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## Chapter 2. Description of Social Media

#### 1. Facebook

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| Introduction | This topic provides information on Facebook.  |

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| Change Date |  Revised August 2016 |

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| a. Background on Facebook  | VA has a presence on Facebook that includes content from all three administrations. VBA’s Facebook Page is <http://www.facebook.com/VeteransBenefits>.***Note:***  Facebook content can be replicated for use on Google+. VBA’s Google+ page is [https://plus.google.com/u/0/+VAVetBenefits](https://plus.google.com/u/0/%2BVAVetBenefits) |

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| b. Why We Need Facebook | Supported by the administration’s initiatives and public demand, the use of social media for Federal agencies has grown tremendously. As of 2016, Facebook currently has 1.6 billion active users. There are strong business drivers for VBA to improve its outreach strategy by utilizing Facebook. These drivers include the need to: * expand marketing of benefit programs and services via popular communication channels
* obtain real-time feedback on quality of benefit programs and services
* listen and react to a target audience’s needs and expectations
* rapidly provide up-to-date content, and
* announce/promote upcoming events.
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1. Facebook, Continued

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| c. Resources for Facebook | Each business line has a webmaster who maintains its public web presence. Although a few webmasters are subject matter experts (SME) in their respective business lines, many are not. These individuals often maintain their websites as a collateral duty and lack experience using social media tools. In order to maintain the integrity and continuity of VBA’s Facebook page, each business line must invest a minimum of one primary content owner who will regularly provide content for their respective business line. An alternate should serve as the primary’s backup. The number of content owners may depend on the volume of content a business line wants or needs to promote.Social networking sites thrive on dynamic content, therefore the business lines must devote the necessary man-hours to review comments and post timely responses. The time allotted for these activities should also include the concurrence process on content posted on Facebook. The content will be posted on a rotational basis. The content owner must have exceptional writing skills and expert knowledge of his or her service line’s benefits and services, to include outreach activities. The VBA We Communications Office will have oversight over the management of VBA’s Facebook page, which will include the authority to approve or disapprove content. The VBA Web Communications Office is responsible for posting the content on behalf of each line of business with the exception of the Education Service GI Bill Facebook page.  |

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| d. Facebook Content Maintenance | In order to maintain a successful Facebook page, content should be promoted in a manner appropriate to the social networking environment. The following list outlines the type of content needed and how it should be promoted on Facebook: |

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1. Facebook, Continued

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| d. Facebook Content Maintenance (continued) | * content must be dynamic: at a minimum, posted daily
* content must be fun (marketed as such), relevant to VBA’s audience, and should address the needs of the service line’s customers
* content must be of substantial value so that VBA customers return and invite their friends, and
* all comments should be reviewed. The content administrator is authorized to remove a comment that contains Personally Identifiable Information (PII), egregious or misrepresented information, or offensive language.

***Note:*** There is one caveat to the ability to remove comments VA deems inappropriate: Facebook will not be monitored 24/7; but will be monitored frequently during regular work hours and less frequently on weekends and holidays.  |
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| e. Facebook Content Approval Process | Each business line should develop a concurrence plan that includes a quick approval time for content posted on Facebook. The VBA Web Communications Office will need time to review and approve, edit or disapprove content, if necessary. The plan should also take into account the time needed to respond to comments, if needed.  |

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| f. Major Risks and Constraints of Using Facebook | The risks associated with the use of Facebook are minimal. They are as follows:* Facebook must be monitored frequently throughout the day to ensure inquiries are responded to, and
* managing Facebook timelines and posts can become overwhelming to anyone who is not a good time manager.
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| g. Facebook Privacy | There is no guarantee that social media sites will protect people’s privacy to the same degree that Federal agencies do. However, the option to remove any content VBA deems inappropriate, such as PII, is available. There is a caveat to this ability: the site cannot be monitored 24/7. A customized disclaimer is added to the Facebook page that discourages the public from providing PII. |

#### 2. Twitter

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| Introduction | This topic provides information on Twitter. |

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| a. Background on Twitter  | Twitter is the most popular web-based micro-blogging service. Each “Tweet” has a maximum character length of 140. A growing number of Federal agencies are using Twitter to keep citizens informed. VBA’s Twitter page is <http://twitter.com/VAVetBenefits>. |

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| b. Why We Need Twitter | There is a business need for VBA to use Twitter. This social media venue will help VBA to: * send regularly updated content (“Tweets”) to multiple people
* announce upcoming events (outreach activities and news releases)
* send real-time alerts about emergencies (Continuity of Operations Tool), and
* attract new audiences for information and services. (Followers can send VBA’s Tweets to their friends by “retweeting”.)

Those who use Twitter can follow VBA’s feed and set alerts for instant notifications.  |

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2. Twitter, Continued

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| c. Resources for Twitter | Tweets are expected to be conversational, and VBA will need to invest the resources required to actively maintain such a dialogue. Each business line must invest a minimum of one primary content owner who will regularly provide content for their respective business line. An alternate should serve as the primary’s backup. The VBA Web Communications Office will have oversight over the management of VBA’s Twitter page, which will include the authority to approve or disapprove content. The VBA Web Communications Office will be responsible for posting the content on behalf of each line of business.As is the case with Facebook, the content owner must have exceptional writing skills and expert knowledge of his or her service line’s benefits and services, including outreach activities. Due to Twitter’s limited character length, the content owner must be skilled at writing content specifically for Twitter. This individual should be familiar with the environment in which Twitter is used and know how to market content using the limited character space available. Tweets employ a sort of shorthand notation and slang that the content owner should be familiar with and use to gain and retain followers. |

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| d. Twitter Content Maintenance | In order to ensure VBA’s stakeholders are provided with the best social networking experience, the following guidelines should be observed:* good descriptions and links must be tailored to Twitter’s character limitations: content must not be too long or too short in a Twitter post
* content must not be a regurgitation of press releases
* content owners must recognize when to repost valuable tidbits of information
* content owners need the ability to recognize when to use text tweets, image tweets, or video tweets as appropriate, and
* content owners should snip (or shorten) the URL if one is referenced in the Tweet.

Most importantly, the content should be eye-catching, fun, engaging, and useful enough to become viral. |

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2. Twitter, Continued

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| e. Twitter Content Approval Process | Each business line should develop a concurrence plan that includes a quick approval time for content posted on Twitter. The VBA Web Communications Office will ultimately review, edit, and approve or disapprove content.  |

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| f. Major Risks and Constraints of Using Twitter | The risks associated with the use of Twitter are minimal. Managing Twitter timelines and posts can become overwhelming to anyone who is not a good time manager.  |

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| g. Twitter Privacy | Twitter collects PII and does share that information with third parties. Users who subscribe to Twitter should be aware of this and the agreed Terms Of Service.  |

#### 3. Pinterest

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| Introduction | This topic provides information on Pinterest. |

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| Change Date |  August 2016 |

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| a. Background on Pinterest  | Pinterest is a popular web and mobile based photo sharing social platform. A growing number of Federal agencies are using Pinterest to share content with customers. VBA’s Pinterest page is https://www.pinterest.com/VAVetBenefits/ |

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| b. Why We Need Pinterest | There is a business need for VBA to use Pinterest. This social media venue will help VBA to: * send regularly updated content (“Pins”) to multiple people
* attract new audiences for information and services. (Followers can share our “Pins” with their friends by “repinning”.)
* increase our outreach to women who comprise 70% of users

Those who use Pinterest can follow us and view our boards. |

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3. Pinterest, Continued

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| c. Resources for Pinterest | Pins are visual in nature and include captions complimenting the image. Each business line must invest a minimum of one primary content owner who will regularly provide content for their respective business line. An alternate should serve as the primary’s backup. The VBA Web Communications Office will have oversight over the management of VBA’s Pinterest page, which will include the authority to approve or disapprove content. The VBA Web Communications Office will be responsible for posting the content on behalf of each line of business.As is the case with other social media platforms, the content owner must have exceptional writing skills and expert knowledge of his or her service line’s benefits and services, including outreach activities. Due to Pinterest’s visual nature, high quality images or links are expected with any submissions.  |

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| d. Pinterest Content Maintenance | In order to ensure VBA’s stakeholders are provided with the best social networking experience, the following guidelines should be observed:* content must include quality images
* content must be fun (marketed as such), relevant to VBA’s audience, and should address the needs of the service line’s customers, and
* content must be of substantial value so that VBA customers return and invite their friends,

Most importantly, the content should be eye-catching, fun, engaging, and useful enough to become viral. |

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3. Pinterest, Continued

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| e. Pinterest Content Approval Process | Each business line should develop a concurrence plan that includes a quick approval time for content posted on Pinterest. The VBA Web Communications Office will ultimately review, edit, and approve or disapprove content.  |

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| f. Major Risks and Constraints of Using Pinterest | The risks associated with the use of Pinterest are minimal. Managing Pinterest pins and boards can become overwhelming to anyone who is not a good time manager.  |

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| g. Pinterest Privacy | Pinterest collects PII and does share that information with third parties. Pinterest users should be aware of this and the agreed Terms Of Service.  |

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#### 4. Instagram

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| Introduction | This topic provides information on Instagram. |

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| Change Date |  August 2016 |

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| a. Background on Instagram  | Instagram is a popular mobile based photo and video sharing social platform. A growing number of Federal agencies are using Instagram to share content with customers. VBA’s Instagram page is https://www.instagram.com/vabenefits/ |

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| b. Why We Need Instagram | There is a business need for VBA to use Instagram. This social media venue will help VBA to: * send regularly updated photos and videos to multiple followers
* attract new audiences for information and services. (Followers can share our content with their friends by “tagging” or sharing)
* keep up with increasing mobile-only based users

Those who use Instagram can follow us and view our content. |

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4. Instagram, Continued

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| c. Resources for Instagram | Photos and videos are visual in nature and include captions complimenting the image. Each business line must invest a minimum of one primary content owner who will regularly provide content for their respective business line. An alternate should serve as the primary’s backup. The VBA Web Communications Office will have oversight over the management of VBA’s Instagram page, which will include the authority to approve, edit, or disapprove content. VBA Web Communications will be responsible for posting the content on behalf of each line of business.As is the case with other social media platforms, the content owner must have exceptional writing skills and expert knowledge of his or her service line’s benefits and services, including outreach activities. Due to Instagram’s visual nature, high quality images or videos are expected with any submissions.  |

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| d. Instagram Content Maintenance | In order to ensure VBA’s stakeholders are provided with the best social networking experience, the following guidelines should be observed:* content must include quality images or videos
* content must be fun (marketed as such), relevant to VBA’s audience, and should address the needs of the service line’s customers, and
* content must be of substantial value so that VBA customers return and invite their friends,

Most importantly, the content should be eye-catching, fun, engaging, and useful enough to become viral. |

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4. Instagram, Continued

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| e. Instagram Content Approval Process | Each business line should develop a concurrence plan that includes a quick approval time for content posted on Instagram. The VBA Web Communications Office will ultimately review, edit, and approve or disapprove content.  |

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| f. Major Risks and Constraints of Using Instagram | The risks associated with the use of Instagram are minimal. Managing Instagram content can become overwhelming to anyone who is not a good time manager.  |

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| g. Instagram Privacy | Instagram collects PII and does share that information with third parties. Instagram users should be aware of this and the agreed Terms Of Service.  |

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