

## THE NATIONAL DECLASSIFICATION CENTER

*Releasing What We Can,  
Protecting What We Must*

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## Problems in Implementation

Execution of the EO 12958, as amended, has been hampered because of a lack of coordination among agencies on review, referral, and declassification policies and processes. The results of the agency-centric approach are:

- Between 1997 and 2007 the Federal Government acknowledges spending \$1.343 billion on declassification. This does NOT include the monies spent by the Intelligence Community on declassification. Without reform in policy and process, billions of dollars will be spent perpetuating a declassification system that does not work, while the backlog of records awaiting processing for the open shelves will continue to grow.

The declassification problem grows worse as the volume and complexity of records increases, and the current (textual) and future (electronic and special media) problems are not resolved.

## Problems in Implementation

The Federal government has 408 million pages of historical records that are 25 years and older at the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) that are still classified and an estimated 1.24 billion pages of historical records in agency custody which need to be reviewed and declassified over the next 25 years.

The public expects access to the 408 million pages at NARA, but they cannot be moved to the open shelves because:

- Agencies need to review their equity in the records of other agencies (referrals).
- Systemic quality issues have been identified, including missed sensitive information and referred non-sensitive information.

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## THE DECLASSIFICATION PROBLEM: NARA's Actions

- Recognizing these problems, NARA took several actions which together are called the National Declassification Initiative (NDI):
  - Established an Interagency Referral Center (IRC)
  - Established a Quality Assurance (QA) review process
  - Developed annual work plans to prioritize records processing and declassification
- These actions cut into the cycle of re-review by:
  - Establishing some interagency collaboration on a voluntary basis
  - Making declassification decisions, as opposed to making more uninformed referrals

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## THE DECLASSIFICATION PROBLEM: NARA's Lessons Learned

- While some process improvements were made, and some success realized, problems remained:
  - 1) **Lack of standardized declassification guidance** – Agencies that generate the same types of information are not always protecting it in the same way, or for the same length of time.
  - 2) **Lack of coordinated equity recognition training among agencies** – Agency reviewers do not have ready access to guides of potential equity holding agencies and have received little or no equity recognition training from those agencies. As a result they are not always aware of other agency equities when reviewing their own records. This leads to missed equities and improper referrals.

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## THE DECLASSIFICATION PROBLEM: NARA's Lessons Learned

- 3) **Ad hoc decision making leads to inconsistent declassification decisions** – During an ISOO audit of agency review procedures at Archives II, it was found that many reviewers did not have access to or were not using their agency's current declassification guides. In the absence of these guides, reviewers were relying on their "gut", verbal guidance or prior knowledge to make declassification decisions.
- 4) **Agency's commitment to ongoing declassification activity under the EO has waned** – Agencies committed resources to meeting the Dec. 2006 review deadline, but have since refocused their declassification efforts. This leaves the challenges of referrals, and review of special media or electronic records under resourced. Declining voluntary participation has also led to growing backlogs in the QA and referral processes in the NDI.

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## HOW TO ADDRESS THE PROBLEM?

Establish a National Declassification Center (NDC) to:

- Translate policy decisions into effective, transparent, standard work processes that protect national security information and ensure public access to historically valuable records.
- Develop solutions to emerging technological challenges found in electronic and special media records containing historically valuable national security information.
- Enable efficient and effective agency review and resolution of equities in both Federal and Presidential records.

## WHAT WILL THE NDC DO?

### 1. Integrate and Coordinate Declassification Review

- Work with agencies to develop a more integrated declassification process.
- Work with agencies to ensure permanent records are reviewed by established deadlines, and all pertinent information is tracked until the document is released to the public.
- Develop an integrated IT system to support the needs of an integrated declassification process.

## WHAT WILL THE NDC DO?

### 2. Support Declassification Review

- Manage an Interagency Referral Process to adjudicate referrals.
- Provide space and support for agencies to review their equities referred by other agencies.
- Establish a Quality Assurance process to mitigate the risk inadvertent releases.
- Develop prioritization and work plans to focus declassification efforts on records of high public interest.

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## WHAT WILL THE NDC DO?

### 3. Consolidate Declassification Guidelines

- Establish a library of approved declassification guides to ensure reviewers have access to all information necessary to accurately complete review of their agency's records.
- Develop standard guides to ensure classified information common to multiple agencies is protected the same way by everyone.

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## WHAT WILL THE NDC DO?

### 4. Develop instructional and automated training programs.

- To ensure reviewers at the NDC have thorough and up to date knowledge of policies and practices.
- To provide equity recognition training to all reviewers.
- To establish certification courses available to all government declassification reviewers.

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## WHAT WILL THE NDC DO?

### 5. Process and Review Special Media Records

- Establish a system to preserve, reformat and review Classified Special Media (CSM).
- Support redaction of CSM records requested under FOIA/MDR.
- Advise agencies on issues related to at risk or obsolete record formats.

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## WHAT WILL THE NDC DO?

### 6. Process and Review Electronic Records

- Develop a system to store and retrieve classified electronic records.
- Establish procedures to support review and referral of classified electronic records by agency reviewers.

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## WHAT WILL THE NDC DO?

### 7. Process Special Access Requests

- Develop an IT system to support review and processing of FOIA and MDR requests for accessioned records.
- Support review of Presidential Records through the Remote Archives Capture program.
- Support review of Legislative records in response to Congressional mandates.

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## WHAT WILL THE NDC DO?

### 8. Perform Archival Processing

- Accession classified records into archival storage.
- Process reviewed records to segregate classified from unclassified records.
- Perform archival processing of declassified records.
- Transfer declassified records to the open shelves for public access.

## WHAT IS NARA PREPARED TO DO?

- Phase I – Work with the agencies to complete a Business Process Re-Engineering of NDC processes. This process will:
  - Detail current declassification processes.
  - Design and implement improved declassification processes in the NDC.



## WHAT IS NARA PREPARED TO DO?

- Phase II – Develop a Concept of Operation for the NDC, and convert the NDI into the NDC at Archives II.
  - NARA will begin the process of making changes to the NDI to establish basic NDC functionality in College Park.
  - NARA will develop a Concept of Operations that details NDC functions and requirements.

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## WHAT IS NARA PREPARED TO DO?

- Phase III – Design and build an electronic system to support improved declassification processes as detailed in the BPR. The system will:
  - Track all agency referrals in classified permanent records.
  - Track declassification and referral review decisions.
  - Have automated redaction capability.

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## WHAT IS NARA PREPARED TO DO?

- Phase IV – Conduct a Cost Benefit analysis to determine if it is in the best interest of the Government to build a separate, secure NDC facility. A Secure Facility would need to:
  - Be TS/SCI Certified with partitioned storage.
  - Meet archival standards for storage of permanent records.
  - Provide storage for 1.2 million cubic feet of records
    - 250,000 square feet for records storage
  - Have review/processing space to accommodate 270 NARA and Agency staff (with parking)

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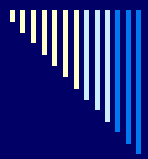
## NDC Summary - Benefits

- Provides opportunities for collaboration and better understanding of equities among agencies. The inter-agency quality assurance teams operate more effectively in this work environment.
- Provides a structure for developing better and more uniform guidance, training, and information systems to document declassification decisions.
- Lays organizational groundwork to address the emerging challenge of electronic and special media records.
- Improves the oversight of interagency declassification activities and decisions.
- Ensures that still sensitive material remains protected, while opening more information to the American people.

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# Questions

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