

Leveraging the Dept. of Veterans Affairs in Identifying Veterans in the Criminal Justice System



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Veterans Treatment Courts – Key Components #3



Eligible Participants are identified early and promptly placed in the veterans treatment court program.



Self-Reporting – Asking the Question



BUT

Are you a veteran?

Vs

Have you ever served
in the US Military to
include the Reserves
and National Guard?

- Veterans may not self-report
- The Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Statistics estimates that 7-8% of the U.S. prison and jail populations are Veterans.

Example— California Dept. of Corrections and Rehabilitation houses about 100,000 prisoners. By self-reporting, 2.7% inmates identified themselves as Veterans. Using VRSS, 7.7% of inmates were determined to have a record of military service. That five percent difference = approximately 5,000 previously unidentified inmates.

Veteran Identification Systems from the VA

Veterans Reentry Search
Service (VRSS) &
SQUARES



Veterans Reentry Search Service (VRSS)

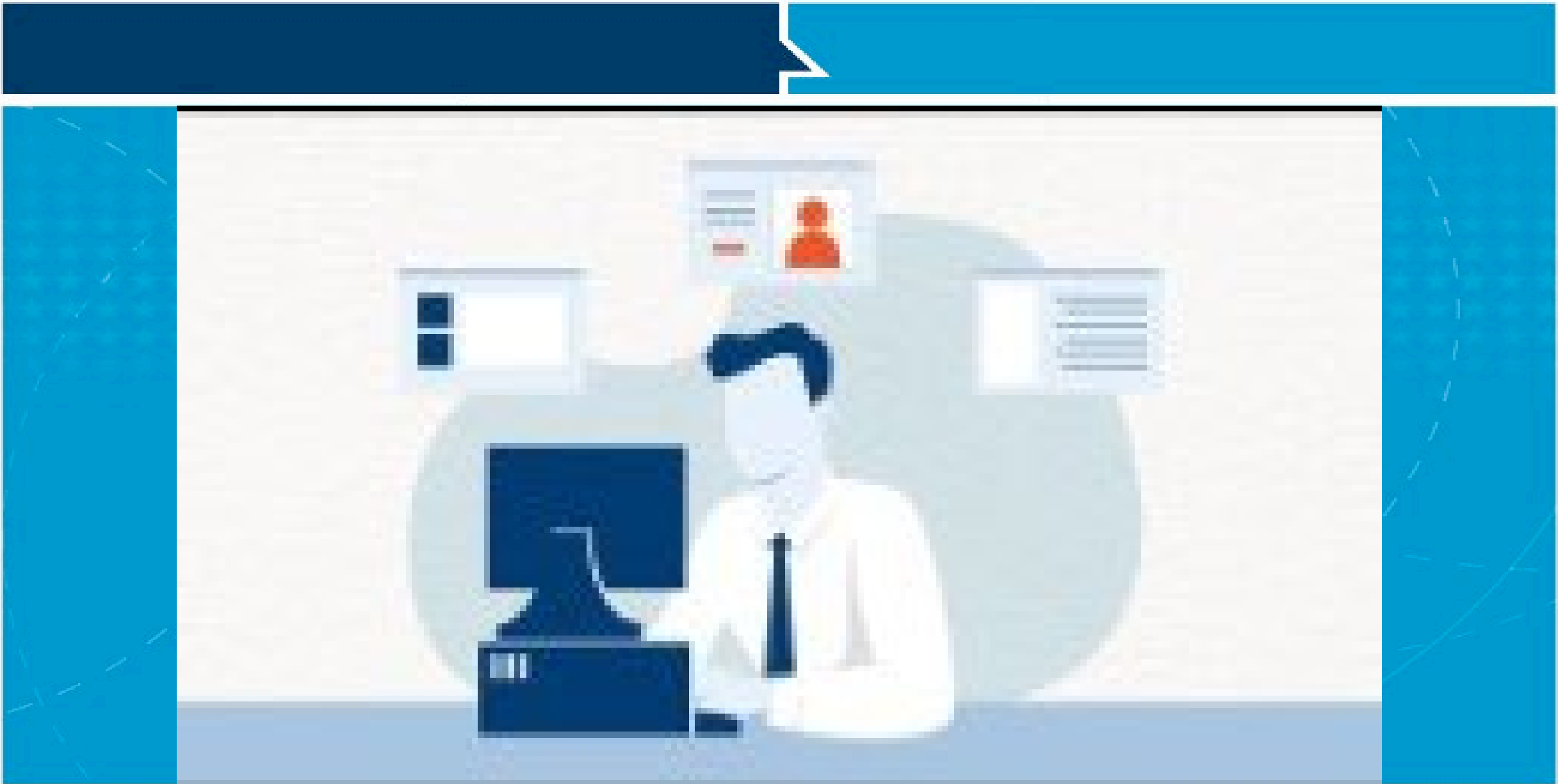
Presented By
Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration
Homeless Program Office
Veterans Justice Programs

Sean Clark

Visit the [VRSS website](#) to apply for access



VA
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Visit the [VRSS website](#) to apply for access

Agenda

- Introduction
- VRSS Purpose and Background
- Technical Requirements & Getting Started
- Submitting a File
- Results: Who gets what and why?
- VRSS and SQUARES Compared
- Questions and Closing Comments

Purpose

- VRSS is a Web-based tool that allows VA to offer its criminal justice partners an improved method of identifying Veterans within their defendant or inmate populations. It also allows VA to conduct more targeted, effective outreach in these settings.
- VRSS is part of the VA's major initiative to End Veteran Homelessness
 - Incarceration is the most powerful predictor of homelessness
 - Ending Veteran Homelessness is an urgent and enduring priority for VA
- The system is designed to enable outreach specialists involved with VA's Health Care for Re-Entry Veterans (HCRV) program (prison populations), and Veteran Justice Outreach (VJO) ("front end" jails and court populations) program to identify Veterans as early as possible and get them linked to VA services upon their release. Both programs are focused on preventing homelessness among justice-involved Veterans.

Background

- **What is VRSS?**
 - VRSS is an online tool that allows external users (prison, jail, and court staff users) to identify the individuals in their facility who have a record of military service.
- **How it works:**
 - An external user logs into VRSS and uploads a file with basic information on their population (prison/jail inmates, or criminal defendants).
 - After allowing **2 hours for processing**, the user receives a result file that identifies those individuals included in the original uploaded file who have a record of military service.
 - Matches are identified through a query mechanism that checks the record against the **VA DoD Identity repository (VADIR)**, the VA's copy of the DoD's Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS).
 - At the same time, another version of the results file is sent to the VA VJO or HCRV specialist responsible for the facility/geographic area.

Technical Requirements & Getting Started

- To use the system, you must first set up a VRSS account. This involves identifying yourself and your facility by entering basic contact information into the system and choosing a username and password.
- The first screen you encounter is the Terms and Conditions of Use.
 - Contains assurances that the VA is upholding federal privacy and security laws while also outlining the limited purposes for which VA will use VRSS
 - VRSS is used only to identify Veterans and provide that information to the outreach specialists
 - The VA is not taking this information and building a registry, or using the information to inform any other VA process
 - VRSS is a free-standing mechanism. The original information you submit is destroyed once you and the VA outreach specialist have retrieved the results.



The screenshot shows the official website of the United States Department of Veterans Affairs. The header includes the VA logo and navigation links: Home, Veteran Services, Business, About VA, Media Room, Locations, and Contact Us. A search bar is located in the top right corner. The main content area is titled "Welcome to the Veterans Re-Entry Search Services". Below this, there is a section titled "Veterans Reentry Search Service (VRSS) - Terms and Conditions of Use". The text explains that the site is for correctional and criminal justice system entities to identify veterans. It lists 11 required fields for identification: 1. Name, 2. Social Security Number, 3. Date of Birth, 4. Gender, 5. Prisoner/Defendant ID number, 6. Cell Location, 7. Facility/Court Name, 8. Facility/Court ZIP Code, 9. Facility/Court State, 10. Parole Date, and 11. Release or Hearing Date. A checkbox at the bottom indicates that the user has read and accepted the terms. A link "Click here to login" is provided. The footer contains various links like Privacy Policy, FOIA, and Web Policies, along with the address: U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs - 810 Vermont Avenue, NW - Washington, DC 20420.

UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

Search All VA Web Pages
Search
Open Advanced Search

Home Veteran Services Business About VA Media Room Locations Contact Us

Welcome to the Veterans Re-Entry Search Services

Veterans Reentry Search Service (VRSS) - Terms and Conditions of Use

This secure Web site enables correctional and other criminal justice system entities to identify inmates or defendants who have served in the United States (U.S.) military. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) makes this service available to facilitate its own direct outreach to these Veterans, and to inform the development of Veteran-specific programs in the criminal justice system. VA has authorized your access to this site because you represent a correctional or other criminal justice system entity that seeks to identify Veterans in its inmate or defendant population. To use the site, you will provide the following information on the individuals whose history of military service you wish to inquire about:

1. Name
2. Social Security Number
3. Date of Birth
4. Gender
5. Prisoner/Defendant ID number
6. Cell Location
7. Facility/Court Name
8. Facility/Court ZIP Code
9. Facility/Court State
10. Parole Date
11. Release or Hearing Date

VA will use the information you provide to identify individuals for whom it has a record of military service. Once this process of identification is complete (please allow at least 24 hours),

☐ I have read and accept the Terms and Conditions of Use

[Click here to login](#)

VA Home | Privacy Policy | FOIA | Web Policies | No FEAR Act Data | Site Index | USA.gov | White House | National Resource Directory | Inspector General

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs - 810 Vermont Avenue, NW - Washington, DC 20420

Reviewed/Updated Date: September 1, 2010

Visit the [VRSS website](#) to apply for access

Submitting a File

- The file that you will build and submit must be in .csv format, built using Excel.
- The file must have a header row and contain 14 fields (14 columns per 1 row/ record)
- **Six out of 14 fields are required:** First name, last name, SSN, PID, Facility Name, and Facility State. Each row/record must include data in these six fields, or the entire file will be rejected.
 - Social Security Number must be the **full** SSN. The SSN is the most vital component for the algorithm to match your records against VA records.
 - The Personal Identification number (PID) is the unique number assigned to the individual by the Correctional Facility or Court System which is submitting data. Because the VA cannot send Veterans' personal information outside the VA firewall, the PID also serves as the mechanism for identifying Veterans to external users. **A PID in the return file indicates that VRSS found a record of military service for that individual**
- The VJP specialist is able to receive more detailed information including Character of Discharge and Number of Days of Active Duty Service (the 2 pieces critical for determining eligibility for VA healthcare and benefits). However, VRSS cannot definitively confirm a Veteran's eligibility for VA services.

Required Fields (6 of 14)

First Name

Last Name

SSN

PID (Unique Identifying #)

Facility Name

Facility State

CSV Data Upload Form

Choose a file:

Browse...

Validate File

Submitting a File (cont.)

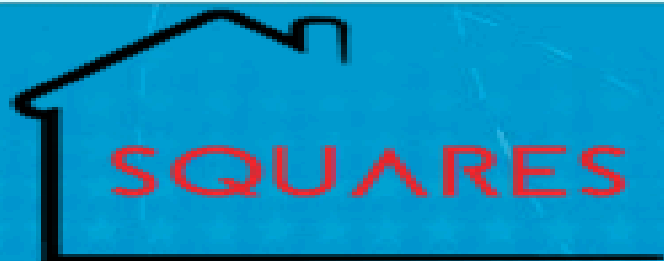
- All data in a file submitted to VRSS must meet the formatting standards in the [VRSS User Guide](#).
 - Reference p. 3 of the VRSS File Format Specifications: length and content requirements
 - VRSS will let you know if there are problems with the file you submit, via an automated email and file confirmation page that includes errors identified by row. This is intended to allow users to quickly and easily correct errors and submit a file successfully.
- Average processing time is about 2 hours.
- The Limited information returned back to the facilities (**PIDs only**, indicating individuals for whom VRSS found a record of military service) is by design; it allows the system to conform to Federal privacy and VA information release requirements.

Results: Who gets what, and why?

- CF/CS User (court, jail, prison): PIDs (user-assigned unique identifiers) only
 - no names or other identifying information
- VJP User: name, DOB, SSN, discharge status, number of days active duty service (all pulled from VA copy of DoD personnel records)
- Why?
 - **An individual's Veteran status is not protected information, so when asked whether someone served, VA can answer yes or no.**
 - However, VA cannot provide VRSS users with names other identifying information without a Veteran's express permission – even though that information was included in the user's submission file
- **No restriction on VRSS users sharing results/Veteran status with partners**

VRSS: Common Questions

- Which records should be included in the submission file?
 - All users are encouraged to include their **entire population** in the file submission. The value of VRSS is identifying Veteran inmates or defendants that have not been previously identified by self-report or other means.
- How often are VRSS users required to upload a file?
 - The frequency of uploads is **up to the end user**. It is important to be in communication and coordination with the VA VJO or HCRV specialist who is conducting outreach in your facility/area and who will be using the information contained in the file.
- How should I handle an inmate record that has multiple SSNs or aliases associated with it in our system?
 - **Include multiple rows/records for that inmate** in your submission, each one identical except for the SSN or alias. This will maximize the chance of VRSS finding a record of military service for that individual, if one exists.
- What is the facility's responsibility once it receives the results?
 - Integration of the information from the results file back into your system varies by facility and is not monitored by the VA.



Using Data to End Veterans Homelessness

**Presented By
Department of Veterans Affairs
Veterans Health Administration
Homeless Program Office**

Leisa Davis



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Visit the [VRSS website](#) to apply for access

Agenda



- Introduction
- Background and Purpose
- User Types and Approval Hierarchy
- Application Process Steps
- Helpful Resources
- Questions and Answers



Visit the [SQUARES Website](#) to apply for access



Using Data to End Veteran Homelessness

Status Query and Response Exchange System (SQUARES) is a web-based application that returns unique information regarding the Veteran's particular status and eligibility for healthcare and/or homeless program services in a secure environment. Depending on the SQUARES outcomes, VA employees and homeless service providers are provided with an eligibility determination so they can begin the enrollment or referral process to assist Veterans with accessing VA healthcare and homeless programs--Supportive Services for Veterans Families (SSVF), Grant and Per Diem (GPD), etc. For more information, watch [SQUARES Video](#) and visit the [SQUARES Website](#)



For Veterans who are not eligible are assisted with referral services to local community resources



**Total SQUARES Users
Over 2,700**

(VA: 597)
(Other: 2,153)

(As of July 6, 2022)



**Over 220,000 queries
were conducted** to obtain
Veteran eligibility
information

User Types

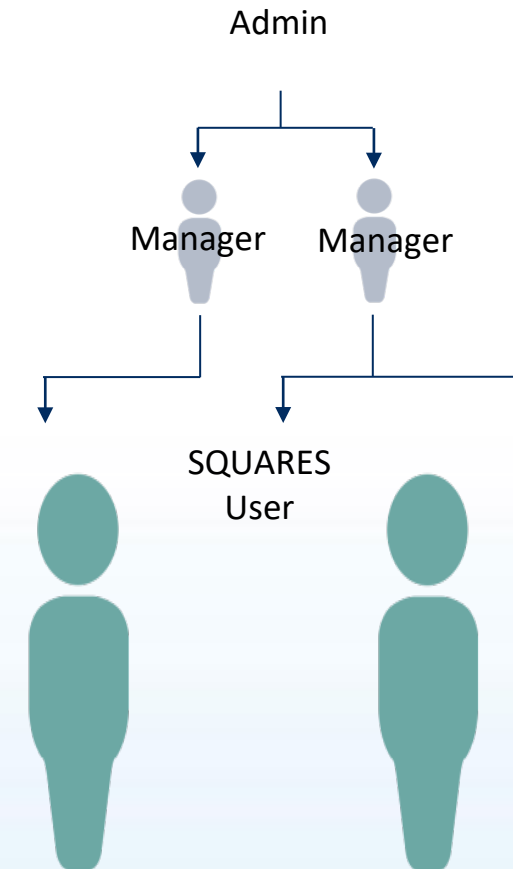
Approval Hierarchy

SQUARES Admin: Project Manager approves SQUARES Managers and VA Users

SQUARES Managers: Designated Approving Officials for External Organizations (VA Grantees, Federal, State, Local Government Agencies and Law Enforcement*)

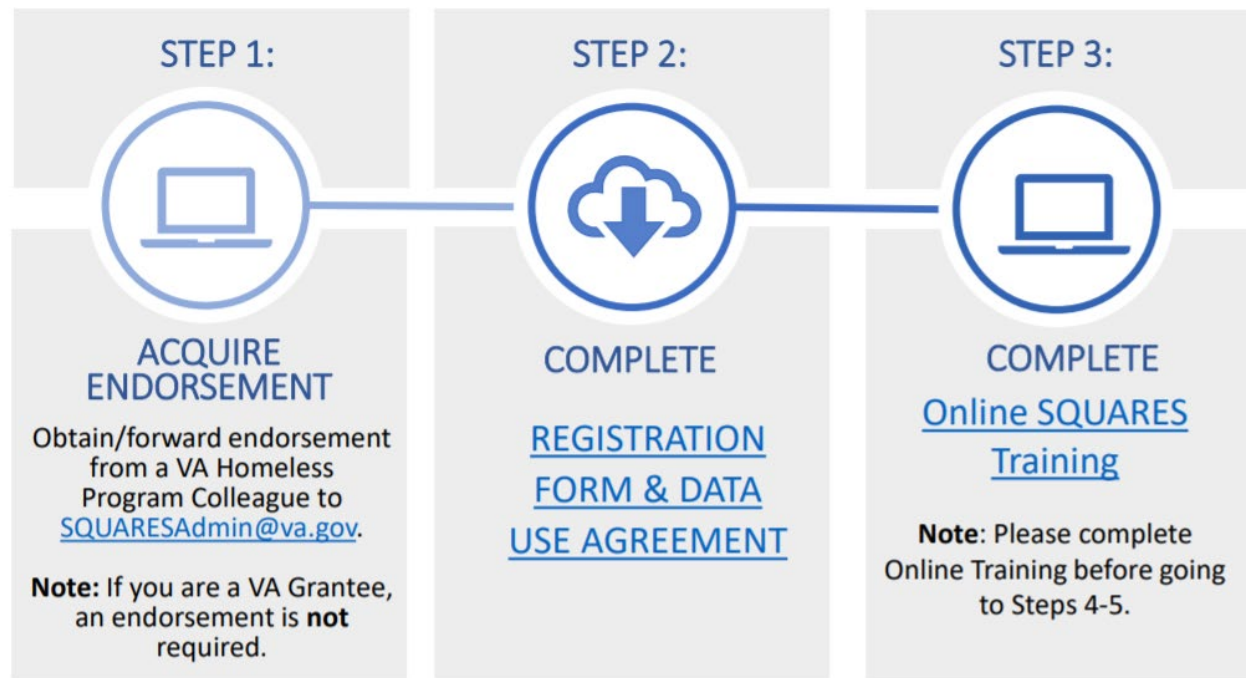
Standard SQUARES Users: VA Employees and External Organizations (VA Grantees, Federal, State, Local Government Agencies and Law Enforcement*)

*Law Enforcement includes criminal justice agencies such as police departments, sheriff departments, courts and jails that may be one of the first agencies to encounter a homeless Veteran.



Application Process Steps

New SQUARES Organization Accounts Getting Started with SQUARES (New SQUARES Managers)



SQUARES Managers and Standard Users need to independently apply for access (using their specific application instructions).

Application Instructions are located on the [SQUARES Resources Website](#)
(Review the Getting Started with SQUARES and Access Instructions before applying for access)

Application Process Steps

STEP 4:



SIGN DATA USE AGREEMENT

Forward Data Use Agreement to SQUARESAdmin@va.gov

Note: If the SQUARES Manager is different from the person named in agreement, forward the new contact information to SQUARESAdmin@va.gov.
Allow 24-48 hours for processing.

STEP 5:



APPLY FOR ACCESS

Download [Instructions on How to Open a New Account for Manager-level Users](#)
Select SQUARES Manager as your application after you receive notification to proceed with the application process.

SQUARES Managers need to be granted access before Standard Users can apply.

SQUARES Users applications are automatically routed to their SQUARES Managers for approval.

For technical assistance, please contact SQUARESAdmin@va.gov.
For additional information, visit [SQUARES Resources](#).

Published: May 2021



Single Search

The screenshot shows a web browser displaying the SQUARES application. The top navigation bar includes links for Home, Bulk Veteran Search, Users, Approvals, Internal User Request, Help Desk, and Squires Cases. Below the navigation bar is a search bar with the placeholder text "Ask a question...". The main content area features the SQUARES logo and the tagline "Using data to end Veteran homelessness". The title "Single Veteran Search" is prominently displayed. Below the title, a note states: "Enter as many fields as possible. Searches without SSN and last name are very unlikely to be successful. For individuals with very common names, searches will almost always fail without SSN." The search form consists of several input fields: "First Name", "Last Name", "SSN", "Date of Birth", and "Gender". A "Search" button is located at the bottom left of the form. At the bottom of the page, a table header is visible with columns: "FIRST NAME", "LAST NAME", "DATE OF BIRTH", "SSN", "GENDER", "VETERAN ELIGIBILITY STATUS", and "CHARACTER OF DISCHARGE".

Populate the fields with specific identity attributes (Name, DOD, SSN, Gender) and click on search. The system will return information regarding the Veterans' status and eligibility from homeless programs within 5 minutes. Refer to the [Single Search Guide](#) for more information. (New feature was recently added to provide additional drill down information)

Bulk Search

Bulk Veteran Search

New

All bulk searches you submitted in the last 24 hours are listed below. Searches are deleted after 24 hours, so be sure to save any results you need on your local device.

| SEARCH # | LABEL | SEARCH DATE/TIME | STATUS |
|---|-------|------------------|--------|
| You have no recent bulk Veteran searches to display. Click New to start a new search. | | | |

[Bulk Search Guide](#)
[Summary of Eligibility Status](#)

Populate the pre-formatted spreadsheet with specific identity attributes (Name, DOB, SSN, Gender), save spreadsheet (as csv or xlsx file) and upload. The system will return information regarding the Veterans' status and eligibility for homeless programs within 24 hours.
Refer to the [Bulk Search Guide](#) for more information.

Helpful Resources

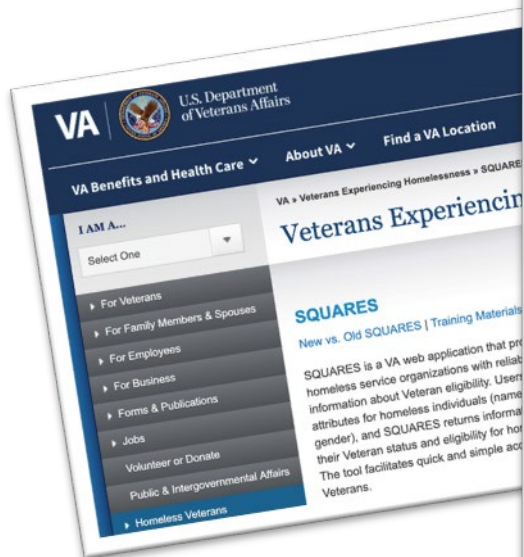
All New SQUARES Users/Managers are encouraged to complete the 10-minute [SQUARES Online Training](#) prior to applying for access. Refer to [SQUARES Website](#) for access instructions



Training for Homeless
Service Providers

| Courses | Brief Description of Course Objectives |
|--|--|
| Lesson 1: Accessing SQUARES | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Acquire key tips for applying for a SQUARES account and accessing the system |
| Lesson 2: Conducting a Single Veteran Search | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explain how to conduct a single search to identify an individual Veteran's benefits and eligibility information• Understand important data in the single search results• Understand the limitations of SQUARES results |
| Lesson 3: Conducting a Bulk Veteran Search | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• State how to conduct a bulk Veteran search• Identify important data in the Veteran bulk |

Helpful Resources



Website

Training Materials

We strongly encourage you to take the 10-15 minute online SQUARES training course before applying for access or using the tool.

- [Take the online SQUARES Training](#)

The following Quick Reference Guides may also be helpful:

- [Requesting and Accessing Your SQUARES Account](#)
- [Conducting a Single Veteran Search](#)
- [Conducting a Bulk Veteran Search](#)
- [Summary of SQUARES Eligibility Information](#)

SQUARES Managers should additionally make sure they have read the SQUARES Manager Guide:

- [SQUARES Manager Guide](#)

Quick Reference Guides

How do I request SQUARES access?

How you request SQUARES access depends on who you are:

VA Homeless Program Grantees (SSVF, GPD, CERS) and Other Contracted Organizations

Any staff member who works with Veterans at a VA homeless program grantee organization is authorized for SQUARES access. Each organization must select one employee to serve as SQUARES Manager. We will review Manager account requests and approve access if the applicant matches the program manager we have on file for your organization. If your organization would like someone new to serve as SQUARES Manager, have the documented program manager let us know via email at squaresadmin@va.gov.

Once the Manager is approved for access, he/she can use SQUARES to approve Standard User accounts for his/her fellow employees. Only Managers can approve Standard User account requests.

Managers and Standard Users both apply for access online. When completing this application, be careful to use your professional email address rather than a personal email ([details](#)).

- [Apply For SQUARES Access](#)
- [Step-By-Step Application Guide](#)

FAQs

Helpful Resources

Issue Details

Case Information

Issue Topic

Modify Existing Organization

Brief Description of the Issue

Either the user or new user first and last name fields need to be filled out

* First Name

* Last Name

* Email

Help Desk

**Use this form to create a VA Help Desk Issue Ticket.
SQUARESAdmin@va.gov will process requests within 24-48 hours.**

VRSS and SQUARES Compared

| | VRSS | SQUARES |
|---------------------------------|--|--|
| Getting Started | Sign up at https://vrss.va.gov/ ; view New User Orientation | Watch SQUARES Video Complete online training Review Application Instructions |
| File Requirements | 14 requested fields (6 required); file in .csv format (details in VRSS User Guide) | Single Search : Returns in 5 minutes Bulk Search : Batch ≥ 50 returns within 24 hours |
| Single Query vs. Batch | Either, but designed for larger files/populations (User process is the same; ~2 hour processing time) | Single Search : Insert Name, DOD, SSN, and Gender (New feature was recently added to provide additional drill down information) Bulk Search : Complete Template |
| Results go to? | CF/CS user (PIDs only); VJP user (incl. more information from records) | 2,700 Total SQUARES Users (VA and NonVA) |
| Technical Assistance available? | Yes: Help Desk (1-800-983-0935) and Tier 2 and 3 I.T. support teams | Contact SQUARESAdmin@va.gov Submit Help Desk Form |



Application in the Field – Detention Facility or Jail

- Booking officer asks the self-report question
- Administrative Staff utilizes VRSS to upload new individuals on established schedule
 - Veteran Status noted in file for the court and attorneys
- Administrative Staff forwards roster with VRSS required data to other identified individual (VTC Court Coordinator) to upload
- Provides
 - Court additional information
 - Data collection to assist in determining community response needs
 - Possibility of Veteran Pod
 - VRSS informs the VA (VJO) of justice-involved individual for connection to services and community response needs
 - Earlier diversion and population reduction



Application in the Field – Court Staff

- Pre-trial Court Staff utilizes SQUARES account during interview prior to 1st appearance/bond hearing
 - Veteran Status noted in case file for the court
- Administrative Court Staff utilize VRSS to upload new defendants on established schedule
 - Veteran Status noted in case file for the court and attorneys
- Provides
 - Court additional information
 - Early VTC eligibility analysis
 - Data collection to assist in determining community response needs
 - VRSS informs the VA (VJO) of justice-involved individual for connection to services and community response needs



Application in the Field – Public Defender Office

- Administrative Staff utilizes VRSS account to upload new clients on established schedule (daily, weekly, monthly etc.)
 - Veteran Status noted in client file for assigned attorney
- Provides
 - Foundation for conversation around assessments
 - Early VTC eligibility analysis
 - Possible sentence mitigation factors
 - Identifies the Justice-Involved veteran to the VA (VJO) to assist in connecting available services



Application in the Field – Probation (supervision)

- Administrative staff utilizes VRSS to upload new clients on established schedule (daily, weekly, monthly etc.)
 - Veteran Status noted in client file for assigned agent/case manager
- Agent/Case manager utilizes VRSS or SQUARES to determine assigned individual's veteran status
- Provides
 - VRSS identifies justice-involved veteran to the VA (VJO) to assist in connecting available services
 - Opens VA and veteran specific community resources to address supervision case plan
 - Allows for swift VTC consideration upon an individual's violation conditions

Dispatch From the Front Lines - April 2022



Dispatch FROM THE Front Lines

April 2022

Identifying the Veteran Population Within the Criminal Justice System

By David Pelletier
Project Director, Justice For Vets

Why Identify Veterans?

Identifying and then targeting interventions for certain populations within the criminal justice system is common practice.¹ However, the military and veteran community is often overlooked as a culturally relevant population. Identifying this population provides an opportunity to engage with unique resources while integrating cultural competency.

To identify justice-involved veterans at the earliest possible opportunity, communities need to incorporate a structured and targeted process within the criminal justice system that surveys the justice-involved population to determine those that have served in the U.S. armed forces. Only through identification can a community connect justice-involved veterans to resources and interventions explicitly designed to support them, including veterans treatment courts (VTCs) and U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Veterans Justice Outreach Program (VJO) specialists.

Veterans Treatment Courts

A VTC is designed specifically to work with justice-involved veteran and military populations. Through this model, court teams can leverage the shared experiences and camaraderie of the military and veteran community. These courts also facilitate engagement and interaction with resources such as the Veterans Health Administration, Veterans Benefit

Administration, state departments of veterans affairs, and community veterans service organizations. This integration of services and resources is often done in partnership with a VJO specialist.

Veterans Justice Outreach Program Specialists

VJO specialists provide a range of services to assist justice-involved veterans, including outreach to veterans across the possible span of their interactions with the criminal justice system, such as law enforcement encounters, courts, jails, and state and federal prisons. VJO specialists provide this outreach to assess each veteran's needs and to connect that veteran with appropriate VA services at the earliest possible point.

In their work in VTCs, VJO specialists serve as liaisons between the VTC team and the VA medical center or other facility from which eligible participants are receiving care. With a veteran's permission, VJO specialists keep the judge and other members of the court team apprised of the veteran's use of treatment and other VA services over time, informing the judge's decisions about the veteran's progress through the court system.²

While the work that VJO specialists do with veterans who participate in VTCs is often the most visible aspect of the program, it is necessary to remember that VJO specialists may be able to assist any justice-involved veteran who is eligible for VA care, regardless of whether he or she is being considered for or is ultimately admitted to a VTC. Developing local communication processes that make VJO specialists aware of individuals identified as veterans at the earliest opportunity—regardless of where and by what mechanism that identification takes place—enables the specialists to work toward the shared mission of facilitating veterans' access to VA health care and other needed services.



NDCI
NATIONAL DRUG
COURT INSTITUTE

est. 1997



NCDC
NATIONAL CENTER
FOR DWI COURTS

est. 2007



**JUSTICE
FOR VETS**

est. 2010