Veteran Re-Entry Search Service (VRSS) FAQs

1. What is VRSS?

VRSS stands for Veterans Re-entry Search Service, and is designed to:

- Identify and find inmates/offenders in criminal justice agencies who have served in the U.S. military, and, once identified

- Enable VA Justice Outreach Specialists and criminal justice agencies to assist Veterans in obtaining outreach services while incarcerated and, once released and in the community, assistance in obtaining access to VA services and benefits and community services as they reenter the community

2. How does it work?

VRSS is an online tool that enables participating correctional facilities (prisons, jails, etc.) and court systems to upload a list of current inmates or defendants, which are then checked behind VA's computer firewall against records of U.S. military service in the VA-DoD Identity Repository (VADIR), a frequently updated copy of the military's *Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System*. A list of identified Veterans will be posted to the VRSS web portal, from which authorized Correctional Facility/Court System staff and VA Veterans Justice Programs (VJP) specialists can download it in order to conduct appropriate outreach prior to or after release from incarceration.

3. Do participating facilities receive compensation for the work and staffing required to implement, use, and manage VRSS?

Although monetary compensation is not awarded to participating facilities, VRSS is intended to provide valuable information about the user's inmate or defendant population that can prompt outreach by VA and potentially inform the user's provision of services/programming.

4. Is there a test environment? Do I have to run a test file?

No, VRSS does not have a test environment, and there is no need to run a test file before submitting your data. After submitting your file, you will receive an auto-generated message indicating whether VRSS has accepted or rejected your file. If your file was rejected, the message will identify the errors by row number and explain any changes needed.

5. What information is included in my results file?

Prisoner IDs of inmates for whom VRSS found record of military service. These appear in a single column in the VRSS results file. No names or other identifying information can be included, because VA cannot release this information without Veterans' permission. The results file returned to VJP Specialists contains more detailed information, which they use to inform their outreach.

6. Is every individual identified in the return file eligible for VA health care and benefits?

Not necessarily. Eligibility for VA health care and other benefits can only be established when a Veteran enrolls with VA for such services. VJP Specialists can assist Veterans with the enrollment process, but cannot determine their eligibility for VA services.

7. Which inmates or defendants should I include in my VRSS submission?

All client records should be submitted. The service is intended to help identify Veterans not known through self-reporting.

8. How often are VRSS users required to upload a file?

Currently there is no required upload frequency; users may upload files on whatever schedule they deem appropriate, given the characteristics of their facilities and populations. Because of the rapid changes in jail populations, many jail users upload a file daily to gain the maximum benefit from the system. Prison users and facilities with lower turnover rates tend to upload less frequently; once a month is common. In any case, it is important to talk with your VJP specialist to ensure you both are on the same page in terms of anticipated upload and outreach frequency.

9. Who is my Veterans Justice Program (VJP) Outreach Specialist? (Note: also referred to as VA or VHA Outreach workers or staff)

Prisons: If you want to find who the VJP Specialist is for your prison, there is a listing on the following website: Healthcare for Re-entry Veterans (outreach - state and federal prisons): http://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/Reentry.asp

Jails/Courts: If you want to find who the VJP Specialist is for your jail or court, there is a listing on the following website: Veterans Justice Outreach (outreach - law enforcement, jails, courts): http://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/VJO.asp

If you cannot not locate your VJP, please contact Sean Clark, National Coordinator, Veterans Justice Outreach, VHA at (859) 233-4511 ext. 3188.

10. What is the VA's assurance for use, confidentiality, and security of data from justice agencies? (Also posted on the website):

Below is an excerpt from the Veterans Re-entry Search Service (VRSS) - Terms and Conditions of Use:

VA makes the following assurances about its use and handling of such data pertaining to individuals who are entered into the system:

1. Data Protection and System Security: VA will protect PII on the VRSS in accordance with all applicable federal laws and regulations, VA policies and procedures, and National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) requirements and guidelines, including, but not limited to, the Privacy Act (5 U.S.C. � 552a), the Federal Information Security Management Act of 2002 (FISMA, 44 U.S.C. �� 3541-49), 38 U.S.C. � 5701, and VA Directive and Handbook 6500.

2. Breach Notification. VA complies with federal statutes and regulations in reporting data breach and loss of PII, in particular 38 U.S.C. �� 5721-27.

3. Administrative Safeguards. VA will restrict access to the data transmitted to it via this Web site to only those authorized employees and officials who need it to perform their official duties in connection with the uses of the information described above.

4. Limited Use. VA will use data transmitted to it via this Web site to identify individuals for whom it has a record of military service, and for no other purpose. VA will not use the information in any determination of benefits nor will the PII be added to a Privacy Act system of records.

5. Disposition of Data. VA may retain data pertaining to your use of the VRSS for lawful purposes, such as to perform tests and to conduct and facilitate audits of the use of the VRSS portal.

VA will dispose of PII and data pertaining to your use of the VRSS portal in accordance with NARA approved records control schedules."

Note: If additional information is needed on data security, this can be obtained by contacting: Sean Clark, National Coordinator, Veterans Justice Outreach, VHA at (859) 233-4511 ext. 3188.

11. What data is needed from a prison, court, or jail, when uploading a list of inmates or defendants, and in what format?

Files uploaded to VRSS must be in comma-separated value (CSV) format and contain fourteen (14) distinct fields, listed below in *Table 1*. Seven (7) of these fields contain individual-specific information, five (5) contain information about the correctional facility or court, and two (2) concern the individual's parole date and anticipated release or court hearing date (if applicable). Court users: Please note under "Description/Notes" where data modifications for court systems are appropriate.

*Table 1 – Field Names and Descriptions (*Required)*

Field Name	Description/Notes
*FirstName	First Name of all incarcerated or charged individuals in your facility
MiddleName	Middle Name of all incarcerated or charged individuals in your facility
*LastName	Last Name of all incarcerated or charged individuals in your facility
SuffixName	Suffix Name of all incarcerated or charged individuals in your facility
*SSN	Social Security Number of all incarcerated or charged individuals in your facility
DateOfBirth	Date of Birth of all incarcerated or charged individuals in your facility
Gender	Gender of all incarcerated or charged individuals in your facility
*Prisoner/DefendantIDNumber	Unique Prisoner ID or Defendant ID numbers for all incarcerated or charged individuals in your facility
CellLocation	Cell Location identifier for your facility
*Facility/CourtName	Facility or Court Name for your location Note: If this information is stored in acronym format, it is ok to use acronyms as VHA Specialists will be able to identify appropriate acronyms as required
Facility/CourtZIP	Zip Code within which your Facility or Court resides
*Facility/CourtState	State within which your Facility or Court resides
ParoleDate	Parole Date of all incarcerated or charged individuals in your facility
Release/HearingDate	Actual or projected release date for incarcerated individuals or hearing date for charged individuals

Important Note: Records for individuals in Halfway Homes and Work Release Centers should be included in the upload as they are considered part of the current incarcerated Veterans outreach initiative.

Prisoner/DefendantIDNumber is particularly essential, as the CF/CS Output File sent back to the facility will contain only Prisoner/Defendant ID numbers. The Prisoner/DefendantIDNumber is unique to each facility.

- The return file for the Correctional or Court System user that originally uploads the file will only contain the ID numbers that were identified as Veteran records; no personal identification information will be included with the numbers.

- The return file that is sent to the VJP specialist for that facility will include more detailed information about the client in order to facilitate outreach and support activities.

12. How should I handle blank fields when I'm building my submission file?

Missing or incomplete data will reduce the quality of results produced by VRSS; the more complete the data entries for each individual, the greater the likelihood of successful identification. The fields indicated below are required to enable accurate queries. If required-field data are not available for an inmate/defendant, he/she should be deleted from the file as this will cause VRSS to reject the entire file:

- FirstName

- LastName

- SSN (Social Security Number)

- Prisoner/DefendantIDNumber

- Facility/CourtName

- Facility/CourtState

Additionally, the following standards should be adhered to in regard to missing data:

- Instead of using zeros ("0"s) for missing data, leave the field blank (note that this does not apply to required fields)Blanks should be right-padded (i.e., blanks should come after, not before, any data entered)

Please see the File Format Specifications Document for the detailed requirements for the VRSS submission file

13. The inmate's record has multiple SSNs associated with it in our system. What should I do?

Include multiple records for that inmate in your submission, each one identical except for the SSN. This approach provides the best chance of finding an inmate's record of military service if there is one. Note that the entry in the results file will be limited to the inmate's Prisoner ID number only; VRSS cannot confirm which of the inmate's multiple SSNs yielded the hit.

14. The inmate's record does not have an SSN (or has only a partial SSN) associated with it in our system. What should I do?

Please only include records with a complete SSN. A blank or partially-complete SSN field will cause VRSS to reject the entire file.

15.Is there an automated process facilities can engage to upload the files?

Not yet, but there will be. Due to user feedback received soon after the VRSS implementation, VA is developing an automated option for VRSS submissions, which is expected to deploy sometime in 2016.