



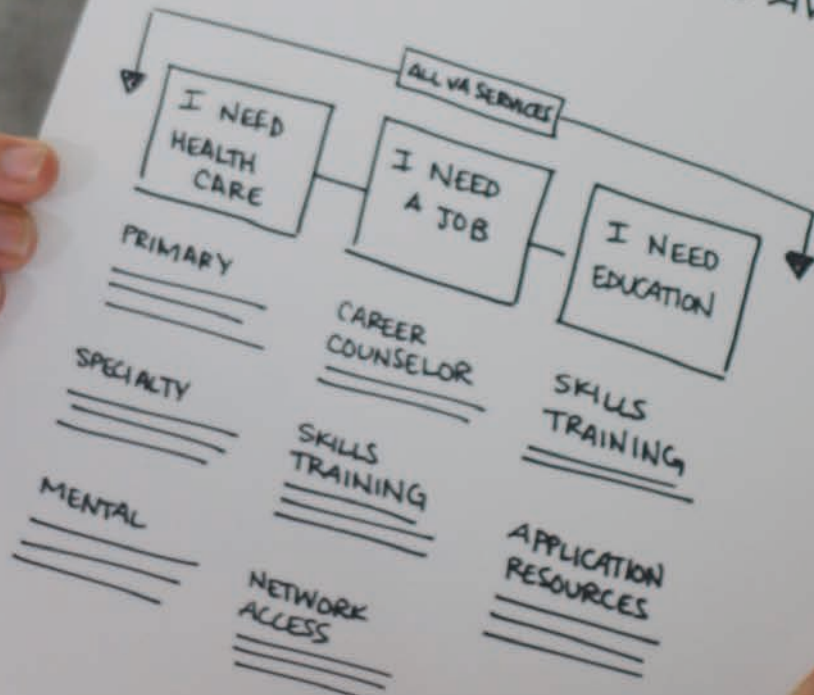
DESIGNING FOR AND WITH VETERANS

ONE YEAR OF USING HUMAN CENTERED DESIGN TO DEVELOP
BETTER SERVICES AND EXPERIENCES FOR VETERANS AND VA

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**ONE YEAR OF USING HUMAN CENTERED DESIGN TO DEVELOP
BETTER SERVICES AND EXPERIENCES FOR VETERANS AND VA**

VA WANTS TO MEET YOUR NEEDS.
HERE ARE THE SERVICES AVAILABLE
TO YOU.



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- _____ (2 months)
- _____ (1 week)
- _____ (5 days)
- _____ (2 days)

TO COMPLETE
 HOW LONG
 TASK / TASK



DISTANCE TO
 IN THE

Executive Summary

When we put the Veteran experience first, we can tackle VA's most complex issues.

For VA to successfully address our greatest challenges, we need to understand how Veterans and their families perceive and interact with VA. The Veterans Experience team is using human-centered design (HCD) at VA to orient services toward Veterans and their families. By working to understand what Veterans want and deliberately designing service experiences to meet those needs, VA can improve the Veteran experience. This leads to service experiences that deliver on all our constituents' needs: Veterans, business lines within VA, Congress, VSOs and the American taxpayers.

We spent the last 18 months on a journey to research and understand the needs of Veterans and their families. We've also sought to understand the needs of our VA employees who deliver those services every day.

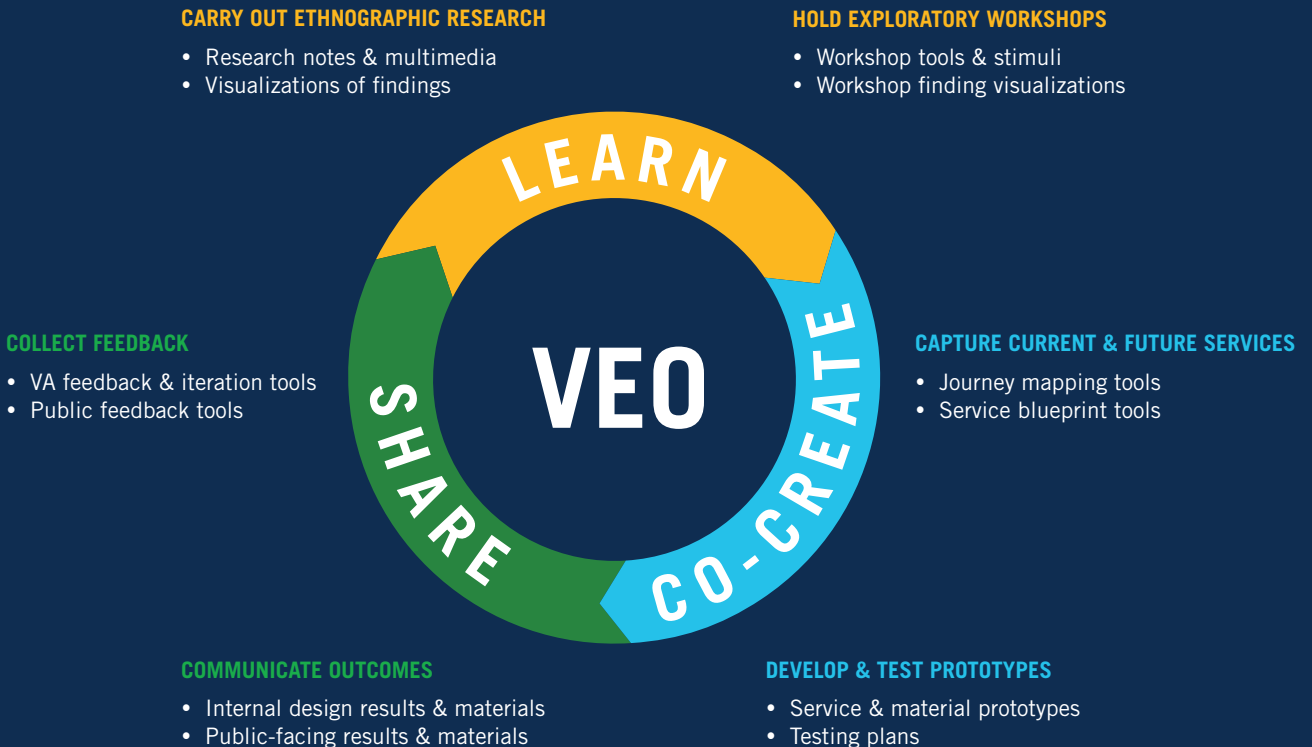
To improve Veterans' experience with VA, we mapped key journeys through service lines at VA from a Veteran's perspective and identified the moments that matter most to Veterans. We then designed interventions to prevent VA from falling short during these crucial moments. We worked to improve and replicate service areas that are bright spots and to help Veterans more holistically understand all that VA offers.

We have also undertaken a series of service design improvement efforts that better enable and support our employees in delivering great customer experience. Through our research, we've learned that organizations with strong customer service empower employees to do the right thing for the customer in every interaction, as opposed to emphasizing rules, trainings, and supervision. As a result, we've taken steps to foster strong customer service by empowering our employees.

As we make changes to better meet the needs of Veterans and their families, continued measurement and review are needed to ensure that we're hitting the mark. That said, we have an enormous opportunity, if we stay focused on this path, to achieve Secretary Bob McDonald's aspiration to make VA the #1 customer service agency in the Federal Government. Our nation's Veterans and their families deserve nothing less.

Veterans Experience Office (VEO) Insight Process

All of our work is organized around the Veteran’s journey. For each journey phase, we carry out an ongoing loop of learning, co-creation, and sharing out. Each activity generates tools, materials, and services that we catalog and share.



Understanding Separation process

Attend TAP THP

Completing paperwork

engaging VA to access benefits

Obtain DD-214

Set up eBenefits account

Health-care

Home loan

Disability comp.

GI Bill

getting out

starting up

Find here impr doc (like DD-214)

VISIT Regional Benefit OFFICE

VR & E

finding something to do

Search Vet Career Center

Applying for GI Bill to cover education

taking care

Manage benefits through eBenefits

If you need a place to stay immediately, Homeless Veteran Line

Get skills through VR + E

addressing mental health needs

Mental Health Assistance

Posttrauma rehab

Social Work

MST counseling

Vet Crisis Line

mental health

PTS services

managing primary care / chronic health

Manage your health through My HealtheVet

Health care

Inpatient care

Prescription services

Disability Comp

Choice Act

acute health support

Prescription

Health care

Emergency care

specialized care

maintaining health

Preventive care Pharmacy

VA Health care

My Health eVet

Re-establishing & Creating relationships

Vet Center

Balancing finances

Attending to health needs

Receive your disability rating

Enroll in health care through vets.gov

CFP exam

My Health eVet

finding a place to live

VA Home loan

Building network

translating skills

acquiring edu / skills

finding job

Building pro

Go back to school

Search Vets Employment Center for job openings

Receive career counseling through VR & E

Reinventing myself

VA Employ

Vet Job Bank

Career Center

Resume Builder

Putting down roots

Family (primary support / thinking)

revisiting housing

Apply for VA home loan

mental, social, emotional health

Get financial counseling

Joining community

military

VSOs

taking care of fam (GI Bill / Life insurance)

GI Bill

Life insurance

Saving for retirement

VA Refunding

Vet Center

VA Medical Health Center

Social Work

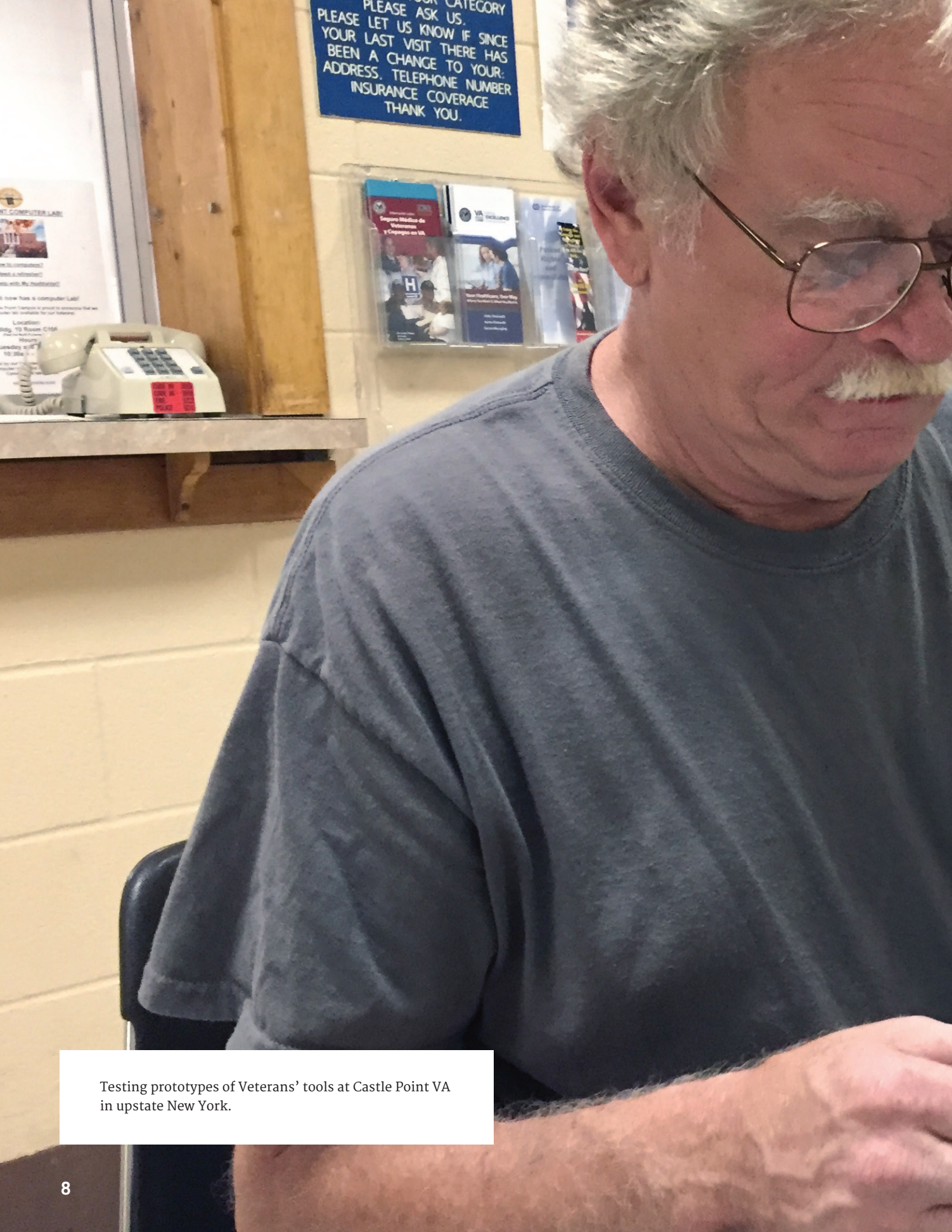
engaging VA to access benefits

Find primary care doctor or hospital

VA Home Loan

Healthcare

1. Visit us at your closest Regional Benefits Office for information on all benefits and services... 2. Visit us at the nearest office on weekdays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. 3. Call and your request will be processed the same day. 4. For more information on VA benefits, visit us at vets.gov. 5. For more information on VA benefits, visit us at vets.gov.



PLEASE ASK US.
PLEASE LET US KNOW IF SINCE
YOUR LAST VISIT THERE HAS
BEEN A CHANGE TO YOUR
ADDRESS, TELEPHONE NUMBER
INSURANCE COVERAGE
THANK YOU.

Testing prototypes of Veterans' tools at Castle Point VA in upstate New York.

VETERANS' EXPERIENCE TOOLS

RAMAP
RW
WHOLESALES
Distributors
Heating, HVAC, & Electrical

Our work is grounded in hundred of hours of in-person research and testing with Veterans and VA staff.

Over the past several years, VA has engaged in a series of successful research efforts to understand how Veterans and their communities engage with VA. Building on the insights and themes cultivated through these research efforts, the Veterans Experience Office embarked on a new project in September 2015 founded on the question: “How might we improve the experience of Veterans and their support networks through life transitions in a manner that anticipates and is responsive to their well-being?”

RESEARCH PROCESS

As part of the Veteran Experience Office’s commitment to keep Veterans at the center of every VA initiative, the team utilized a Human-Centered Design process to begin improving Veterans’ experience. Beginning with qualitative research—interviews, stimuli activities, and environmental observations—the team generated a comprehensive perspective of the life and needs of Veterans across multiple geographies, life stages, and areas of service. Ethnographic field research on Veterans and their support networks provided the team with a detailed perspective of Veterans: who they are, what they need and hope for, and how they behave.

The resulting qualitative data, coupled with expert and stakeholder interview data, provided us with Veteran-centered insights, empowering the Veterans Experience Office to develop actionable Veterans experience tools and make insightful recommendations related to the design of new or enhanced products, services, and offerings for Veterans and VA.

RESEARCH GOALS

This research effort explored behaviors, attitudes, and perceptions of Veterans and their support networks through the lens of “life transitions” to achieve the following goals:

- | | |
|---|--|
| 1 | DEEPEN OUR UNDERSTANDING OF VETERANS' LIFE GOALS AND NEEDS THROUGHOUT THEIR LIVES |
| 2 | UNDERSTAND KEY “MOMENTS THAT MATTER” IN VETERANS' INTERACTIONS WITH VA |
| 3 | DESIGN AND PROTOTYPE INTERVENTIONS TO COLLECTIVELY WORK TOWARD SYSTEMIC CHANGE |

RESEARCH PLAN AND OUTCOMES

To achieve our goals and generate a comprehensive understanding of Veterans’ experience, the research team curated a research sample of over 150 Veterans from around the country, and conducted a new round of in-depth ethnographic interviews with 39 participants. Out of the field research, the team developed a collection of Veterans experience tools (Journeys of Veterans Map and VA Customer Persona Ideation Cards) as a first step towards creating or enhancing new products or services to benefit Veterans.



PHASE I: DISCOVERY

- A** Portland, OR
- B** Seattle, WA
- C** Chicago, IL
- D** Detroit, MI
- E** New York, NY
- F** Bethlehem, PA
- G** Arlington, VA
- H** Washington, D.C.
- I** Grottoes, VA
- J** Charlotte, NC
- K** Atlanta, GA
- L** St. Augustine, FL
- M** Orlando, FL
- N** Tampa, FL
- O** Pensacola, FL
- P** Houston, TX

PHASE II: DESIGN

- Q** Denver, CO
- R** San Diego, CA
- S** Los Angeles, CA
- T** Dallas, TX
- U** Tahlequah, OK
- V** Ada, OK
- W** Baltimore, MD

JOURNEY TOOLS

Our discovery findings allowed us to build multiple new tools that capture common experiences during Veterans' life journeys. These journey tools can be used as a starting point for designing or refining products and services.

The Challenge Not all Veterans are the same, yet they often experience a broad set of shared needs and goals as they move through their lives. To serve Veterans better, VA must understand this series of needs and goals, so VA can fit into Veterans' lives at appropriate points along their journeys, during the moments that matter most.

Our Approach By sorting and synthesizing the stories of Veterans we spoke with during our research process, we developed a model for the common phases and stages of Veterans' life experience.

Design Solution We created three tools to better define and explore Veterans' journeys: a comprehensive research report, an overview map for a Veteran life journey, and 'deep dive' journey maps for specific aspects of Veteran experience.

Future Impact We are engaging the organization at both agency and administrative levels in collaborative working sessions to share the technique of journey mapping. These tools can be used to drive strategic planning and decision-making across the Veteran ecosystem, foster empathy with employees, build a shared language between Veterans and VA, and ultimately help change the way we do business in a way that better meets Veterans' needs.

HOW TO USE JOURNEY TOOLS:

Use the three Journeys of Veterans tools to:

- Develop a shared understanding of Veterans' experiences across VA
- Identify VA customer service gaps or bright spots along Veterans' journeys
- Recognize where multiple VA services might touch Veterans simultaneously along their journeys
- Focus on "moments that matter" as junctures during which VA should design excellent customer service experiences and outreach opportunities
- Reference life moments as starting points for generating new products or services



The journey map is the best thing I have ever seen come from VA.

LES BEAVERS

Executive Director (Former),
NASDVA

Journeys Research Report

The Journeys of Veterans research report captures an aggregated view of Veterans' life journeys from pre-service through death. The report describes the three phases of our journey model—Serving in and Separating from the Military, Living Civilian Life, and Retiring and Aging—which together cover 10 major life stages and associated VA services, including

various moments and “moments that matter,” i.e., significant moments in Veterans' lives during which VA can and should play a role. This information serves as a foundation on which to build a common understanding of Veterans' experiences and can be used as a starting point for designing or refining products and services.



SERVING IN AND SEPARATING FROM THE MILITARY

JOINING

People join the military for a number of reasons, although approximately 78% of active duty members enlist immediately after high school. In addition to the pride of serving their country and fellow citizens, new recruits see the military as an employment opportunity, a pathway into future educational opportunities, and a way to jump-start their adult lives. Some servicemembers also join to get away from difficult environments or improve their chances of having a better future.

WHAT WE HEARD

- Many servicemembers enlist in the military after high school. As a result, they “grow up” in a highly structured, insular environment, which enhances certain skill sets and potentially mutes others, like managing finances or planning for the future.
- The spectrum of motivation for joining the military is broad—from looking for a sense of purpose to tangible returns (e.g. a paycheck or educational benefits).
- Some servicemembers join the military to escape negative life conditions (e.g. abuse or alcoholism); however, often these conditions do not go away and may continue to impact them even after separation.
- Many Veterans have a vague idea of the VA benefits available to them (GI Bill and Health Care being the most familiar), but expect a full set of VA benefits and services upon separation.

LEAVING HOME
Military recruits often want to change their current life path, gain independence, or get away from their living environments. This may be a moment of anxiety and excitement.

EMBRACING MILITARY CULTURE
Recruits are often eager for the opportunity to leave their home towns, travel across the world, and do something different with their lives. They feel enthusiastic and optimistic.

BEING MOTIVATED BY THE MISSION
Some recruits feel it is their duty to serve their country and their purpose is to protect their fellow citizens. By joining the military and making a sacrifice for a greater good, these recruits hope to earn respect and honor.

UNDERSTANDING FUTURE PROSPECTS
The promise of future VA benefits and services is often used during recruitment as a tool to help potential servicemembers envision their future prospects. This may be the first time servicemembers are “introduced” to VA.

VETERANS MAY BE THINKING...

- “I’ll be able to afford school.”
- “I’ll be able to build a career in the military if I want to.”
- “The military offers great benefits and will help me achieve my goals.”
- “I’m giving up my independence for a few years and I’m not completely sure it is well be worth it.”
- “I’ve heard bad things about VA.”

PAIN POINTS

- Lack of transparency around how Veterans earn benefits (e.g. contractual requirements).

JOINING

“SERVING YOUR COUNTRY WAS REAL BIG. IT WAS AN HONOR.”

DAN, TEXAS

VA OPPORTUNITIES

VA can inform servicemembers and shape the perception of VA services at the onset of their military career. Focusing on how and what is communicated about education and health care benefits, among others, potentially shapes the expectations of future Veterans.

VA SERVICES

- GI Bill (Future)
- VA Health Care (Future)

LEAVING HOME

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Moment that Matters

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PREPARING FOR MILITARY SERVICE

New recruits prepare to abandon their comfort zones and join bootcamp, an overwhelming and exhilarating moment where the idea of military service becomes a reality. Recruits might talk with other people who are planning to serve or have already served in the military, seeking strategies for how best to adapt to their new lifestyle during this transition.

“I WAS EXPECTING TO GO INTO CRASH FIRE RESCUE SO I COULD GET OUT AND BECOME A FIREFIGHTER.”

TEB, FL

Journeys of Veterans Map

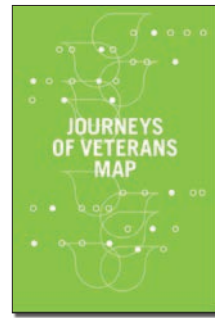
This map, based on our discovery findings, covers life stages Veterans may encounter, from pre-service to end of life.

These life stages are organized in three phases in which Veterans' goals and aspirations are distinctly different. Each life stage lists out moments Veterans typically experience and the associated VA services, and calls out key "moments that matter" which may have significant impact on Veterans' experiences.

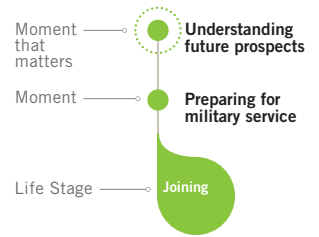
"Moments that matter" are explicitly called out across the 10 life stages. Two metrics were used to identify these "moments that matter": 1) Veterans cited these points as major moments in their lives with long-term implications for their well-being, and 2) VA can and should play a significant or enhanced role during these moments. While "moments that matter" have heightened significance for Veterans, each moment along the map is important to Veterans' overall well-being.

Life events impact individual goals and change priorities. Events like marriage, divorce, widowhood, birth of a child, obtaining a new degree, loss of housing, empty nesting, major illness, and so on have profound effects on people's priorities and how they approach their lives—as well as how they interact and perceive services. These events are unpredictable and may happen at any point across this journey.



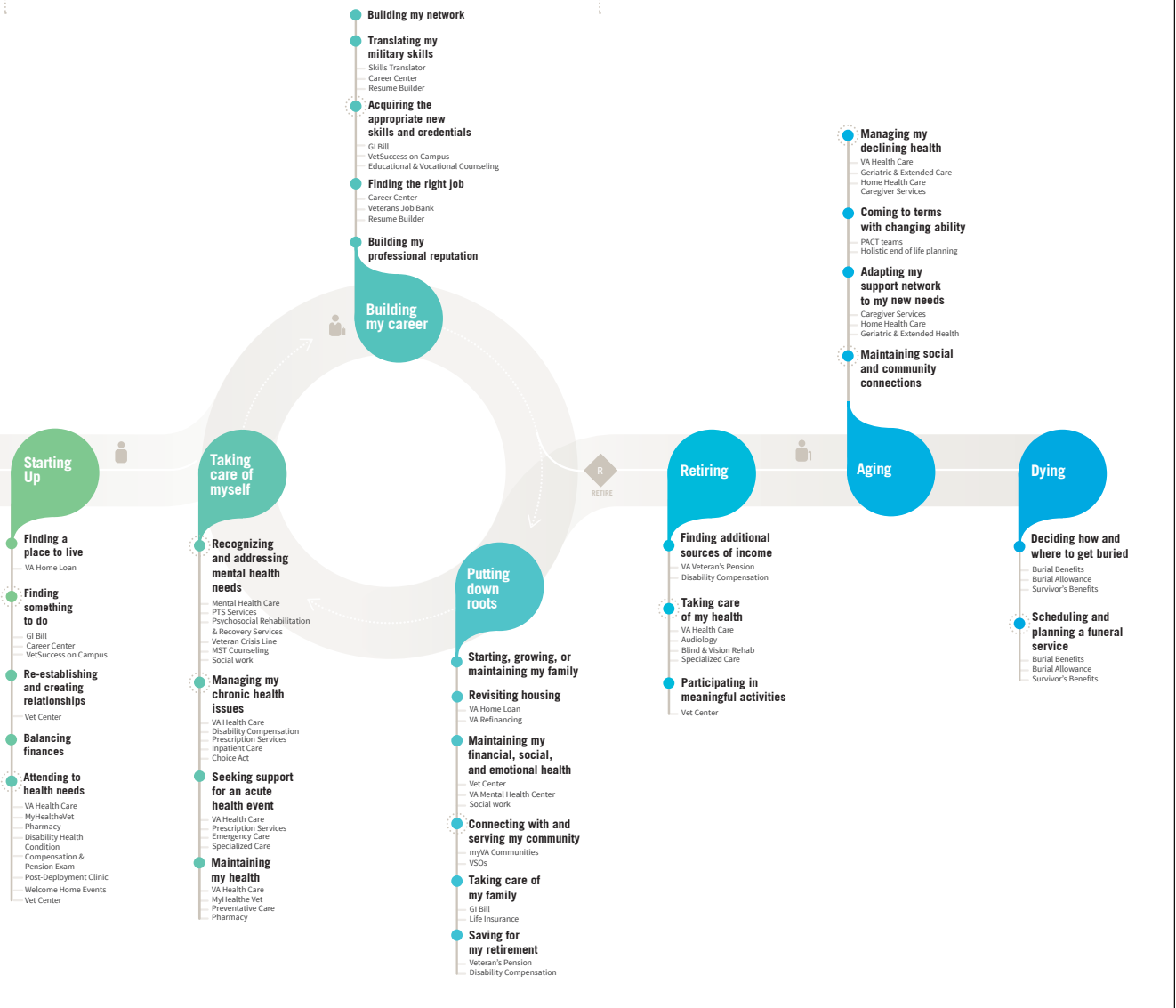


LEGEND



LIVING POST-MILITARY LIFE

RETIREMENT AND DEALING WITH AGING



Deep-Dive Journey Maps

The deep-dive maps expand each stage of the Veterans' journey, further illuminating the varied experiences in a Veteran's engagement with VA.

We created the deep-dive maps in collaborative journey-mapping sessions with Veterans and participants from across all VA administrations and relevant staff offices. Together, we focused on making sure we had the "doing" steps right, discussing what Veterans are thinking and feeling at these steps, the role VA currently plays, and opportunities for future research or improvements.

LOW-FIDELITY MAP

We generated spreadsheet versions of the deep-dive maps for ongoing use and revision by VA. These 'lo-fi' maps will allow for different key personnel or offices to input revisions in key steps, Veterans' feelings and thoughts at these steps, VA onstage activities, and potential opportunities. There will be one VA owner for each of these maps, who will be responsible for compiling updates and integrating new insights into existing workflows.

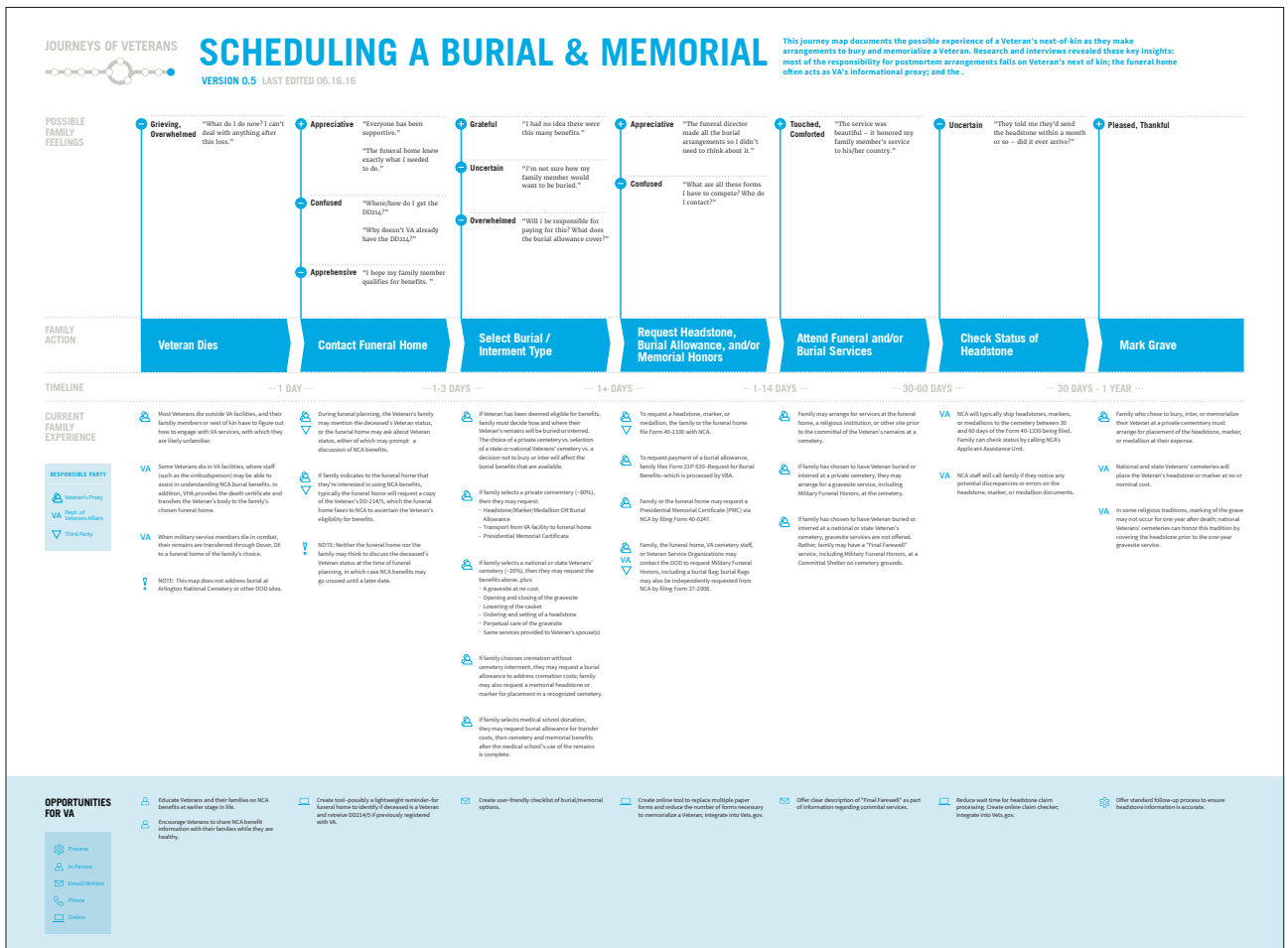
DEEP-DIVE MAPS CREATED TO-DATE

- Enrolling in Healthcare
- Accessing Primary & Specialty Care
- Accessing Mental Health Services
- Looking for a Job
- Looking for Housing
- Furthering Education
- Filing for Disability Insurance
- The Compensation & Pension Examination (part of Disability Insurance)
- Appealing Disability Insurance Rating
- Vocational Rehabilitation
- Burying a Family Member

Event	When	Where	How	Why/How Often
Schedule Burial				
Request Headstone, Burial Alternative, or Other Memorial				
Attend Funeral and/or Other Service				

HIGH-FIDELITY MAP

The 'hi-fi' maps are professionally designed versions of the 'lo-fi' map content. These visualizations of the deep-dive journeys are intended for use as tools in collaborative settings, for example when teams gather to consider opportunities to improve aspects of service around a portion of the journey. Updates to the hi-fi maps can be coordinated with VE team.



PERSONA TOOLS

We generated two new tools about 10 types of common VA users—aggregate characters known in the private sector as ‘personas.’

The Challenge Veterans’ varied backgrounds and experiences effect how they interact with VA, so VA needs to understand different expectations, requirements, and attitudes of Veterans in order to design and deliver better products and services.

Our Approach Building on our discovery research and prior VA human-centered design efforts, we developed personas: fictitious characters combining qualities from many different real people who represent VA’s actual customers. Personas are not the same as market segments. Instead, personas capture attitudes, needs, and expectations of potential users of VA’s services.

Design Solution We created two persona tools that explore how Veterans’ military and personal experiences shape their needs of and attitudes toward VA: a comprehensive research report with a set of 10 updated personas, and a deck of ‘ideation’ cards to allow service designers, product owners, and others to generate new ideas for responding to the needs of Veterans with different worldviews, personal qualities, military experiences, and life needs.

Future Impact We are using persona tools in conjunction with the journey tools throughout the organization to build an understanding of a range of Veterans’ perspectives. These tools can be used to focus products and services on addressing particular Veteran needs and expectations, refine offerings to address a broader spectrum of Veterans, and ultimately create a better experience for each unique Veteran we serve.

HOW TO USE PERSONA TOOLS:

- Understand the diverse needs and attitudes of VA’s primary set of customers
- Develop fluency in describing Veterans’ experiences and a shared understanding of Veterans’ needs across the spectrum
- Recognize where VA services do a great job at or fall short of meeting different Veterans’ expectations and needs
- Identify which services have a broad impact on multiple personas and which services are more targeted
- Reference personas as starting points for generating new products or services

Personas Research Report

The VA Customer Personas research report describes 10 common VA personas. These personas are derived from hundreds of ethnographic interviews with Veterans, their families, and their service providers. This research included visits to their homes and places of work, as well as rich discussions about their lives. Qualitative research of this kind provided incredibly detailed data about not just what Veterans do or want, but why and how they live their lives and try to achieve their goals. This information serves as a foundation on which to build a more detailed understanding of how Veterans' experiences are variable; these personas can be used as a starting point for designing or refining products and services.

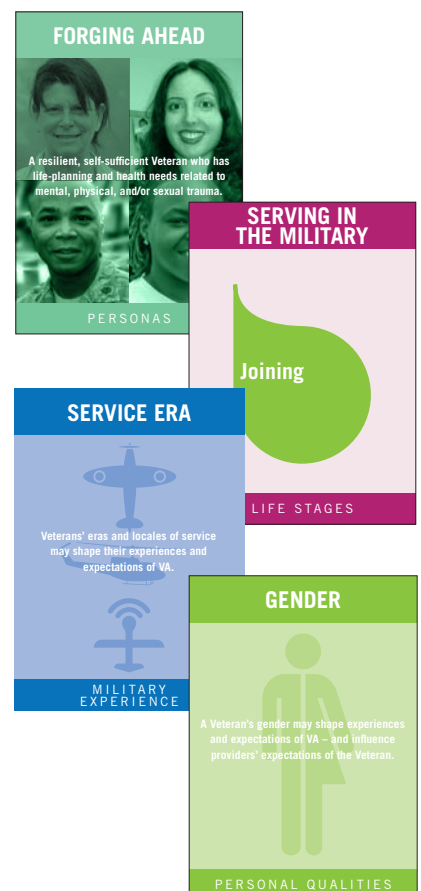


Ideation Cards

The ideation cards are a translation of VA's customer personas into user-friendly ideation or playing cards.

The ideation card deck contains four suits, including Veteran personas, life stages, military experiences, and personal qualities. The cards will be most immediately useful for people throughout VA who are in the process of designing better products, services and experiences for Veterans. Whenever possible, experienced human-centered designers should facilitate use of the cards with teams who have limited day-to-day experience with creative ideation.

The cards' primary use is to help designers ask idea-provoking questions and generate innovative solutions. People should use the deck to: imagine and invent new possible tools and services; identify gaps in current tools and services; and think of new ways to evaluate the utility of tools and services for different types of Veterans. For example, product owners could potentially re-design VA benefit handbooks, personalizing them according to different Veteran personas, or service owners could design less-burdensome enrollment processes to align with particular Veterans' needs.



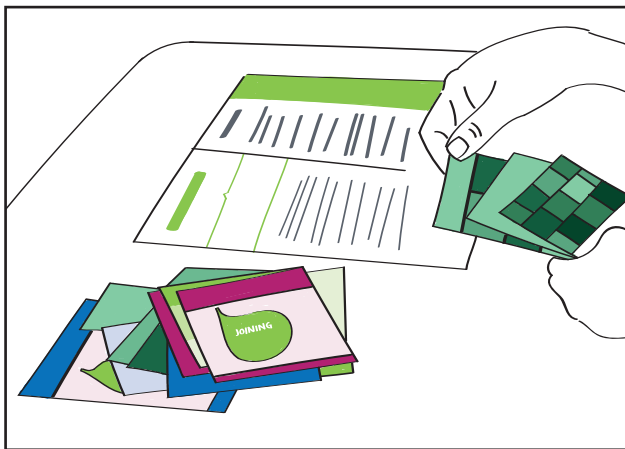
Future Evolutions

Veteran personas and journey maps can be used to drive strategic planning and decision-making across the Veteran ecosystem. We envision VA will leverage these materials in the following ways:



VA AGENCY LEVEL

VA can use the journey maps and personas to assist VA Strategic Planning and Programming, OEI/OPP. These materials provide a Veteran-centric framework to orient decision-making toward a cohesive portfolio of administration activities. The journey map can also be used as a living document to track new programs and initiatives against the Veteran experience.



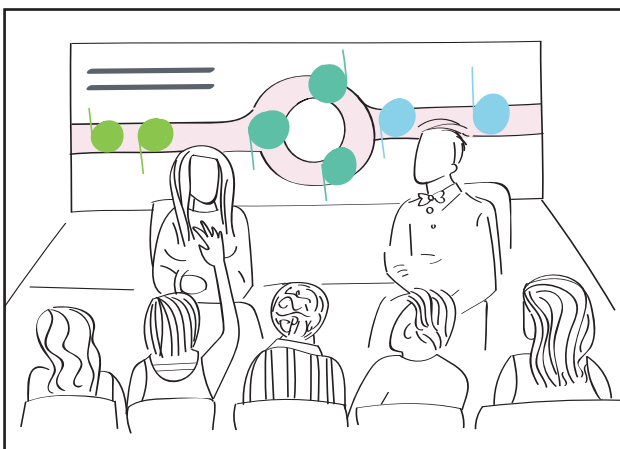
VA ADMINISTRATION LEVEL

Journey maps and personas can be used by administration and program leaders to shape efforts with the Veteran perspective in mind. These materials can provide a basis for prioritizing needs and aligning services based on Veteran experience. The journey map can also help identify VA customer service gaps or bright spots along Veteran journeys and measure improvement against “moments that matter.”



FRONTLINE EMPLOYEE TRAINING

VA can educate VA employees across all administrations about the Veteran experience with journey maps and personas, highlighting “front stage” experiences and “back stage” services. These materials can empower employees to deeply understand how their work affect Veteran experience, and provide a common language for employees to discuss Veteran-centric customer service.



ORGANIZATIONS SERVING VETERANS

Journey maps and personas can be shared across the ecosystem of organizations that help Veterans, enabling a common perspective and understanding of Veterans. These materials can provide a common language around Veteran experience, facilitate discussion and collaboration across the ecosystem, and help identify “moments that matter” where organizations could effectively partner.



VA stakeholders immerse themselves in qualitative research and brainstorm possible ways to improve Veterans' experiences.

DESIGN SPRINTS WITH VA STAFF





VA stakeholders test persona ideation card prototypes during the “co-design” phase of the rapid-cycle design sprint.

By co-designing, we can make a significant impact on Veterans and VA employees in just one month.

All across VA, our employees are embarking on ambitious projects and doing impactful work. To amplify those efforts, our team identified some already “in-flight” opportunities, and applied a rigorous but rapid human centered design methodology to help move the work along. We were able to fold both Veteran and VA employee voices into the creation of new products, processes, and services.

OVERALL APPROACH

Our team ran three rapid-cycle design sprints that resulted in three processes: Hire Right, Hire Fast; VA Feedback Tool; and Human Resources. For each of these efforts, we applied a similar human centered methodology to drive meaningful impact. Our process looked like this:

Week 1: Discovery Research

Conducting qualitative field research to diagnose pain points, locate bright spots, and generate important insights

Weeks 2-3: Prototype Co-Design

Designing low-fidelity “testable” solution prototypes with VA Stakeholders and Veterans

Weeks 4-5: Testing & Handoff

Testing prototypes in the field, integrating findings into new prototype iterations, and handing the prototypes off to VA stakeholders

OVERALL OUTCOMES

Our team introduced a capability and supported a mindset shift in VA stakeholders interested in designing relevant products and services for Veterans and VA employees. In addition to the prototypes, we provided implementation considerations and success factors, and created warm handoffs between the design team and VA stakeholders ultimately responsible for the work.

“
We both succeeded and failed at times, but we always got what we needed at the end of the day. It was an incredible but quick journey.

THOMAS PASAKARNIS
Program Manager,
Veterans Experience

HIRE RIGHT HIRE FAST

A modification of VA's current hiring processes enables faster onboarding of Medical Support Assistants.

The Challenge It currently takes 80 to 175 days to recruit, hire, and start Medical Support Assistants (MSAs) at VA Medical Centers (VAMCs).

Our Approach We aimed to communicate a new process to hire and fill MSA vacancies faster and with the right person, and engage the appropriate stakeholders along the way to implement the program successfully. Our team traveled to VA Puget Sound for a week of discovery research. We heard from HR staff, current MSAs, medical center directors, service line chiefs, and Veterans. Based on our research, we co-designed communication and implementation materials. We learned that having all the stakeholders in the room at the same time to work through ideas led to a better solution for all. Towards the end, we tested our materials with HR staff and hospital directors, integrating their feedback into the final handoff product.

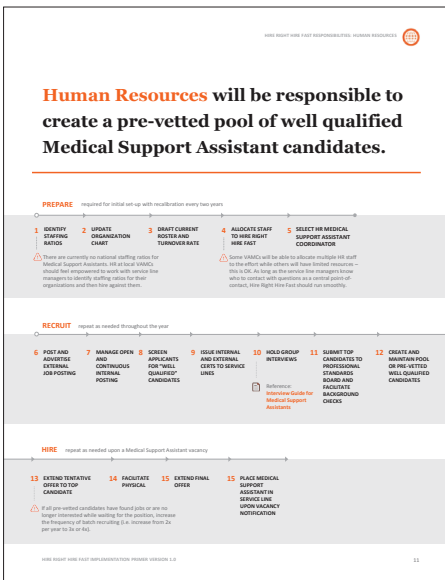
Design Solution In the new process, HR creates a pool of pre-vetted candidates prior to an MSA job vacancy to fill the slot within 30 days of vacancy. This shift leads to faster hiring of well-qualified candidates. A Hire Right Hire Fast Primer and Implementation Roadmap were created to aid VA Medical Centers as they implement the new program. These materials walk stakeholders through the new hiring process and help VA Medical Centers consider implementation barriers.

Future Impact Five VAMC's are successfully piloting the Hire Right Hire Fast program using the communication and implementation materials created during the design sprint.



Going through the process of Hire Right Hire Fast created a mindset that barriers can be overcome.

RALPH GIGLIOTTI
Network Director VISN 19,
Rocky Mountain Network



PROCESS OVERVIEW

The Hire Right Hire Fast primer provides a process overview and steps to implement the new hiring process to VA facilities.

SUCCESS FACTORS

The implementation materials highlight key success factors to assess the readiness of VAMCs to implement the new program.

VA FEEDBACK TOOL

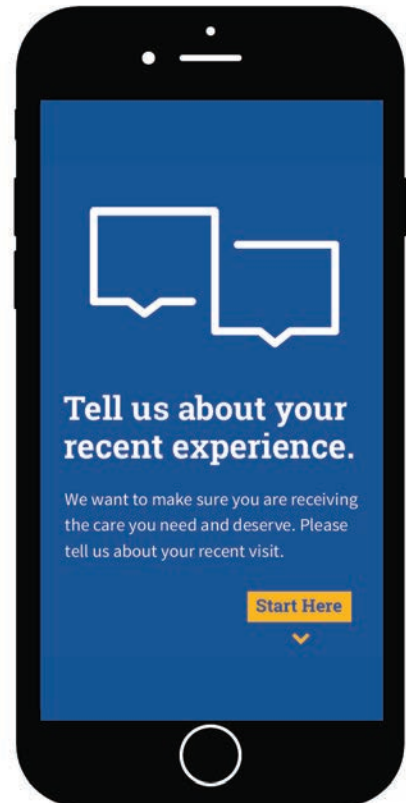
The VA Feedback Tool provides a real-time and direct communication path to address both Veteran and employee needs.

The Challenge Veterans are confused about how to provide feedback to VA, and employees use multiple systems to track feedback—making it difficult to document and respond to feedback in a timely manner. Our challenge was to create a tool to route Veterans’ feedback to the right employees so they can respond quickly and effectively.

Our Approach Our team conducted research at the VA Medical Center in Baltimore to identify the current state of feedback collection and response. Collaborating with VA employees and Veterans helped us identify common issues and which employees could best address that feedback. We conducted interview sessions to gather Veterans’ and employees’ reactions to initial designs of the feedback tool and made improvements based on these reactions.

Design Solution A user-friendly digital tool was designed to address Veterans’ most pressing needs and the issues they encounter when interacting with VA. The tool can be accessed through a website link using a computer, tablet, or a smart-phone—either directly after their encounter with VA or on their own time. A back-end routing structure was created to address both Veteran and employee needs by bringing feedback directly to the appropriate party.

Future Impact The feedback tool will help Veterans feel that their voices are heard and ensure that any issues or concerns they have are resolved appropriately.



“

The feedback needs to go to the right people. When it's not specific, it's not actionable.

PRIMARY CARE EMPLOYEE,
Baltimore



FEEDBACK EXPERIENCE TODAY...

A MULTITUDE OF OPTIONS FOR SUBMITTING AND COLLECTING FEEDBACK EXIST

There is no unified place for Veterans to submit feedback and they are often not confident a follow-up will occur. For VA, feedback is collected in so many places it is difficult to respond effectively.

THERE IS NO CONSISTENT PROCESS FOR DIRECTING FEEDBACK TO THE APPROPRIATE PARTY

Receiving a follow-up and/or resolution to an issue can be a lengthy process with feedback passing through many hands. Patient Advocates are often required to act as the middlemen when issues need to be routed elsewhere.

THERE IS NO UNIFIED WAY TO DOCUMENT OR RESPOND TO VETERANS' FEEDBACK OVER TIME

Feedback collection and documentation occurs in a variety of places. Feedback is distributed at different intervals and is not accessed as a whole, allowing issues to re-occur and frustrate Veterans.

FEEDBACK EXPERIENCE TOMORROW...

A UNIFIED CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE REDUCES BARRIERS AND COMPLEXITY FOR VETERANS

Rather than having to guess where they should go to get their questions answered, Veterans will have a reliable tool right at their fingertips connecting them directly to VA facilities and services.

SMART BACK-END ROUTING ENGAGES (THE RIGHT) EMPLOYEES

Back-end routing directs feedback to the appropriate party within VA, simplifying the response to Veteran feedback. This allows employees to spend less time entering and routing feedback and instead spend more time meeting and responding to Veterans' needs.

DATA COLLECTION AND RESPONSE IS ENABLED OVER TIME

This feedback tool will provide an easier and more integrated way to gather, analyze, and respond to Veterans' feedback over the long term.

HUMAN RESOURCES TOOLS

We identified opportunities to streamline and simplify VA HR's organizational processes and practices.

The Challenge As VA contemplates its enterprise HR transformation, HR @ VA wanted to understand what organizational orthodoxies may be getting in the way of progress and which key moments in the employee experience are ripe for disrupting to ensure there isn't a return to today's norms.

Our Approach Coming out of a workshop with numerous stakeholders to scope the central issues at hand, we embedded with a combined HR and business partner team undergoing a real-time challenge for real-time observation and research—conducting over 20 interviews with Subject Matter Experts from both sides to gain deeper insight. Through our research we identified key unwritten rules that inhibit HR's efficacy within VA and procedural assumptions that unintentionally reinforced these rules.

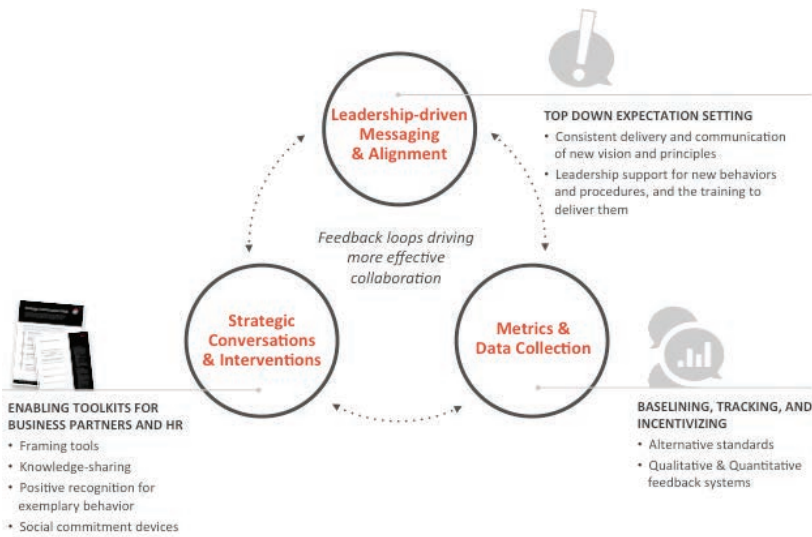
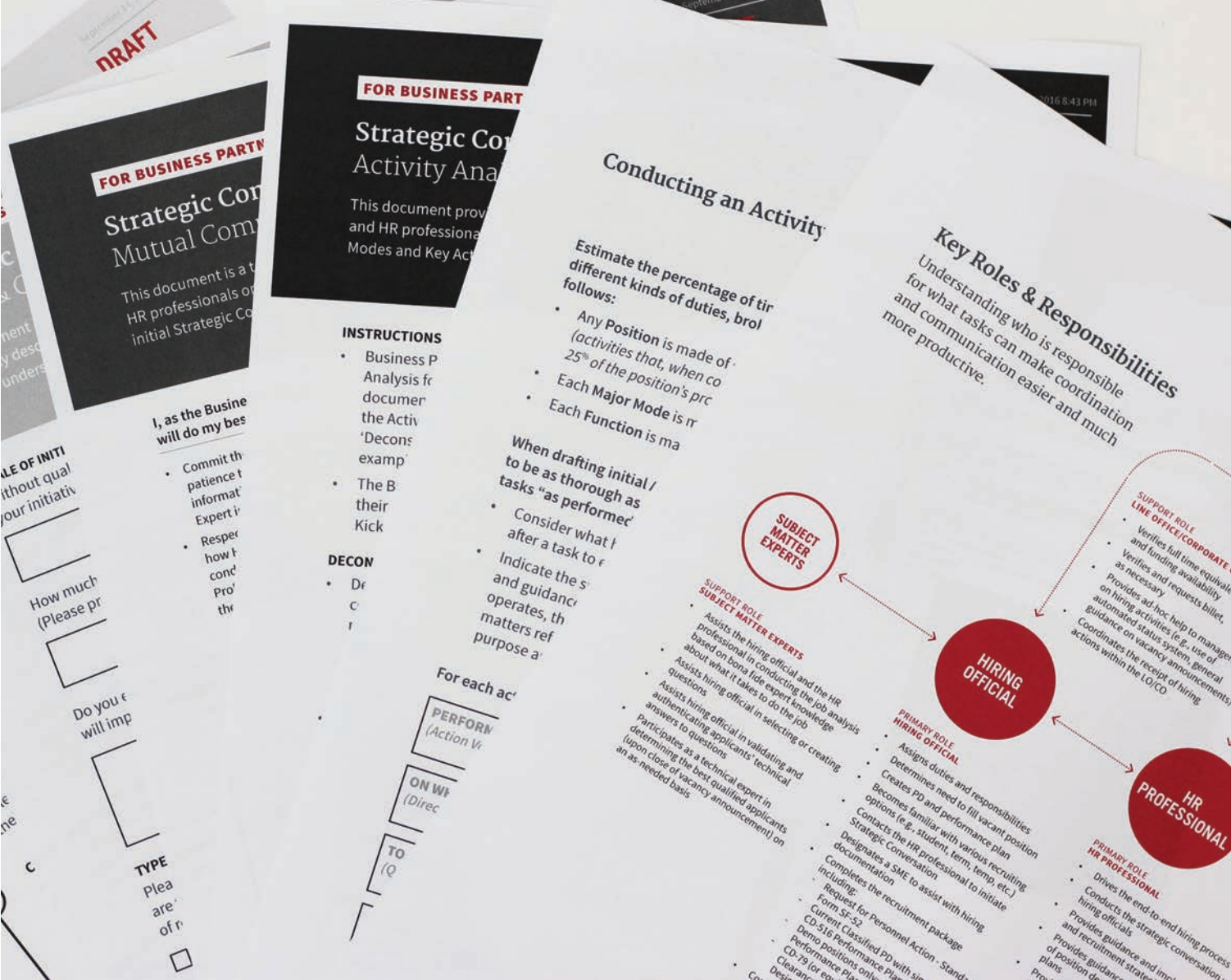
Design Solution Our goal was to develop scalable tools that will lower the barriers to behavior change. Specifically, we honed in on building a Strategic Conversations Toolkit to facilitate productive, structured conversations around alignment and expectations between HR and their business partners at the beginning and throughout the hiring process—to offer HR's business partners tools to effectively start an engagement with HR and change the dynamic of initial conversations (and beyond).

Future Impact The intended outcomes include enabling HR to act as strategic thought partners, dissolving the current dynamic that obstructs real collaboration, and guiding business partners to engage with HR in a way that will ultimately achieve their own goals and outcomes.



This initiative is the best work I've been involved with at VA.

MEGHAN FLANZ
Assistant Secretary,
Human Resources and
Administration





Public Policy Lab conducts prototype testing with Veterans at the Veterans Benefits Administration building in Manhattan.

IN-DEPTH DESIGN WITH VETERANS





Co-designing onboarding materials with Veterans.

ONBOARDING TOOLS

We created print and digital materials to help Veterans navigate the potentially confusing landscape of post-military life.

The Challenge

Currently Veterans receive information about VA in a fragmented way, which creates a confusing and disjointed experience when first trying to understand and access VA services. VA has the opportunity to foster more positive and effective interactions throughout Veterans' journeys by improving Veterans' "onboarding" experience to VA.

We identified two opportunities to complement existing efforts and address gaps in the current onboarding experience:

INTRODUCING VETERANS TO VA

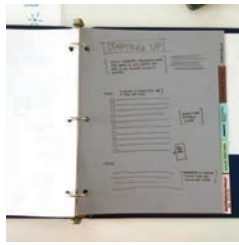
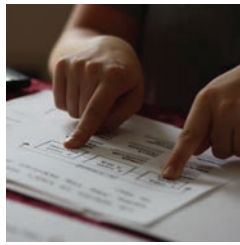
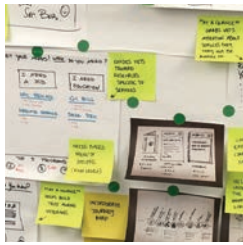
To help Veterans answer the question "What can VA do for me?," we explored new ways to orient both recently-separated and long-time Veterans to VA benefits and services. We tested components including a welcome letter and other communication materials that give Veterans a broad overview of when and how VA might be useful in their lives. We included resources and contact information for each service to help Veterans get their questions answered online, over the phone, and in person.

HELPING VETERANS GET STARTED

To help Veterans answer the question "How can I get help for specific needs?" we explored ways to help Veterans take immediate steps to access specific services such as obtaining primary health care or applying for disability compensation. This objective builds on the first effort by providing in-depth and actionable information about how to access VA services. We tested step-by-step checklists to access a benefit or service, as well as other key pieces of information about eligibility and related programs.

Our Approach

Through an iterative testing and design process, we created over 10 versions of the prototypes, incorporating feedback throughout the process from over 150 Veterans.



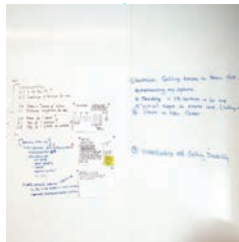
V1

V2

V3

V4

V5

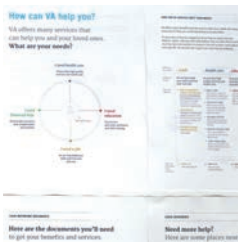


EXPLORATORY RESEARCH

We began our process by interviewing, co-designing, and testing the value proposition of potential tools. Over two weeks, we conducted a mix of in-depth and intercept interviews with Veterans in Denver and New York City. During interviews, we asked Veterans to briefly tell us their story, invited them to participate in a card-sorting activity, and tested the value proposition of a low-fidelity prototype.

KEY FINDINGS

- Provide a manageable, yet broad, view of what VA offers so Veterans can identify programs and services that might apply to them both now and in the future
- Provide the first steps for a Veteran to take towards receiving access to a prioritized list of care, programs, services or benefits
- Be extremely clear about what to expect in the process, how long it will take, and what documents are required



V6



V7



V8



V9



V10



EVALUATIVE TESTING & ITERATION

To test and refine our initial concepts, we followed an iterative testing and design process. We conducted testing cycles in California, Colorado, Michigan, Texas, and Oklahoma. During the testing, we presented in-progress prototypes to a mix of recently separated Veterans, currently separating service members, long-time Veterans, and re-engaging Veterans. In between rounds of testing we incorporated feedback into revised versions of the prototypes.

KEY FINDINGS

- Allow Veterans to quickly grasp what VA offers and see how VA can help throughout their lives
- Use simple, direct, and actionable language for ease of comprehension
- Engage Veterans with a friendly and welcoming tone and accessible design
- Present information in clear and digestible amounts, making it easy to quickly get to the most relevant information

Design Solution

The result is a set of communication materials introducing VA to Veterans and their supporters.

A

Welcome to VA.



I would like to welcome you to the Department of Veterans Affairs. We're here to meet the needs of you and your loved ones.

VA can help as you plan to support your family, attend to your health needs, begin a new career, continue your education, buy a home, or plan for retirement. Our goal is to be there for you whenever you need us throughout your life. Use your VA Welcome Guide to figure out how and when VA can best serve you.

WHAT DO YOU NEED?

- Health Care** VA can help you visit your health care needs.
- Finances** VA can help support your financial goals.
- Housing** VA can help you secure a home for yourself and your loved ones.
- Employment** VA can help you develop your career.
- Education** VA can help you reach your educational goals.
- More Support** VA can help you reach your educational goals.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

- Look through your VA Welcome Guide and learn how VA can help.
- Go to www.va.gov to learn more about VA and your benefits options.
- Go to www.ebenefits.va.gov and create a profile to access your benefits and services.
- Request additional copies of the VA Welcome Guide from www.va.gov and give them to other Veterans you know.

Sincerely,
Secretary Bob McDonald
Department of Veterans Affairs

B

VA WELCOME GUIDE

HELLO.

**Welcome to VA.
Let's get started.**

Some ways VA can help you while you're...

GETTING OUT

WHAT IS YOUR GOAL?	WHAT CAN YOU DO?	WHAT SERVICES CAN VA PROVIDE?	VISIT US ONLINE	CALL US	SEE US IN PERSON
Engage VA to receive benefits and services	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify your education Become a claimant Apply for a disability rating Plan for your family's financial future Apply for employment Apply for health care Prepare to find a job Complete your paperwork 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> VA Bill VA Home Loan Disability Compensation VA Life Insurance Veterans Pension VA Health Care Compensation and Employment Medical Archives Service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> VA.gov VA Benefits (VA.gov/benefits) VA Home Loans (VA.gov/homeloans) VA Disability Compensation (VA.gov/disability) VA Life Insurance (VA.gov/life) Veterans Pension (VA.gov/pension) VA Health Care (VA.gov/healthcare) Compensation and Employment (VA.gov/employment) Medical Archives Service (VA.gov/archives) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1-800-828-0838 1-800-541-5311 1-800-541-5311 1-800-541-5311 1-800-541-5311 1-800-541-5311 1-800-541-5311 1-800-541-5311 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> VA Regional Offices VA Regional Offices VA Regional Offices VA Regional Offices VA Regional Offices VA Regional Offices VA Regional Offices VA Regional Offices

WHAT DO YOU NEED?

- Health Care
- Finances
- Housing
- Employment
- Education
- More Support

A WELCOME LETTER

A one-page letter, signed by Secretary Bob, welcomes Veterans into VA and lets them know someone cares.

B WELCOME GUIDE

A lightweight booklet introducing Veterans to what VA has to offer, where and when VA can help throughout their lives, and the first few steps to take to get started with VA.

C

Create a Quick Start Guide

Quick Start Guides (QSGs) are one-page guides to Veterans' claim, discharge, and other VA services. They are designed to help Veterans know what steps, when, and what questions to ask at each point in their VA journey.

Apply for Education Benefits

This guide will help you apply for VA Education benefits, such as the Post-9/11 GI Bill, the Montgomery GI Bill program, or the Job Training and Care program. Note: Work with VA to find out if you are eligible.

Apply for VA Health Care

This guide will help you apply for VA Health Care, which includes checkups, prescriptions, and access to specialists, such as physical therapists, and mental health providers. Note: Work with VA to find out if you are eligible for VA Health Care.

Apply for a disability rating

This guide will help you apply for a disability rating, which describes how much your medical condition(s) affects your daily life. This rating is between 0% to 100%. Your rating gives you access to certain VA benefits, such as compensation and on-going health care. Note: Work with VA to find out if you are eligible for a disability rating.

D

Get help near you.

Contact local resources in **your local area** to get help with VA benefits and services.

HEALTHCARE	BENEFITS & SERVICES	ADDITIONAL SUPPORT
<p>PROVIDER FOR MEDICAL AND HEALTH CARE SERVICES (Physician or nurse)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> VA Medical Centers Community-Based Organizations Other health care providers (e.g., VA clinics) VA Health Care Network VA Health Care Network 	<p>PROVIDER FOR BENEFITS AND SERVICES (Physician or nurse)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> VA Regional Offices VA Regional Office VA Regional Office VA Regional Office VA Regional Office 	<p>PROVIDER FOR ADDITIONAL SUPPORT (Physician or nurse)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> VA Community Care Program VA Community Care Program VA Community Care Program VA Community Care Program VA Community Care Program
<p>VA MEDICAL CENTER</p> <p>VA Medical Center 116th Street, NW Washington, DC 20316 Phone number</p>	<p>VA REGIONAL OFFICE</p> <p>VA Regional Office 116th Street, NW Washington, DC 20316 Phone number</p>	<p>VA COMMUNITY CARE PROGRAM</p> <p>VA Community Care Program 116th Street, NW Washington, DC 20316 Phone number</p>

C QUICK START GUIDES

Templatized, front and back one-pagers provide simple, actionable, and step-by-step information to help Veterans apply for or get started with specific services.

D LOCAL RESOURCES

A one-page template allows VE district field officers to create a comprehensive and personalized list of local people and places who can help along the way.

Apply for VA Health Care

This guide will help you apply for VA Health Care, which includes regular checkups, prescriptions, and access to specialists, such as cardiologists, gynecologists, and mental health providers.

Note: Work with VA to find out if you are eligible for VA Health Care.

A checklist to help you apply for VA Health Care:

- 1 PREPARATION**
 - Collect the following information:
 - Discharge papers** (DD214 member-4 or equivalent)
 - Your most recent **tax return**
 - Social security numbers** for yourself and your dependents
 - Account numbers** for insurance programs you are enrolled in
- 2 APPLICATION**
 - Apply by completing the healthcare application form in one of the following ways:
 - ➔ Visit us **online** at vets.gov and click on "Health Care"
 - ➔ Give us a **call** at (877) 222-8387 (press 2); M-F, 8am-8pm ET
 - ➔ See us **in person** at a VA Medical Center
 - ➔ Print out and **mail** the completed form to the Health Eligibility Center (2957 Clairmont Rd., Ste 200, Atlanta, GA 30329)
- 3 REVIEW AND DECISION**
 - Call (877) 222-8387 (press 2) if you haven't heard back from VA more than one week after you've submitted your application
- 4 NEXT STEPS**
 - If **approved**, take steps to access the benefits you are eligible for:
 - review priority group assignment** and personalized benefits handbook mailed by VA after enrollment
 - Contact your local VA Medical Center to **set up an appointment**
 - Make an appointment to **obtain your VHC**

WHERE CAN I FIND MY DISCHARGE PAPERS?
Visit archives.gov to request your records.

HOW WILL I FIND OUT ABOUT VA'S DECISION?
If **accepted**, you'll receive a phone call from VA and a personalized benefits handbook in the mail. If **denied**, you'll receive a letter indicating the reason.

WHAT ARE PRIORITY GROUPS?
VA offers different levels of health care coverage based on your service, disability status, and income. Priority groups **determine, in part, how much you pay for VA Health Care services.**

WHAT IS A VHC?
A VHC is a photo ID that gives you access to VA Health Care facilities. When you're enrolled in VA health care, you can get a VHC by making an appointment with your local VA Medical Center to get your picture taken for your VHC.

CONTACT US
VISIT US ONLINE vets.gov
GIVE US A CALL

Testing the utility of Quick Start Guides.

Future Impact

If implemented successfully, these tools will:

PROVIDE ACTIONABLE TOOLS

Veterans seek tools that can help them navigate a complex landscape of benefits and services, such as detailed checklists and specific actions to take to access a service

BRIDGE THE GAP

Veterans need this information close to separation, before they may even know about resources like ExploreVA or Vets.gov. These new materials will point Veterans in the direction of these helpful resources.

PRESENT A HOLISTIC VIEW OF VA SERVICES

Veterans want a quick, “at-a-glance” understanding of ALL VA offers and then be able to quickly get to the information that is most relevant to them and meets their individual needs

INTEGRATE MULTI PLATFORMS

Veterans expect both physical and digital tools to assist them in navigating VA. While many recent Veterans are digital natives, they also want paper-based tools to store in one place and facilitate conversations with VA representatives.

“

I would want this to occur before and during separation. If they give it to you after, it would be like packing your parachute after you jump out of the plane.

VETERAN
NYC

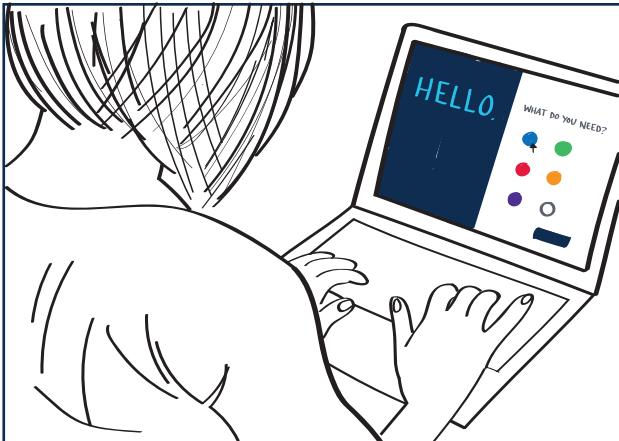
Future Veteran Experience

We heard from Veterans that they want the materials to be available in many different formats and places. They want the information presented before transition, but also want to have access to the material through other mediums. We imagine the following scenarios:



IN THE MAIL

Nick is getting ready to separate from the military in a few months, and is trying to plan his next steps. He receives a packet in the mail with a letter from Secretary Bob welcoming him to VA, a guide that gives him an overview of VA benefits, and a curated set of Quick Start Guides for services most relevant for separating Veterans. Nick reads through the materials and starts applying for services.



ONLINE

Chelsea is doing some research on VA benefits and comes across the Welcome Guide online. She clicks through to the section called “Starting Up” because she recently separated from the military and starts to consider applying for disability compensation. Then she follows the link to the “Apply for a Disability Rating” Quick Start Guide and finds a checklist which helps her get started.



WITH A COUNSELOR

Kate is preparing for her separation from the military in a few weeks. As part of processing out, Kate meets with a counselor in the transition office who talks her through the journey map in the Welcome Guide. They discuss what VA services might make sense for Kate at this stage in her life. Kate is interested in the GI Bill, so the counselor gives her the Quick Start Guide for education benefits to help her get started with the application process.



AT A FACILITY

Richard is in the waiting room at his VA Regional Benefits Office when he notices a rack of Quick Start Guides. He's curious about disability benefits, so he walks over and picks up one that says "Apply for a Disability Rating." Richard takes the paper over to the receptionist to find out more, and she gives him a copy of the Welcome Guide and a sheet of local resources to help him get started.

Future Onboarding Landscape

To provide a more holistic Veteran experience, these onboarding materials are intended to fill gaps and augment information distribution in VA's current onboarding experience.

CURRENT DISTRIBUTION

FILL GAPS

Welcome and Quick Start Guides fill gaps in the Veteran experience during key “moments that matter” to present Veterans with a holistic view of VA benefits.





AUGMENT

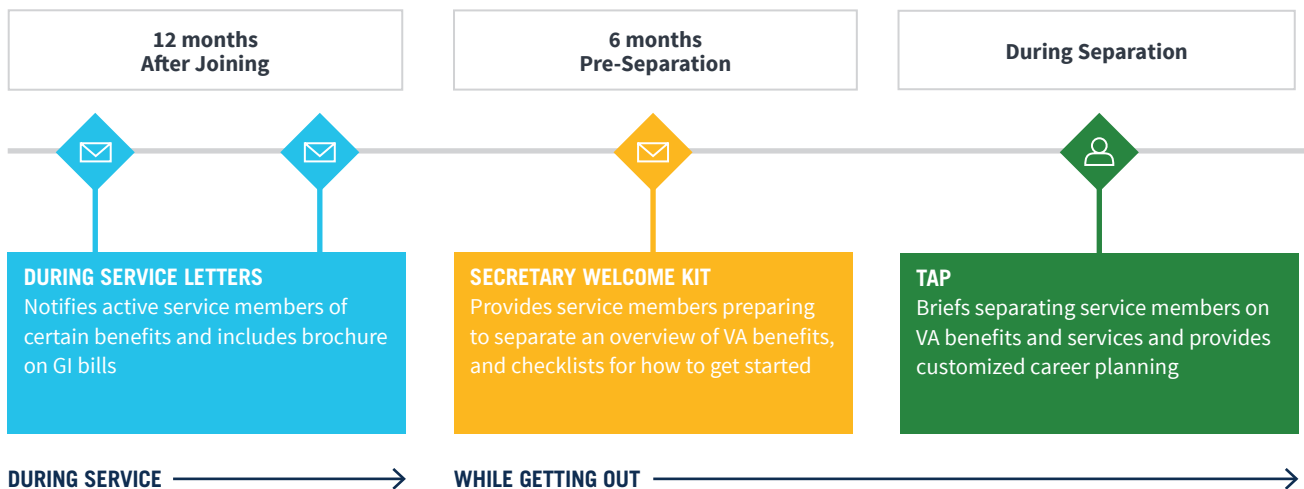
Onboarding materials augment existing information by providing a starting point to orient Veterans to VA, promote and link to more detailed information sources, and enable warm hands-offs between services.

REPLACE

Onboarding materials will potentially replace current mailing such as the Welcome Home and FOLL Packets, plus locally developed resources that have been created in the absence of national level information.

DISTRIBUTION CHANNELS

-  In-person
-  Online
-  Phone
-  Mail



AVAILABLE ONGOING SUPPORT

Vets.gov

Acts as a one-stop shop for benefits information and application access

EXPLOREVA

Presents digital information on the breadth of VA services available

BENEFITS CALCULATOR

An interactive tool to help Veteran determine benefits eligibility

eBENEFITS + MYHEALTHVET

Allows Veterans to apply, research, and manage benefits online

VSO SUPPORT

Connects Veterans to peers, mentors and VSO reps to guide them through benefits process

LOCAL FACILITY DISTRIBUTION

Provides Veterans with local information

Shortly
After Separation

6 months
After Separation

2 weeks
After Health Care Enrollment

WELCOME HOME PACKET

Welcomes Veterans to VA with the VBA benefits handbook, and a timeline on how to apply for benefits

FOLL PACKET

Reminds Veterans they may be eligible for benefits with follow up documents

HRC CALL

Invites Veterans to schedule an appointment

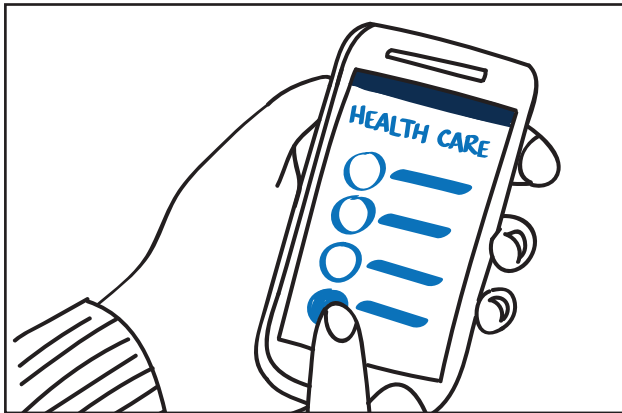
VHA HANDBOOK

Provides personalized information

AFTER STARTING UP

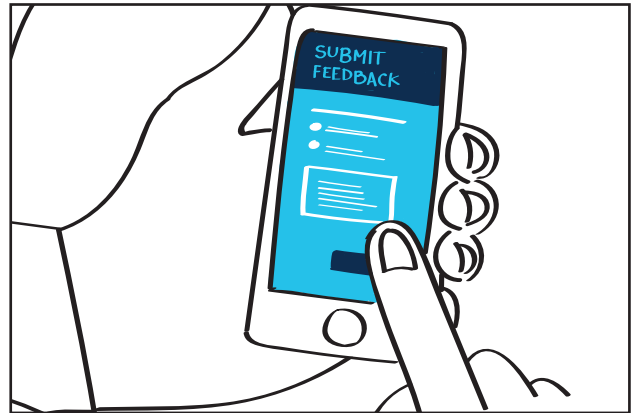
Future Evolutions

Over time, VA can increase the impact of these onboarding tools by continuing to develop them and integrate them with existing VA materials and processes. We envision that these onboarding tools will evolve in the following ways:



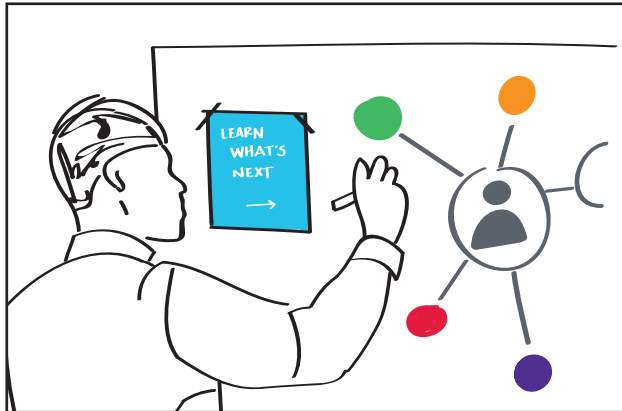
QUICK START GUIDE MOBILE APP

Access interactive checklists, links, and resources from a smart phone.



INTERACTIVE ONLINE FORUM

Read and share tips and feedback from Veterans on online versions of the tools.



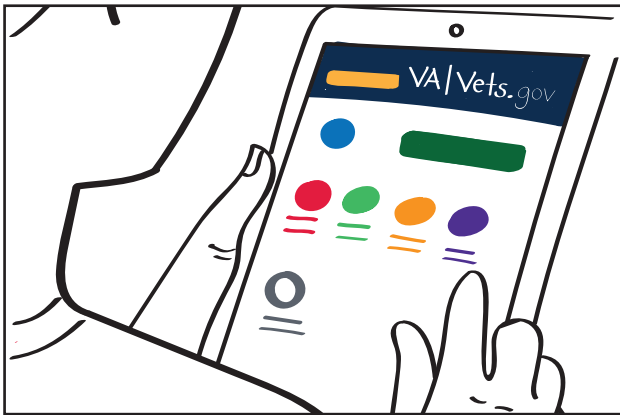
INTEGRATION INTO TAP

Augment or replace current TAP materials with Welcome Guide and Quick Start Guides.



REDESIGN OF VBA/VHA HANDBOOKS

Redesign VBA and VHA handbooks to reflect new design and taxonomy of needs.



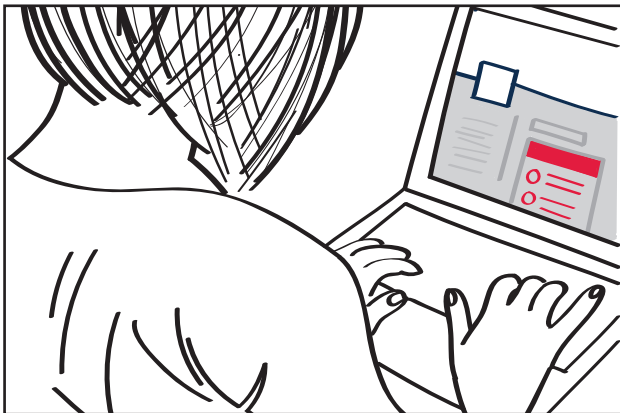
EXTENSION OF VETS.GOV

Host interactive versions of Quick Start Guides on Vets.gov.



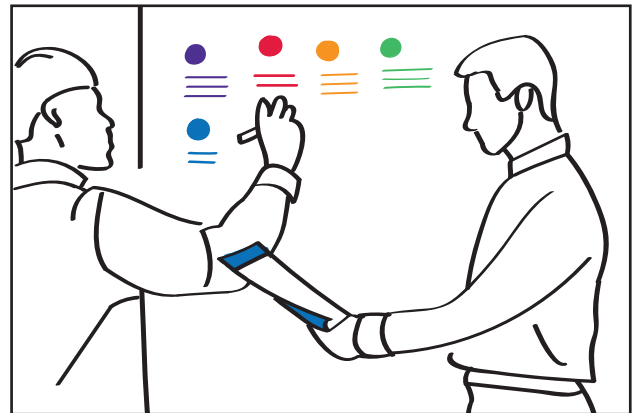
OUTPUT OF BENEFITS NAVIGATOR

Include Quick Start Guides as resources alongside outputs of the explore VA navigator.



OMNICHANNEL PROMOTION

Promote onboarding tools through official VA channels (print, digital, social media).



INTEGRATION INTO EMPLOYEE ONBOARDING

Integrate tools into HR employee training to facilitate strong customer service.

Implementation Recommendations

To implement these onboarding tools successfully we recommend conducting small-scale pilot tests to validate their value to Veterans and make final necessary improvements before widely distributing.

The goal of the tests will be to understand if the onboarding tools improve the Veterans experience, positively impact their perception of VA, and increase accessibility to VA benefits and services, leading to increased trust in VA.

WHAT WOULD WE TEST?

The pilots would address a number of key uncertainties and inform how to improve the tools and make them more useful for Veterans.

- Are Veterans using the tools? How are they using them?
- Do the tools provide clarity and simplify Veterans understanding of VA benefits and services?
- Are the tools inspiring Veterans to seek more information and take action?

HOW WOULD WE TEST?

To address key uncertainties and test the value of the tools to Veterans, we recommend conducting two small-scale pilot tests (e.g., 50–100 participants each). Both tests will inform how to distribute these materials to Veterans to maximize value, while simultaneously reaching all intended audiences to understand Veteran use of the tools. We recommend carrying out the tests over a period of time (e.g., 3–6 months) so that Veteran behavior, adoption, and engagement with the tools can be observed and evaluated over time. Data-driven evaluations (e.g., surveys and observational interviews) will inform additional iterations of the tools for continuous improvement and refinement.



PILOT TEST 1: IN THE MAIL

To test the impact of the onboarding tools on Veterans during separation, we recommend distributing the Welcome Letter, Welcome Guide, and a curated set of Quick Start Guides to a small sample of separating Veterans and their supporters (n=25–100) via mail. To evaluate success, we recommend testing with Veterans at three, six, and twelve months through brief surveys and short interviews. Both qualitative and quantitative data will indicate how Veterans are using the tools, if they simplify their understanding of VA benefits and services, and how the tools are inspiring action.



PILOT TEST 2: AT LOCAL FACILITIES

To assess staff readiness to facilitate use of the tools as well as understand how a broader audience of Veterans and supporters may use the tools, we recommend distributing the Welcome Guide, Quick Start Guides and Local Resource Guides at local facilities (e.g., VAMCs or VSOs). To measure success, we recommend monitoring behavior of both staff and Veterans over time through observation and intercept interviews. Qualitative data from these evaluation methods will indicate how facilities are using the tools to facilitate engagements with Veterans as well as how Veterans are using the tools to access services.

HOW DO WE GET STARTED?

PREPARE

- Design testing plans
- Recruit Veterans
- Set up data collection systems
- Revise testing plans as needed

EXECUTE

- Distribute materials
- Carry out testing
- Begin evaluation

EVALUATE

- Complete evaluation
- Document process, impact, and responses
- Iterate on materials
- Repeat process for continuous evaluation



DEVELOPED BY THE VETERANS EXPERIENCE TEAM

For more information contact:

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Chief Design Officer, Veterans Experience
sarah.brooks@va.gov

Acknowledgments

This project was developed in conjunction with Doblin Deloitte, the Public Policy Lab, and The So Company.

A special thank you to all of the Veterans, families, connectors, community members, and VA employees who dedicated time to sharing their stories and giving us a glimpse into their experiences with VA.

Thank you also to the VA Subject Matter Experts, stakeholders, organizations, and facilities across the organization and within the community who guided and supported this project from beginning to end. All of your insight, feedback, and support throughout this project were invaluable.

All photos were taken during research that contributed to the creation of this document. Photos of any Veterans and their families were taken with permission of the interviewee. Participants of this research voluntarily participated. Names have been changed to anonymize data.

How is the Veterans' Experience Office exploring new ways to improve Veterans' services?

Over the course of its first year, VA's Veterans' Experience Office has used human-centered research and design approaches to develop a wide range of new tools and services, improving VA experiences for both Veterans and VA staff.

PG 5 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Read a quick overview of our process and results.

PG 9 VETERAN EXPERIENCE TOOLS

See how we used in-depth ethnographic research to develop five useful new tools for designing better Veteran services.

PG 23 DESIGN SPRINTS WITH VA STAFF

Check out the three rapid design projects we conducted with VA staff, and see prototypes of the new tools and services we developed to improve VA hiring and Veteran feedback.

PG 33 IN-DEPTH DESIGN WITH VETERANS

Learn how we carried out a collaborative design process with Veterans across the country to develop a set of new tools to make it easier to 'onboard' into VA services.