

**National Archives and Records Administration
Plan to Eliminate Records Backlog at the National Personnel Records Center
Update May 25, 2023**

This update responds to language in section 5301 of the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023 (P.L. 117-263):

(2) UPDATES.—Not later than 90 days after the date on which the comprehensive plan is submitted under paragraph (1), and biannually thereafter until the response rate by the National Personnel Records Center reaches 90 percent of all requests in 20 days or less, not including any request involving a record damaged or lost in the National Personnel Records Center fire of 1973 or any request that is subject to a fee that has not been paid in a timely manner by the requestor (provided the National Personnel Records Center issues an invoice within 20 days after the date on which the request is made), the Archivist of the United States shall submit to the appropriate congressional committees an update of such plan that—

- (A) describes progress made by the National Personnel Records Center during the preceding 90-day period with respect to record request backlog reduction and efficiency and responsiveness improvement;
- (B) provides data on progress made toward the goals identified in the comprehensive plan; and
- (C) describes any changes made to the comprehensive plan.

Background

The National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) located in St. Louis, MO, is a part of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA). The NPRC stores and provides access to more than 2 million cubic feet of records documenting U.S. military service of American veterans of all branches of service. Each year, the NPRC responds to around 1.1 million requests for military service records from veterans and their families, or more than 4,000 requests per workday. The majority of NPRC records are only available in hard copy and can only be accessed in person, by NARA staff.

During the first two years of the pandemic, NARA accumulated a large backlog of unanswered requests for military service records. NPRC never fully closed during the pandemic; however, on-site production was significantly curtailed due to quarantines and on-site staffing limits that were imposed to protect staff from COVID-19. Throughout the pandemic, NPRC staff continued to work on-site to service its most urgent requests, such as those involving burials for deceased veterans, medical emergencies, and homeless veterans seeking shelter. The NPRC maximized its on-site operations within occupancy limits by adding second and third work shifts, adding shifts on Saturdays and Sundays, and standing up additional locations to maximize output while maintaining safe levels of onsite staffing during the pandemic.

A. Describes progress made by the National Personnel Records Center during the preceding 90-day period with respect to record request backlog reduction and efficiency and responsiveness improvement;

As of May 13, 2023, the backlog of unanswered, *overdue* records requests was approximately 285,000. This number is the count of requests that have not been responded to within the 20

workday response period. This number excludes requests received within the past 20 workdays. Since NARA’s initial report to Congress in February 2023, NARA has received approximately 325,000 new records requests and responded to nearly 375,000 requests, reducing the backlog by more than 50,000.

The NPRC has already eliminated the backlog of requests for separation documents (DD Form 214 or equivalent) and returned to its pre-pandemic level of servicing more than 90% of these requests within 20 days or less. DD 214 requests represent approximately 60 percent of all requests received and are most often needed by veterans and their dependents to prove eligibility for military and veterans’ benefits. NPRC prioritizes these requests ahead of all other requests for military service records.

The remaining backlog is made up of requests for records *other than DD 214s*. “Other” requests are more complex than DD 214 requests and normally require extensive redaction of third-party personal data or substantial research of secondary sources in order to collect responsive information. This category also includes requests which require the reconstruction of records lost in the [1973 fire](#). Due to this complexity, these requests take longer to service when compared to DD 214 requests.

B. Provides data on progress made toward the goals identified in the comprehensive plan

The table below reflects our milestones and targets for reducing and eventually eliminating the backlog of other requests.

	Backlog	Target Date
Initial Report	338,000	February 2023
Current	285,000	May 2023
25% Reduction	253,500	July 2023
50% Reduction	169,000	September 2023
75% Reduction	84,500	October 2023
Backlog Eliminated	0	December 2, 2023

The volume of new requests being submitted to NPRC is higher than previously experienced and projected. NARA is continuing to expand capacity with additional staff and contractor support and continues to estimate that the backlog of other requests will be eliminated by December 2, 2023. However, if the increase in demand is sustained throughout the year or continues to grow, we may have to reassess this target at a later date.

C. Describes any changes made to the comprehensive plan.

The comprehensive plan submitted in February, 2023 remains current, without change.