

**National Archives and Records Administration
Plan to Eliminate Records Backlog at the National Personnel Records Center
Update May 25, 2024**

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 days with respect to record request backlog reduction and efficiency and responsiveness improvement;

As of January 22, 2024 the backlog of unanswered, overdue records requests that accumulated due to the pandemic was eliminated. Furthermore, despite absorbing a significant increase in the

volume of new requests submitted to NPRC, it has continued to achieve the performance standard required in the FY 2023 NDAA, specifically to service more than 90% of all requests in 20 workdays 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.

Routine requests for separation documents (DD Form 214 or equivalent) represent approximately 60% of all requests received and are most often needed by veterans and their dependents to prove eligibility for veterans’ benefits. NPRC prioritizes these requests ahead of other requests for military service records and is currently servicing 97% of these requests in less than ten workdays, with an average response time of 4.2 workdays.

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

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

	Backlog	Target Date
Initial Report	338,000	February 2023
25% Reduction	253,500	July 2023
50% Reduction	169,000	September 2023
75% Reduction	84,500	October 2023
Backlog Eliminated	0	January 2024
Current	0	May 2024

During FY 2023, NPRC received an average of 24,500 requests per week, which is a significant increase from its pre-pandemic average of 21,000 weekly requests. NPRC is experiencing further increases in demand during FY 2024; currently receiving more than 30,000 new requests each week. We attribute the increase to improvements made to NARA’s eVetRecs system which make it easier for veterans to submit new requests, and to recently enacted legislation (Honoring Our Pact Act and Camp Lejeune Justice Act) that expands veterans’ rights and benefits.

Despite this significant increase in demand, there has been no backlog re-growth. NPRC is receiving and servicing more than 30,000 new requests each week and achieving the performance standard required in the FY 2023 NDAA. New requests are assigned to technicians immediately upon receipt and NPRC’s work in process inventory is lower today than it was before the pandemic.

C. Describes any changes made to the comprehensive plan.

Due to the increase in the volume of new requests received by NPRC, the backlog elimination was achieved in January 2024 instead of December 2023. No other changes were made to the comprehensive plan.