

**ACCEPTABLE USES OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER (SSN)
AND THE VA SSN REVIEW BOARD**

I. REASON FOR ISSUE: This Handbook identifies acceptable uses of the social security number (SSN) and establishes the procedure to be followed to determine when a collection or use of the SSN is necessary – i.e., if it is required by law, authorized by law, or fulfills a compelling business need; or if it is unnecessary – none of the above. This Handbook covers current collections or uses of the SSN as well as requests for a new collection or use of the SSN.

2. SUMMARY OF CONTENTS/MAJOR CHANGES: VA Directive 6507, *Reducing the Use of Social Security Numbers*, requires the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to reduce and, where possible, eliminate the collection and use of the SSN as the Department's primary unique identifier for individuals in VA operations, programs and services. To do this, Directive 6507 states that VA will assemble a board to review and evaluate all current and proposed uses of the SSN. The board will determine whether said uses are required by law, authorized by law, fulfill a compelling business need, or none of the above. This Handbook identifies the roles and responsibilities for the VA SSN Review Board.

3. RESPONSIBLE OFFICE: Assistant Secretary for the Office of Information and Technology (005), Deputy Assistant Secretary, Information Protection and Risk Management (005R), Associate Deputy Assistant Secretary, Office of Privacy and Records Management (005R1), and VA Privacy Service (005R1A).

4. RELATED DIRECTIVE: VA Directive 6507, *Reducing the Use of Social Security Numbers*, and VA Directive 6502, *Enterprise Privacy Program*.

5. RESCISSION: None.

CERTIFIED BY:

**BY DIRECTION OF THE SECRETARY
OF VETERANS AFFAIRS:**

/s/
Roger W. Baker
Assistant Secretary for
Information and Technology

/s/
Roger W. Baker
Assistant Secretary for
Information and Technology

Distribution: Electronic Only

**ACCEPTABLE USES OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER
AND THE VA SSN REVIEW BOARD**

CONTENTS

| PARAGRAPH | PAGE |
|--|-------------|
| 1. PURPOSE..... | 5 |
| 2. ACCEPTABLE USES OF THE SSN..... | 5 |
| 3. OVERVIEW OF THE SSN REVIEW PROCESS FOR EXISTING SSN COLLECTIONS AND USES | 7 |
| 4. OVERVIEW OF THE SSN REVIEW PROCESS FOR NEW SSN COLLECTIONS AND USES | 10 |
| 5. ROLE AND COMPOSITION OF THE VA SSN REVIEW BOARD..... | 11 |
| 6. ADDITIONAL VA PRIVACY SERVICE RESPONSIBILITIES..... | 13 |
| 7. GENERAL SSN PRIVACY REVIEW REQUIREMENTS | 13 |

ACCEPTABLE USES OF THE SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER AND THE VA SSN REVIEW BOARD

1. PURPOSE

a. VA Directive 6507, *Reducing the Use of Social Security Numbers*, mandates the creation of a board to review and evaluate current uses and requests for new uses of the social security number (SSN) and to determine the following: whether these uses are necessary – i.e., if they are required by law, authorized by law, or fulfill a compelling business need; or whether these uses are unnecessary – none of the above. This Handbook outlines acceptable uses of the SSN, the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) SSN review process, the composition of the VA SSN Review Board ("the Board"), and how the Board will operate.

b. VA Directive 6507 also directs the Administrations and Staff Offices to develop and implement plans to reduce and, where possible, eliminate the collection and use of the SSN as the Department's **primary unique identifier** for Veterans, beneficiaries, and employees in VA operations, programs, and services. If the Board approves an SSN collection or use that is not required by law, then the appropriate Information Owners and Information System Owners will be given reasonable opportunity to develop and implement plans to reduce and perhaps eventually eliminate these uses. These specific plans would then be incorporated into the Administration's/Staff Office's overall SSN reduction plan. The requirements for this plan are found in Appendix A, Action Plans, of VA Directive 6507. **Note:** SSN reduction and elimination plans will focus on collections and uses of the SSN as the Department's primary unique identifier. This Handbook should not be considered as justification to scrub the SSN from all existing VA records.

c. Until a new identification number system is created for employees and Veterans and beneficiaries for use across VA information systems, thereby eliminating the need for use of the SSN as the Department's primary identifier, all Administrations and Staff offices must consider ways to reduce access and increase security controls to protect the SSN when collected and used in VA business processes.

d. The provisions of this Handbook apply to all Administrations and Staff Offices except official oversight work conducted by the Office of Inspector General.

2. ACCEPTABLE USES OF THE SSN

a. There are currently eleven categories of necessary or acceptable use of the SSN as the primary identifier within the Department. For the first eight categories, the use of the SSN is required by law. The term "required by law" means a law explicitly states that the SSN must be collected and/or used. The ninth category covers official oversight work conducted by the Office of the Inspector General. The tenth category addresses collections and uses of the SSN authorized by law, as well as collections and uses that meet a compelling business need. "Authorized by law" means that a law allows the SSN to be collected and/or used, but it does not require it to be collected or used. "Compelling business need" is defined by Directive 6507 to be "A business

requirement so great as to persuade by the forcefulness of an argument in its favor.” The eleventh category addresses future required collections and uses of the SSN. The Board has the authority to define and approve new acceptable use categories as they are identified.

(1) **Law Enforcement, National Security, and Credentialing.** Almost every law enforcement application must be able to report and track individuals through the use of the SSN. This includes, but is not limited to, checks of the National Crime Information Center; state criminal histories; and Federal Bureau of Investigation records checks.

(2) **Background Investigations and Security Checks.** The conduct or verification of background investigations and security checks requires the use of the SSN. The SSN is the single identifier that links all of the aspects of these investigations together. This use is also linked to other Federal agencies that continue to use the SSN as a primary identifier.

(3) **Health Care Requirements.** Federal and state laws may require the collection and use of the SSN for treatment, payment/reimbursement, eligibility and enrollment, health care oversight, or public health reporting. **Note:** This acceptable use only covers health care requirements required by law. Uses of the SSN for patient care and safety that do not have a legal requirement fall under the compelling business need acceptable use in subparagraph (10) below.

(4) **Interactions with Financial Institutions.** Federal law requires that individuals who hold accounts with financial institutions must provide the SSN as part of the process to open accounts. Thus, VA may be required to provide the SSN for systems, processes, or forms that interface with or act on behalf of individuals or organizations in transactions with financial institutions.

(5) **Confirmation of Employment Eligibility.** Federal statute requires that all persons employed within the United States must provide an SSN or comparable identifier to prove that he or she is eligible to work for or with the government of the United States. Any system that documents this fact must contain the SSN.

(6) **Administration of Federal Workers' Compensation.** The Federal Workers' Compensation Program continues to track individuals through the use of the SSN. In addition, the Office of Personnel and Management continues to track Federal employees through the use of the SSN. Thus, systems, processes, or forms that interact with or provide information for the administration of these types of systems or associated systems may be required to retain the SSN.

(7) **Federal Taxpayer Identification Number.** The application of Federal and state income tax programs rely on the use of the SSN. Thus, systems that have any function that pertains to the collection, payment, or record keeping of this use must contain the SSN. In addition, individuals who operate a business under their own name may use their SSN as the tax number for that business function.

(8) **Government Data Matching.** Systems, processes, or forms that interact with other government agencies may require the continued use of the SSN as a primary identifier until such time as the applications to which they are linked move to some other identifier as a primary means for transferring, matching, or checking information. These applications should be rigorously scrutinized to determine the availability of some other means of conducting these transactions. Data matches with private-sector business partners that require the SSN will fall under acceptable use (10) under subparagraph (10).

(9) **Oversight Work Conducted by the Office of Inspector General.** Pursuant to the statutory authority of the OIG to act as an independent oversight unit of VA programs and operations, OIG is not required to obtain Department approval to conduct its oversight work in the form of criminal and administrative investigations, audits, inspections, evaluations, contract reviews, and other reviews. Such oversight may involve uses of the SSN. For example, if OIG audited VA compliance with VA Directive 6507 and this Handbook, SSNs would be used to document and evaluate compliance.

(10) **Compelling Business Need.** Many systems, processes, or forms that do not meet the “required by law” criteria of acceptable uses (1) through (8) in subparagraphs (1) through (8) for the continued use of the SSN as the Department’s primary identifier may not be able to transition to another identifier in a timely manner due to the excessive cost associated with the change or an ongoing requirement by a private-sector business partner where that entity requires the use of the SSN. In these instances, the Administration or Staff Office must demonstrate a compelling business need for the continued collection or use of the SSN. In addition, uses of the SSN that are authorized by law, but not required by law, will fall into this category. In these cases, the continued use of the SSN may be acceptable for a specified period of time, provided that plans are in place to reduce these uses and, as appropriate and feasible, for the eventual migration away from the SSN in the future. Plans to alter these uses must take into account interactions with other applications as well as all methods for entry, processing, or transfer of information from those applications. It is critical that transfer away from the SSN does not cause unacceptably long interruptions to continued operations of these applications. If collections and uses of the SSN continue on the basis of compelling business need, then the justification for these continued activities must be reviewed annually by the VA SSN Review Board.

(11) **Other Cases.** The previous categories may not include all uses of the SSN delineated by law. Should an application owner be able to show sufficient grounds that a use not specified in subparagraphs (1) through (8) is required by law, then a new acceptable use will be created. Any application that seeks to use this clause as justification must provide specific documentation in order to continue use under this justification. If the VA SSN Review Board identifies and approves a new use, then the Board will create a new acceptable use category specifically for the new required use.

b. If the VA SSN Review Board identifies and approves a new applicable use of the SSN required by law, then it will create a new acceptable use category. In addition, the VA Privacy Service will modify the list of acceptable uses as dictated by changes in law.

3. OVERVIEW OF THE SSN REVIEW PROCESS FOR CURRENT SSN COLLECTIONS AND USES

a. Administration and Staff Office Responsibilities

(1) Each Administration and Staff Office will establish a process for reviewing its SSN collections and uses. This process must include input from the appropriate business lines and subject matter experts.

(2) Administrations and Staff Offices that have a significant number of SSN collections and uses should consider creating their own SSN review boards. These boards would be able to facilitate most of the Administration/Staff Office responsibilities identified in this Handbook. These boards would also be able to ensure that recommended actions to reduce specific collections or uses of the SSN do not adversely impact business processes elsewhere within the Administration or Staff Office.

(3) As required by VA Directive 6507, each Administration and Staff Office must conduct an assessment of its current SSN collections and uses throughout its areas of responsibility and determine which SSN collections and uses are necessary and which are not. Ease of use or unwillingness to change will not be considered a compelling business reason to continue a particular collection or use of the SSN.

(a) Unnecessary collections and uses – Each Administration and Staff Office will determine the best methods for the elimination of its unnecessary SSN collections and uses and document these methods in its Administration/Staff Office SSN reduction plan. Specifically, the Administration or Staff Office SSN reduction plan must identify unnecessary SSN collections and uses, the actions to be taken to reduce or eliminate these collections and uses, and the timetable for completion. The Administration and Staff Office SSN reduction plans will be submitted to the VA Privacy Service according to the requirements outlined in VA Directive 6507.

(b) Necessary collections and uses – Each Administration and Staff Office will then prepare a Privacy Review of each SSN collection and use. These will be called SSN Privacy Reviews, see Paragraph 7. **Note:** Directive 6502, *Enterprise Privacy Program*, defines Privacy Review in paragraph 3.e.(12) as “a review by Under Secretaries, Assistant Secretaries, Other Key Officials, and information owners of all PII [personally identifiable information] for which they are responsible, and how such data is maintained.”

(4) All SSN Privacy Reviews will be submitted to the VA Privacy Service. Each Administration and Staff Office will consult with the VA Privacy Service to discuss and agree upon its approach and methodology for providing its SSN Privacy Reviews to the VA Privacy Service.

(5) Administrations and Staff Offices should use the VA SSN Review Board decisions to justify funding requests that help VA move away from SSN collections and uses that the Board determines fulfill a compelling business need. As such, the Board decisions

should be included as part of the Exhibit 300 budget justifications and be incorporated into appropriate Plans of Action and Milestones (POA&Ms) for all major information technology investments.

(6) Administrations and Staff Offices must be active members of Integrated Project Teams (IPTs), which are formed for each major application or collective grouping of similar development/operational functions. One important function of the IPT is to address security and privacy concerns about the use of SSNs.

b. VA Privacy Service Responsibilities

(1) The VA Privacy Service will examine the Administration and Staff Office SSN Privacy Reviews for compliance with this Handbook. VA Directive 6502 requires the VA Privacy Service to review, monitor, and maintain Privacy Reviews.

(a) **Current SSN collections and uses required by law** – SSN collections and uses identified as falling under acceptable uses (1) through (8) in paragraphs 2.a.(1) – (8) will be reviewed for accuracy and completeness (the appropriate legal requirement is cited and the minimum information as outlined in paragraph 7 below is provided). The VA Privacy Service will consult with the Office of General Counsel if there are questions regarding the legal requirement. SSN Privacy Reviews falling under acceptable uses (1) through (8) in paragraphs 2.a.(1) – (8) will automatically be approved unless the Office of General Counsel determines that the collection or use is not required by law. If the collection or use is not required by law, then it will be re-categorized as falling under acceptable use (10) in paragraph 2.a.(10). **Note:** Follow-up annual SSN Privacy Reviews are not necessary for existing collections and uses under acceptable uses (1) through (8) in paragraphs 2.a.(1) – (8) unless they become part of a new form, process, system, or application. All new forms, processes, systems, and applications collecting or uses the SSN must be reviewed and approved in accordance with paragraph 4 below.

(b) **Current SSN collections and uses that meet a compelling business need** – SSN collections and uses identified as falling under acceptable use (10) in paragraph 2.a.(10) will be reviewed for accuracy and completeness (the minimum information as outlined in paragraph 7 below is provided). The VA Privacy Service will work with the appropriate Administration or Staff Office regarding any questions it may have about these collections and uses. If the Administration or Staff Office established its own SSN review board, then the VA Privacy Service will work exclusively with the Administrative/Staff Office SSN review board. The VA Privacy Service will recommend to the VA SSN Review Board the approval of SSN Privacy Reviews falling under acceptable use (10) in paragraph 2.a.(10) unless the documentation is incomplete or the Administration or Staff Office has not responded to VA Privacy Service requests for additional information. **Note:** Continued collections and uses of the SSN under acceptable use (10) in paragraph 2.a.(10) will be reviewed annually to ensure that they are included in the Administration/Staff Office SSN reduction plan for the eventual migration away from the SSN at some point in the future. The VA Privacy Service will review follow-up annual SSN Privacy Reviews for compelling business need collections and uses and will recommend to the Board that these continue to be approved unless

the Administration or Staff Office does not develop or does not implement actions to reduce or mitigate the compelling business need collection or use.

(c) **Current SSN collections and uses in other cases** – SSN collections and uses identified as falling under acceptable use (11) in paragraph 2.a.(11) will be reviewed for completeness by the VA Privacy Service. The VA Privacy Service will then forward the SSN Privacy Review to the Office of General Counsel for guidance on the legal authority.. If the Office of General Council determines that the collection or uses is required by law, then the Board will approve the SSN Privacy Review as long as it is complete. The Board will also add this new use to the list of acceptable SSN use categories. If the Office of General Council determines that the SSN collection or use is not required by law, then it will be re-categorized as falling under acceptable use (10) in paragraph 2.a.(10) and will be processed as such.

(d) **Current SSN collections and uses by the OIG** – SSN collections and uses identified as falling under acceptable use (9) in paragraph 2.a.(9) will not be reviewed by the VA Privacy Service as noted in paragraph 1.d.

(2) The VA Privacy Service will make a negative recommendation on SSN Privacy Reviews and ask for the VA SSN Review Board to intervene in the following situations:

(a) An SSN Privacy Review is incomplete or inaccurate, and the Administration or Staff Office has not responded in a timely manner to VA Privacy Service requests for additional information; or

(b) A follow-up annual review of an SSN Privacy Review falling under acceptable use (10) in paragraph 2.a.(10) reveals that the Administration or Staff Office has not developed or is not implementing an SSN reduction or mitigation plan for that SSN collection or use.

c. **VA SSN Review Board Responsibilities**

(1) The VA SSN Review Board will automatically approve existing SSN collections and uses that the VA Privacy Service has determined fall under acceptable uses (1) through (8) and (11) in paragraphs 2.a.(1) – (8) and (11) because they are required by law. In addition, new required uses identified under acceptable use category (11) will be added to the list of acceptable SSN use categories outlined in paragraph 2 above.

(2) The VA SSN Review Board will review all VA Privacy Service recommendations on existing SSN collections and uses falling under acceptable use (10) in paragraph 2.a.(10) and make a final decision. This will help ensure consistency in SSN collections and uses across all of VA. In general, the VA SSN Review Board will approve VA Privacy Service recommendations unless the Administration or Staff Office appeals.

(3) Administrations and Staff Offices may appeal negative recommendations on current SSN collection and uses made by the VA Privacy Service to the VA SSN Review Board. The Board will establish the specifics of the appeals process.

(4) VA SSN Review Board decisions will be final and binding on the Administrations and Staff Offices. The VA Privacy Service will inform the Administration or Staff Office of all VA SSN Review Board decisions.

4. OVERVIEW OF THE SSN REVIEW PROCESS FOR NEW SSN COLLECTIONS AND USES

a. No new collection or use of the SSN as a primary identifier shall be implemented without the review of the VA Privacy Service and the review and approval of VA SSN Review Board. New collections and uses that may require the SSN include, but are not limited to: new forms, new processes, new systems, new applications, and new databases.

b. The Administration or Staff Office must prepare an SSN Privacy Review for each new SSN collection or use for the VA Privacy Service to review and for the VA SSN Review Board to approve or disapprove. This must be done during the design phase of the new collection and use, well in advance of implementation. For example, the SSN Privacy Review for a new form collecting the SSN from the public should be submitted to the VA Privacy Service prior to Paperwork Reduction Act documentation being submitted to the Office of Management and Budget. The IPT for a new IT system or application, or for a change to an existing IT system or application, must complete and submit an SSN Privacy Review to the VA Privacy Service with the Privacy Impact Assessment.

c. The Administrations and Staff Offices must ensure that each SSN Privacy Review for a new SSN collection or use includes input from its appropriate business lines and subject matter experts. In addition, the Administration/Staff Office SSN review board must be involved if one was established.

d. The VA Privacy Service will examine each SSN Privacy Review for a new SSN collection or use for compliance with this Handbook.

(1) **New SSN collections and uses required by law** – new SSN collections and uses identified as falling under acceptable uses (1) through (8) in paragraphs 2.a.(1) – (8) will be reviewed for accuracy and completeness (appropriate legal requirement is cited and the minimum information as outlined in paragraph 7 below is provided). The VA Privacy Service will consult with the Office of General Council if there are questions regarding the legal requirements. New SSN Privacy Reviews falling under acceptable uses (1) through (8) in paragraphs 2.a.(1)-(8) will automatically be approved unless the Office of General Counsel determines that the collection or use is not required by law. If the collection or use is not required by law, then the collection or use will be re-categorized as falling under acceptable use (10) in paragraph 2.a.(10). **Note:** Follow-up annual SSN Privacy Reviews for approved new collections and uses under acceptable uses (1) through (8) under paragraphs 2.a.(1) – (8) are not necessary unless they become part of another new form, process, system or application.

(2) **New SSN collections and uses that meet a compelling business need** – new SSN collections and uses identified as falling under acceptable use (10) in paragraph 2.a.(10) will be reviewed for accuracy and completeness (the minimum information as outlined in paragraph 7 below is provided). The VA Privacy Service will work with the appropriate Administration or Staff Office if there are questions about these collections and uses. If the Administration or Staff Office established its own SSN review board, then the VA Privacy Service will work exclusively with the Administrative/Staff Office SSN review board. The VA Privacy Service will recommend to the VA SSN Review Board the approval of the new collection or use unless the documentation is incomplete or the Administration or Staff Office has not responded to VA Privacy Service requests for additional information. **Note:** New collections and uses of the SSN under acceptable use (10) in paragraph 2.a.(10) will be reviewed annually to ensure that they are included in the Administration/Staff Office reduction plan for the eventual migration away from the SSN at some point in the future. The VA Privacy Service will review follow-up annual SSN Privacy Reviews for the new compelling business need collections and uses and will recommend to the Board that these continue to be approved unless the Administration or Staff Office does not develop or does not implement actions to reduce or mitigate the compelling business need collection or use.

(3) **New SSN collections and uses in other cases** – new SSN collections and uses identified as falling under acceptable use (11) in paragraph 2.a.(11) will be reviewed for completeness by the VA Privacy Service. The VA Privacy Service will then forward the SSN Privacy Review to the Office of General Counsel for guidance on the legal authority. If the Office of General Counsel determines that the SSN collection or use is required by law, then the Board will approve the SSN Privacy Review as long as it is complete. The Board will also add this new use to the list of acceptable SSN use categories. If the Office of General Counsel determines that the new SSN collection or use is not required by law, then the new SSN collection or use will be re-categorized as falling under acceptable use (10) in paragraph 2.a.(10).

(4) **New SSN collections and uses by the OIG** – New SSN collections and uses identified as falling under acceptable use (9) in paragraph 2.a.(9) will not be reviewed by the VA Privacy Service as noted in paragraph 1.d.

e. The VA SSN Review Board will automatically approve new SSN collection and uses falling under acceptable uses (1) through (8) and (11) in paragraphs 2.a.(1) – (8) and (11) that were reviewed and recommended by the VA Privacy Service because these are required by law.

f. The VA Privacy Service will forward its recommendation on SSN Privacy Reviews for new SSN collections and uses falling under acceptable use (10) in paragraph 2.a.(10) to the VA SSN Review Board for review and approval or disapproval.

g. The VA SSN Review Board will review the SSN Privacy Reviews for new SSN collections and uses and make a final decision. This will help ensure consistency in SSN collections and uses across all of VA. The Board will also determine if there are new acceptable uses of the SSN that need to be added to the acceptable use categories identified in paragraph 2.

h. VA SSN Review Board decisions will be final and binding on the Administrations and Staff Offices. The VA Privacy Service will inform the Administration or Staff Office of all VA SSN Review Board decisions.

i. Administrations and Staff Offices should use the VA SSN Review Board decisions to justify funding requests that help VA move away from SSN collections and uses that are determined to fulfill a compelling business need at the time that they are reviewed by the VA SSN Review Board. As such, these should be included as part of the Exhibit 300 budget justifications and be incorporated into appropriate Plans of Actions and Milestones (POA&Ms) for all major information technology investments. In addition, privacy concerns and use of SSNs should also be addressed by the members of Integrated Project Teams (IPTs) formed for each major application or collective grouping of similar development/operational functions.

5. ROLE AND COMPOSITION OF THE VA SSN REVIEW BOARD

a. The Assistant Secretary for the Office of Information and Technology is the Department's Senior Agency Official for Privacy. As such, he/she is responsible for VA's Privacy Programs, including the Department's SSN Reduction Effort. He/she or his/her designee will chair the VA SSN Review Board.

b. The VA SSN Review Board will be an existing senior information technology (IT) governance board responsible for the following: developing and enforcing information protection/data security policies and processes; aligning IT goals with business goals; and developing and approving IT budgets. The Information Technology Leadership Board (ITLB), or equivalent board, will serve as the VA SSN Review Board. The VA SSN Review Board will:

(1) Approve all accurate and complete SSN Privacy Reviews for all existing and new SSN collections and uses that fall under acceptable use categories (1) through (8) and (11) in paragraphs 2.a.(1) – (8) and (11) because these uses are required by law;

(2) Review and approve or disapprove all VA Privacy Service recommendations on existing SSN collections and uses that fall under acceptable use category (10) in paragraph 2.a.(10). Compelling business needs must be consistent among and across the Administrations and Staff Offices;

(3) Review and approve or disapprove all VA Privacy Service recommendations on new Administration and Staff Office SSN collections and uses that fall under acceptable use category (10) in paragraph 2.a.(10) to ensure that they are consistent across VA;

(4) Review appeals of VA Privacy Service negative recommendations on existing SSN collections and uses and make final decisions. If a decision requires legal review, then the VA SSN Review Board will abide by the legal determination from the Office of General Counsel.

(5) Review SSN collections and uses as part of its regularly scheduled meetings.

c. The members of the ITLB, or equivalent board, will include, but will not be limited to, senior representation from the following:

- (1) Assistant Secretary for Human Resources and Administration;
- (2) Assistant Secretary for Information and Technology;
- (3) Assistant Secretary for Management;
- (4) Under Secretary for Benefits;
- (5) Under Secretary for Health; and
- (6) Under Secretary for Memorial Affairs.

d. The VA SSN Review Board decisions regarding SSN collections and uses will be final and binding.

6. ADDITIONAL VA PRIVACY SERVICE RESPONSIBILITIES

a. The VA Privacy Service will maintain a list of all approved SSN Privacy Reviews. This list will be available to all Administrations and Staff Offices. From these, the VA Privacy Service will identify and maintain a current list of SSN collections and uses within the Department that are authorized or required by law.

b. The VA Privacy Service, to the extent that it is able to, will monitor Federal laws or regulations that address the general use of Social Security numbers. However, the VA Privacy Service will not be responsible for notifying the Administrations and Staff Offices of new laws, regulations, or authorities regarding the collection and use of the SSN within their programmatic areas. The Administrations and Staff Offices are best able to understand what information they need and the specific laws and regulations governing their programs.

c. The VA Privacy Service will provide support, as needed, for the VA SSN Review Board and its meetings.

7. GENERAL SSN PRIVACY REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

a. The VA Privacy Service will develop a template and instructions for the SSN Privacy Reviews within six months of the effective date of this Handbook. This will enable the VA Privacy Service to review the information the Administrations and Staff Offices are using to inventory and conduct their assessments of existing and new SSN collections and uses. The goal is to prevent the re-creation of information that might already be available.

b. At a minimum, each SSN Privacy Review will include the following:

- (1) The name of the organization and office;
- (2) Whether it is an SSN collection or use;
- (3) Whether it is a current or new SSN collection or use;
- (4) A clear and accurate description of the form, process, system, database, application, etc. that collects/uses or will collect/use the SSN;
- (5) Clarification as to whether the SSN is needed for identification or authentication purposes. In many instances, the SSN may not be needed for all authentication or follow-up purposes;
- (6) Information regarding the exposure risk, such as vulnerability and threat associated with disclosure of the SSN collection/use;
- (7) Information regarding modification risk, such as the level or difficulty in changing the SSN collection/use and the impact this will have on existing business processes:
and
- (8) The acceptable use category for the SSN collection or use.
 - (a) **Acceptable uses required by law** – The use falls under acceptable uses (1) through (8) in paragraphs 2.a.(1) – (8) or acceptable use (11) in paragraph 2.a.(11). A citation to the law must be provided. **Note:** Referencing Executive Order 9397 alone as a use required by law will not be acceptable, as Executive Order 9397 was amended in November 2008 and no longer requires Federal agencies to use the SSN exclusively as permanent account numbers for individual persons in Federal agency systems. Also, justification for the use of the SSN for one or more transaction nor interaction within an application does not constitute authority to use the SSN for every transaction or interaction within the application. Any transactions that use the SSN as a primary identifier, such as the display, transfer, or presentation of the SSN, should be closely scrutinized to determine if some alternate form of identification or authentication may suffice.
 - (b) **Acceptable use authorized by law and meets a compelling business need** – The use falls under acceptable use (10) in paragraph 2.a.(10) and is authorized by law. If authorized by law, provide the citation to the law **and** a detailed explanation of the compelling business need for the collection/use of the SSN. For example, Executive Order 9397 may be used to justify an authorized use of the SSN. **Note:** Justification for the use of the SSN within an application does not constitute authority to use the SSN for every transaction or interaction within the application. Any transactions that include the display, transfer, or presentation of the SSN should be closely scrutinized to determine if some alternate form of identification or authentication may suffice. Appropriate explanations might include, but are not limited to, the following:
 1. Cost to reduce/eliminate the SSN collection/use;

2. Time to reduce/eliminate the SSN collection/use;
3. Resources needed to reduce/eliminate the SSN collection/use;
4. Interactions with other applications;
5. Existing security protections around the collection or use (in conjunction with other explanations);
6. New system/application/database currently in development and will replace legacy system collecting or using the SSN within a few years; and/or
7. No acceptable identifier alternative is available for sharing with other applications/systems.

(c) **Acceptable use that meets a compelling business need** – The use falls under acceptable use (10) in paragraph 2.a.(10) and is not authorized by law. A detailed explanation of the compelling business need for the collection/use of the SSN must be provided. Appropriate explanations might include, but are not limited to, those identified in paragraph 7.b.(8)(b) 1 through 7 above.

c. The VA Privacy Service will work with the Administrations and Staff Offices to develop the detailed process for SSN Privacy Reviews. It is expected that all existing SSN Privacy Reviews will begin to be submitted to the VA Privacy Service for review within one year of the effective date of this handbook.