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## Chapter 3. Inquiry Routing and Information System (IRIS)

#### 1. IRIS Policy and Procedures

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| Introduction | This topic contains information on Inquiry Routing and Information System (IRIS) policy and procedures, including:   * background on the IRIS function * definitions of terms that apply to IRIS * request new or reactivate disabled user account * the use of e-mail responses for development purposes * the differences between e-mail, IRIS, and hard-copy letters * determining which type of response to use, and * responding as the inquirer requested. |

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| a. Background on IRIS Function | The Inquiry Routing and Information System (IRIS) is the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Internet-based, public inquiry management system. All electronic inquiries received from the public through VA Internet web sites will be directed to IRIS.  IRIS provides VA customers with secure communication of personal data, should they voluntarily choose to send it to VA. |

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| b. Definitions of Terms That Apply to IRIS | The following definitions apply to IRIS:   * ***Inquiry***:A question, complaint, suggestion or other communication submitted to VA from a Veteran, claimant, beneficiary, or other member of the public. * ***Message***: The term ***message,*** as used in IRIS, includes all types of electronic messages that VA receives from the public and is synonymous with “correspondence.” * ***Group***: Departmental Stations responsible to respond to IRIS inquiries relating to topics associated with their area of responsibility. * ***Responder***:A VA employee assigned to review and respond to IRIS inquiries. * ***Inquirer***:A Veteran, claimant, beneficiary, or other member of the public, who uses IRIS to convey a question, complaint, compliment, suggestion or status of claim or appeal request, or other communication submitted to VA. * ***Veterans Assistance Inquiry (VAI)***: A VAI is an annotation placed in the Subject field of an inquiry that is used to record and controls an unresolved issue for a follow-up action subsequent to a personal contact (such as a telephone call or personal interview) with a member of the public. ***Note***: IRIS is used to create and control VAIs. |

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| c. Request access for new user, reactive a disabled user, or remove a user | To request access for a new user, reactivate a disabled user, or remove a user, a supervisor or coach will send the following information to the VA IRIS System Administrator Group (SAG) ([vairissysadmin@med.va.gov)](file:///C:\Users\BASMSWEE\Desktop\M27\vairissysadmin@med.va.gov)):   * Name of new or reactivated user * Email address of new or reactivated user * Group to which the new or reactivated user will be added * Date user needs to be active (optional)   A member of the VA SAG will establish/ reactivate an account either within 1 business day or according to the date provided. Once the account has been established/ reactivated, the user will receive two notification emails: a welcome email which will include instructions for the IRIS interface and a ListServ notification which will inform the new user or reactivated a user that has been added to the ListServ Announcement list. When sending an email either to add, reactive a disabled user or remove a user, in the subject line indicate either the request is to add, reactivate or remove as appropriate. |

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| d. Use of E-Mail Responses for Development Purposes | Any inquirer response by e-mail shall be considered an “official” response and shall be processed following the steps as indicated below:   |  |  | | --- | --- | | Step | Action | | **1** | Review inquiry to determine if it is in response to a developmental request. | | **2** | Respond to the inquiry. | | **3** | Upload a copy of the inquiry and the response, if delivered via letter, into the appropriate eFolder. | | **4** | Provide a copy to the claimant’s POA (if applicable). | | **5** | Forward the inquiry and response to the appropriate Service Center team for action. | | **6** | Document all actions in Internal Notes in IRIS and the system of records. |     ***Note***: If the power of attorney (POA) is sent a copy of the response via email, document this in Internal Notes in IRIS and the system of records. |

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| e. Differences between IRIS and VA letterhead responses | Generally speaking, IRIS responses are less formal than responses prepared on VA letterhead.  Responses to electronic inquiries are typically shorter and do not have the “feel” of a traditional letter sent through the U.S. mail. |

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| f. Determining Which Type of Response to Use | The inquirer will indicate how he/she would like to receive his/her response. The inquirer chooses one of three response types:   * a hardcopy letter sent through U.S. mail * a telephone call * an electronic response via email (IRIS). |

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| g. Responding as the Inquirer Requested | Every effort should be made to ensure that you respond to the inquirer as he/she requested.  There are circumstances, however, where you may not be able to respond as requested. When that occurs, proceed as follows:   * If the inquirer has requested a phone response, but cannot be reached by phone, leave a simple voice mail message that you attempted a call and will call back once more. After two failed attempts to contact the inquirer via telephone, close the IRIS as solved and annotate a private note, unable to contact with the specific dates and times indicated. *Do not leave any personal information on the voice mail*. * If there is no way to reach the inquirer electronically or by phone, respond via US Mail on VA letterhead and annotate the content of the letter in an internal note.   NOTE: After responding to the inquirer, enter an Internal Note into IRIS and document the actions taken in the system of records and upload a copy of the inquiry and any letters generated into the appropriate eFolder. |

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#### 2. IRIS Responses

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| Introduction | This topic contains information on IRIS responses, including:   * IRIS links * general steps for responding * preparing the response * IRIS referrals * repetitive mail closing * signature block * attachments |

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| a. IRIS Links | For more specific information on the use of the IRIS system and preparation of responses see:   * [IRIS Responder Instructions: Legacy Console](http://vaww.va.gov/IRISINFO/docs/RespondingToInquiriesWithXRefFunctionality.pdf) * [Responding to Inquiries: Standard Console](http://vaww.va.gov/IRISINFO/docs/Providing-Inquiry-Support-Standard-Console.pdf) * [Using Standard Texts](http://vaww.va.gov/IRISINFO/docs/Using-Standard-Texts.pdf) |

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| b. General Steps for Responding | Below are the general steps to follow when responding to an IRIS inquiry.   |  |  | | --- | --- | | Step | Action | | **1** | Open the inquiry and read the inquiry content. | | **2** | Determine if the inquiry is correctly assigned to you and your group. If not, re-assign to the correct group. You may also need to change the Topic/Subtopic to something more in line to what the inquirer is asking about. Include a note as to why the inquiry is being reassigned. After correcting these selections, click Save and Close. | | **3** | If you determine that the inquiry is correctly yours, locate the information needed from any collateral sources to be able to respond. | | **4** | Check the response method preferred by the inquirer. | | **5** | Respond to the inquiry. | | **6** | Take credit for the action via EP 400 *Correspondence* | | **7** | Enter a note into the inquiry and the system of records outlining the actions taken and the response provided to the inquirer | | **8** | Upload a copy of the inquiry and the response, if delivered via letter, into the eFolder. | |

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#### 2. IRIS Responses, Continued

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| c. Preparing the Response | Follow the steps in the table below to ensure a high quality, professional response.   |  |  | | --- | --- | | Step | Action | | **1** | Use an appropriate salutation. | | **2** | Have information and/or notes for response ready and use, if appropriate, an overview sentence. | | **3** | Consider using headings within the response. | | **4** | Use the mandatory closing paragraph and signature block. | | **5** | Edit the response. | | **6** | Proofread the response. Ensure response adequately addresses all aspects of the inquiry and provides accurate information | |

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| d. IRIS Referralse. Repetitive Mail Closing | Most IRIS inquiries submitted by the public related to Compensation, Pension, Survivors Benefits, and Appeals go directly to the National IRIS Response Center (NIRC) for a response. Most of these inquiries are routine in nature and can be handled by the NIRC staff without external assistance.  If the NIRC lacks sufficient information to properly respond to the IRIS inquiry, the NIRC must request the information from the Veterans Service Center (VSC) of jurisdiction via an NIRC referral. Once this information is received from the VSC, the NIRC prepares and releases the response and closes the IRIS inquiry.  \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  These inquiries occur when an inquirer repeatedly submits inquiries on the same issue over a prolonged period of time, all of which have been responded to correctly. The following should be sent to the inquirer:  “We have appropriately responded to your other requests for this same information. Therefore, we must discontinue any further responses to you regarding this issue.” If inquiries continue, the responder may, with the approval of leadership/supervisor, enter a Private Note on the inquiry that includes the following statement:  “This issue has been addressed on this contact’s previous inquiries.  Since no additional information pertaining to this issue is available, we are closing this inquiry without a response.”  Then change the status to ‘Solved’. |

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| f. Signature Block | Regardless of the source of the letter, all outgoing correspondence will show the following signature line:  RO Director  VA Regional Office  The signature must match the font in the last paragraph of the letter.  NOTE: Ensure if the inquirer has elected a Power of Attorney (POA) that they receive a courtesy copy (cc) and that they are noted as a recipient in the response. |

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| g. Attachments | If attachments are being sent with the *response*, the attachment should be noted in the body of the inquiry and in the closing block. Attachments should not contain Personally Identifiable Information; most often attachments are blank forms or electronic brochures.  You may provide web links within the body of the response or they may be included in the attachment. It is not required to provide web links in both locations.  ***Note***: Inquirers cannot send attachments in IRIS. |  |

3. Timeliness Standard for Responses and Reports

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| Introduction | This topic provides the timeliness standard for responding to IRIS inquiries. |

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| a. Timeliness Standard for IRIS Responses | The timeliness standard for responding to IRIS inquiries is five business days, starting the business day after the receipt of the inquiry as recommended by the Office of the Inspector General. If we cannot provide a reply with a complete response within the five business day, an interim response is required.  This standard is automatically programmed into the IRIS application. |

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| b. IRIS Reports | BAS will provide a weekly report that will be distributed to field stations through the Office of Field Operations (OFO). Field stations must take immediate action to address any outstanding inquiries that exceed VBA’s business standard of 5 business days for a response.  BAS will actively monitor inquiry response timeliness and will coordinate through OFO to identify and notify stations that may require additional actions to address outstanding inquiries.  Reports for all groups can be accessed through the IRIS Oracle Service Cloud by going to Reports Explorer. The following link will explain what reports are assessable for your use: <http://vaww.va.gov/IRISINFO/docs/Reports-Explorer-Folders.pdf> |

#### 4. IRIS Security

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| Introduction | This topic contains information on IRIS security, including:   * a general description of IRIS security, * IRIS security concerns, and * the use of passwords in IRIS. |

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| a. General Description of IRIS Security | IRIS is a secure application. The application resides on a secure server behind a firewall. When an inquirer or a VA responder connects to IRIS, an encrypted connection is established.  Inquiries and responses are retained in a database on the IRIS server and are not deleted. |

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| b. IRIS Security Concerns | When a response is provided via the IRIS system, an e-mail message is sent to the inquirer that a response is waiting to be read. The IRIS e-mail message contains no personal information, only a link back to the VA response in the database.  Privacy becomes an issue if a person other than the sender has access to the sender’s e-mail, giving that person access to the sender’s personal information. |

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| c. Use of Passwords in IRIS | Most internal IRIS users utilize Single Sign On (SSO) to log in using PIV cards. There are some groups in the IRIS who continue to use specifically issued usernames and passwords due to the way the account is set up in IRIS. Persons with more than one account will have one account set up with SSO and the others will have system-specific passwords issued by the VA IRIS System Admin group.  Established users who fail to log in on a regular basis will have their access automatically disabled in 45 days; they will receive a warning notice two weeks ahead of the disabling activity and a second one when the disabling has occurred. New users must log in within 30 days; if they fail to log in at least once in the initial 30 day period, they will receive a two week warning notice and a final notice of disabling at the 30 day threshold and then their account will be automatically disabled. |

#### 5. Reporting Work Credit

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| Introduction | This topic provides guidance and information on reporting requirements for work credit, including:   * reporting work credit * IRIS referrals, and * work credit for IRIS referrals |

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| a. Reporting Work Credit | VSCs must use End Product (EP) 400 to record work credit for their responses to IRIS inquiries. Upon providing the requested information to the IRC or to the inquirer, the VSC will immediately clear an EP 400 for that inquiry. |
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#### 6. IRIS-Related References

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| Introduction | This topic provides reference and material relative to the IRIS program. |

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| a. IRIS Related References | Reference information and material relative to the IRIS program is provided below:  [IRIS Instruction Guides](http://vaww.va.gov/irisinfo/irisguides.asp)   * General Information * System Installation & Setup Details * Policies & Procedures * Knowledge Base Answers * Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) * Issues & troubleshooting * Analytics & Reports * Training Information |
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