

**Proposed Original Document Definition
For Records Decommissioning Process Purposes
Compensation Service
March 19, 2013**

Purpose: To provide an original document definition for Document Conversion Services (DCS) contract vendors.

References: M21-MR III.ii.1.C.10.a, M-21-MR III.ii.3.C.7.a, M23-1 Chapter 2, VA Directive 6609

Background: The Veteran Benefits Administration (VBA) has contracted out the scanning of paper claims documentation into the Veterans Benefits Management System (VBMS). Once the records are scanned into VBMS, service treatment records and original documents will be separated from the claims documentation. Original documents will be sent back to the Veteran.

Question: What exactly is an original document?

- **Historically:** M23-1 noted that original documents consisted of mainly documents used to establish service, age, marriage, birth, and death.
- **Current M21-MR definition:** "...Records that are considered sentimental, irreplaceable, or replaceable with great expense."
- **VA Directive 6609** notes: "...originals of documents used for evidentiary purposes which, if lost or destroyed, would be difficult or impossible to replace"

Definition Guidelines: Original documents can be placed into 2 categories.

1.) Records used to establish service, age, marriage, birth, and death.

These documents will often be printed on specialty paper and have a raised seal or a stamped seal.

- Examples:
- A.) Birth/Death/Marriage Certificate
 - B.) Legal Adoption/Divorce Decrees
 - C.) DD form 214 or other discharge papers, (onion paper)
 - D.) Original Social Security Cards
 - E.) Passports

***All documents in this category should be sent back to the Veteran.**

2.) Other records of a sentimental nature not used to establish the above categories. VA regulations make allowance for the return of sentimental documents to the Veteran. Due the subjective nature of sentimentality, a black and white definition is impossible. Therefore a focus on what appears to be possibly sentimental or hard to be replaced will be needed. Sentimental documents can be of an odd shape or printed on specialty paper and may appear of a historical nature. They may have official seals or stamps on them. Scanning officials will need to use their best judgment in records identification.

Examples of sentimental and hard to replace documents:

- 1.) Medal Citations
- 2.) Pictures and Newspaper articles
- 3.) Diplomas
- 4.) Official college transcripts
- 5.) Wartime correspondence, (letters from home) etc.

***When in doubt of whether a document is of a sentimental nature, send the document back to the Veteran.**

Quality Control:

- 1.) It is recommended that an emphasis of quality be placed on category 1. If quality control finds a category 1 document that has not been removed from claims documentation prior to decommissioning, this is a critical error.
- 2.) Category 2 errors are not considered necessarily to be of a critical nature and their occurrence recorded for tracking purposes only, (for future training).
- 3.) The **BEST** quality assurance should be done by VBA employees identifying these records before they are sent for scanning.