

Chapter 2
MANAGING VA FOLDERS, FORMS, LETTERS, TESTING
AND OCCUPATIONAL INFORMATION

- 2.01 Introduction
- 2.02 References and Resources
- 2.03 Folders Used by Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment (VR&E) Division
- 2.04 Counseling/Evaluation/Rehabilitation (CER) Folders
 - a. Ordering CER folders
 - b. Creating CER Folders
 - 1. Preparing a CER Folder
 - 2. Reviewing the CER Folder Location
 - 3. Filing Documents in CER Folders
 - (a) Left Side of the CER folder
 - (b) Center Portion of the CER Folder
 - (c) Right Side of the CER folder
 - c. Assigning Jurisdiction for CER Folders
 - d. Maintaining CER Folders
 - e. Maintaining Locked Files
 - f. Retiring CER Folders
 - 1. Responsibility for Retiring a CER Folder
 - 2. Locating a Retired CER Folder
 - g. Destroying CER Folders
 - 1. Identifying CER Folders for Destruction
 - 2. Responsibility for CER Folder Destruction
- 2.05 Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Forms
 - a. Types of VA Forms
 - b. Creating and Revising VA Forms
 - c. Maintaining and Accessing Existing VA Forms
 - d. Locally Developed Forms
 - e. Local Reproduction of VA Forms
- 2.06 VA Form Letters
 - a. Types of VA Form Letters
 - b. Maintaining and Accessing Existing VA Form Letters
 - c. Modifying VA Letters Locally

2.07 Testing and Testing Supplies

- a. Responsibility for Testing Supplies
- b. Securing Test Materials and Used Booklets
- c. Disposing of Worn or Unserviceable Test Materials
- d. Testing Policies
 - 1. Releasing Test Results
 - 2. Authorizing Test Administration by Other Agencies
 - 3. Obtaining Prior Test Information From Outside Sources

2.08 Occupational and Educational Information

- a. Types of Occupational and Educational Information and Professional Publications
 - 1. Occupational Information Reference File
 - 2. Professional Publications
 - 3. Comprehensive Educational Information File
- b. Selecting Materials
- c. Ordering Occupational and Educational Materials

Chapter 2
 MANAGING VA FOLDERS, FORMS, LETTERS, TESTING
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2.01 Introduction

This chapter provides information on folders, letters and forms utilized by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) Program. Procedural guidelines on the development, retention, transmission and destruction of Veteran information by VR&E staff and contractors is outlined to ensure that all Veteran records are maintained and disposed of in the proper manner.

2.02 References and Resources

- Regulation: 38 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) 1.500-1.527
- Publication: Record Control Schedule (RCS) VB-1, Part I, Section 7
- VA Form (VAF): VAF 20-8824e, Common Security Services Access Request Form

2.03 Folders Used by VR&E Division

The table below describes the types of folders used by the VR&E Division.

| Type of Folder | Description | Contents | Responsibility for Creation and Maintenance |
|---|--|---|---|
| Claims folder for both living and deceased Veterans who have filed an initial claim for any type of benefit | Red-rope, three-flap folder with fasteners attached on the inside | Service data, dependency evidence, and information on the Veteran's disability | Veterans Service Center (VSC) |
| Counseling/Evaluation/Rehabilitation (CER) folder for Veterans receiving benefits under Chapter 31 | Kraft brown, three-flap folder with fasteners attached on the inside | Documentation related to the determination of Veteran's entitlement, and the administration of VR&E services and assistance | VR&E Division |

| | | | |
|---|--|--|---------------|
| Educational/Vocational Counseling folders for Chapters 30, 32, 33, 35, 36, 1606, 1607 | Manila, two-flap folder with fasteners attached on the inside | Counseling narratives, and educational or vocational plan | VR&E Division |
| Dependents Education and Assistance (DEA) folders for Chapter 35 | Blue manila, two-flap folder with fasteners attached on the inside | Counseling and administrative documents for Chapter 35 eligible dependents | VR&E Division |

2.04 CER Folders

The VR&E Division uses three-flap folders to maintain all pertinent documentation related to a Veteran’s or Servicemember’s request for, and receipt of, VA vocational rehabilitation benefits and services.

a. Ordering CER folders

Each Regional Office (RO) must order sufficient quantities of three-flap CER folders in order to create folders for Veterans receiving Chapter 31 benefits. The VR&E Officer (VREO) or designee is responsible for ordering CER folders. There is no centralized location for purchasing or distributing the three-flap CER folder. Folders may be ordered through the RO’s Support Services division.

b. Creating CER Folders

1. Preparing a CER Folder

A CER folder is established for a Veteran or Servicemember who applies for Chapter 31 benefits, and whose basic eligibility for Chapter 31 benefits has been established. The CER folder must be labeled with the Veteran’s or Servicemember’s information, to include full name and VA claim number.

A CER folder must not be established for a Veteran whose claim for Chapter 31 benefits does not meet the basic eligibility criteria. When a Veteran’s claim for Chapter 31 benefits does not meet basic eligibility, the VAF 28-1900 and denial letter will be drop-filed in the Veteran’s claims folder (C-file). If no C-file exists, then a CER folder will be established to store these records.

If a duplicate CER folder is inadvertently established, the case manager must ensure that the documents are consolidated into one folder, and the other folder is destroyed appropriately.

2. Reviewing the CER Folder Location

VR&E staff must first review the Beneficiary Identification and Records Locator Subsystem (BIRLS) before creating a new Veteran's CER folder to determine if any CER folders have already been created at another RO.

- (a) If a CER folder record does not currently exist in BIRLS, create a CER folder and enter the RO number, e.g. 372, for folder location.
- (b) If a CER folder record already exists in BIRLS and shows the record is located in another RO, request the CER file and update the record upon receipt of the Veteran's CER folder, to show the correct location of the CER folder.

For more information on using BIRLS, see M21-1, Part II, Chapter 6.

3. Filing Documents in CER Folders

The documents contained in a CER folder must be organized in the following manner:

(a) Left Side of the CER folder

The left side of the CER folder must include all supporting information related to eligibility and entitlement, fiscal authorizations, and payments, such as:

- VAF 28-1900, Disabled Veterans Application for Vocational Rehabilitation
- All Benefits Delivery Network (BDN) and Corporate-Waco, Indianapolis, Newark, Roanoke, Seattle (CWINRS) printouts including Generated Eligibility Determination (GED) processing, Disallowance processing, case status changes, folder location, etc.
- VAF 28-1905, Authorization and Certification of Entrance or Reentrance into Rehabilitation and Certification of Status
- VAF 28-1910, Application and Public Voucher for Advancement from the Vocational Rehabilitation Revolving Fund Assistance

- VAF 28-1923, Notice of Authorization of Subsistence Allowance
- VAF 28-1999b, Notice of Change in Student Status
- VAF 28-0175, Chapter 31 Change in Enrollment
- Subsistence allowance awards and related documents
- Documentation related to the direct or indirect payment of other Chapter 31 benefits to, or on behalf of the Veteran
- All documents related to change in the name or address of the Veteran
- All documents related to adding or removing the Veteran's dependents

(b) Center Portion of the CER Folder

The center portion of the CER folder must include all forms, form letters, and other documentation regarding case management activities related to monitoring the progress of the Veteran, such as:

- All forms in the VAF 28-1905 series, except VAF 28-1905, Authorization and Certification of Entrance or Reentrance Into Rehabilitation and Certification of Status
- All written and printed communication with the Veteran, such as letters and emails, concerning the Veteran's rehabilitation program
- All written and printed communication with school officials, contract service providers, etc., regarding the Veteran's progress
- The Veteran's report of grades and/or transcript of records
- Closure statement and checklist for rehabilitation or discontinuance

(c) Right Side of the CER folder

The right side of the CER folder must include all documentation that supports determinations for the Veteran's entitlement to benefits and services, such as:

- Copies of rating decisions
 - Medical information
 - Counseling and evaluation forms
 - Test results and reports of evaluative procedures
 - Copies of correspondence concerning counseling issues
 - Vocational Exploration narratives
 - Rehabilitation plans
 - All forms in the VAF 28-1902 series
- c. Assigning Jurisdiction for CER Folders
1. CER folders are maintained under the jurisdiction of the RO that has geographical responsibility for the area in which the Veteran resides.
 2. A CER folder will be transferred and reassigned to another RO who has jurisdiction over the area in which the Veteran is receiving services under a rehabilitation plan.
- d. Maintaining CER Folders
1. The case manager is responsible for maintaining, updating, and consolidating documents that are established locally in order to support provision of services.
 2. The case manager must file all related development materials neatly and in reverse chronological order in the CER folder. It is imperative that the CER folder does not contain any documentation for another Veteran or any other individual.
 3. The case manager must review the CER folder before filing documents to avoid duplication.
 4. The case manager must ensure that the Veteran's most up-to-date rehabilitation plan is filed on top at the right flap of the CER folder at all times.
- e. Maintaining Locked Files

Locked files are CER folders that contain records of a restricted nature. These folders must be maintained in a locked room or a locked cabinet. VA requires the maintenance of locked files in, or in close proximity to, the office of the VREO, or designee. The following identifies the Chapter 31 Veterans whose folders must be maintained in locked files:

1. A Veteran-employee is a Veteran employed by the RO having jurisdiction over the area in which he/she resides.
2. A service organization employee is a Veteran employed by a service organization within the RO having jurisdiction over the area in which the Veteran resides.
3. An employee-relative is a Veteran who is a relative of an employee within the RO having jurisdiction over the area in which the Veteran resides.
4. A work-study student is a Veteran participating in a work-study program and who is performing his/her work-study duties within the RO having jurisdiction over the area in which the Veteran resides.

The VREO or designee is the sole custodian and is responsible for the handling of all materials contained in the locked files. The responsibilities include recording when folders are charged in or out, releasing folders upon proper request, and safeguarding folders at all times. A charged-out CER folder must be returned to the locked files as soon as the necessary action(s) are completed.

f. Retiring CER Folders

CER folder retirement allows for storage of certain inactive folders at national archive centers. CER folders are generally kept at the RO for at least one year following closure of the case, to ensure availability of the folder in the event of an appeal or subsequent application, and to file correspondence that may arrive after the closure of the file. Folders of cases that have been inactive for over one year following assignment to Discontinued or Rehabilitated status may be retired.

1. Responsibility for Retiring a CER Folder

The VR&E Division is responsible for retiring CER folders. The guidelines for retiring CER folders are found in the Record Control Schedule (RCS) VB-1, Part I, Section VII, 07-630.010-07-630.016, dated November 4, 1997.

2. Locating a Retired CER Folder

To locate a retired CER folder, check the BIRLS inquiry (BINQ) locator screen in BDN to find which US National Archives and Federal Information Center the folder has been sent for safe-keeping.

g. Destroying CER Folders

CER folder destruction is necessary given the limited amount of storage space available at ROs and National Archives centers. CER folders are eligible for destruction 10 years after the date of last activity. CER folder destruction must be completed through pulping, macerating, shredding, or otherwise definitively destroying the information contained in the records.

1. Identifying CER Folders for Destruction

VA uses an Internet-based program to identify folders that are ready for destruction, the Web Automated Folder Processing System (WAFPS). To gain access to WAFPS, staff must complete VAF 20-8824e, Common Security Services Access Request Form, and submit it to their local Information Security Officer (ISO). See Appendix O, VA Forms for information on accessing VAFs. Users of WAFPS are notified via email when destruction lists are available for review.

2. Responsibility for CER Folder Destruction

It is the responsibility of the VREO to ensure that the CER folders identified on the WAFPS list meet the criteria for destruction, which is defined as no activity over the past 10 years. The CER folders are then presented to the Records Management Technician (RMT) for destruction.

2.05 VA Forms (VAFs)

a. Types of VAFs

Standard forms are used government-wide for a variety of programs and benefits. VA uses standardized forms to ensure continuity and consistency of information. Case managers must use VAFs to document the process and outcome of counseling, evaluation, case management activities, and actions when providing benefits and services. See Appendix O, VA Forms, for information on the location of and access to VAFs.

b. Creating and Revising VAFs

VR&E Service has responsibility for creation of new forms and revising or retiring existing forms as necessary.

c. Maintaining and Accessing Existing VAFs

VAFs are maintained in CWINRS. They can also be found in the VR&E Knowledge Management Portal (KMP) or the Electronic Performance Support System (EPSS), or online at www.va.gov/vaforms/search_action.asp.

d. Locally Developed Forms

MP-1, Part II, Chapter 4 and M23-1, Part I, Chapter 18 provide guidelines for the use of locally developed forms and overprinted VAFs.

e. Local Reproduction of VAFs

ROs may reproduce VAFs locally using copiers or computers. Locally generated forms must be VA-authorized forms.

2.06 VA Form Letters

Generally, VR&E discourages the use of form letters to reply to individual inquiries. However, if they are used, VR&E Service develops and provides them to VR&E offices. A case manager must not use form letters when a person requires personalized assistance.

a. Types of VA Form Letters

1. Standard VA form letters are used by the VR&E case manager to communicate in writing with Veterans, and other eligible persons, about a wide range of situations that arise in the course of their Vocational Rehabilitation program.
2. Locally generated form letters are developed by the RO for personalized situations that are not covered by a VA form letter.

b. Maintaining and Accessing Existing Form Letters

VA form letters may be accessed in CWINRS or the KMP.

c. Modifying VA Letters Locally

VR&E offices may modify letters to improve the recipient’s understanding of the content of the letter, or to meet local administrative needs. Letters may be modified to include reasons for a decision, an office address, directions to reach an office, the name of a case manager, and allowable amounts for payment of travel expenses.

See Appendix AF, VA Letters, for information on the location of and access to VA letters.

2.07 Testing and Testing Supplies

a. Responsibility for Testing Supplies

The VREO or a designee must ensure that sufficient quantities of test materials are available for counseling activities in the RO and its decentralized places of counseling. The VREO is not responsible for testing supplies used by contractors.

b. Securing Test Materials and Used Booklets

The VREO or designee must ensure that all test materials and used booklets are safeguarded. This can be accomplished in many ways, such as keeping the material in a secured room or in a locked cabinet.

c. Disposing of Worn or Unserviceable Test Materials

The VREO or designee must ensure that staff members follow VBA’s policy regarding the disposal of Veterans’ documents as outlined in M28R.II.A.2.12(e).

d. Testing Policies

1. Releasing Test Results

Test results for an identified Veteran must not be disclosed to a person other than one who normally uses the test results in connection with VR&E activities, such as a VA contract case manager or a mental health professional.

When necessary, VR&E staff must obtain a request in writing from the requesting party before releasing any test results.

Test results may be released when the release conforms to the provisions of Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Regulations found in CFR 1.500-1.527, and one of the conditions listed below:

- Release has been authorized in connection with a research project or study
- The counselee has given his/her written consent to release the information to individuals who may be expected to use such data in the counselee's best interest
- The release of test results falls under one of the routine uses of records permitted under the Privacy Act of 1974 and described in 58 VA 21, 22, 28, Compensation, Pension, Education and Rehabilitation Records-VA published in The Federal Register
- The release of test results falls under the agreement for the exchange of information with state and federal vocational rehabilitation agencies and state employment services

2. Authorizing Test Administration by Other Agencies

If a case manager determines that the Veteran needs testing that is administered by another agency, necessary arrangements will be made for testing. VA and any other institutions concerned should receive copies of the results. Other institutions may include colleges or universities that require test results to determine granting advanced credit or admission to a program. These tests include the following:

(a) GED Test High School Level

Each RO and guidance center should have a copy of the current edition of official GED centers.

(b) College Level Tests

On College Level Tests, such as College Level Examination Program (CLEP), only colleges and universities may award credit, and the decisions to grant credit based on CLEP are made by the individual institutions. Case managers must be familiar with the policies of the institutions of higher learning in their areas concerning granting of such advanced credit. Information regarding the institutions participating in CLEP in a particular geographic area may be obtained

from one of the College Entrance Examination Board (CEEB) regional offices.

(c) Special Admissions Tests

Special admissions tests may be paid for on behalf of the Veteran if the tests are necessary for the Veteran to gain admission to or determine placement into a program of study. When possible, the testing facility should invoice VR&E directly for the cost of special admission tests. However, reimbursement for test administration by other agencies can be made after the Veteran provides evidence of the date the examination was taken and evidence of payment of expenses, such as receipts for testing and fees.

3. Obtaining Prior Test Information From Outside Sources

Use of pertinent test results from other sources is desirable when there is reasonable assurance of their reliability. CEEB and American College Testing (ACT) scores can usually be secured from the high school transcript or from the counselee. Otherwise, scores may be requested from CEEB or ACT.

2.08 Occupational and Educational Information

a. Types of Occupational and Educational Information and Professional Publications

The list below describes the materials that must be made available to VR&E personnel:

1. Occupational Information Reference File

This file should include the Dictionary of Occupational Titles (DOT), the Occupational Information Network (O*NET), Occupational Outlook Handbook (OOH), and any other electronic resources for the purpose of career exploration, labor market trends, transferable skills analysis, and other career planning activities.

2. Professional Publications

Professional publications provide current information on the philosophy, theory, ethics, techniques, and developments in counseling, rehabilitation, and related areas, and may be used as source material for staff development.

3. Comprehensive Educational Information File

This file consists of educational directories and guides, financial aid publications, and school and college catalogs, especially from schools located in the area serviced by the RO. Most of these materials are available via the Internet.

b. Selecting Materials

VREOs must regularly and systematically select and procure publications that are required to meet local needs for counseling and rehabilitation training services, and the professional information needs of the VR&E staff. Selection of materials must be based on usefulness, authoritativeness, appropriateness, comprehensiveness, and currency.

c. Ordering Occupational and Educational Materials

The following provides the guidelines for ordering various types of occupational and educational materials:

1. Free materials, particularly occupational materials, may be ordered by submitting a request to the appropriate sources.
2. Materials that are not free, such as professional journals, books, and occupational information may be ordered through the Contracting Officer, or using a purchase card if the vendor accepts purchase cards, with the RO Director's approval.