

**Department of Veterans Affairs  
Veterans Re-entry Search Service (VRSS)**

***CSV File Format Standards & Specifications***



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**Version 2.0**

# Introduction

## Background

At the request of the Secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Eric Shinseki, the Homeless Program Office sought development of an automated system to locate Veterans who are incarcerated in correctional facilities nationwide, as well as Veterans who have been charged or convicted in state or federal courts, to be known as the Veteran Re-entry Search Service (VRSS). Through analysis of records from prison systems, court systems and the Veterans Affairs/Department of Defense Identity Repository (VADIR), VRSS will enable outreach to Veterans who have been charged or convicted as well as Veterans who have been released from jail or prison.

## Purpose of this Document

This document outlines the acceptable standards for any file submitted to VRSS. The VRSS system is designed to allow federal, state, and local correctional and court system staff to upload their facilities' registry listings to identify individuals who have served in the military. The ultimate purpose of VRSS is to accurately identify charged, convicted, or incarcerated Veterans, to facilitate outreach by VA Veterans Justice Programs (VJP) staff.

## Overarching Process

There are approximately 1,295 federal and state, and 3,000 city/county correctional facilities and between 3,000–4,000 federal and state court systems in the United States (U.S.). The VRSS system will be available for use by any of them. Upon receipt of a user's complete list of inmates or defendants, VRSS utilizes process algorithms within VA's regularly updated military database, VADIR, to identify individuals with a record of military service.

Once corrections and court users register and are approved for VRSS User access, they can upload a file with the agency/institution's entire inmate and defendant population, in accordance with the file format specifications outlined in this document. Periodic batch queries occurring several times per day return output files to the correctional facility/court system user's VRSS account, containing the Prisoner and Defendant ID numbers of individuals with a record of U.S. military service. Users then receive an email notifying them that a Correctional Facility/Court System (CF/CS) output file is available for download.

A second output file is delivered simultaneously to the VJP outreach specialist; this file contains more extensive information on the identified Veterans, including character of discharge. These two output files are intended to facilitate coordination of VA outreach services with correctional facilities and courts, and to encourage development of other correctional services for Veterans.

## Website for Data Uploading

<https://vrss.va.gov>

## File Fields

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
*PrisonerIDNumber	Unique Prisoner ID or Defendant ID numbers for all incarcerated or charged individuals in your facility
CellLocation	Cell Location identifier for your facility
*FacilityName	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
FacilityZIP	Zip Code within which your Facility or Court resides
*FacilityState	State within which your Facility or Court resides
ParoleDate	Parole Date of all incarcerated or charged individuals in your facility
ReleaseDate	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.

## Mandatory Data Fields

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 partial or no data is available for a particular individual, these fields still must not be left blank, as this will cause VRSS to reject the entire file:

- FirstName
- LastName
- SSN
- PrisonerIDNumber
- FacilityName
- FacilityState

**Important Note:** The essential query logic requires one of the two following combinations for each prisoner/defendant submitted: **EITHER [SSN + Last Name + First Name], OR [SSN + DOB]**

PrisonerIDNumber is particularly essential, as the CF/CS Output File sent back to the user will contain only PrisonerIDNumbers.

## Missing Data

Algorithms are set to use information provided within certain tolerances and are more effective when more complete data is provided.

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; see below guidance on missing data for required fields)
- Blanks should be right-padded (i.e., blanks should come after, not before, any data entered)
- For required fields indicated below by ‘Allow Null = N’, any fields left blank will cause VRSS to reject the entire file and generate an error message. To proceed with the upload, all required fields must contain data. If required-field data are not available for an inmate/defendant, he/she should be deleted from the file.

## Field Specifications

Table 2 – Comma-Separated Value (CSV) Format (\*Required)

Field Name	Data Type	Length	Allow Null	Options / Description
*FirstName	Varchar(20)	20	N	
MiddleName	Varchar(20)	20	Y	
*LastName	Varchar(26)	26	N	
SuffixName	Varchar(4)	4	Y	
*SSN	Varchar(9)	9	N	XXXXXXXXXX
DateOfBirth	Date(8)	8	Y	YYYYMMDD
Gender	Char(1)	1	Y	M, F, U
*PrisonerIDNumber	Varchar(30)	30	N	
CellLocation	Varchar(20)	20	Y	
*FacilityName	Varchar(80)	80	N	
FacilityZIP	Char(5)	5	Y	
*FacilityState	Char(2)	2	N	Two-letter state abbreviation
ParoleDate	Date(8)	8	Y	YYYYMMDD
ReleaseDate	Date(8)	8	Y	YYYYMMDD

## CSV Header Row

**A critical note on your CSV file’s top (first) row:** VRSS treats the top (first) row in a CSV file as a header row (typically reserved for column titles, or “headers”), whether or not it is intentionally being used for this purpose. *Information included within this row will NOT be processed.* Therefore, **you must include a header row in your file**, reserving the top/first row for column titles (FirstName, MiddleName,

etc.) across all 14 columns. This “pushes” the beginning of the list to row 2, ensuring that all records are addressed. If you do not include a header row, any inmate/defendant information in row 1 (the entire record) will be treated as a header and ignored. If for some reason row 1 does not or cannot include headers/column titles, leave it blank and begin your listing on row 2.

## ParoleDate

Use field/column 13 of 14, **ParoleDate** (tables 1 and 2), to note (if known) the parole date of incarcerated or charged individuals within your facility. Note that the ParoleDate field accepts date-only input (YYYYMMDD), and not text. If unknown or not applicable, leave this field blank.

## File Specifications

**File Name:** Space(s) in a file name is not permitted or the file will not upload. Files exceeding fifty (50) characters in the file name will not be accepted. Special characters should not be used in the file name.

**File Type:** Files must be in .csv format and contain 14 columns (described above).

**File Size:** File size is limited to 100MB. If a file exceeds this limit, VRSS will reject the file and generate an error message.

**Use of “” or ‘’ for values:** If “” or ‘’ are used within the file, the characters will be removed and the file will process. It is preferred, however, that files are sent without special characters.