Research Tracker

Related: History of research projects on Veteran Facing Tools

On this page:

User group	Total number included to date
Veterans	63 (interviews) 801 (tree testing or card sort sessions)

Initiative: Author Experience, or AX

AX Discovery research (January 2019)

Pittsburgh	
Team	Meghan C and Kevin W
Executive Summary	Through stakeholder workshops and contextual interviews with potential content management authors, we sought to identify content priorities, challenges, and project opportunities. Outputs from this research informed early stages of information architecture, CMS workflow and permissions, governance frameworks, and training. Some of the largest challenges for authors found stem from the lack of cross-administrative data integration and spliced VAMC staff priorities; the opportunities reflect a future in which content development work prioritizes strategically addressing Veteran need over front-end maintenance. For authors, pain points revolved around (1) the need for full-stack skills in upkeep, (2) lack of guidance, (3) lack of flexibility in changing content or making corrections, and (4) the organization of resources for content creators.
Link to readout	AX Discovery Research summary.pdf
Methods	Workshops	Contextual inquiries
Participants	TOTAL (~20) Stakeholder groups: - Veteran employees from various departments - VSO reps and Congressional staff - Public Affairs and Communication staff 1 MyHealtheVet Coordinator	TOTAL (3) Louis Scavnicky Ryan M Stubblebine Kimberly Edwards
Dates conducted	8-10 January 2019	

AX Study 1 (March 2019)

Pittsburgh	

| Team | Eileen W and Kevin W (co-leads) |
	Kat R (researcher)
Executive Summary	This research examined the usability of newly implemented CMS features through interviews and collaborative trainings. Generally, out-of-the-box functionality and appearance of Drupal hindered usability due to a steep learning curve, exacerbated by (1) WYSIWYG form starkness (lack of functions), (2) burdensome instructional and governance guidance text, (3) editorial process label language, and (4) various, easy to fix system bugs. From this research, the team found that there was no fundamental pivot required in this workflow.
Link to readout	Pittsburgh AX Testing 1 synthesis.pdf
Methods	Contextual Inquiry
Participants	Pittsburgh partners and more **(TOTAL 5)**
	Louis Scavnicky, Ryan M Stubblebine, Kimberly Edwards, Jenny H-L, Jeff Grandin
Dates conducted	5 March 2019

AX Study 2 (June 2019)

Pittsburgh: Heinz campus	
Team	Meghana K and Ryan S (research leads)
	Lapedra T, Rachel K, Jane N, Kate S (researchers)
Executive Summary	In-person research consisting of mixed methods (task-based, contextual inquiry, paraphrase testing) with 8 Public Affairs team members at the Heinz campus of Pittsburgh VA Medical Center. This effort aimed to evaluate the effectiveness and usability of the current Drupal CMS authoring experience for immediate usability and long-term workflow improvements. We evaluated and compared the author experience (1) using the current Drupal CMS to find, edit, review and publish content and (2) using an Invision (facility dashboard) prototype as a proof-of-concept. An ancillary goal was to gather feedback from the Public Affairs team on types of CMS-related resources needed to efficiently onboard to Drupal CMS. We found that participants felt the new Drupal CMS was more efficient and easier to use, preferred aspects of the Invision prototype noting its clear summary and wayfinding to key content and actions and expressed enthusiasm for a variety of in-CMS help resources. Additionally, we observed that regional and facility content distinctions weren't meaningful to participants and may conflict with established concepts of organization division.
Link to readout	VA.gov CMS - round 3 - Facility research readout (high level takeaways for demo).pdf
	AX research 2 synthesis.pdf
Methods	Moderated, in-person usability
Participants	Public Affairs workers **(TOTAL 8)**
Recruitment	Heather Steele
Dates conducted	25-27 June 2019

VA.gov CMS: Facilities, Operating Status research - Author experience, round 1 (August 2019)

Remote	
Team	Lapedra T (research lead)

Executive Summary	This research study focused on the potential interplay between operating statuses and banner/on-page alerts, gathering feedback on a potentially streamlined authoring experience for creating various alerts types—including peripheral tasks such as sending email notifications to subscribers concurrently, and archival.
	As an overall goal, we were testing whether a facility operating status should be tied to an on-page Facility alert. These will be the Facility operating status options in Drupal:
	- Normal facility hours and services - Facility notice = blue info alert (informational) - Limited services or hours = yellow warning alert (Warning) - Facility closed = red error alert (error)
	And lastly, we were assessing the need for authors to create an alert "series," due to the lack of a parent-child relationship.
Link to readout	Readout Deck
Relevant links	Product recommendations and decisions based on research
Methods	Moderated, remote usability testing
Participants	VAMC Pittsburgh Web Managers (**TOTAL 2)**
Recruitment	PGH stakeholders
Dates conducted	22-23 August 2019

Initiative: Veteran facility pages studies

Facilities Discovery research (January 2019)

Pittsburgh: University Drive	
Team	C.M. Kennedy and Stephanie L (researchers)
Executive Summary	An explorative study aimed at providing formative direction on Facilities work, conducted in VA Pittsburgh at the University Drive campus. Researchers leveraged contextual inquiries, semi-structured interviews, and other ethnographic methods to gain insight to the Veteran experience. Specific goals included:
	- Discover if/how visitors to VAMC Pittsburgh interact with facility's website - Understanding if patients seek other benefits while at the VAMC and paths towards awareness - Learn where the website succeeding and falling short in supporting needs
	The team found that pages needed to separate content into a hierarchy based on location. There is national, regional, and local information that users need in different situations, and that the information should be distinguished in order to avoid confusion and repetition. For facility information, the team found that facilities need to highlight basic local information: contact information, facility information and services, and events. Lastly, the team recommended to create a clear division between benefits information and facility information.
Link to readout	Facilities Discovery research synthesis.pdf
Methods	In-person moderated interviews. 30 minutes.
Participants	**TOTAL (20)**
	Day 1 for contextual interviews - 8 Veterans Day 2 for card sorting - 7 Veterans (plus 2 from the next day) Day 3 for usability tasks - 5 Veterans
Recruitment	In-person intercepts at respective VAMCs
Dates conducted	8-10 January 2019

VAMC Information Architecture v1 testing (February 2019)

Remote	

Team	Jeff Barnes (research lead) Mikki T (researchers)	
Executive Summary	In a two-pronged study, we assessed the effectiveness of both the first pass of Pittsburgh VAMC's information architecture (IA) and the high level categories of service listings. The team used 10 tasks in a tree test to assess the IA (n=211); the service categories study leveraged a closed card sort method (n=348). Results from the tree test suggest that the architecture labels needed major reconsideration (overall task success rate: 45%), with participants demonstrating the most conflation between "Health Services" and "Patient and Family Services" labels. Conversely, the "Locations and Services" label tested well. The tree tests results led the team to strongly consider cross-linking critical calls to action (CTAs), such as appointment scheduling and patient enrollment. Results from the card sort showed that "Patient and Family Services" created confusion (success rate: 50%), while "Health Services" felt clear for participants (success rate: 78%).	
Link to readout	VAMC Information Architecture v1 Testing synthesis.pdf	
Methods	Tree testing (navigation)	Closed card sort (services listing)
Participants	**TOTAL (211)** Veterans (206) Spouse of a Veteran (3) Caregiver (2)	**TOTAL (348)** Veterans (340) Spouse of a Veteran (6) Dependent (1) and Caregiver (1)
Recruitment	Using MyHealtheVet email listserv (about 5,000 recipients)	Using MyHealtheVet email listserv (about 5,000 recipients)
Dates conducted	*4 days* 8-11 February	*4 days* 26 February - 1 March

Facilities Usability 1 (February 2019)

Remote	
Team	Jodi (research lead) Eric C, Meghana K, C.M. Kennedy (researchers)
Executive Summary	Task-based evaluation of a way-finding using the menus using InVision prototypes on Home, 2 location pages, University Drive and Heinz (start user from the top and the bottom - entry points regional and location page or facility locator). The team found that the information across the site felt more appealing than the current pittsburgh.va.gov webpage. However: 1) visual inconsistencies for user actions across the pages hindered usability, 2) people look for checklist style instructions for seeking care, 3) major actions (such as `make an appointment`) need more context around respective calls to action, and 4) the most important actions need to take place as early as possible in the workflow.
Link to readout	Facilities Usability 1 synthesis.pdf
Methods	Remote moderated usability testing... 45 minutes, with 60 blocked
Participants	**TOTAL (10)** Veterans (7 total, 5 enrolled) Family members (2 total, 1 enrolled) Active Military (1)
Recruitment	(participants enrolled in healthcare) Perigean
Dates conducted	20-27 February 2019

Health Services IA: Usability Testing (April 2019) & Health Services IA: Tree Testing (May 2019)

Tree test: remote. Usability tests: Washington, DC and Seattle, WA

Team	Meghana K (research lead) Kate S, Eric C (researchers)
Executive Summary	Mixed method approach to evaluating the information architecture, content, and design patterns of facility services used on the Facility Invision prototype. The VA.gov CMS team conducted 17 **in-person usability tests** with Veterans and **a tree test** (n=255) to understand if people could find and comprehend the health and facility services they have access to. Our goal was to evaluate the pros and cons of having health/facility services content presented in (1) alphabetical order or (2) grouping by similarity (primary care, specialty care, etc.). An ancillary goal was to identify any new patterns that could further improve the UX. We found that while both content structures presented critical usability problems for people, a grouped structure seemed more useful in creating a memorable wayfinding experience. Additionally, we observed that miscellaneous categories caused more confusion than benefit for users.
Link to readout	Facilities health service IA synthesis.pdf

Methods	Moderated, in-person usability	Tree testing
Participants	**TOTAL (17)** DC (10) Seattle (7)	**TOTAL (255)** 255 completed (~230 abandoned)
Recruitment	In-person intercepts at respective VAMCs	Using email listserv (from Jeff Barnes)
Dates conducted	DC: 16 April Seattle: 25 April	30 April - 10 May

Facilities Usability 3 (June 2019)

Pittsburgh: University Dr and Heinz campuses	
Team	Eric C and Meghana K (research leads) Lapedra T, Kate S, Rachel K, Jane N, Ryan S (researchers)
Executive Summary	Task-based usability testing with 7 Veterans and 2 Caregivers in an interactive staging site, examining the effectiveness, usability, and clarity of information on Pittsburgh's facility site. Additionally, we spoke with 13 VA employees to gain deeper context into Veteran needs. We learned that: 1) site navigation between the regional health services page and facilities pages did not meet users' expectations in finding actionable content; 2) appointment access and wait time data can potentially dissuade users from seeking care without a baseline for comparison; 3) sharing relevant content through direct linking was seen as one of the most valuable parts of having a website, warranting further need for "detail pages" on services.
Link to readout	VA.gov CMS - round 3 - Facility research readout (high level takeaways for demo).pdf Facilities Usability 3 synthesis.pdf
Relevant links	Post-research discussion (with Andy): Product recommendations and decisions based on research
Methods	Moderated, in-person usability
Participants	**TOTAL (22)** Veterans (7) Caregivers (2) Employees: Eligibility specialists (3), Patient advocates (3), Care coordinators (6)
Recruitment	Heather Steele for PGH recruitment, using team-drafted participant priority matrix
Dates conducted	25-27 June 2019

VA.gov CMS: Facilities, Operating Status research - Veteran experience, round 1 (August 2019)

Remote	
Team	Eric C (research lead)

Executive Summary	This research involved 7 Veterans to examine the semantic and usability implications of presenting facility alerts, which occur in various ways: banner alerts (for system-wide alerts) and on-page alerts (operating status e.g., normal hours and services, limited hours or services and closed). Findings show that presenting multiple alerts on any given page did not hinder usability, but that the method for notifying Veterans of situations needed to be contextual and personalized. Additionally, alerts to operating statuses need to include guidance for Veterans and caretakers to take any necessary steps in managing their care in accounting for service disruptions. The research team recommends continuing design and development of the infrastructure to support multi-channel notification systems.
Link to readout	VX operating status - high level readout (pdf)
Relevant links	Product recommendations and decisions based on research
Methods	Moderated, remote usability testing
Participants	**TOTAL (7)** Veterans (7)
Recruitment	Howie B + Agile6, Eric C
Dates conducted	20-23 August 2019

Initiative: Administration, previously known as "Office"

OPIA/Administration 1 (March 2019)

Washington DC		
Team	Workshop: Jodi L, Andy Lewandowski, Howie B Interviews: Eric C (research lead), Howie B (researchers)	
Executive Summary	This was a two-pronged effort with the aim at learning how OPIA's website could be most relevant with those who have influence over VA's public perception, such as VSOs, reporters and journalists, and Congressional staffers. One approach focused on pulling together knowledge with 9 internal stakeholders with various experiences in the VA through workshop exercises. The second approach used the outputs from the workshop to inform conversations with 7 external (potential) users. While external users focused their needs around: • transparency on how VA.gov provides accountability • key initiatives • connecting with the VA • timely content ... the outputs of the design studio with internal stakeholders prioritized press releases and more curated messaging, such as blogs and bios. ***This was de-prioritized following the first period of performance.***	
Link to readout	OPIA/Administration discovery readout.pdf	
Methods	Workshop (Washington, DC)	Moderated, informal conversations (remote)
Participants	**TOTAL (12)** Dominique Ramirez, Gary Hicks, James Hutton, Joshua Tuscher, Mark Ballesteros, Michael Taylor, Randal Noller, Susan Carter, Tom Thomas, (Jeff Barnes, Jennifer Lee, Meghana K)	**TOTAL (7)** VSOs (3) Journalists & reporters (3) Government agency public affairs lead (1)
Recruitment	OPIA recommendations	Connections from OPIA, Jeff Barns, snowballing
Dates conducted	28 February 2019	4-13 March 2019