

**National Archives and Records Administration
Plan to Eliminate Records Backlog at the National Personnel Records Center
Update November 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% 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 November 20, 2023, the backlog of unanswered, *overdue* records requests was approximately 70,000. 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 most recent report to Congress in May 2023, NARA has reduced its backlog by 215,000 requests, despite receiving 645,000 new requests during this period.

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% 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

As of November 20, 2023, the total number of overdue, unanswered requests for military service records was approximately 70,000. This is the number of requests that have not been responded to within the 20 work day deadline. This is a reduction of 88% from the peak number of unanswered requests of 604,000 in March 2022. The NPRC achieved this backlog reduction while continuing to receive an average of more than 5,000 new records requests each day. In FY 2023, the NPRC responded to more than 1.5 million requests for military service records, including both new and backlogged requests. This is the largest number of requests the NPRC has ever completed in a single year. The NPRC is currently servicing more than 36,000 requests per week.

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
25% Reduction	253,500	July 2023
50% Reduction	169,000	September 2023
75% Reduction	84,500	October 2023
Current	70,000	November, 2023
Backlog Eliminated	0	January, 2024

In FY 2023, NPRC received an average of 24,500 requests per week, which is a significant increase from our pre-pandemic average of 21,000 weekly requests. This represents an increase of 182,000 requests for the year over our typical annual receipts. 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.

While NPRC is making great progress on its backlog, the absorption of this significant increase in new receipts has somewhat slowed our effort to address older requests. NARA is continuing to expand capacity with additional staff and contractor support and estimates that the backlog of other requests will be eliminated in approximately ten weeks.

C. Describes any changes made to the comprehensive plan.

The comprehensive plan submitted in February 2023 remains current, but due to the increase in the volume of new requests received by NPRC, the projected backlog elimination date has moved from December 2023 to January 2024.