages as discussed in the Links section of this Handbook. In addition, VA Web managers are required to certify annually on the VA Web Registry that their respective VA Web sites are compliant with all Privacy requirements. See Privacy section and Links section for further information. |  |  |

|  | #  | Issue                                                          | Synopsis of Requirement                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Internet Sites                                                                        | Intranet Sites                                                                        |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|----------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                   | 57 | <a href="#">Provide Information about Grants and Contracts</a> | Every VA component that provides grants or has contracting opportunities must provide information about those opportunities on its Web site and must link to <a href="#">Grants.gov</a> and other appropriate cross-agency portals. Organizations that post contracts information must link to federal portal(s) with contracting information related to that organization. See Links section.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |    |                                                                                       |
|                                                                                   | 58 | <a href="#">Provide Information about Regulations</a>          | Every VA component that issues regulations and has a Web site must provide information about those regulations on its Internet Web site and must also link to the <a href="#">Regulations.gov</a> portal; this portal is where the public can find, review, and submit comments on federal documents that are open for comment and published in the Federal Register. All VA components responsible for issuing regulations must comply with the requirements of 5 USC §552(a)(1), (a)(2), Section 207(f)(1)(A)(ii) of the E-Government Act Section and all applicable legal requirements including VA Handbooks and Directives. See Links section for additional information. |    |                                                                                       |
|                                                                                   | 59 | <a href="#">Provide VA Site Map or Subject Index</a>           | The VA Web site must have a page entitled "Site Map" that provides an overview of the major content categories on the VA Web site. There must be a link to the Site Map from all VA Internet Web site home pages, using those words as the link text. These pages must be kept up-to-date so they are useful to your audience. VA's site map link is <a href="#">Site Map</a> . If a Web manager creates a link to a site map for an individual VA Web site, s/he must label the link to that Web site's site map to distinguish it from the department <a href="#">Site Map</a> link. See Links section.                                                                      |  |                                                                                       |
|                                                                                   | 60 | <a href="#">Link to Appropriate Cross-Agency Portals</a>       | VA Web sites must link to appropriate <a href="#">cross-agency portals</a> to guide visitors to additional resources that exist across the U.S. government when those links are applicable and meaningful to Web site visitors. Links to cross-agency Web sites (portals) can supplement or eliminate the need to create information on VA Web sites and can provide additional resources to help find what they need. An example of a cross-agency portal is usa.gov at <a href="http://www.usa.gov">http://www.usa.gov</a> , a mandated link that must be posted to all federal Web sites. See Links section and checklist items #18 and #60.                                |  |  |

|  | #  | Issue                                                                              | Synopsis of Requirement                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Internet Sites                                                                        | Intranet Sites |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|
|                                                                                   | 61 | Use or link to <a href="#">the IRIS (Inquiry Routing &amp; Information System)</a> | VA's <a href="#">Contact VA</a> link routes to the IRIS home page. That page provides links that are required to appear on this page including links to toll-free phone numbers, to the Facilities Locator, to FOIA, to the VA Small Business contact, to the IRIS FAQ Knowledge Base which is indexed with the VA search capability, and to an approved electronic system for inquiry submission and routing to and tracking by participating offices, facilities, and entities throughout VA. VA organizations are encouraged to participate in the IRIS if not already doing so. Individual VA Web sites must provide a link to the IRIS on their own Web site contact pages, if any, or must provide a link to the IRIS in addition to a link to the Web site's Webmaster that is used only to report operational problems with the Web site. See the IRIS section and the Links section of this Handbook and also find specific information about the IRIS at <a href="http://vawww.va.gov/irisinfo">http://vawww.va.gov/irisinfo</a> . |    |                |
|                                                                                   | 62 | <a href="#">Provide Organizational information ("About Us" page)</a>               | The VA home page and all major entry point pages must post the <a href="#">About VA</a> link. This link must use the page title as the link text. The page(s) must provide basic information about the VA organization. At a minimum, this page or pages must include all of the following:<br>a) A description of VA's mission, including statutory authority (required by Section 207 (f)(1)(A)(i) of the E-Government Act);<br>b) VA's strategic plan (required by Section 207 (f)(1)(A)(iv) of the E-Government Act);<br>c) information about VA's organizational structure (required by Section 207 (f)(1)(A)(iii) of the E-Government Act);<br>d) Basic information about VA parent and subsidiary organizations and regional and field offices, as appropriate (See §552(a)(1) ;<br>e) the names of the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs, VA Under Secretaries, the heads of staff offices, and other key staff, as appropriate (see 5 U.S.C. §552(a)(1); and 6) contact information. See Links section.               |  |                |

|  | #  | Issue                                       | Synopsis of Requirement                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Internet Sites                                                                        | Intranet Sites |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----|---------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|
|                                                                                   | 63 | <a href="#">Link to usa.gov</a>             | The E-Government Act designates usa.gov as the official Web portal of the U.S. Government which serves as the "home page" for the entire U.S. government by providing a topical and organizational directory of U.S. government Web sites, a government-wide search index, links to all federal and state government Web sites, and a host of other information useful to members of the public, government employees, and business and non-profit organizations. VA Internet Web sites must link to usa.gov from their home pages and major entry point pages to the home page of usa.gov, using the usa.gov link. See Links section and also checklist items #17 and #18.                                                                                                                                                                  |    |                |
|                                                                                   | 64 | <a href="#">Provide Contact information</a> | VA Internet Web sites must have the <a href="#">Contact the VA</a> link on their home pages; it must also appear on every major entry point page. VA's link routes to the IRIS home page at <a href="https://iris.va.gov/">https://iris.va.gov/</a> ; the IRIS homepage provides all the information and links required for the Web page accessed by the <a href="#">Contact the VA</a> link. In addition, all individual VA Internet Web sites must provide a contact link for the Web site itself in addition to the <a href="#">Contact the VA</a> link; the link label must be the same as the title of the page to which it links and must be a label that can be distinguished from the <a href="#">Contact the VA</a> link. See the Links section for specific requirements about contact links for individual VA Internet Web sites. |    |                |
|                                                                                   | 65 | Link to Office of Inspector General         | In accordance with Public Law 110-161 (Consolidated Appropriations Act for FY 2008, Division B, Title V, Section 534), a link to the Office of Inspector General must appear on all VA website home pages. <a href="#">Inspector General</a> is the correct link label.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |  |                |



**2. PROHIBITED PRACTICES.** The following activities are prohibited practices. Use of these practices will result in the removal of specific Web pages or entire VA Web sites from VA's Web presence until the Web pages or Web sites are in compliance with this Handbook as determined by the responsible staff offices. Questions and requests for guidance on any of these prohibited practices should be addressed to the appropriate VA officials listed in the Who To Contact section in Appendix A of this Handbook. Prohibited practices include and are not limited to:

- a. Using domains other than va.gov without official approval to do so.
- b. Creating and implementing production VA Web sites in the va.gov domain or other approved domain for or on behalf of VA without receiving appropriate, documented prior permission (see VA Web Request).
- c. Failing to register a production Web site in the VA Web Registry (see VA Web Registry).
- d. Failing to link Web sites from a Web site's designated Agency, Program Office, facility or field Web site; VA Web sites must have appropriate parent/child relationships in the VA hierarchy.
- e. Linking to external Web sites that are not related to VA's mission.
- f. Failing to employ branding on a Web page to the extent it causes a Web customer to question whether he or she is still viewing a VA Web page. (See Glossary for definition of branding.)
- g. Using Intranet links on the Internet and/or linking to internal VA resources (server, print server, individual work station, etc.) from the Internet, example [\\vaisw.xxxx](#); failing to remove/redact internal hyperlinks prior to external publication.
- h. Demonstrating or giving the appearance of favoritism to a commercial Web site when there are multiple sources of the same information.
- i. Posting content on an Internet Web site that requires a specific browser for viewing. VA Internet Web pages must be browser-neutral and viewable with industry-standard browsers with the exception of browsers and plug-ins and links to those plug-ins that are required to access specific VA applications or documents. VA Intranet Web sites must utilize a browser-neutral approach to Intranet Web pages to the maximum extent possible.
- j. Disseminating any information on Internet and/or Intranet Web pages that is or can be reasonably construed to be an endorsement or promotion of vendors or products, or information that purports to sell goods or services to Internet or Intranet customers.
- k. Posting information on any VA Web site that is or may be construed to be the conducting of personal business or other use not appropriate to VA's mission. Examples of this activity include, but are not limited to, soliciting for contributions to a political cause, soliciting the sale of an individual's or other person's personal property, and selling goods or services for one's own benefit. Questions about the acceptability of posting specific types of information on a VA Web site should be addressed to appropriate VA officials (see the Who To Contact section in Appendix A) and/or the Office of General Counsel or local Regional Counsel prior to posting. Also see Directive 6001, "Limited Personal Use of Government Office Equipment including Information Technology" which can be found at <http://vaww.va.gov/vapubs/>.
- l. Including advertising-style banner images on Web pages that could be construed as advertising for software plug-ins (e.g., "Get Acrobat Now!" banner, "Get Flash Now" banner); the inclusion of icons and/or links to plug-ins that are required to access VA content or VA applications that are used on or posted to a VA Web site is permitted.



m. Failing to obtain and post necessary prior approvals for collecting information on forms posted to the Internet and/or Intranet, and/or copying all or part of a form that has been previously approved by OMB and using all or part of that form on another Web site without contacting the appropriate OMB liaison and without obtaining permission prior to such utilization. (See OMB Approvals section of this Handbook.)

n. Soliciting by or from federal employees for contribution/donation of funds, goods, or services without the prior written approval of authorized VA officials and adherence to all relevant guidelines that govern solicitations. Any questions on this subject should be addressed to appropriate VA officials and/or the Office of General Counsel or local Regional Counsel.

o. Posting procurement-sensitive information on an unsecured, open access Internet or Intranet Web site.

p. Failing to secure sensitive information, including but not limited to, non-public information about VA employees on the Internet and/or the Intranet.

q. Including sensitive information on VA Web sites that could be used to exploit VA resources. Examples of information to exclude online: internal facility floor plans, sensitive non-patient areas or schematics (facility infrastructure), detailed aerial photographs, details about computer systems, personal information such as family information in an employee bio.

r. Using persistent cookies on a VA Internet Web site without prior written permission for specifically defined cookies; exceptions to the prohibition of persistent cookies on VA Internet Web sites may only be granted by the Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology if there is a documented "compelling need" and that approval must be in writing. Persistent cookies are permitted on Intranet sites without written permission provided their use is consistent with applicable legal requirements, e.g., the Privacy Act. Session cookies are allowed on both Internet and Intranet Web sites and do not require approval.

s. Posting draft documents on an Internet or Intranet Web site for reasons other than to obtain comments from a Web site's visitors during an established comment period, or to provide preliminary information to Web site visitors prior to the issuance of a final document (exception is VA Handbooks and/or VA Directives which may not be posted to any VA Web sites in draft form); failing to clearly mark each page of the document with the word "draft"; posting drafts that contain confidential, privileged information without pass-wording that information in a secure environment; failing to remove draft documents from the Internet or Intranet when they become obsolete and replacing them with final versions or removing them from publication without replacement. Note: While marking each page with the word "draft" on all pages using headers or footers and/or watermarks are acceptable methods for sighted Web site visitors, those formats are not accessible to Web site visitors using screen readers. To provide notice to the sight-impaired that the information being viewed is in draft form, Web managers must include the word "draft" in a text link to the documents and must also ensure that the word "draft" is included in the text of the document at or near the beginning of the document (subject, title, or in introductory paragraphs), or Web content managers may attach a preface statement to the document that states in text that the document is a draft. It is not necessary to place this additional text on all other pages to satisfy this requirement. Questions about posting draft documents to the Internet should be addressed to appropriate VA Web management officials (see Who To Contact section in Appendix A of this Handbook);

t. Failing to remove or correct information from a VA Internet and/or Intranet Web site that is known to be obsolete, inaccurate, irrelevant to the VA mission, and/or that contains multiple spelling and grammatical errors (exceptions are historical or archival documents that may not be altered, or linked documents over which VA has no editorial control).

u. Failing to notify another Web site manager that inaccurate information appears on his/her Web site.

v. Failing to conform to VA Handbook 6310.1, Forms Management Procedures, requirements that pertain to all forms, including electronic forms and OMB-approved forms; failing to obtain prior permission from administration and VA Forms Managers before posting forms on VA Web sites.

w. Using copyrighted documents, graphics, and/or audio files without appropriate permissions and payment of any applicable fees for that use; failing to receive consent to use a picture or voice of any individual in VA materials (VA Form 10-3203)

x. Publishing any budget information on the Internet or Intranet without the prior written permission of the appropriate Administration or headquarters authority.

## **CHAPTER 3. CONTENT MANAGEMENT & TECHNICAL MANAGEMENT OF WEB PAGES (INTERNET & INTRANET)**

**1. DEFINITION OF CONTENT.** Content is the information to be disseminated to Web site visitors. For the purposes of this document, content does not include overall page attributes such as branding, font size, etc., which must be standardized as defined in this document. Content and technical managers should also consult the VA Web Best Practices Guide for additional information and guidance on templates, fonts, images, branding, logos, links, etc.

**2. CONTENT MANAGEMENT.** Designated staff are expected to provide and maintain the quality and accuracy of the information posted to Web pages. Information should be current, accurate, factual, relevant to the VA mission, spell-checked and grammatically correct. The content for publication must be approved by appropriate VA management who have line authority over the Web site, and must be updated as often and as timely as necessary to ensure currency and accuracy. Internet Web pages should be written at a 7th grade level to ensure the broadest level of comprehension or to the most elementary level of understanding for the subject matter presented to the target audience; Intranet pages should be written at a level of comprehension appropriate to the target VA audience.

**3. TECHNICAL MANAGEMENT.** Designated Web management staff are required to take the approved content for Web pages and to embed it into the proper Web page formats. Web managers must also test pages to ensure that the appearance conforms to VA standards for look and feel, that there is consistent navigation, that all required links appear on the page, that there are no broken links, and that all mandatory requirements, including Section 508 compliance, privacy, date stamps and formats are met.



## CHAPTER 4. REQUIREMENTS FOR CREATING, CHANGING AND REGISTERING VA WEB SITES

### 1. VA WEB REQUEST (INTERNET & INTRANET)

a. **VA Web Request Requirement.** VA Web Request is the mandatory first step in the process for initiating the creation of a new production or development VA Internet or Intranet Web site, and/or to make significant changes to an existing production or development VA Internet or Intranet Web site. This requirement also applies to all Web sites that conduct business on behalf of VA. Significant changes should be processed using the appropriate change control procedure(s) as defined by each administration (VHA, VBA, NCA, other). Examples of significant changes include changing technologies such as HTML to ColdFusion (CFM) or to Active Server Pages (ASP); adding a database application. (Updating content and/or authorizing routine Web site maintenance activities are not considered significant changes for VA Web Request purposes.) Questions regarding “significant changes” must be addressed to the appropriate VA officials shown in the Who To Contact section in Appendix A of this Handbook.

b. **VA Web Request Form.** The VA Web Request form resides on the <http://vaww.va.gov/webrequest/> Web site and asks a series of questions relevant to site name, site type, purpose of site, organizational ownership, names of Points of Contact, etc. The form is routed automatically to the appropriate VA officials for the organization to which the Web site belongs for review and approvals to proceed. VBA requests are forwarded to [webadmin.vbaco@va.gov](mailto:webadmin.vbaco@va.gov); NCA requests are forwarded to [public.inquiry@va.gov](mailto:public.inquiry@va.gov); VHA requests are forwarded to [vhawebcommunications@va.gov](mailto:vhawebcommunications@va.gov). All other requests are sent to the appropriate approving officials as shown at <http://vaww.va.gov/webrequest/> by clicking on the link labeled “List of Web Communications Offices”. Approving officials will review the form and will approve or deny requests, and/or may request additional information prior to making a determination. Once approved and established, all VA Web sites in production must be entered in the VA Registry; VA production Web sites that are hosted by VA Web Operations will have their new VA Web sites automatically entered into the VA Web Registry after approvals are granted and the Web site is established. Webmasters whose production Web sites are not hosted by VA Web Operations are required to register their sites in VA Web Registry manually until electronic means for automatic registration are established at hosting sites other than the VA Web Operations hosting site. (See VA Web Registry section below.)

### 2. VA WEB REGISTRY (INTERNET & INTRANET)

a. **VA Web Registry Responsibility.** The VA Web Registry is a One-VA database application that is maintained by VA CIO’s Information Technology Operations (ITO) to manage the quality and compliance of VA production Web sites, both Internet and Intranet, VA-hosted and outsourced. Registration in and updates to the VA Web Registry are the responsibility of the Web managers of every VA Web site in production.

b. **VA Web Registry Content.** Specific information that includes Web site address, VA Web site points of contact (POCs) for technical issues and for content, technology used and plug-in requirements for all VA Web sites in production. VA Web sites that are created solely for development purposes are exempt from this requirement only while they remain in

development status; once converted to production (including pilot status), they must be entered in the Web Registry. Development sites that are utilized as production sites without meeting all requirements and obtaining necessary prior approval will be shutdown immediately when violations of privacy, security or other substantial failure(s) are found, or in no more than thirty days for less significant issues. The Web site will not be restored until all requirements are met and permission is obtained to resume operation.

c. **VA Web Registry Mandate.** VA production Web sites must be entered in the VA Web Registry to ensure that the VA Enterprise Compliance Monitoring software is able to audit compliance with applicable requirements. Information in the VA Web Registry must be updated by Web managers whenever changes to the recorded information occur. The Web Registry can be found at <http://vaww.va.gov/webregistry/>.

**CHAPTER 5. INFORMATION ARCHITECTURE (INTERNET AND INTRANET)**

**1. GENERAL.** VA Web site content must be organized in ways that are meaningful and useful to Web site visitors and must use information architecture principles and standards (e.g., VA, NIST, other). VA Administrations, Program Offices and facility sites, and other VA organizations that provide Web services must assess their audiences' wants and needs to determine information needs and to provide optimum content organization.

**2. VA OWNERSHIP AND RESPONSIBILITY FOR CONTENT.** VA will be responsible for the creation and maintenance of Web site sections that are required by legislation or policy. Duplication or re-creation of this content is prohibited unless the prohibition against duplication or re-creation of Web site content is waived in accordance with this Handbook. Waivers should be submitted to [public.inquiry@va.gov](mailto:public.inquiry@va.gov) for NCA Web sites, [webadmin.vbaco@va.gov](mailto:webadmin.vbaco@va.gov) for VBA Web sites, [vhawebcommunications@va.gov](mailto:vhawebcommunications@va.gov) for VHA Web sites and [vawebsolutionsstaff@va.gov](mailto:vawebsolutionsstaff@va.gov) for all other VA Web sites. Waivers will be considered on a case-by-case basis and may be granted when the duplication or re-creation is to the benefit of users of the VA Web site. While links must be provided to official statements, VA statement sections may be duplicated or re-created; however, VA strongly encourages VA Web sites to have links to this content as the authoritative source instead of duplicating or re-creating it. See Links section for additional information.

**3. VA STATEMENT SECTIONS.** VA statement sections are the following, and links to each of them are listed in information posted to <http://vaww.va.gov/6102/> and are also discussed elsewhere in this Handbook:

- a. The agency's strategic plan and annual performance plans.
- b. Descriptions of agency organizational structure, mission and statutory authority.
- c. Information made available under the Freedom of Information Act.
- d. Summary statistical data about equal employment opportunity complaints filed with the agency and written notification of "whistleblower" rights and protections as required.
- e. Global (site-wide) Web site search.
- f. Electronic web-ready versions of the Agency Seal and Signature.
- g. Specific Web site security and privacy policies.
- h. Links to usa.gov.
- i. The agency point of contact for small businesses.
- j. Other cross-government portals or links required by law or policy.
- k. Agency linking policies, which may include associated link disclaimer pages.



**4. E-GOVERNMENT REQUIREMENTS RELEVANT TO INFORMATION ARCHITECTURE.**

Subject to the requirements of this Handbook, VA will provide guidance but defer to each Administration on e-government requirements relevant to Information Architecture and Web site content updates, including:

- a. Making determinations about and developing inventories, priorities and schedules for Web site content and making government information available and accessible to the public, in accordance with public comment, and posting this information on an Administration's Web site.
- b. Assuring suitable information and service quality that is consistent with information quality requirements discussed elsewhere in this Handbook. This includes clearly identifying the limitations inherent in the information dissemination product (e.g., possibility of errors, degree of reliability, and validity) so that users are fully aware of the quality and integrity of the information or service being provided, removing the limitations inherent in the information if any, and reconsidering delivery of the information or services; establishing and maintaining communications with members of the public and with state and local governments to ensure that the agency creates information dissemination products that satisfactorily meet their respective needs; determining whether any individual document or documents on their Federal agency public Web site(s) requires translation.

**5. VA RESPONSIBILITY FOR TRAINING.** VA will provide regular training to VA personnel responsible for the operation, maintenance and content of VA Web sites, including:

- a. Understanding WebTrends reports and using those reports to modify content, update Web pages, prioritize needed changes and measure the success of any changes.
- b. Understanding compliance monitoring reports and using those reports to prioritize updates and to improve Web site accessibility in compliance with Section 508 and with other applicable requirements.
- c. Understanding IRIS reports and using those reports to modify Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) content and to improve customer service to VA's Web site visitors who utilize the IRIS to communicate with the VA.
- d. Using VA's Enterprise Content Management System (ECMS) to manage the content of all VA Web pages.
- e. Providing other training as determined by the VA Web Management Governance Board.
- f. Providing other training as determined by Administrations and Program Offices through needs assessments and strategic planning and any training required by law or considered appropriate.

**6. CONSULTATION WITH OFFICE of GENERAL COUNSEL.** VA officials should consult with the Office of General Counsel about any legal questions concerning VA Web site content.

## CHAPTER 6. MANDATORY FEDERAL AND VA WEB SITE REQUIREMENTS (INTERNET & INTRANET)

### 1. APPLICATION OF MANDATES TO VA WEB SITES (INTERNET AND INTRANET)

#### a. Domains.

(1) Citizens must be able to identify official VA Web sites and trust that those VA Web sites will provide current and accurate VA information. VA Web sites must use government domains (.gov), show U.S. sponsorship, follow basic common linking practices, and be current. VA Web sites must use a domain ending with VA.GOV unless prior permission to use another domain (e.g., .com, edu, or org) is granted in writing by the Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology. Establishment of new .gov domains requires a written request from the Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology to GSA for approval. Requests for exemptions must be sent to; [webadmin.vbaco@va.gov](mailto:webadmin.vbaco@va.gov) for VBA, [public.inquiry@va.gov](mailto:public.inquiry@va.gov) for NCA, [vhawebcommunications@va.gov](mailto:vhawebcommunications@va.gov) for VHA, and [vawebolutionsstaff@va.gov](mailto:vawebolutionsstaff@va.gov) for all others. Requests for an exemption will be forwarded to the CIO and must include a detailed justification for using a domain other than VA.GOV. No waivers for VA Web sites developed in collaboration with non-federal partners (e.g., a local university or medical research facility) are permitted; VA Web sites developed in collaboration with non-federal partners are subject to all federal rules and regulations and all VA requirements as set forth in this Handbook.

(2) Using Alias Addresses to access a VA domain: Explicit prior permission must be obtained to use an "alias" on an Internet Web site so that non-va.gov Web sites can redirect to an Internet va.gov domain; for example, a Web address ending in .com, when clicked on, will redirect to a www.xxxxxx.va.gov Web address. A non-VA gov Internet site can only be redirected to an Internet va.gov address; redirecting to an Intranet site is prohibited. Prior permission must be sought in writing by contacting [webadmin.vbaco@va.gov](mailto:webadmin.vbaco@va.gov) for VBA requests, [public.inquiry@va.gov](mailto:public.inquiry@va.gov) for NCA requests, [vhawebcommunications@va.gov](mailto:vhawebcommunications@va.gov) for VHA requests for VHA, and [vawebolutionsstaff@va.gov](mailto:vawebolutionsstaff@va.gov) for all other organizations. Requests will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis; the requestor will be notified of the decision. If approval for the alias address is granted, a va.gov redirect address must be created to receive the re-directed traffic using the VA Web Request process. When the redirect address is created, the Web traffic will be routed through the redirect action from the original .edu, .org, com, etc., Web address.

**b. Approval for Creating and Publishing a New Web site, Changing an Existing Web site, and the Requirement to Register VA Production Web sites.** The publication of VA Web sites requires prior approval authorizing the creation and the publication of the Web site. VHA, VBA, NCA, and other VA approving entities must have policies that delineate the appropriate chains of approval for obtaining and maintaining approval of Web site publication. Accountability for the content of each Web site must be included in any justification for publication of a VA Web site or a Web site contracted to act on VA's behalf. See <http://vaww.va.gov/webrequest/>, the VA Web Request section of this Handbook, <http://vaww.va.gov/webregistry/>, and the VA Web Registry section of this Handbook for additional requirements and details.

**c. Standards for Establishing a VA Web Site.**

(1) Internet Web pages must be designed to support the widest range of potential users and computing platforms; however, specific products, plug-ins, or links to those plug-ins that are required to access a VA application or VA content must be provided to the visitors of the Web site where the content or applications reside. All Web pages created in hypertext markup language (HTML) shall conform to the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) Specifications and Standards.

(a) Where accessibility is concerned, follow the Access Board Guidelines to [Web-based Intranet and Internet Information and Applications](http://www.access-board.gov/sec508/guide/1194.22.htm) (1194.22) found at <http://www.access-board.gov/sec508/guide/1194.22.htm> ). The following standards will apply when creating a VA Web site:

(b) When coding for HTML-based documents or files on the Internet, Webmasters or others producing the code must utilize HTML 4.01 Transitional, which is the minimum acceptable standard. The preferred standard is XHTML 1.1 Transitional. Transitioning to XHTML will position agency Web pages for an easier transformation to an XML environment in the future.

(c) Webmasters must use development technologies already approved by appropriate VA management officials; permission to use development technologies not already approved must be obtained in writing prior to utilizing those technologies. Those technologies must meet all requirements consistent with this Handbook. Any questions about the use of or permission for programming or scripting languages should be directed to the approving officials in the Who To Contact section in Appendix A of this Handbook.

(2) VA Intranet Web sites must use approved servers and technologies per requirements as directed by Enterprise Architecture at <http://vaww.va.gov/oit/eam>. See the Technical Reference Model & Standards Profile (TRMSP) on the Enterprise Architecture Service (EAS) Intranet Web site at <http://vaww.ea.oit.va.gov/>. Questions about currently approved technologies and systems should be addressed to the appropriate management officials in the Who To Contact section in Appendix A of this Handbook.

**d. Priorities and Posting Content Schedule.** VA must establish priorities and a schedule for posting content on their Internet Web sites; this responsibility is assigned to the agency's Records Management Service. This information is linked via the "About VA" Web page by clicking on the Web site Information link on the side stripe and then clicking on [Web Content Inventory and Publication Schedule](http://www.va.gov/webinventory/), which routes to <http://www.va.gov/webinventory/>.

**e. Content Review.** VA Web content managers must review the content of their Web sites no less than once per year at a minimum to ensure the currency and integrity of published information. Web pages containing dynamic data should be reviewed monthly, quarterly or semi-annually depending on the nature of the content. All VA Web pages must display on the bottom of each Web page a Reviewed/Updated field that displays a date no older than one year earlier than the date it is viewed. The date format must be month, day, and year; an example is: Reviewed/Updated: January 7, 2005. Other date formats may not be used. Exceptions are:

(1) Documents and files that contain information that will never change including veterans appeals decisions, legislative histories, policy decisions, precedent opinions, memoranda, and legal documents whose content is permanent are exempt from this requirement. These documents should be placed in specifically marked folders so that they can be identified as historical and/or archival and can be excluded from any audit process that flags documents based on the currency of the dates of those documents. VA Web Operations must be provided with identifying information about those folders, including ownership, folder names and nature of contents, to remove them from the Web page audit process conducted by VA's compliance monitoring tool. (See Compliance Monitoring Tool section of this Handbook for details.)

(2) Pages that display dynamic content such as search engine form pages may exclude a date on a search engine form page because it does not represent the currency of the content in the search index. The documents found and displayed by the search engine should have dates that are no greater than one year old unless they are historical or expired documents that will never change. These documents must be tagged as 'old', "expired", 'superseded' or 'no longer valid' so users will know that while the document meets their selected search criteria, the document is an archive, historical or is outdated document/policy.

(3) The publishing of any budget data requires prior written permission from the appropriate Administration or headquarters authority.

(There is also a date stamp requirement for metadata; these requirements are separate from each other. Please see the Metadata section of this Handbook for more information.)

**f. Web Site Compliance with all Mandates.** VA Webmasters and content managers must ensure the compliance their Web sites with all federal mandates. Existing requirements are listed in the Web site Checklist and in other sections of this Handbook. Information can also be found at: <http://www.usa.gov/webcontent/index.shtml> and on documents linked to at this Web address.

**g. Compatibility with Internet Browsers.** VA Internet Web sites and Web pages may not be browser-specific. Operators of VA Web sites must ensure compatibility with most industry-standard browsers, such as Internet Explorer and Netscape. Intranet pages must be browser-neutral to the maximum extent possible. See the Technical Reference Model & Standards Profile (TRMSP) on the Enterprise Architecture Service (EAS) Intranet Web site at <http://vaww.ea.oit.va.gov/>.

**h. Ensuring the appropriate use of cookies on VA Internet Web Sites.** Definitions of the two types of cookies, persistent cookies and session cookies, may be found in the Glossary of this Handbook under Cookies. Information about the use of cookies is available at <http://www.va.gov/privacy/> and [http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/privacy/website\\_privacy.html](http://www.whitehouse.gov/omb/privacy/website_privacy.html).

(1) Persistent cookies are permitted on VA Intranet Web sites but are prohibited on the Internet unless granted specific exceptions for use. They may be used on the Internet only when:

(a) The site gives clear and conspicuous notice that the Web site is using persistent cookies;

(b) There is a compelling need to gather the data on the Web site;

(c) Appropriate and publicly disclosed privacy safeguards exist for handling any information derived from the cookies; and

(d) The Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology authorizes, in advance, the use of the specific persistent cookie.

(2) Session cookies are permitted on both the Internet and the Intranet so that Web site visitors can conduct business with the Department and do not require permission for use.

i. **Use of Content Management System.** VA Web content must be managed by the Enterprise Content Management System (ECMS, also called CMS). This tool must be used by all VA Internet and Intranet Web sites. All details relevant to using and participating in this system can be found on the ECMS Intranet Web site at <http://vawww.va.gov/cms/>. Also see ECMS section of this Handbook.

j. **Use of the Information Routing & Inquiry System (IRIS).** The IRIS is a Web-based e-communications tool for the public to use when communicating with VA via the Internet; the IRIS is accessed by clicking on the [Contact VA](#) link that must be posted to the VA home page and all major entry point pages. The use of this tool satisfies the mandate that all federal Web sites provide a mechanism to communicate with the agency via electronic means. (Other acceptable alternatives are addressed in the IRIS section of this Handbook.)

k. **Use of Mandated Links.** Links to appropriate information should be contained on Internet and Intranet Web pages. For detailed information on this subject, see the Links section of this Handbook.

**2. NON-VETERAN FOCUSED INTERNET WEB SITES.** Not all Internet Web sites and/or Web pages are veteran-focused; they may be directed to or contain information directed to specific audiences, such as education/training Web sites, research Web sites or other VA business. In these instances, the following requirements must be met:

a. There must be a legitimate need for non-veteran information to be posted to the Internet; that information must be directed to audiences who must access this information through the Internet and cannot/may not access this information via the Intranet.

b. Web sites and/or Web pages directed to non-veteran audiences must have an audience statement prominently displayed at the top of the Web page or homepage of the Web site that states for what audience the material is addressed.

c. Web sites may not contain information for VA employees unless appropriately justified. Examples of appropriate justifications include but are not limited to emergent events, access to forms, and access to training materials.

### 3. METADATA REQUIREMENTS (INTERNET & INTRANET)

a. **What is Metadata?** Metadata is summary information about a file posted on-line, such as an .html, .doc, .pdf, or .xls file. It describes a document or resource in the same way that a library catalog defines the elements of a book, such as title, author, publisher, etc. See Glossary for a more detailed description.

b. **Mandate.** Required metadata elements must have been implemented on all VA Web site home pages and major entry point pages by December 31, 2007. To increase search effectiveness, it is recommended that underlying Web pages and linked documents also implement metadata as cited in the VA Web Best Practices Guide.

The VA Web Search Improvement Web site provides guidance on the VA Metadata Standard, with tutorials for implementing required metadata fields and related controlled vocabulary. This site can be accessed from the VA 6102 Intranet Web site at <http://vaww.va.gov/6102/> using the left navigation link labeled Metadata.

The following chart provides an overview of required metadata elements for home pages and major entry point pages:

| Element      | Description                                                       | Format/Value                                                |
|--------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| Title        | Formal title on the resource.                                     | Free text                                                   |
| Subject      | An abstract or free text account, of the content of the resource. | Free text                                                   |
| Author       | Creator Authority List available for VA offices.                  | Controlled Vocabulary: see VA Metadata Standard, Appendix B |
| DateCreated  | Original date the resource was created.                           | YYYYMMDD                                                    |
| DateReviewed | Date on which the resource was last reviewed.                     | YYYYMMDD                                                    |
| Language     | Language Authority List.                                          | Controlled Vocabulary: see VA Metadata Standard, Appendix C |

#### 4. CYBER SECURITY REQUIREMENTS

a. **Background.** As the VA increases the scope and utility of its information technology, the VA increases its reliance on these technologies. This reliance increases the potential risks on the trust between veterans and the VA. These risks and impacts drive VA information security criteria for information systems. The Office of Cyber Security (OCS) is the responsible VA Program Office whose mission is to ensure the privacy, confidentiality, integrity, and availability of VA information assets (hardware and software) associated with the services offered by VA.

b. **Security Criteria.** VA information security criteria are based upon commonly accepted, and, in some cases, federally mandated risk management principles and the application of prudent management, operational and technical controls to ensure the confidentiality, integrity and availability of VA data to its constituency. This includes the ability to properly authenticate or identify users, verify data, and to audit and monitor information systems and their use.

c. **Requirements.** The security requirements for VA Web sites and Web sites that represent VA are:

(1) VA Web site managers who are responsible for the placement of content on VA public Web servers, operate VA public Web servers, and/or are contracted by VA to operate a VA Web site, are responsible for meeting the following cyber-security requirements.

(a) VA Web sites must be configured securely in accordance with VA guidance or at a minimum the guidelines of the NIST SP 800-44, Guidelines on Securing Public Web Servers, which defines server and Web content security for federally operated public Web servers.

(b) Each va.gov Web site and all Web sites hosted on behalf of VA by a third party must clearly post a link to the approved VA security statement on its Internet Web pages. (The security link is found on the link labeled "Web Policies & Important Links", which must appear on all VA Internet Web pages. See Links section.)

(2) Each VA system/Web site owner must evaluate the Web application in accordance with VA Policy 6500 and must determine its sensitivity categorization using Federal Information Processing Standards (FIPS) 199, Standards for Security Categorization of Federal Information and Information Systems; and its recommended security controls according to NIST FIPS 200, Minimum Security Requirements for Federal Information and Information Systems, and NIST SP 800-53, Recommended Security Controls for Federal Information Systems. The owner must ascertain if the system or application requires certification and accreditation from the regional Information Security Officer (ISO) or OCS. Where appropriate, a certification and accreditation (C&A) shall be conducted, prior to the Web system or application going into production, resulting in an authority to operate (ATO). System owners are responsible for:

(a) ensuring the integrity, availability and confidentiality of their servers and content. Meeting this responsibility requires owners to determine the security requirements for the proper management security and operations of their Web server. This may include determining authentication and encryption requirements, implementing a secure network for a



Web server, and planning for contingencies if an outage or disaster or a security compromise occurs.

(b) obtaining, securely configuring, implementing, and maintaining technology and systems in accordance with VA requirements to prevent security incidents and violations including, but not limited to: unauthorized access to or use of VA Web resources, alteration, misuse, theft or destruction of data, insertion of malicious code, sabotage, impersonation, Internet Protocol (IP) spoofing, hijacking of devices, sessions, or authenticators, and to minimize impact in the event of a major failure or disaster

(c) performing adequate security planning for each information system as part of the VA's overall security management and planning processes, ensuring that appropriate officials are assigned security responsibilities, periodically reviewing the security controls in their information systems, and authorizing system processing prior to operations, and periodically thereafter per VA policy.

d. **References.** Web site addresses that provide specifics regarding cyber security requirements can be found in Appendix A.

**5. MANDATORY WARNING NOTICES.** Warning notices must be posted on Internet and Intranet Web pages as described in this section. Warning notices are required in addition to any privacy or other notices on a VA Web site.

a. **Required Approval Prior to Use.** The use of the four warning notices identified in "5d. Placement of Warning Notices and Example of Notices are approved for use and must be used without modification. If a Web manager decides to create his/her own warning notice(s), s/he must include all required legal elements in that warning notice; notices must be approved in advance of posting by VA legal counsel.

b. **Required Elements of Warning Notices.** Warning notices shall contain the following elements:

(1) The Web site and/or content are part of the VA, VA computer systems, federal government computer systems, or similar VA or federal networking resources. All use is considered to constitute understanding and acceptance that there is no reasonable expectation of privacy for any data or transmissions on government networks or systems.

(2) The Web site is for viewing and retrieving information except as otherwise explicitly authorized (also state if specific restrictions apply, such as access is restricted to certain authorized groups or application users).

(3) All VA Internet and Intranet Web sites and pages are actively monitored. The use of VA systems and all data transmitted through these systems are subject to review and action including, but not limited to, monitoring, recording, retrieving, copying, auditing, inspecting, investigating, restricting access, blocking, tracking, disclosing to authorized personnel, or any other authorized actions by all authorized VA and law enforcement personnel and in accordance with VA Privacy policies.

(4) All use is considered to constitute understanding and acceptance of all terms and considered to be consent to monitoring, storage, retrieval, disclosure, analysis, restriction of access, investigation, or any other authorized actions by all authorized VA and law enforcement personnel.

(5) All unauthorized use is subject to action that may result in criminal, civil, or administrative penalties.

**c. Other Elements.**

(1) Other elements may be included in warning notices as long as they do not appear to restrict authorized actions by either VA or law enforcement personnel. Include wording such as “including, but not limited to,” or “. . . or other applicable laws.” or “...or any other authorized actions” where appropriate.

(2) Do not cite Acts or Public Laws as possible criminal laws that apply because the statute(s) that result from those Acts/Public Laws would be enforced and may be amended by future Acts or Public Laws. For example, do not cite the Computer Fraud and Abuse Act of 1986 with reference to 18 U.S.C. §1030, which has since been significantly amended instead, cite only 18 U.S.C. §1030.

**d. Placement of Warning Notices and Examples of Warning Notices.** The warning notices in this section of the Handbook shall be placed as described for each notice. The fonts and font sizes used in these examples are not mandatory; however, the fonts and font sizes used must permit the average person to read the text. The boxes/bordering around the warning notices in this section are not required and are only used here to visually block off each warning notice.

**(1) Warning Notice for Public Internet Presence.**

(a) This notice must appear on every Internet Web page in the site. The notice must appear as either:

1. a link to a separate page containing the notice in its entirety (recommended) and which is specifically labeled Warning Notice or contains “Warning Notice” in its label, or

2. complete text on the page.

(b) The warning notice or link to the warning notice must appear on **every** Internet Web page that meets either of the following criteria:

1. If a Web page was created to be a source document, that Web page must also display the warning notice.

2. If a Web page links to a source document (e.g. press release, VA’s accountability Report, OIG reports), the Web page that displays the link to that source document must display the warning notice. This requirement applies even when the warning notice is already included on the source document that is linked from that Web page.

An example of a Warning Notice for VA's Public Internet Presence is as follows and is contained inside the bordered space:

This site is intended for use by the public for viewing and retrieving public information only except as otherwise explicitly authorized. VA information resides on and transmits through computer systems and networks funded by VA; all use is considered to be understanding and acceptance that there is no reasonable expectation of privacy for any data or transmissions on Government networks or systems. See <http://www.va.gov/privacy> for further information on privacy.

All transactions that occur on VA systems other than the viewing and downloading of information on VA Web sites may be subject to review and action including (but not limited to) monitoring, recording, retrieving, copying, auditing, inspecting, investigating, restricting access, blocking, tracking, disclosing to authorized personnel, or any other authorized actions by all authorized VA and law enforcement personnel. The use of this system constitutes the understanding and acceptance of these terms.

Unauthorized attempts or acts to either (1) access, upload, change, or delete information on this system, (2) modify this system, (3) deny access to this system, or (4) accrue resources for unauthorized use on this system are strictly prohibited and may be considered violations subject to criminal, civil, or administrative penalties.

(2) Warning Notice for Intranet or Extranet (non-public) Presence.

(a) This notice must appear on **every** Web page on the site, without exception. The notice may appear as either:

1. a link to a separate page containing the notice in its entirety (recommended), or
2. complete text on the page.

(b) The warning notice or link to the warning notice must appear on **every** Internet or Extranet Web page that meets either of the following criteria:

1. If a Web page was created to be a source document, that Web page must also display the warning notice.
2. If a Web page links to a source document (e.g. press release, VA's accountability Report, OIG reports) the Web page that displays the link to that source document must display the warning notice. This applies even when the warning notice is already included on the source document that is linked from that Web page.

An example of a Warning Notice for VA's Intranet or Extranet (non-public) Presence is as follows and is contained inside the bordered area:

This site is intended to be used by [authorized VA network users <or> authorized users of Example Corporation/Example University] for viewing and retrieving information only except as otherwise explicitly authorized. VA information resides on and transmits through computer systems and networks funded by VA; all use is considered to be understanding and acceptance that there is no reasonable expectation of privacy for any data or transmissions on Government Intranet or Extranet (non-public) networks or systems.

All transactions that occur on this system other than the viewing and downloading of Web site information and all data transmitted through this system are subject to review and action including (but not limited to) monitoring, recording, retrieving, copying, auditing, inspecting, investigating, restricting access, blocking, tracking, disclosing to authorized personnel, or any other authorized actions by all authorized VA and law enforcement personnel. All use of this system constitutes understanding and unconditional acceptance of these terms.

Unauthorized attempts or acts to either (1) access, upload, change, or delete information on this system, (2) modify this system, (3) deny access to this system, or (4) accrue resources for unauthorized use on this system are strictly prohibited. Such attempts or acts are subject to action that may result in criminal, civil, or administrative penalties.

(3) Application Warning Notice. This notice applies to a Web page restricted to those authorized/allowed to conduct electronic transactions with (or within) the VA. This would include a Web page for online benefit applications, online job applications, or online contract proposal bidding. This warning notice must appear either at the top of the Web page or immediately next to (below) the application, form, entry field, or other submittal part within the Web page. If the transaction or application spans more than one page, the warning notice must appear on each page (for example, to complete an online form, a user must go through three Web pages to complete it -- an application warning notice must appear on all three pages). Additionally, the warning notice requirements of paragraph 9d(1) (for public Web sites) or paragraph 9d(2) (for Intranets/Extranets) still apply.

An example of an Application Warning Notice is as follows and is contained inside the bordered area below:

WARNING: This [site/page] is restricted to use only by customers of the Department of Veterans Affairs [name of benefit program/staff office/etc.] for viewing and retrieving information only except as otherwise authorized. All use is monitored for authorized purposes, and any use constitutes consent to monitoring, storage and retrieval, disclosure, analysis, access restriction, investigation, or any other authorized actions. Any unauthorized access (or denial of access) to this system, all files, and all data therein is prohibited and is subject to criminal, civil, and administrative penalties under Federal Laws including, but not limited to, 18 U.S.C. §1030 (fraud and related activity in connection with computers) and 18 U.S.C. §2701 (unlawful access to stored communications). In addition, Federal Laws (18 USC 287 and 1001) provide for criminal penalties for knowingly submitting or making false, fictitious, or fraudulent statements or claims.

(4) Access Control Warning Notice - access to a site/directory restricted to certain authorized VA staff (or other authorized individuals). This would include a Web page for

online portals to VA computer resources (such as Human Resources or other VA systems), Intranet Web sites set up for specific offices, or sites set up for access by authorized groups or individuals. This warning notice must appear either at the top of the Web page or immediately next to or below an application, form, entry field, link, or other submittal part within the Web page that takes the user further into the restricted site. Further, it must appear on every Web page (in any location) in the restricted site/directory. Additionally, the warning notice requirements of paragraph 9d(1) (for public Web sites) or paragraph 9d(2) (for Intranets/Extranets) still apply.

An example of an Access Control Warning Notice is as follows and is contained inside the bordered area:

WARNING: This site and all subdirectories and files within are restricted to authorized Department of Veterans Affairs, *[name of staff office or program]* staff only. All use is monitored for authorized purposes, and any use constitutes consent to monitoring, storage and retrieval, disclosure, analysis, access restriction, investigation, or any other authorized actions. Any unauthorized access (or denial of access) to this system, all files, and all data therein is prohibited and is subject to criminal, civil, and administrative penalties under Federal Laws including, but not limited to, 18 U.S.C. §1030 (fraud and related activity in connection with computers) and 18 U.S.C. §2701 (unlawful access to stored communications). In addition, Federal Laws (18 USC 287 and 1001) provide for criminal penalties for knowingly submitting or making false, fictitious, or fraudulent statements or claims.

## 6. PRIVACY REQUIREMENTS (INTERNET & INTRANET)

a. **Privacy Requirement and Directive.** The E-Government Act of 2002 (Public Law 107-347, codified as amended at 44 U.S.C. Chapter 36, and the Privacy Act, 5 U.S.C. § 552a govern how federal agencies collect, protect, use, disclose, store, and discard Privacy Act-protected information. VA Web sites and any Web-based applications that use, collect and/or store personally identifiable information (PII) must comply with all applicable legal requirements protecting the privacy of individuals. The VA Privacy Directive that covers the department's requirements, as well as its attendant handbook, can be found at <http://www.va.gov/vapubs/>. Other information regarding privacy and security, including but not limited to the use of cookies, collections of personal information, and systems of records can be found at <http://vaww.va.gov/privacy/>.

b. **Posting Privacy Policies and Conducting Privacy Impact Assessments (PIAs).** Section 208 of the E-Government Act requires VA to post privacy policies for VA Web sites in plain language and machine-readable formats.

c. **Conducting Privacy Impact Assessments.** Section 208 requires a PIA when a Web site, system or project collects, maintains, and/or disseminates any individual's information in identifiable form. VA Handbook 6502.2 at <http://vaww.va.gov/vapubs/> establishes department-wide procedures for conducting and submitting PIAs. Each PIA must be updated and submitted annually to OMB by September 30. PIAs must be submitted to the Privacy Office at [privacyservice@va.gov](mailto:privacyservice@va.gov) for review prior to September 1 of each year so that the

Privacy Office can review and forward the material to OMB by the federal government-wide deadline.

d. **Key privacy requirements.** The key privacy requirements are:

- (1) Post privacy policies on each Web site.
- (2) Post a "Privacy Act Notice" on Web pages covered by the Privacy Act that tells visitors the following:
  - (a) Provide the legal authority which authorizes the solicitation of the information and whether disclosure of such information is mandatory or voluntary.
  - (b) State the principal purpose or purposes for which VA intends to use the information collected.
  - (c) State the routine uses which may be made of the information.
  - (d) State the effects on the individual, if any, of not providing all or any part of the requested information.
  - (e) Inform the individual concerned that she/he shall be entitled to have access to that record for the purpose of making appropriate corrections, deletions and additions.
- (3) Translate privacy policies into a standardized machine-readable format, Platform or Privacy Preferences (P3P) or equivalent.
- (4) Ensure that the collection of information does not intrude to an unreasonable extent upon the personal affairs of the individual concerned.
- (5) Ensure that the record is protected by such safeguards as are reasonable in the circumstances to take against loss, against unauthorized access, use, modification or disclosure, and against other misuse.

e. **Internet Requirement.** All federal agencies must post or link to privacy policies on their principal Web site, any known major entry points to their sites, and any Web page that collects information from visitors to the Web site in individually identifiable form. In addition, the link may also appear on the page linked to by [Web Policies & Important Links](#). This link to Web policy information must be posted on all VA Internet Web pages and does not preclude the need to post privacy links as stand-alone links as indicated. (See Links section of this Handbook.) VA Webmasters must provide links to the Privacy Policy maintained by VA's Privacy Service at <http://www.va.gov/privacy/> and not copy the text of the Privacy Policy. VA's Internet link is [Privacy Policy](#) which goes to the General Web Page Privacy Policy at <http://www.va.gov/privacy/>. VA Web managers must also certify annually in the VA Web Registry that their respective Web sites comply with all required Privacy policies and mandates, including the requirement that all privacy information must be posted in both plain language and machine readable formats. The General Policy explains how information collected via VA Web sites, pages and forms is to be collected, used, and maintained. VA Web sites that collect information from users are subject to additional legal or regulatory

requirements beyond those satisfied by the General Policy and must also include a link to an appropriate Limited Policy. The General Policy must be updated as necessary to ensure that it remains accurate and complete to the extent required by applicable law, regulation, or guidance. All security controls per NIST SP 800-53 found at <http://csrc.nist.gov/publications/nistpubs/> must be implemented to safeguard Internet Web sites, collaboration tools, and their contents, including PII.

**f. Intranet Requirement.** The VA Intranet home page and all major entry point pages on the Intranet must include the link [Intranet Privacy Policy](#) which goes to the VA Intranet Web Page Privacy Notice at <http://vawww.va.gov/privacy/>, where the full text of the policy can be found. It is not necessary to copy the text of the notice on each Web page. Warning notices about appropriate use of and restrictions for Intranet users must be displayed at login, using a pop-up, link, or other suitable actionable item such as a clickable box to confirm "OK" prior to being able to continue. Examples of warning notices can be found in the Mandatory Approved Warning Notice section of this Handbook. Collections of information from individuals on the Intranet require an appropriate limited policy. All PII must be protected according to the Privacy Act requirements when such information is posted to all Intranet Web sites and to collaboration tools.

## 7. SECTION 508 ACCESSIBILITY REQUIREMENTS (INTERNET AND INTRANET)

**a. Section 508 Compliance.** Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act requires that electronic and information technology provided by the federal government is accessible to persons with disabilities, including employees (Intranet) and members of the public (Internet) to the extent it does not pose an "undue burden." Section 508 addresses various means, tools, and methods for disseminating information, including but not limited to computers, software, electronic office equipment, page design and attributes (e.g., the use of graphics, animation, moving images, fonts, page navigation, etc., as discussed in the VA Web Best Practices Guide). It applies to, but is not solely focused on, federal pages on the Internet or the World Wide Web and on the Intranet.

### **b. Application of Section 508 to Electronic and Information Technology (EIT)**

(1) Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act applies to electronic and information technologies in the Federal sector, including those used for communication, duplication, computing, storage, presentation, control, transport and production. This includes computers, software, networks, peripherals and other types of electronic office equipment. The standards define *electronic and information technology*, in part, as "any equipment or interconnected system or subsystem of equipment, that is used in the creation, conversion, or duplication of data or information." In addition, it includes telecommunications products including telephones, information kiosks and transaction machines, World Wide Web sites, and multimedia and office equipment such as copiers and fax machines and also includes the support services for computers, ancillary equipment, software, firmware and similar procedures and related resources.

(2) The U.S. Access Board's Electronic and Information Technology Accessibility Standards impact on people with disabilities who use VA's electronic and information technology including VA Web sites and VA Web-based applications. VA Web managers must ensure that the content and technical standards of all Web pages, files and any documents or



other content made available on VA Web sites or via Web-based applications, collaboration tools or devices conform to Section 508 and the U.S. Access Board's accessibility standards, specifically the requirements of Web-based Intranet and Internet Information and Applications that can be found at: <http://www.access-board.gov/>.

**c. Section 508 Accessibility Requirement.** Accessibility is ensuring that content can be navigated and read by everyone, regardless of location, experience, or the type of computer technology used. VA Web managers must ensure that all Web pages, documents, and files posted to the Web and/or to a collaboration tool must be accessible, including .pdf, .xls, .doc. Note: An MS Word document that is converted to a PDF for posting retains the structure to support access using a screen reader. A graphical pdf, pcx, jpg, tif, or bmp document, i.e., a scanned document in one of these graphical formats, however, is not in compliance unless the document has been run through a "paper capture" routine from Adobe Acrobat to make the graphical PDF accessible, or Optical Character Recognition (OCR) is utilized to produce readable text. Graphical PDF documents are otherwise considered to contain non-text elements which would need then to have an accompanying text equivalent. Web audit tools will be used to monitor compliance. The Section 508 Accessibility Office can assist with testing documents; recent versions of Adobe have a testing capability in their applications and the Adobe Web site also has a testing capability.

**d. Other Section 508 Requirements.** In addition to meeting the accessibility requirements, VA Web managers must also:

(1) Post links to Section 508 Accessibility information on specific Internet and Intranet pages. VA's link is [Accessibility](#). See Links section of this Handbook for details.

(2) Certify annually on the VA Web Registry that their respective VA Web sites comply with Section 508.

(3) Provide notice to blind or visually-impaired Web visitors when the information they are viewing is in draft form by including the word "draft" in a text link to the documents. Web content managers must also ensure that the word "draft" is included in the text of the document(s) at or near the beginning of the document (subject, title, or in introductory paragraphs), or Web content managers may attach a preface statement to the document that states in text that the document is a draft. It is not necessary to place this additional text on all other pages to satisfy this requirement. While marking each page with the word "draft" on all pages using headers or footers and/or watermarks are acceptable methods for sighted Web site visitors, those formats are not accessible to Web site visitors using screen readers. Questions about posting draft documents to the Internet should be addressed to appropriate VA Web management officials (see Who To Contact section in Appendix A of this Handbook).

**e. Links to detailed information regarding Section 508 Accessibility.** Links to information about Section 508 can be found in Appendix A.

**f. Contacting VA's Accessibility Office.** For information, guidance, and testing assistance, contact [Section508@va.gov](mailto:Section508@va.gov) and also check the Section 508 Web site at <http://www.va.gov/oit/ea/section508/>.



## **8. PAPERWORK REDUCTION ACT (PRA): OFFICE OF MANAGEMENT & BUDGET (OMB) APPROVAL IS REQUIRED TO COLLECT INFORMATION ON VA INTERNET AND INTRANET WEB SITES.**

a. **Mandate.** OMB approval must be obtained prior to the collection of information from the public. Collections of information from VA Intranet users may fall within the scope of this requirement under some circumstances.

b. **Definition of Collection of Information.** Collection of information means the obtaining, causing to be obtained, soliciting, or requiring the disclosure to an agency, third parties or the public of information by or for an agency by means of identical questions posed to, or identical reporting, record-keeping, or disclosure requirements imposed on ten or more persons, whether such collection of information is mandatory, voluntary, or required to obtain or to retain a benefit. A collection of information may be in any form or format, including the use of report forms; application forms; schedules; questionnaires; surveys; reporting or record-keeping requirements; contracts; agreements; policy statements; plans; rules or regulations; planning requirements; circulars; directives; instructions; bulletins; requests for proposal or other procurement requirements; interview guides; oral communications; posting, notification, labeling, or similar disclosure requirements; telegraphic or telephonic requests; automated, electronic, mechanical, or other technological collection techniques; standard questionnaires used to monitor compliance with agency requirements; or any other techniques or technological methods used to monitor compliance with agency requirements.

c. **When and How to Obtain OMB Approval:** Prior to collecting information on any VA Web site, the VA office responsible for the Web site that will collect the information must, in accordance with VA Directive 6310 and VA Handbook 6310.2, determine if the PRA applies to the contemplated collection of information. The requirement also applies to copying all or part of a form previously approved by OMB for use, and using all or part of that collection form as a new collection of information on another Web site. The responsible office must contact the appropriate OMB liaison and obtain approval from OMB to proceed. If the OMB liaison determines that the collection activity falls under the PRA, the liaison will provide all the necessary information and instructions for obtaining OMB approval. Once OMB approval is received, the collection of information may proceed as directed by OMB through the VA liaison, and the Web site operator must post the PRA-required information and notices on the Web site. To determine the appropriate OMB clearance liaison for the Web site, contact the Associate Deputy for the Assistant Secretary for Information Technology (005R1), Records Management Service (RMS) in VACO (main phone number for Records Mgmt (RMS) is 202-461-7485). NCA employees can contact NCA Records Management Office at (202) 461-4114 or the Business Process Improvement Service at (202) 461-6733. Note: collections of information may involve rules that govern systems of records; contact VA's Records Management Service (RMS) in VACO for further information and also check the VA Handbook 6300.4, Procedures for Processing Requests for Records Subject to the Privacy Act and VA Handbook 6300.5, Procedures for Establishing & Managing Privacy Act Systems of Records that can be found at <http://www.va.gov/oirm/recdsmgmt/directives.htm>.

**9. POSTING FORMS TO VA WEB SITES.** All forms, including electronic forms and forms that have or are required to have approval for use by OMB (see OMB Requirements for Collections of Information in this chapter), must conform to the requirements of VA Handbook 6310.1, Forms Management Procedures at <http://vawww.va.gov/vapubs/>. All forms must be

approved by the Forms Management Offices of each administration and also approved by VA Forms Managers at [VAFormsManagers@va.gov](mailto:VAFormsManagers@va.gov) prior to posting on a VA Web site.

**10. LINKS (INTERNET & INTRANET).** VA Web site managers must post mandated links to Internet and Intranet pages as discussed in this Handbook. The following information pertains only to links and linking policies that are required. There are four categories of mandatory links. Category 1 covers links that must appear only on the agency home page; Category 2 covers links that must appear on the VA home page and on all major entry point pages; Category 3 covers links that must appear on all Web pages; Category 4 covers links that must appear on the pages of specific VA Web sites or Web pages that provide certain types of information. Links used by VA other than those mentioned in this section may be placed on any VA Web pages as deemed appropriate by the Web managers because they serve the mission of VA and are relevant and useful to VA's Web site visitors. VA Web pages must have links that navigate to the appropriate pages above and below them, if any, in their appropriate organizational hierarchy.

**a. Definition of Hyperlink (also known as a link).** A hyperlink is a document formatting tag that allows documents or files to be linked by making certain words, phrases or graphics "clickable." Clicking on a hyperlink will direct the browser to another HTML page within the same directory, to another location on the current page, to another HTML page, to another file, or to another Internet or Intranet site. It is also known simply as a "link". Hyperlinks can be created by using absolute referencing and/or using relative referencing; see examples of each below. The two VA conventions for Internet addresses are [www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov) and [www.vba.va.gov](http://www.vba.va.gov). The VA conventions for Intranet addresses are [vaww.va.gov](http://vaww.va.gov) and [vbaw.vba.va.gov](http://vbaw.vba.va.gov). Where an existing domain name is available, the Web manager must use that domain name for addressing in lieu of the IP address. If a user requires a new domain name, existing agency domain naming rules must be used.

**b. Creating Hyperlinks.** There are two ways to create hyperlinks: absolute referencing and relative referencing. Relative referencing should be used whenever possible.

(1) Absolute referencing includes the entire Web address in the hyperlink, beginning with "http://" and continuing through the entire extension of the file to be linked to. An example of an absolute reference is: `<a href="http://www.va.gov/debtman/owe.html"></a>`. In this example, the link is to a page that does not sit in the same root of the VBA main Web server as the referring page.

(2) Relative referencing is a "shorthand" method of using a Web address in a hyperlink. For this method to work, the Web page referenced in the hyperlink MUST be in the same Web space of the server as the referring page. The location of the referring page matters because it is the point from which the hyperlink is connected. Unlike the absolute reference, the relative reference hyperlink refers to a file's location within the directory hierarchy on the same server as the referring file; therefore use of the "http://" in the address string is not required and one or more subdirectories of the path may not be required, again, depending on where the two files lie in relation to one another. An example of a relative reference is `<a href="/bln/21/Milsvc/benefacts.htm"></a>`. In this

example, the link is a clickable graphic that takes the user to a Web page file that is physically located in the same root as the referring page on the Main VBA server.

c. **Testing of Hyperlinks.** Hyperlinks must be tested on posting to VA Web pages to ensure their viability and usability, and they must refer to the correct domain. Existing links must be reviewed by Web managers no less than every six months to ensure the continuing integrity, objectivity, relevance, and usefulness of that linked site.

d. **Definition of a VA Major Entry Point.** Web pages that are frequently accessed directly by Web site visitors. Major entry points include:

- (1) Agency home page; <http://www.va.gov/>
- (2) An Administration's home page (NCA, VHA, and VBA home pages)
- (3) A Web site's home page
- (4) A program's home page; an example is My HealthVet at <http://www.myhealth.va.gov/>
- (5) All pages linked directly from the VA home page including, but not limited to, the link to Life Insurance, Home Loan, Appeals, Compensation & Pension, and Health Benefits.
- (6) Any other page that Web site statistics indicate are frequently visited or linked to by Web site visitors. Statistics on the most frequently accessed pages (based on the number of page views during a specified period of time) can be obtained from reports run on servers that host VA's Web pages for VHA, VBA, NCA, etc. Reports with statistical data are available for the following:
  - (a) click on <http://vawww.webstats.va.gov/> for Intranet and Intranet
  - (b) send requests for NCA statistics via regular e-mail to [publicinquiry@va.gov](mailto:publicinquiry@va.gov)
  - (c) <http://philitc.vba.va.gov/iit/> for VBA statistics, with the exception of VBA Education. Note: You may need to alter the address string to include the name of the month for which the information is being gathered. If a change is made to the date in the URL string to the selected month, the results will provide the latest stats on usage (hits) for the top ten pages on the VBA server; for example, if the desired results are statistics for the month of May, the string would be: <http://philitc.vba.va.gov/iit/reports/WWW/may/123LogReport.htm/> How far to drill down to determine the number of most often-accessed pages (i.e., the top ten, top twenty, etc.) should be determined by each administration or organization in VA. Examples of high traffic pages include, but are not limited to, pages linked from the VA home page, VBA Regional Office home pages, VISN and medical center home pages, program office home pages.

e. **General Link Requirements.**

(1) Links to sensitive information regarding procurement, human resources, or other information that is privileged and confidential must have restricted access and may not be posted to unsecured, open access VA Internet or Intranet. These types of information are

protected information and must be secured by passwords that are assigned to specific persons or groups who need, and are authorized, to access this information.

(2) Links must not be created that connect to internal VA resources, such as servers, print servers or individual workstations, for example [\\vaisw.xxx](#).

(3) Web managers must not place any Intranet links on any Internet pages. Intranet links incorrectly published on the Internet will manifest as broken links. Web managers must ensure that all Web site links are correct working links, and that Intranet links are not mistakenly moved to pages published on the Internet. They must also redact/remove internal hyperlinks prior to external publication. VA Web Operations or other Web management officials (see the Who To Contact section in Appendix A of this Handbook) may immediately remove any page or document containing Intranet links from Internet production servers. Web content managers will be notified and those pages will not be permitted to be restored until corrected.

(4) When links appear in horizontal rows on a Web page, an individual hyperlink label must not break between rows.

(5) Separators/delimiters should not appear at the beginning or the end of a row, but must be used for separating links in a row.

(6) Links can be placed in horizontal rows, on side stripes, in footers, or on other suitable locations on Web pages as long as their appearance fits into recommended page templates and styles.

(7) Font sizes of hyperlinks can be adjusted as necessary to fit into available space provided the sizing does not impair readability and visibility.

**f. External Links.** Any VA Web sites that link to sites external to VA must ensure that no government or agency mandates or standards are violated prior to posting that external link. The following items must be considered before external links are created:

(1) Web managers must determine that external links are appropriate to VA's mission and are useful for VA's Web site visitors before placing the external links on a VA Web page or allowing them to be used on a published Web page. Agency links to commercial organizations or interest groups present special challenges with respect to maintaining agency objectivity and thus must be used judiciously. They may be posted only in accordance with the following requirements:

(a) VA Web pages must not directly or indirectly endorse or promote any product or vendor; however, viewers, plug-ins and links that are required to access VA content and/or VA applications are permitted using links and icons. Banner displays that suggest an advertisement such as "Get Acrobat Now!" or "Get Flash Now" must not be used.

(b) The display of an external link must not demonstrate or give the appearance of favoritism to an external site when there are multiple sources for the same information.

(c) VA Web sites that display links to commercial search engines must avoid the appearance of endorsement or favoritism by linking to a page that lists and links to no fewer than three commercial search engines. The display page must also have a disclaimer that says that the links to commercial services are for informational purposes only and do not constitute an endorsement by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

(d) Web site visitors must be told when using links to any non-VA Web sites that they are leaving VA. In addition, Web site visitors must be told when using links to any Web sites that are not .gov or .mil that VA is not responsible for the content of the site to which they are routed. Mouseovers (see Glossary) or other less obtrusive technological alternatives will **not** suffice. VA Webmasters must show customers a disclaimer prior to each external link or groupings of external links that includes:

(1) in all cases, language that explains that the Web site visitor is about to leave a VA Web site AND

(2) if going to a Web site that is not .gov or .mil, language to the effect that this link does not represent any expressed or implied VA or federal government sponsorship or endorsement of the organization or the contents of its Web page to which the URL is linked.

(e) The preferred method to meet the requirements of disclaimers is for each external non-federal government link or each table of multiple links, to have a JavaScript popup that will appear with disclaimers that contain both elements as stated above in 10.f.(1) and 10.f.(2). Examples of pop-ups, for a single link and for multiple links to be included in the same disclaimer, are the following:

1. Example of single link disclaimer:

|                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>You are now leaving the Department of Veterans Affairs Web Site</u></b></p> <p>VA does not endorse and is not responsible for the content of the linked Web site.</p> |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

2. Example of multiple links disclaimer for links displayed together in a table:

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>You are now leaving the Department of Veterans Affairs Web Site</u></b></p> <p>VA does not endorse and is not responsible for the content of any of the links listed below.</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><a href="#">First external link</a>      <a href="#">Second external link</a>      <a href="#">Third external link</a></p> |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

(f) Any organization, government or non-government, to which a VA Web site has links (excluding mandated links) and whose posting is not considered relevant to VA's mission and/or useful to that Web site's visitors by appropriate VA officials, must be removed

immediately from the Web site when directed to do so by appropriate VA officials at that site and/or by VA Web management officials. See “Who To Contact” section in Appendix A of this Handbook.

**g. Links for the Internet.** The types of links that may be placed on Internet pages are:

(1) Required Links: All the links cited below and their required locations on VA Web pages are required by law.

(2) Other Links: VA uses links other than those mandated by law that are specifically listed in this section of the Handbook. Other links may be displayed on Web pages at the discretion of local Webmasters, content managers, or their management, and must meet all general links policies and requirements.

(3) Catch-all Hyperlink: Some specific required links may appear on a single reference document represented by a “catch-all” hyperlink rather than each one being displayed separately. VA has an Internet Web page that has these links; the link to access this page is [Web Policies & Important Links](#) and must be displayed on all VA Internet Web pages. This Web page contains brief explanations of and links to VA’s disclaimer link ([Disclaimer](#)), the Accessibility link ([Accessibility](#)), the security link ([Security Controls to Protect Information](#)), the link to Section 515 Information Quality information ([Information Quality](#)), the link to information about digital rights copyrights, trademarks, and patent rights ([Digital Rights, Copyright, Trademark, and Patent Laws](#)), the No Fear Data Link ([No Fear Act Data](#)), the FOIA ([Freedom of Information Act](#)), the schedule for publishing information ([Web Content Inventory and Publication Schedule](#)), VA’s Internet Privacy policy ([Privacy Policy](#)), the small business link ([Policy on Regulating Small Businesses](#)), the link to [Significant Guidance Documents](#), and VA’s policy regarding the use of links to other information ([Policy on Links to Other Information](#)). All other mandatory links cited in the information below are required to be stand-alone links and are not permitted to be placed on this catch-all page.

(4) Internet Web page categories and attendant mandatory links for each category are as follows:

(a) Category 1. VA home page only at <http://www.va.gov/>. The following links are required to appear on the VA home page. They are not required to appear on any other pages although they may be used elsewhere if determined to be useful by Web site managers.

1. [USA Freedom Corps](#)

2. [White House](#)

3. [Freedom of Information Act](#) (This link must appear as a stand-alone link on the VA home page in addition to being contained in the catch-all link that must be posted to all Internet pages and provided on the page linked to by the Contact VA link.)

4. [VA Forms](#)



(b) Category 2. Links that must appear on the VA home page AND on all major entry point pages. These links are not required to appear on any other pages on VA Web sites, but they can be used elsewhere if determined to be useful by Web site managers:

1. [Annual Performance and Accountability Report](#)
2. [About VA](#)
3. [usa.gov](#)
4. [Site Map](#) (This link must appear on all VA Internet home pages: links to site maps pertaining to individual Web sites must have a label that distinguishes it from the department link)
5. [Contact VA](#) (This link routes directly to the IRIS at <https://iris.va.gov/> home page which provides required links to specific types of information.)
6. [Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQs\)](#)
7. [Privacy Policy](#) (Use this link for the Internet only; do not confuse it with the Intranet Privacy Policy which is to be used exclusively on the Intranet.) This link must also appear on any Web page that contains specific types of information that require that the policy or a link to the policy be placed on the Web page, and must appear on any Web page that collects information from individuals per the requirements of the Paperwork Reduction Act. PDF files are exempt from this linking requirement. (Note: Per ICGI recommendations, this link is also included in the Catch-all Hyperlink, [Web Policies & Important Links](#), that must be posted to all Internet Web pages. Use of the Catch-all Hyperlink on all Internet Web pages does not preclude the need to post this link as a stand-alone link on the VA home page, major entry pages or specifically designated pages as indicated.)
8. [Small Business Contacts](#) (This link must also be displayed on the webpage linked to by the [Contact VA](#) link.)
9. [Inspector General](#) (In accordance with Public Law 110-161 (Consolidated Appropriations Act for FY2008, Division B, Title V, Section 534), a link to the Office of Inspector General must appear on all VA website home pages.))

(c) Category 3. Links that must appear on all Internet Web pages.

1. [VA Home](#) (All Internet pages except the VA home page; individual VA Web sites must have a link to its Web site home page on all of its pages.)
2. [Facilities Locator](#)
3. [Search](#) (Web managers may also display links to a search capability specifically for their local VA Web sites; the label for that link must distinguish it from the VA search capability)
4. [Web Policies & Important Links](#)

(d) **Category 4** Other Internet Links that must appear on individual VA Web sites and/or on specific Web pages:

1. Every VA component that issues regulations must provide information about those regulations on its Internet Web site and also link to the [Regulations.gov](http://www.regulations.gov) portal.

2. VA Web sites must link to appropriate cross-agency portals when applicable to guide the visitors to additional resources that exist across the U.S. government. Examples of cross-agency portals are the usa.gov link (required on the VA home page and all major entry point pages), [GovBenefits.gov](http://www.govbenefits.gov) which provides information about availability of federal and state government benefits, and [Seniors.Gov](http://www.seniors.gov) which provides information material to the elderly.

3. Every VA component that provides grants or has contracting opportunities must provide information about those opportunities on its Web site and must link to [Grants.gov](http://www.grants.gov) and any other appropriate cross-agency portals, such as [http://www.usa.gov/](http://www.usa.gov) which has links to the Small Business Administration, the Minority Business Development Agency, and many other organizations and sources of information.

4. The VA Jobs Web site, [Job Opportunities](http://www.va.gov/jobs), must have a link to [USA.Jobs](http://www.usajobs.gov) on its home page.

5. Contact Us Links. VA Web managers must post a link to contact their own VA Web sites; this link may be labeled Contact Us, Contact This Web site, or other suitable label to distinguish it from the [Contact VA](http://www.va.gov/contact) link. The link label must be the same as the title of the page to which it links. The Web site's link must be employed in one of the following ways:

a. route to a Web page that provides Web site information, including Web site phone numbers, corporate Web site e-mail addresses such as [Webmaster@va.gov](mailto:Webmaster@va.gov), Web site-relevant street addresses (if any), contact information to report technical, content, and/or accessibility problems with the Web site, links to other significant Web site information, a link to the IRIS at <https://iris.va.gov/> for any information not relevant to the Web site, and any other information as deemed appropriate by Web site managers. Individual/personal VA e-mail addresses must not appear on department Internet Web pages. Web site visitors utilizing corporate e-mail addresses should be cautioned about entering PII since the security of that information via regular e-mail cannot be guaranteed. Contact information should be limited to va.gov e-mail addresses except in those rare circumstances when a va.gov address is not available.

b. **OR** provide a link to the Webmaster's or other Web site manager's corporate e-mail address, such as [Webmaster@va.gov](mailto:Webmaster@va.gov), to report problems with the Web site and also link to the IRIS at <https://iris.va.gov/> for all other types of inquiries not material to the operation of the Web site. Individual/personal VA e-mail addresses must not appear on department Internet Web pages. Web site visitors utilizing corporate e-mail addresses should be cautioned about entering PII since the security of that information via regular e-mail cannot be guaranteed. Contact information should be limited to va.gov e-mail addresses except in those rare circumstances when a va.gov address is not available.



c. **OR** the VA organization must have an electronic system that provides an electronic tracking mechanism for inquiries that come through the Contact Us links on a specific Web site and must also provide a link to the IRIS at <https://iris.va.gov/> for issues not material to the Web site.

**Caution:** if Web site managers choose to develop a form for Web site visitors to complete when they contact a VA Web site directly or to copy all or part of an approved form that exists on another Web site, the Web site managers must contact their OMB liaison for instructions and OMB permission to collect information prior to posting the form on their own Web site. In addition, collections of information may involve rules concerning Systems of Records; contact Records Management Service for information about Systems of Records (See OMB Approvals section and the Who To Contact section in Appendix A. Also see Glossary for definition of "system of records".)

6. The No Fear Act Data link, which is displayed on the Internet as The [No Fear Act Data](#) links to [http://www.va.gov/orm/NOFEAR\\_Select.asp](http://www.va.gov/orm/NOFEAR_Select.asp) and must be posted as a stand-alone link on the VA Job Opportunities home page in addition to being listed in the catch-all link, [Web Policies & Important Links](#), that must be posted on VA Internet Web pages.

7. The [Español](#) link provides access to benefit and compensation brochures that are written in English and in Spanish. This link may be posted wherever it is considered useful.

8. [Policy on Regulating Small Businesses](#) - Per Executive Order 13272 the Department of Veterans Affairs will give proper consideration to the impact of its rulemaking activities on small entities. This link is listed in the catch-all link, [Web Policies & Important Links](#) that must be posted on VA Internet Web pages.

9. [Significant Guidance Documents](#) - Review VA's "Significant Guidance Documents." This link is listed in the catch-all link, [Web Policies & Important Links](#) that must be posted on VA Internet Web pages.

h. **Links for the Intranet.** Intranet Web page categories and attendant mandatory links for each category are shown below. Other links appropriate to the Intranet may be displayed on Intranet Web pages at the discretion of local Webmasters, content managers, or their management if determined to be useful to Intranet Web site visitors and appropriate to VA's mission. Those links must meet all general links policies and requirements.

(1) **Category 1.** The Intranet home page only must have the following link: a link to the Intranet search engine at <http://vaww.index.va.gov/search/>.

(2) **Category 2.** The Intranet home page and all Intranet major entry point pages on the Intranet must have the links specified below.

(a) [Section 508 Accessibility](#) (this is the Intranet link for Section 508 Accessibility; the link of the same name listed in the Internet section is accessible only to the Internet.)

(b) [Intranet Privacy Policy](#) (Note: this hyperlink goes to an Intranet link and must not be used on the Internet; the Privacy Policy hyperlink listed for the Internet goes to an Internet

page. Each has its own privacy policy.) In addition to the Intranet home page and all major entry point pages, the Privacy link must be displayed whenever the content of a Web page requires that it must be displayed on that page. Contact the Privacy Office for instructions.

(c) [No Fear Act](#) (this link should not be confused with the [No Fear Act Data](#) link for the Internet. This Intranet link goes to material about discrimination, whistleblower protections, grievance procedures, etc., for employees.) This link must also appear on any VA Intranet Web sites that contain information about employment or other Human Resources issues.

(3) **Category 3.** All Intranet pages must have the following link: [VA Intranet Home](#) (or VHA, VBA, NCA Intranet Home). Other appropriate links may appear on Intranet pages as determined by Webmasters, content managers, and/or their management to be useful, necessary, and relevant to VA's mission.

(4) **Category 4.** There are no required links for the Intranet in this category.

**11. BLOGS.** "Blog" is a term based on the words "Web log" and refers to an online journal comprised of the commentary posted thereon.

a. Requirements for all VA blogs are as follows:

(1) Blogs that are managed, maintained, hosted, or sponsored by VA on VA's Web site(s) must comply with all applicable Federal laws and policies.

(2) All VA blogs must be on a va.gov domain or other VA approved "dot gov" domain and are considered official VA documents.

(3) Blogs must fit the mission of VA and must be relevant to current issues/events at VA as determined by appropriate VA management officials; blogging activities must not interfere with the primary mission of the agency.

(4) Blogs must be documented in the VA Web Registry as existing on a given registered Web site; the Web Registry must be updated when the blogs are discontinued. Any blogs without postings within 30 days should be removed from publication; archived transcripts must be kept according to Records Management policies and requirements.

(5) All blog content must be reviewed by designated blog managers and also vetted by appropriate Public Affairs Officers before publishing to any audience to ensure that content does not undermine, counter, or contradict VA's official position on any issue. All blogs must be controlled and managed by an officially designated VA employee(s) or persons contracted to VA on a routine, ongoing basis.

(6) Blog managers may not redact or edit parts of any commentary submissions; all of the content from a blog submission must be posted or none of the content may be posted. No submitted commentary can be posted if it contains inflammatory or defamatory remarks, profanity, personal or sensitive data, language that is or may be construed as a threat, or containing links to other Web sites whose content is deemed by blog managers to be inappropriate links. Any links cited in blog commentary must meet the requirements of 6102 or may not be used.

(7) Images, text, video, audio files used in VA blogs must comply with [Copyright Law of the United States of America and Related Laws Contained in Title 17 of the United States Code](#) and other Federal policies and directives.

(8) All VA employees and contractors who engage in blogging must have prior written permission to create a blog or to participate in an existing blog in the performance of their official duties with the Department of Veteran Affairs. Prior written permission must be sought from facility directors, VISN CIO's, Regional Office Directors, Program Office Directors or other appropriate official(s) as determined by the employee's/contractor's VA chain of command. Persons working for VA in any official capacity who are engaged in blogging may not give the appearance of representing the department without this prior written permission.

(9) Links posted on blogs must comply with VA linking policies as stated in this Handbook.

b. VA Blogs Opened to Public Commentary. Any blogs that are opened to comments from public individuals must meet the following additional requirements:

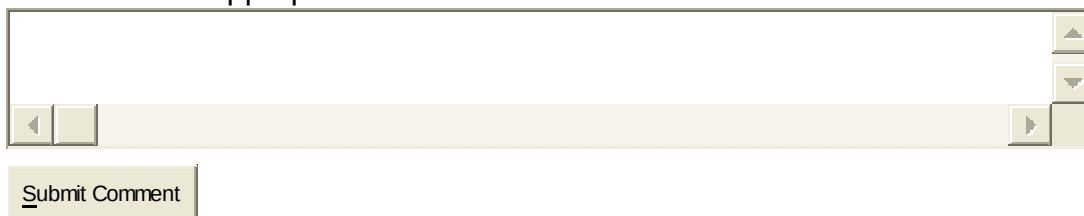
(1) Prior written permission must be obtained from appropriate VA management officials to open blogs to the submission of comments from the public.

(2) Blogs that permit the submissions of commentary for posting from the public must provide a comment entry field and a disclaimer on the blog that specifically states what may and may not be posted at the discretion of VA. Comments submitted must be directed to the blog owner for review by designated staff and public affairs officials prior to posting.

(3) If the submission field for comments or any other required fields ask for an e-mail address, name, or other personal identifying information, appropriate permissions to gather personal information from public individuals must be obtained from OMB, and all privacy and forms requirements must be met (see other sections in this chapter). Any searches of personal information will require System of Records status. An example of a disclaimer is:

### **Leave a Reply**

This blog is governed by the general rules of respectful civil discourse and is used only to post commentary on this topic. It may not be used to submit requests for customer service; requests for customer service must be made to <https://iris.va.gov>. Please do not submit any personal sensitive information in your submission since this mechanism is not secure. VA will review the content of all commentary and will not post any content that is not relevant to the topic of the blog and/or contains inflammatory or defamatory remarks, profanity, personal or sensitive data, language that is or may be construed to be a threat, or containing links to information on non-VA Web sites that is deemed by VA not to be useful or relevant. Any commentary that indicates illegal activity or a violation of law will be turned over to VA authorities for appropriate action.



## 12. AUDIO AND VIDEO BROADCASTS

**a. Background.** Audio and video broadcasts may be known as audiocasts, videocasts, audcasts, vidcasts, podcasts, or vodcasts. These terms refer to broadcasts that have been converted to file formats for playback on a handheld device or computer. These methods of broadcasting allow the playback of audio and/or video content such as audio books, music, public service announcements, training materials, or any other oral or visual presentation that can be heard and/or seen at the convenience of the listener/viewer.

**b. Requirements for all broadcasts.** All audio and video broadcasts must comply with the following rules:

(1) Broadcast authors must have prior written permission from appropriate management officials and also from appropriate public affairs officials in the author's organization to produce and disseminate the broadcast.

(2) Broadcasts must be generated by authoritative sources only and may not duplicate other existing broadcast materials.

(3) The topic of the broadcast must be evident in the broadcast title.

(4) Broadcast content must support and promote VA policies and practices and may not undermine, contradict or in any way counter official VA policy or practices and must contain content that is current and accurate.

(5) Broadcasts must conform to all requirements of VA Directive and Handbook 6102.

(6) Broadcasts must conform to all Section 508 requirements including but not limited to:

(a) All video and audio broadcasts must be captioned; captioning must be synchronized with the audio portion.

(b) Complete text transcripts must be made available when the broadcast is released; summaries of transcripts are not permitted.

(c) Verbal descriptions of visual elements of a video cast or suitable narration that provides adequate description of visual elements must be provided and synchronized with the action.

**13. EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES.** The technologies available for use on the Internet and/or Intranet are dynamic; new tools, applications and methodology become available at a rapid pace. All new technologies must meet the requirements of this Handbook and any other applicable VA directives and handbooks prior to implementation. Other requirements are as follows:

a. Recognized authorities who have jurisdiction over Web activities must approve in writing the implementation of the new technology for use in VA prior to its implementation.

b. The use of any new technology must be vetted and approved by appropriate VA staff who address privacy, security, Section 508 compliance, and any other applicable disciplines that determine or contribute to the determination of the usability, security, and integrity of the technology to be implemented.

c. No new technology may be implemented for the purpose of avoiding the application of the rules and policies that govern VA's use of the Internet and/or Intranet.

## CHAPTER 7. ENTERPRISE TOOLS

### 1. VA ENTERPRISE CONTENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEM (ECMS)

a. **Background.** The VA Enterprise Content Management System (ECMS) provides Webmasters and content authors with a number of options for authoring content and Web site development. The ECMS provides automated support of business processes such as content review and approval, change control for tracking and managing updates (versioning, rollback), and compliance verification for specific VA standards and requirements.

b. **ECMS Requirement.** Web content is to be managed by the ECMS. This tool must be used by all VA Internet and Intranet Web sites. Information about ECMS and its implementation is available at <http://vawww.va.gov/cms/> or by contacting the mailgroup at [VAWebCMSSupport@va.gov](mailto:VAWebCMSSupport@va.gov). This Web site provides documentation on approved strategies and methods for implementation of the tool as well as user documentation.

### 2. INQUIRY ROUTING & INFORMATION SYSTEM (IRIS) (INTERNET)

a. **Background.** The Inquiry Routing & Information System (IRIS) is a One-VA Internet-based, customer relations management tool accessed by the public via the [Contact VA](#) link. This tool is approved and supported by the Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology. The [Contact VA](#) link routes to the IRIS homepage at <https://iris.va.gov> where links to specific types of information can be found and where VA Web site visitors can create and submit inquiries to VA. The use of this tool satisfies the mandate that certain types of information must be provided to the public on all federal public Web sites and that all federal Web sites must provide a mechanism to communicate with the agency via electronic means.

b. **IRIS requirement for VA Internet Web Sites.** The [Contact VA](#) link must be placed on the VA home page and all major entry point pages. In addition, Web managers must also put the link to the IRIS at <https://iris.va.gov/> on their Web site's contact page, if any, or if a Web site provides its own electronic system for receiving e-communications from the public via the Internet, the IRIS link must also be posted to that Web site wherever appropriate to ensure that Web site customers can gain access to VA information not otherwise found on the individual Web site. See the Links section for details. **Note:** While the IRIS routes Internet inquiries to organizations throughout VHA, VBA, NCA and many program offices, not all organizations participate in the IRIS. VA organizations not already participating in the IRIS are encouraged to do so.

### 3. COMPLIANCE MONITORING TOOL (INTERNET & INTRANET)

a. **Description of compliance monitoring tool.** VA Web managers and appropriate VA management officials must ensure that all VA Web pages meet all government-wide and agency requirements. To assist in this process and to enhance VA's oversight capability, VA implemented an automated compliance monitoring tool that continually scans all of VA's Web pages in production to ensure compliance with many of these requirements. A scan cycle is completed when all VA Web pages have been reviewed, at which time reports of the findings of a scan cycle are produced by the monitoring tool and a new scan cycle begins. Monthly scan cycle reports must be downloaded or reviewed online by Web managers and by appropriate VA management officials every month. Reports and other information can be

found at <http://vaww.webxm.va.gov/>. In addition, scans will be conducted automatically for sites migrated into the ECMS system whenever there is a promotion request to move content from development to production servers to ensure compliance with requirements within the purview of this tool prior to the publication of a Web page or Web site. Corrective action must be initiated by Web managers as soon as problems with compliance requirements become apparent. Failure to make necessary corrections in a timely manner may result in the removal of Web pages or entire VA Web sites until compliance is assured. The compliance-monitoring tool is a diagnostic tool that does NOT fix any problems that it finds.

b. **Reports generated by Compliance Monitoring Tool.** Reports generated by this tool can be found at <http://vaww.webxm.va.gov/> and include spelling errors, broken links, application defects, compliance problems with accessibility, privacy, trademarks and copyrights, and security, and the currency of Web pages that must be reviewed or updated every 12 months and that are not historical or archival.

## RESOURCES TO ASSIST WEB SITE MANAGERS

### 1. VA INTRANET WEB SITES FOR WEB MANAGERS

a. **VA Intranet 6102 Web Site.** The Web site for all 6102 documents is <http://vaww.va.gov/6102/>. Items posted to this Intranet site include the current version of VA Directive and Handbook 6102, VA Web Best Practices Guide, links to metadata information, and other documents and links relevant to 6102.

b. **Other Web sites and reference links for Web managers.**

(1) VA Office of Enterprise Development, Resource Management IT, VA Web Solutions - <http://vaww.va.gov/websolutions/> (Provides overall coordination and support for VA's Intranet and Internet Web activities.)

(2) VA Office of Enterprise Development, Resource Management IT, VA Web Operations - <http://vaww.va.gov/webops/> (includes page templates and images and How To Tips.)

(3) VA Web Request – <http://vaww.va.gov/webrequest/> (Provides and forwards a form to obtain permission to create a new Web site and/or to change an existing Web site, for example, transferring an existing site from one location to another or from one format to another.)

(4) VA Web Registry – <http://vaww.va.gov/webregistry/> (Web site on which all production Web sites in VA must be registered.)

(5) Section 508 Accessibility References:

(a) Section 508 Accessibility Web Site - <http://www.va.gov/oit/ea/section508/>

(b) VA Directive & Handbook 6221, Accessible Electronic and Information Technology (EIT) – <http://www.va.gov/vapubs/>.

(6) VA Search for the Internet - <http://www.index.va.gov/>

(7) VA Search for the Intranet - <http://vaww.index.va.gov/>

(8) Enterprise Content Management System (ECMS) - <http://vaww.va.gov/cms/>

(9) Inquiry Routing and Information System (IRIS) Web site - <http://vaww.va.gov/irisinfo/>

(10) Web XM – <http://vaww.webxm.va.gov/>

(11) Internet Web Search Improvement Project (VAWSIP) - <http://vaww.va.gov/vawebsearch/>

(12) Cyber Security – The following resources are available that address cyber security guidance:



(a) The Computer Security Resource Center at <http://csrc.nist.gov/publications/nistpubs/> has the following reference documents available on their Web site:

1. NIST SP 800-44, Guidelines on Securing Public Web Servers -
2. NIST SP 800-53, Recommended Security Controls for Federal Information Systems and NIST SP 800-53A, regarding Assessment Methods and Procedures.
3. NIST SP 800-37, Guide for the Security Certification and Accreditation of Federal Information Systems
4. FIPS 199, Standards for Security Categorization of Federal Information and Information Systems
5. FIPS 140-2, Security Requirements for Cryptographic Modules

(b) The VA Publications Web site at <http://vaww.va.gov/vapubs/index.cfm> has the following reference documents available on their Web site:

1. VA Directive 6500, Information Security Program
2. VA Directive 6212, Security of External Electronic Connections
3. VA Directive 6300, Records Information Management
- (13) Privacy Act policies – <http://www.va.gov/privacy/> and <http://vaww.va.gov/privacy/>
- (14) VA Enterprise Architecture – <http://vaww.va.gov/oit/eam>
- (15) VA Handbook 6310.1, Forms Management Procedures - <http://vaww.va.gov/vapubs/>
- (16) VA Web Best Practices Guide reference Web Site- Federal Web site best practices from the Interagency Committee on Government Information - [http://www.usa.gov/webcontent/regs\\_bestpractices/best\\_practices.shtml](http://www.usa.gov/webcontent/regs_bestpractices/best_practices.shtml)
- (17) Snippets - <http://vaww.teamshare.va.gov/snippets/> (This Web site is for the VA Web/Programming community for sharing useful code snippets.)
- (18) Monthly Webmaster Conference Call Information - <http://vaww.teamshare.va.gov/webmaster/>
- (19) VHA Web Communications - <http://vaww.va.gov/webcom/>

## **2. WHO TO CONTACT**

- a. General questions should be addressed to the appropriate contacts below:

(1) VHA: VHA Web Communications group at [vhawebcommunications@va.gov](mailto:vhawebcommunications@va.gov)

(2) VBA: VBA Web Administrator at [webadmin.vbaco@va.gov](mailto:webadmin.vbaco@va.gov)

(3) NCA: National Cemetery Administration at [public.inquiry@va.gov](mailto:public.inquiry@va.gov)

(4) All other organizations not under the purview of VHA, VBA, or NCA should address their questions specific to VA Directive and Handbook 6102 to <http://vaww.va.gov/6102/6102comment.asp>, which is the link labeled Feedback on 6102 on <http://vaww.va.gov/6102/>.

b. Subject matter and other guidance may be addressed to:

(1) VA's Section 508 Accessibility Office at [Section508@va.gov](mailto:Section508@va.gov)

(2) Office of Information & Technology's Records Management Service (RMS) in VACO (005R1B) The RMS main phone number is 202-461-7457.

(3) VA Privacy Office at [privacyservice@va.gov](mailto:privacyservice@va.gov)

(4) VA Forms Managers at [VAFormsManagers@va.gov](mailto:VAFormsManagers@va.gov)

(5) VA Web Operations at [vhaiswebops@med.va.gov](mailto:vhaiswebops@med.va.gov)

(6) VA Web Solutions at [vawebsolutionsstaff@va.gov](mailto:vawebsolutionsstaff@va.gov)

(7) VA IRIS System Administration Group at [vairissysadmin@med.va.gov](mailto:vairissysadmin@med.va.gov)

(8) VA Web CMS Support at [VAWebCMSSupport@va.gov](mailto:VAWebCMSSupport@va.gov)

(9) Public Affairs issues must be directed to local or organization's Public Affairs Officers (PAOs)

(10) Cyber Security issues must be directed to local Information Security Officers (ISOs) or the Office of Cyber Security (OCS).

### 3. VA WEB BEST PRACTICES GUIDE

a. **Description of VA Web Best Practices Guide (BPG).** This guide is for VA employees and contractors who work with technical and/or content aspects of preparing and maintaining VA Internet and Intranet Web sites and provides Web managers with an overview of best practice elements for their VA Web sites. It can be found at <http://vaww.va.gov/6102/>.



## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

### 6102 Definitions, Acronyms and Abbreviations

1. **508 Compliance:** Meeting all mandates required by Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Pub. L. 93-112, codified as amended at 29 U.S.C. 794d to ensure that all Web pages are accessible to disabled persons.
2. **ABG:** Access Board Guidelines
3. **Accessibility:** Ensuring that content can be navigated and read by everyone, regardless of location, experience, or the type of computer technology used. Creating accessible content must be an integral part of the Web design philosophy, and accessibility features must be incorporated into all aspects of the design process.
4. **Alternative Formats:** Web file formats that are not universally accessible but are available to the public via specific software or plug-ins. These formats include, but are not limited to: Portable Document Formats (PDF), WordPerfect, MS Word, MS PowerPoint, and statistical data files, such as SAS, SPSS, SQL, and MS Excel.
5. **Alternative Text:** Instructions included in the HTML tags for graphics that describe what the graphic is and a methodology widely used because it enables sight-impaired people to “see” the graphics. When alternative (alt) text is included, a yellow text box with the description will appear when a user holds their mouse over a graphic.
6. **Auditing:** The process used by an operating system to detect and record security-related events in a secure, pass-worded file known as a security log; types of entries include, but are not limited to, an attempt to create, access, or delete objects such as files and directories.
7. **Authentication:** Confirmation of the identity of a party involved in data transmission which is a process that determines a user's identity, as well as determining what a user is authorized to access, e.g. a financial database or a support knowledgebase. The most common form of authentication is user name and password, although this also provides the lowest level of security.
8. **Authorization of trusted devices:** The process of deciding if device X is allowed to have access to service Y. This is where the concept of trusted devices exists. Trusted devices (devices are authenticated and indicated as "trusted") are allowed access to services. Untrusted or unknown devices may require authorization based on user interaction before being granted access to the services. This does not principally exclude the automatic authorization given by an application. Authorization always includes authentication.
9. **Audio and Video Broadcasting:** (May be known as audiocasts, videocasts, audcasts, vidcasts, podcasts, or vodcasts.) These terms refer to broadcasts that have been converted to file formats for playback on a handheld device or computer. These methods of broadcasting allow the playback of audio and/or video content such as audio books, music, public service announcements, training materials, or any other oral or visual presentation that can be heard and/or seen at the convenience of the listener/viewer.

10. **Availability:** Ensuring timely and reliable access to and use of information. A loss of availability is the disruption of access to or use of information or an information system.
11. **Blog:** The term is a popularized form of the words “Web log”: Generally speaking, a blog is an online journal comprised of postings in descending chronological order, meaning the most recent posting appears at the top of the page. They are “post-centric” rather than “page-centric,” since content is determined by the commentary posted thereon as opposed to a Web page on which the content is driven only by the page owner and representing only one point of view in a more formal presentation. Many blogs, but not all, allow readers to comment on the original content posted by the blogger of ownership, thereby allowing the readers to respond and comment so that much of the blog content is essentially written by its audience. Blogs can address a host of topics or may be devoted to a specific topic or event, such as a running commentary on an issue in a specific arena.
12. **BMP:** The [standard bit-mapped graphics format](#) used in the [Windows environment](#). By convention, [graphics files](#) in the BMP format end with a [.BMP extension](#). Click on links in this definition for more information.
13. **Branding:** Branding is defined as those items that identify the Department on its Web pages through its look and feel such as logos, templates, font and font sizes, and other items that aid in identifying the Web site as a VA Web site. See the VA Web Best Practices Guide at <http://vaww.va.gov/6102/> for details.
14. **Broken Graphic:** A graphic that does not appear when a Web page loads. When an image doesn't load, the alt text or some generic icon shapes are displayed instead.
15. **Broken Link:** A hyperlink to a non-existent or non-operational page or server; also known as a “dead link.”
16. **Browser:** Short for Web browser, a software application used to locate and display Web pages. Technically, a browser is a client program that uses the medium of Hypertext Transfer Protocol to submit tasks to Web servers connected to the Internet to retrieve requested information.
17. **CFM:** Acronym for Macromedia's ColdFusion, an application used for developing Web applications and which uses .cfm for its suffix.
18. **CFR:** Code of Federal Regulations
19. **Confidentiality:** Preserving authorized restrictions on information access and disclosure, including the means for protecting both personal privacy and proprietary information so that it is accessed only by authorized persons.
20. **Content:** Information on Web sites' visitors; this information and its presentation must be consistent with VA's communications and public affairs policies, procedures and organization messages. For the purposes of this document, content does not include overall page attributes such as branding, font size, etc., which must be standardized as defined in this document. See definition of static Web content and dynamic Web content below:

a. Static Web content consists of information in the form of "Web documents" that are rendered identically each time they are accessed.

b. Dynamic Web content consists of information that is rendered differently based on specific user input or a program or script, and is usually managed in a database associated with a server.

**21. Content Management:** Ensuring that information posted to VA Web pages complies with all legal and Handbook requirements and is current, factual, spell-checked and grammatically correct. The content for publication must be approved by appropriate VA management.

**22. Cookies:** A message given to a Web browser by a Web server. The browser stores the message in a text file and the message is then sent back to the server each time the browser requests a page from the server. When the user's computer consults the originating server computer, the cookie is sent back to the server, allowing it to respond to the user's browser according to the cookie's contents, for example to enable automatic logon with username and password, or to store user specific variables during an application session. There are two types of cookies defined as follows:

a. session cookies are small files that contain information about a user and which are stored only in temporary memory and then automatically erased when the Web browser is closed.

b. persistent cookies are small files containing information about a user which are stored permanently until steps are taken to manually erase them.

**23. Cross-Agency Portal:** A Web site that brings together information and services from multiple Federal agencies or organizations about a particular topic or for a particular audience.

**24. CSS (Cascading Style Sheets):** A format used to separate style from structure on Web pages; it is a feature of HTML that defines how different elements, such as headers, links, and text will appear, for example defining fonts, colors, paragraph spacing, etc. Style sheets can be applied to any page or all pages on a particular Web site.

**25. Document:** A file provided on a Web site that contains text, such as pages, text files, word-processing files, and spreadsheet files.

**26. Document Management:** Organizing existing documents and making them easier to share internally in a given organization.

**27. Domain Names:** A unique name that identifies an Internet or Intranet site and which consists of a sequence of characters separated by periods such as [www.xxx.xxx](http://www.xxx.xxx) or [vaww.xxx.xxx](http://vaww.xxx.xxx). Top-level domains include .gov, .mil, .us, .org, .com, and .edu. The .gov domain name is reserved for non-military, United States Federal government institutions. The domain name for all Department of Veterans Affairs Web sites is va.gov.

28. **Domain Name Service (DNS):** A meaningful and easy-to-remember name for an Internet address. The DNS is the way that Internet domain names are located and translated into IP (Internet Protocol) addresses. Every computer on the Internet has a unique IP address.
29. **Download:** To copy something from a primary source to a more peripheral one, as in saving something found on the Web to a file on an individual's local hard drive.
30. **ECMS (Enterprise Content Management System):** Software that enables authorized staff to manage the creation, modification, and removal of content from a Web site. Also referred to as CMS.
31. **Email (e-mail):** Electronic mail; the transmission of messages over communications networks.
32. **Enterprise:** An enterprise consists of all functional departments, people, and systems within an organization.
33. **Extranet:** A public-private Web site or portal, secured or password-protected, specifically designed for selected workers in an organization and selected external partners to conduct internal business.
34. **FAQ (Frequently Asked Questions):** List of common questions and answers designed to save users time and effort when looking for help.
35. **Federal Public Web Site:** Any Web site that:
- a. Is funded and sponsored entirely by a Federal agency or organization,
  - b. Presents official government information, and
  - c. Is available to the public without passwords or log-ins.
36. **Firewall:** A dedicated device (hardware and/or software) placed between internal and external networks to control access and prevent misuse or abuse.
37. **FOIA (Freedom of Information Act):** 5 U.S.C. § 552, which provides that federal agencies must disclose records requested unless they may be withheld under one or more of the nine statutory exemptions.
38. **Frames:** The simultaneous display of several HTML files on a Web page. A Web page that has frames will normally display a navigational tool bar that remains constant through an entire site in one section of the page and content in another section.
39. **FTP (File Transfer Protocol):** A protocol which allows a user on one host to access and transfer files to and from another host over a network. FTP is the standard method for exchanging files between computers on the Internet.

40. **GIF (Graphics Interchange Format):** A compressed image file format that displays quickly on a Web page.
41. **GUI (Graphical User Interface):** A visual, icon-driven interface for an operating system or other computer application, elements can include windows, icons, buttons, cursors and scroll bars.
42. **Home:** The primary page or starting point reached through the URL.
43. **Home page:** The main page of a Web site. Typically, the home page serves as an index or table of contents to other documents stored at the site. The home page is described as a single document but can contain multiple screens. By convention the home page provides consistent access to the major content areas of the Web site.
44. **HTML (Hypertext Markup Language):** The authoring language used to create documents on the World Wide Web. HTML defines the structure and layout of a Web document by using a variety of tags and attributes. Browsers are programmed to interpret HTML for display.
45. **HTTP (Hypertext Transfer Protocol):** the underlying set of rules that enables Web browsing that is used by the World Wide Web. This protocol defines how messages are formatted and transmitted, and what actions Web servers and browsers must take in response to various commands. For example, when a URL is entered in a browser, it sends an HTTP command to the Web server directing it to fetch and transmit the requested Web page.
46. **HTTPS (Hypertext Transfer Protocol over Secure Socket Layer, or HTTP over SSL):** HTTPS encrypts and decrypts the page requests and page information between the client browser and the Web server using a Secure Socket Layer (SSL). HTTPS by default uses port 443 as opposed to the standard HTTP port of 80. URL's beginning with HTTPS indicate that the connection between client and browser is encrypted using SSL.
47. **Hyperlink:** A document formatting tag that allows documents or files to be linked by making certain words, phrases or graphics "clickable." Clicking on a hyperlink will direct the browser to another HTML page within the same directory, to another location on the current page, to another HTML page, to another file, or to another Internet or Intranet site. Also known simply as a "link". Hyperlinks can be created by using absolute referencing and/or using relative referencing; see examples of each in the Handbook section about hyperlinks.
48. **Industry Standard Web Formats:** Web file formats that are universally accessible to anyone with a Web browser, which do not require specific software or plug-ins. HTML and XML are current examples of industry standard formats.
49. **Information Architecture:** Structuring, organizing, and labeling information in a manner that is logical and meaningful to the recipients of that information. This process includes mapping the path for users to take when they visit a Web site and want to obtain information



or to accomplish a task, and also how to arrange the vast amount of information that VA offers on its Web site. Sometimes referred to as IA.

50. **Integrity:** Guarding against unauthorized information modification or destruction of information, includes ensuring information non-repudiation and authenticity. A loss of integrity is the unauthorized modification or destruction of information.

51. **Internet:** A global digital infrastructure that connects millions of computers with cross platform compatibility, using the Internet Protocol (IP) to communicate between computers.

52. **Internet Service:** A network-based information service including http, gopher, ftp, mailto, news, and telnet (ex. Web pages, email forums, chat rooms, listservers.)

53. **Intranet:** A private Web site or portal, secured or password-protected, specifically designed for an organization to conduct internal business. An Intranet is fully comparable to and interoperable with the Internet, but is not readily available to the public. Intranet access may be VA-wide or limited to an Administration or Program Office.

54. **IP address:** A 32 bit number that identifies each sender or receiver of information that is sent across the Internet or Intranet. An IP address has two parts: the identifier of a particular network on the Internet or Intranet and an identifier of the particular device, which can be a server or a workstation within that network.

55. **IRIS (Inquiry Routing and Information System):** A Web-based customer service tool through which the public may securely submit and route electronic inquiries via the Internet to VA's business lines, medical facilities, and other VA Offices and which tracks those inquiries until resolved. Also provides an FAQ Knowledge Base that is indexed with VA's search engine, links to VA facilities and to 800 toll free phone number information.

56. **ISO:** Information Security Officer

57. **JPEG (JPG or Joint Photographic Experts Group):** A compressed image file format.

58. **Link:** See definition for hyperlink.

59. **Listserv:** An e-mail list delivery solution to manage electronic newsletters, discussion groups, and direct e-mail.

60. **MAC:** Media Access Control address

61. **Machine Readable format:** The formatting of Web page Privacy Policy statements so they can be read by Web browsers or other applications designed to interpret machine-readable policy statements. Such technologies may then alert users automatically about whether site privacy practices match their personal privacy preferences.

62. **Major Entry Point:** Internet and Intranet Web pages that are frequently accessed directly by Web site visitors, such as a department home page, an individual Web site's home page, an organization's home page, the root level below the organization's home page or any

Web page that Web site statistics indicate is most often visited or linked to by Web site visitors.

63. **Management Controls:** The organization, policies, and procedures used to reasonably ensure that (1) programs achieve their intended results; (2) resources are used consistent with agency mission; (3) programs and resources are protected from waste, fraud, and mismanagement; (4) laws and regulations are followed; and (5) reliable and timely information is obtained, maintained, reported and used for decision making.

64. **Metadata:** Metadata provides summary information about a file posted on-line, such as a .doc, .pdf, or .xls file. Typically, it includes several elements of HyperText Markup Language/HTML which define information about the properties of the file it describes in the same way that a library catalog card defines the elements of a book. Metadata customarily includes elements such as the name of the author of the file, the language the file is written in, the source of the file, keywords that describe the file, and the target audience for the posted content. Standardized descriptive metadata improves the precision of searches, enables enhanced field searching, permits the indexing of non-textual objects, increases the consistency of the metadata collected, enables Web site management through the use of version identification, effective dates and rights/permissions, determines the relevance of search results (which is indicated by the order in which retrieved items are displayed on the search results page), and provides information about the resource on the search results page. Title, description, and date metadata, when displayed on the search results page, aid the searcher in selecting the resources to view.

65. **Meta Tag:** Information inserted into the header portion of the Web page that is used to communicate information about the page, for use by browsers or search engines. Typically metatags are used to redirect users to other Web pages, set expiration dates, identify authors, exclude Web pages from automatic search engine indexing, and provide descriptions for use by search engines.

66. **Mouseover:** A JavaScript element that triggers a change on an item (usually a graphic) in a Web page when the mouse passes over it; a term used to indicate the text that appears next to a mouse pointer when a computer mouse is held over any screen object that is an active link, or over some other graphics element that is capable of performing an action, such as an icon or command button. The change usually signifies that the item is a link to related or additional information. May also be known as a "rollover".

67. **Navigation:** The means by which a user can navigate the content of a page or site. Navigation usually consists of a collection of links to sections and subsections of a site. Often a site map is provided as an overview. Tables of contents usually list links to subsections of a site or sections of a specific document.

68. **NCA:** National Cemetery Administration

69. **OCR (Optical Character Recognition):** The branch of computer science that involves reading text from paper and translating the images into a form that the computer can manipulate. All OCR systems include an optical scanner for reading text and sophisticated software for reading images.

70. **OCS:** The Office of Cyber Security whose mission is to ensure the privacy, confidentiality, integrity, and availability of VA information assets (hardware and software) associated with the services offered by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

71. **OMB:** Office of Management & Budget

72. **Operational Controls:** Security methods primarily implemented and executed by people (as opposed to systems). These controls are put in place to improve the security of a particular system (or group of systems). They often involve management activities as well as technical controls.

73. **Organization and Federal Organization:** Any entity of a federal agency, at any level of the agency; for example, any department, agency, bureau, division, office, program, or other organizational unit.

74. **Page:** A text file at a single URL, written or generated in a markup language like HTML, and viewed through a browser, e.g., .pdf, .doc, .xls, but not including pop-up windows, dialog windows, files that provide text descriptions of non-text content to enhance accessibility (d-links), redirection pages, or slides within a presentation, except where otherwise noted.

75. **PAO:** Public Affairs Officer

76. **PDF (Portable Document Format):** a proprietary file format created by Adobe Systems that enables complex documents to be viewed on almost any computer while retaining document formatting. Adobe Acrobat Reader is the free viewer application.

77. **PII:** Personally Identifiable Information, such as name, social security number, service number, etc.

78. **Plug-in:** A program that browsers utilize to play or execute downloaded files. Some of the more popular plug-ins are RealAudio, QuickTime, Media Player and Adobe Acrobat Reader.

79. **POC (Point of Contact):** The primary individual or group to whom reports of errors or requests for technical assistance related to an Internet service can be made. A POC for Content is that person who has knowledge of the information that is being disseminated on a Web page; a Technical POC is that person who has knowledge of the technical aspects of a Web page, such as links, navigation, branding, etc., and other attributes that provide the framework by which to convey the information on a Web page.

80. **PRA:** Paperwork Reduction Act

81. **Privacy Act:** 5 U.S.C. § 552a, which protects records maintained by federal agencies that pertain to individuals and are retrieved by their names or other personal identifiers (e.g., claim number, social security number). Sometimes referred to as PA.

82. **Privacy Impact Assessment (PIA):** PIAs are required annual written assessments of the protection of electronic personal information that is collected, maintained, and handled by all federal agencies; these assessments are mandated by the E-Government Act and VA Directive 6502. See Privacy section of this Handbook for details.

83. **Privacy Policy:** The policy under which the organization operating a Web site handles the personal information collected about visitors to the site and which must conform to all mandates and requirements that govern the collection of information.

84. **Program Office:** A component of the VA organization for which a station number and/or routing symbol exists.

85. **Public Document:** Any document or information not subject to access limitations.

86. **RDF (Resource Description Framework):** A foundation for processing metadata; it provides interoperability between applications that exchange machine-understandable information on the Web.

87. **Search Engine:** A program that searches documents for specified keywords and returns a list of the documents where the keywords were found.

88. **Secondary Document:** Additional pages containing the next level of detail and linked to the home page.

89. **Second-Level Domain Name:** A Web site address that is at the next highest level of the hierarchy below the top-level domains, such as va.gov.

90. **Section 508:** The section of the Rehabilitation Act that requires that any electronic information developed, procured, maintained, or used by the federal government must be accessible to employees and member of the public with disabilities to the extent it does not pose an "undue burden".

91. **Sensitive Information:** Information that requires protection due to the risk 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 various confidentiality provisions such as the Privacy Act and the HIPAA Privacy Rule, and information that may be withheld under the Freedom of Information Act.

92. **Server (Web):** A server is a computer that contains a collection of programs that manages, shares and provides access to Web- based applications, files and pages using Web formats and protocols. The VA uses three types of Web servers as listed below:

a. Development servers are used as platforms to develop and review Web pages before releasing them to the public;

b. Staging servers are used by the Technical Support Office to house files for review and scanning before moving them to the production server; and

c. Production servers contain the current files accessed by VA's Web sites.

93. **Site Map:** A linked, graphic or text-based display of a Web site's hierarchy which helps users navigate through a Web site that has more than one page by showing the user a diagram of the entire site's contents. Typically, site maps break down a Web site's content into increasingly specific subject areas to help the visitor understand its structure, from the main navigation pages to their subordinate pages. The main difference between a site map and a subject index is that a subject index is typically an alphabetical list, not a hierarchically structured set of links.

94. **SMTP (Simple Mail Transfer Protocol):** A protocol used to transfer electronic mail between computers. Most e-mail systems that send mail over the Internet use SMTP to send messages from one server to another; the messages can then be retrieved with an e-mail client.

95. **Social media:** A term describes the online technologies and practices that people use to share content, opinions, insights, experiences, perspectives, and media themselves. Social media can take many different forms, including text, images, audio, and video. The social media sites typically use tools like message boards, forums, podcasts, bookmarks, communities, wikis, Weblogs, etc.

96. **Spam:** Unsolicited e-mail on the Internet; often referred to as junk mail.

97. **SSL (Secure Socket Layer):** Provides for encrypted transmission of information or data over the Internet. SSL works by using a private key to encrypt data that is transferred over the SSL connection. By convention, URLs that require an SSL connection start with https instead of http.

98. **Subject Index:** A list of a Web site's content, typically presented in alphabetical order, similar to an index in the back of a book. The main difference between a subject index and a site map is that a site map conveys Web site structure or navigation.

99. **System of Records:** A file, database, or program from which personal information is retrieved by name or other personal identifier of the record's subject. VA must create, populate, maintain, use and disclose information in a system of records as required by the Privacy Act.

100. **Technical Controls:** Security controls that the computer system executes to protect the system or the data on the system. The controls can provide automated protection for unauthorized access or misuse, facilitate detection of security violations, and support security requirements for applications and data.

101. **Technical Management:** Placing approved content on Web pages in the proper Web page formats. VA Web managers must test pages to make sure that the appearance conforms to VA standards for look and feel, that there is user-friendly navigation, that all

required links appear on the page, that there are no broken links, and that all mandatory requirements for Section 508 compliance, privacy, etc., are met. These mandates, requirements and recommendations are contained in the other sections of this Handbook. Content and technical managers should also consult the VA Web Best Practices Guide for additional information and guidance on templates, fonts, images, branding, logos, etc.

102. **Technical Support:** Providing services to the technical operation of a Web site to ensure the optimal continuing performance of the site.

103. **Thumbnail:** A miniature version of a larger graphic placed within a document to provide the user with a small version of the image, and to reduce the load time of a Web page. Usually the picture is also an anchor to another page that has the expanded graphic.

104. **URL (Uniform Resource Locator):** the global address of documents and other resources on the World Wide Web; includes the protocol (http, ftp, telnet, etc) followed by the DNS address (e.g. <http://www.va.gov>).

105. **Usability:** The measure of the quality of a visitor's experience when using a Web site, including the ability to accomplish basic tasks.

106. **VA Internet Service Web Site:** An information resource established and/or maintained by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for the purpose of supporting its mission of service to veterans and their families, for whose content the Department is solely responsible and which must comply with VA internal directives.

107. **VA Web Operations:** Also known as Web Ops. Ensures the performance, availability, and security of VA's national Internet, and Intranet servers along with their associated Web applications. VA Web Operations provides Web site and enterprise-based application hosting services for all VA facilities and programs, including the VA's primary internal ([vaww.va.gov](http://vaww.va.gov)) and external ([www.va.gov](http://www.va.gov)) sites.

108. **VA Web Registry:** The VA Web Registry is a One-VA database on which all VA Web sites in production must be registered and that lists all VA Web sites and outsourced sites that conduct business on behalf of VA. It is also the vehicle that is used to certify that all VA Web sites are compliant with VA mandates, including Section 508 accessibility and Privacy mandates, ensuring that VA Web sites have no persistent cookies (unless permitted to do so in writing by the Assistant Secretary for Information & Technology), and identifying any plug-ins necessary for using the Web site.

109. **VACO:** Veterans Affairs Central Office.

110. **VBA:** Veterans Benefits Administration.

111. **VHA:** Veterans Health Administration.

112. **VPN (Virtual Private Network):** A network scheme in which portions of the network are connected via the Internet, but the information sent across the Internet is encrypted. VPN can

provide remote access to an organization's network via the Internet, sending data over the public Internet through secure "tunnels."

113. **W3C:** World Wide Web Consortium.

114. **Web (or The Web):** A term applied indiscriminately to the Internet/Intranet environment of services, but more appropriately applied to the client/server environment of information and services accessible by utilization of html or xml and hypertext transfer protocol.

115. **Web Application (Web-based Application):** A software program that uses HTTP for its core communication protocol and delivers Web-based information to the user in the HTML language, based on user input (navigation or data input); using a Web site as the front-end, and transacting with a database on the back-end.

116. **Web Author:** A person responsible for developing and maintaining the content of one or more Web pages. This person may also share Webmaster functions.

117. **Web Clients:** Software applications, typically browsers that access information distributed over the Internet.

118. **Web Content Managers:** Federal employees, who write, edit, manage, and form strategic plans for the content of federal Web sites.

119. **Web Form:** A form on a Web site that enables visitors to communicate with the host by filling in the fields and submitting the information. Information received via a form can be received as public e-mail or processed through another kind of software, such as a correspondence management system.

120. **Web Page:** An individual computer file developed in accordance with HTML Web format standard, which can be addressed by a hypertext link. Documents and collections are constructed of linked pages. Web page can also refer to an entire Web site, including all files, graphics, etc.

121. **Web Records:** For NARA purposes, Web records are those documents that document the information on the site itself. See [Comply with NARA Web Records Management Requirements](#) in the Webmaster Checklist for more details. Examples of Web records are:

a. Web content records that include the content pages that compose the site, inclusive of the HTML markup; records generated when a user interacts with a site; and if the agency chooses to document its site this way, lists of the URLs referenced by site's hyperlinks.

b. Web management and operations records that provide context to the site include: Web site design records, records that specify an agency's Web policies and procedures by addressing such matters as how records are selected for the site and when and how they may be removed, records documenting the use of copyrighted material on a site, records relating to the software applications used to operate the site, and records that document user access and when pages are placed on the site, updated, and/or removed.

c. Web management and operations records that provide structure related to the site that include site maps that show the directory structure into which content pages are organized and COTS software configuration files used to operate the site and establish its look and feel, including server environment configuration specifications.

122. **Webmaster:** An Internet/Intranet service administrator, who designs, publishes, manages, and maintains Web sites that provide a variety of information services. The Webmaster may also have primary technical responsibility for the Web server.

123. **Web site (Web site):** A collection of Web content organized under a single home page.

124. **Web site usability:** Making Web pages easy to understand, to read, and to navigate.

125. **WebXM:** A diagnostic tool with specific parameters for determining the health of VA Web pages by crawling individual VA Web sites and analyzing content, integrity, and compliance with specific standards. WebXM scans are run automatically no less than once per month, and Webmasters will be notified by VA management of any violations or anomalies found on their respective pages.

126. **Wiki:** A Web site or similar online resource which allows users to add and edit content collectively.

127. **World Wide Web (WWW):** A hypertext-based client/server application that guides the user to the linked collection of information that is accessible through common browsing software.

128. **XML (eXtensible Mark-up Language):** Acronym for which is a specification developed by the W3C. XML is a pared-down version of Standard Generalized Mark-Up Language, designed especially for Web documents. It allows designers to create their own customized tags, enabling the definition, transmission, validation, and interpretation of data between applications and between organizations.