

Discovery Research Readout

School Resources Page Migration



VA | Vets.gov

10.3.19



What We Wanted to Learn
What We Did
What We Learned
Appendix

What We Wanted to Learn

The Problem | The Product | Why This Testing

The Problem

As a School Certifying Official (SCO) or School Administrator, I want to be able to easily locate resources that aid me in certifying students and responding to student inquiries.

I'd like to feel confident that I have all of the necessary information to support military connected students.

This research is being conducted to gain an understanding of the informational needs of School Certifying Officials (SCO) and School Administrators.

Based on the research, the School Resources content will be reorganized in a clear and logical way, so the most important content is easy to find and use.

Why This Testing?

We conducted the research to discover user needs and understand what aspects of the SCO and School Administrator's experience with the School Resources pages can be improved.

What We Did

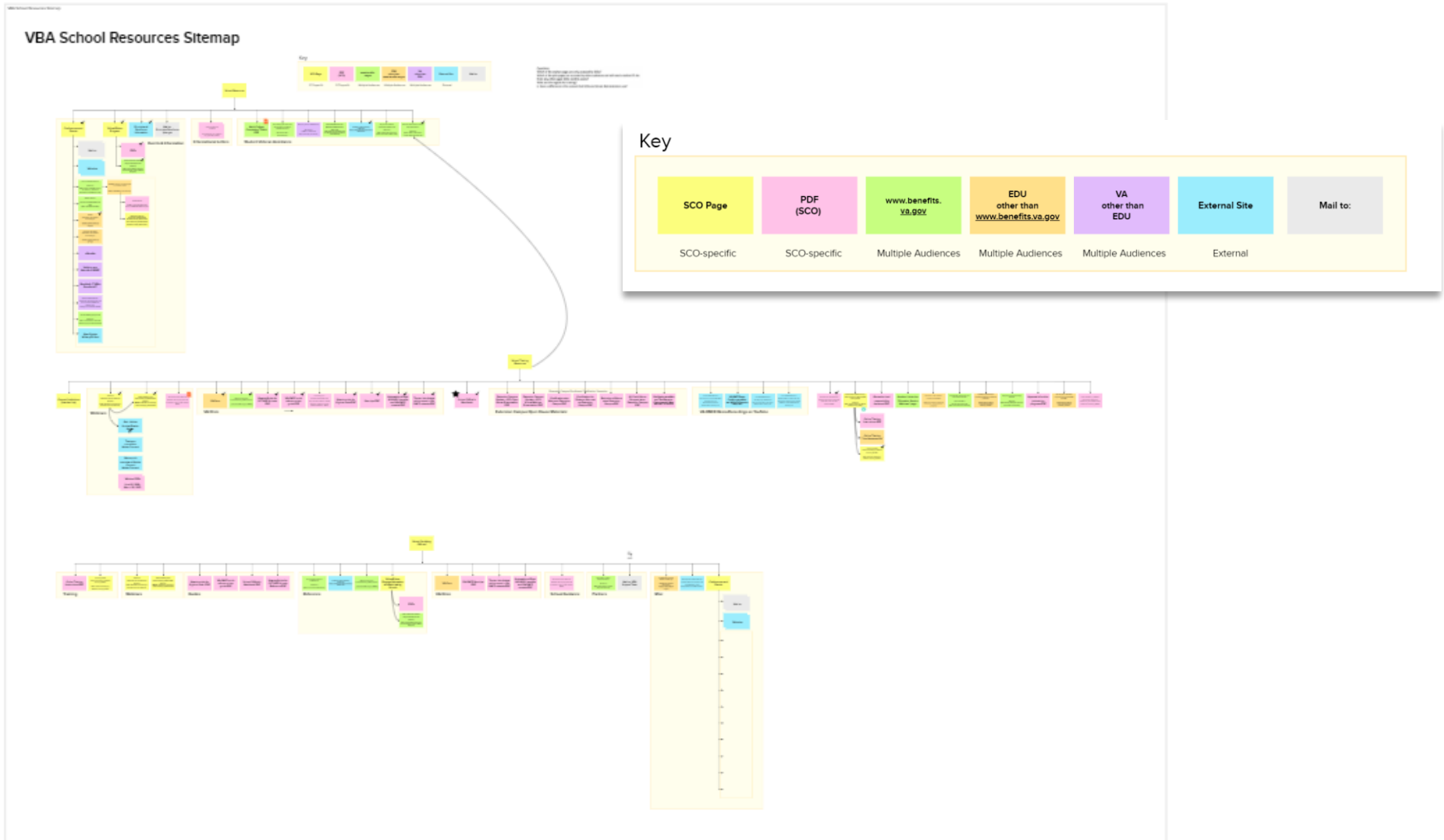
Research Activities | Participants

Reviewed existing assets and artifacts to build foundational knowledge:

- EDU SCO Roundtable Recommendations
- Google Analytics
- Call Center Insights
- Education Journey Research

Activities

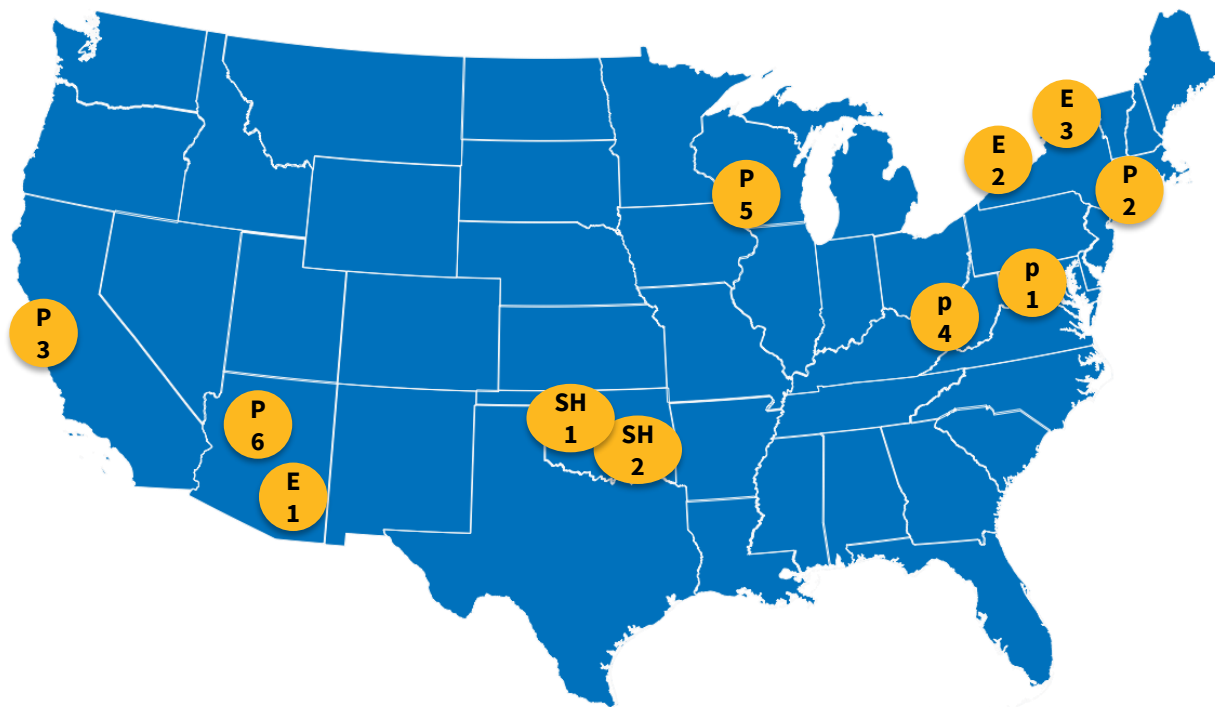
Created assets to facilitate discovery research



Interviewed SCOs to hear their challenges and needs first-hand.

Interviewed Education Liaison Representatives (ELRs) and SCO Hotline representatives to better understand the questions they commonly receive from SCOs.

Participants



8

Colleges &
Universities

11

School Certifying
Officials

3

Education Liaison
Representatives

2

SCO Hotline
Reps

Activities

Synthesized the findings

School Resources | Discovery Interviews

Area for gathering discovery interviews key takeaways and synthesizing findings and recommendations.

Use the sections below to create up to 10 key findings and observations for each participant per observer based on the task.

	1. Theme	2. Checklist	3. Group
1 P1/B September 08, 2019, 10am Participant: [Name] Observer: [Name] P 1/B 10 minutes 10 years			
2 P2 September 08, 2019, 10am Participant: [Name] Observer: [Name] P 2/B 10 minutes 10 years			
3 P3/B September 08, 2019, 10am Participant: [Name] Observer: [Name] P 3/B 10 minutes 10 years			
4 P4/B September 08, 2019, 10am Participant: [Name] Observer: [Name] P 4/B 10 minutes 10 years			
5 P5 September 08, 2019, 10am Participant: [Name] Observer: [Name] P 5/B 10 minutes 10 years			
6 P6 September 08, 2019, 10am Participant: [Name] Observer: [Name] P 6/B 10 minutes 10 years			
7 P7 September 08, 2019, 10am Participant: [Name] Observer: [Name] P 7/B 10 minutes 10 years			
8 P8 September 08, 2019, 10am Participant: [Name] Observer: [Name] P 8/B 10 minutes 10 years			

Findings and recommendations for other projects

Findings:

Recommendations:

Gather sticky notes into patterns and themes and limit them to 3-8 groups.

Seasoned SDOs rely on work experience and institutional knowledge instead of using School Resources section. Content seems interesting for novice SDOs (0-3 years) as experienced SDOs already know how to certify students.

Group 1: [Sticky notes]

Group 2: SDOs find the current organization challenging and often rely on 3rd party resources to find information. [Sticky notes]

Group 3: SDOs are concerned that they're not well informed, and would appreciate a centralized source of information and better communication regarding updates and resources. [Sticky notes]

Group 4: SDOs find a variety of resources useful and would like the most useful to be easily accessible. [Sticky notes]

Group 5: SDOs think grouping content and training by topic or role would be useful. [Sticky notes]

Group 6: SDOs feel that access to additional content would help them support Veterans more efficiently. This content includes: [Sticky notes]

Group 7: [Sticky notes]

Formulate and refine your top findings and recommendations.

Findings	Recommendations	Quotes
The School Resources content seems more useful for novice SDOs (0-3 years) as experienced SDOs already know how to certify students.	Add announcements regarding changes that apply to both new and experienced SDOs and archive content as it becomes outdated.	"This is a quote." P1
SDOs find the current organization challenging and often rely on 3rd party resources to find information.	Aggregate training that is beneficial for new SDOs and ensure that the training resources for all levels and roles are well-organized and easy to locate.	"This is a quote." P1
SDOs find the current organization challenging and often rely on 3rd party resources to find information.	Create the information architecture and navigation to enhance usability and ensure that findings are SDO-friendly.	"This is a quote." P1
In some cases, frequently accessed resources are given precedence and high priority resources are difficult for SDOs to locate.	Ensure that the content is organized based on priority and that the high-priority resources are most prominent.	"This is a quote." P1
SDOs find a variety of resources useful and would like the most useful to be easily accessible.	Reorganize the content based on priority and give the most precedence to high-priority resources.	"This is a quote." P1
SDOs find the information they need to support students from a wide variety of resources.	Where feasible, provide access to additional content that SDOs and School Administrators access frequently.	"This is a quote." P1
SDOs find the current organization challenging and often rely on 3rd party resources to find information.	Consider alternative ways of grouping the content.	"This is a quote." P1
SDOs are concerned that they're not well informed regarding policy changes and procedural changes and updated resources and would appreciate better communication.	Improve ease of access to information related to announcements, policy changes, procedural changes and resource updates.	"This is a quote." P1
SDOs are concerned that they're not well informed regarding policy changes and procedural changes and updated resources and would appreciate better communication.	Improve ease of access to information related to announcements, policy changes, procedural changes and resource updates.	"This is a quote." P1

What We Learned

SCOs want and need VA resources to do their work effectively, but find it challenging to access information on the VA website.

“On the VA website, if you don’t know exactly what you’re looking for, you’ll be there for a while.”

- P5

Finding 1

SCOs find the current organization challenging



SCHOOL CERTIFYING OFFICIAL RESOURCE SHEET	
Important Contact Information	
Education Liaison Representatives	http://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/resources/education_resources/school_certifying_officials/eir.asp
State Approving Agencies	http://www.nasaa-vetseducation.com/Contacts.aspx
Regional Processing Offices	http://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/regional_processing.asp
Internet Inquiry System / Right Now Web	https://gibill.custhelp.com/app/home
Debt Management SCO Hotline Number	http://www.va.gov/debtman/
Main VA Education Call Center Hotline	855-225-1159 (Remember – this number is for SCO use only!)
	1-888-442-4551
Important Resources	
VA-ONCE	https://vaonce.vba.va.gov/vaonce_student/default.asp
Public WEAMS	http://inquiry.vba.va.gov/weamspub/buildSearchCountryCriteria.do
Chapter 33 Annual Tuition and Fees Cap Rates	http://www.benefits.va.gov/GIBILL/resources/benefits_resources/rate_tables.asp
VA Forms	https://www.va.gov/vaforms/search_action.asp
Benefit Comparison Chart	https://benefits.va.gov/GIBILL/comparison_chart.asp
Yellow Ribbon	http://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/yellow_ribbon/yellow_ribbon_info_schools.asp
Important Training Resources	
United States Code (Title 38)	http://uscode.house.gov/
Code of Federal Regulations	http://www.ecfr.gov/cgi-bin/text-idx?c=ecfr&id=oc88306372b2d366d6102ad13568ca&rgn=div5&view=text&node=38.2.0.1.1.6&idno=38
Annual Reporting Fees	PL 111-377 sec 204 - https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-111pub377/content-detail.html PL 115-48 sec 304 - https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-115pub48/content-detail.html
School Certifying Official Handbook	http://www.benefits.va.gov/GIBILL/docs/job_aids/SCO_Handbook.pdf
VACO Webinars	https://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/resources/education_resources/school_certifying_officials/presentations.asp
VA-ONCE Quick Reference User Guide	https://www.benefits.va.gov/GIBILL/docs/vaonce/VAONCEguide.pdf
VA Conferences and Events	http://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/resources/education_resources/school_certifying_officials/conferences_and_events.asp

- Often rely on other resources to find information (i.e., Google, job aids, the web)
- Would like the pages to be easier to use with more sub-headings
- Reacted favorably to the direction of the new "School Certifying Officials" page that launched in September

“New SCOs may wonder ‘What information do I need to know and what can I sift through over time?’”

- P6

“The School Resources pages are confusing and not intuitive, [SCOs] just Google the SCO Handbook. The pages contain so many links.”

- P1

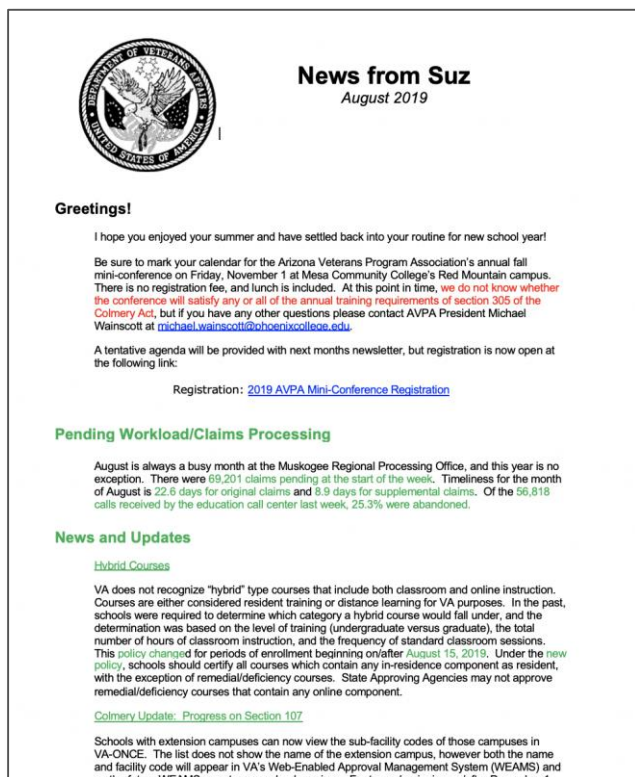
Recommendation

- Improve overall design to aid in the organization and functionality of site.
- Refine headings to improve findability and support search engine optimization.
- Update the information architecture and navigation to enhance usability.
- Add archive content so useful content is not obscured by outdated content.

Finding 2

SCOs are concerned that they're not well-informed regarding new changes

- Are interested in new policy changes, procedural changes and resource updates
- Report they get information on important policy updates from ELRs
- Would like to know when new SCO Handbook and forms are published
- Would like a table of effective dates when new legislation is passed (i.e., what goes into effect in 2018, 2019, 2020)
- Did not mention the “Breaking News” page in the “About GI Bill” section as a source for announcements



“Information on Colmery updates and other new legislation would be helpful.”

- E1

“When new information comes out, I’d like it at the top, front and center.”

- P4

Recommendation

- Allow for the posting of announcements in a highly visible area.

Topics may include:

- Resource updates (i.e., SCO Handbook)
 - New policies and regulations
 - New procedures
 - New forms
 - New training opportunities, such as upcoming webinars, conferences & events (which maybe announce and presented in a prominent training section)
- Consolidate and present clear, timely guidance regarding policy and procedural changes.

Finding 3

SCOs find the following resources most useful in their work:

- SCO Handbook★
 - Submit a Question★
 - VA-ONCE
 - VA-ONCE Quick Reference User Guide
 - SCO Hotline
 - Training
 - Webinars (with associated Q&A)
 - Upcoming Events
 - WEAMS
-
- ELRs & SCO Hotline Representatives believe the answers to most non-student-specific SCO questions they receive exist in the SCO Handbook or VA-ONCE Quick Reference User Guide.
 - Many SCOs print the SCO Handbook and keep it close by for easy reference.

“The SCO Handbook is incredibly useful.”

- P3

“Submit a Question” is hands down the best feature on the website. Huge kudos!”

- P1

Recommendation

- Ensure that the most useful resources are prominent and easy to locate.
- Provide clear pathways to content that is less frequently used but equally important.
- Consider whether elevating key content from the SCO Handbook or VA-ONCE Quick User Guide to a web page would be beneficial to SCOs.

Finding 4

Enhanced content will help SCOs better assist military-connected students

The most frequently requested content and functionality includes:

- Clear guidelines regarding training requirements
- Announcements (new policies & procedures, SCO Handbook updated, upcoming training & webinars, forms updated)
- Information related to new policies & procedures
- A link to WEAMS

Additional content and functionality SCOs mentioned appears in Appendix B.

"Online training Instructions PDF. Move this information up front on the surface.

- P4

Would like to know which association training or national conferences are approved to meet the new certification requirements.

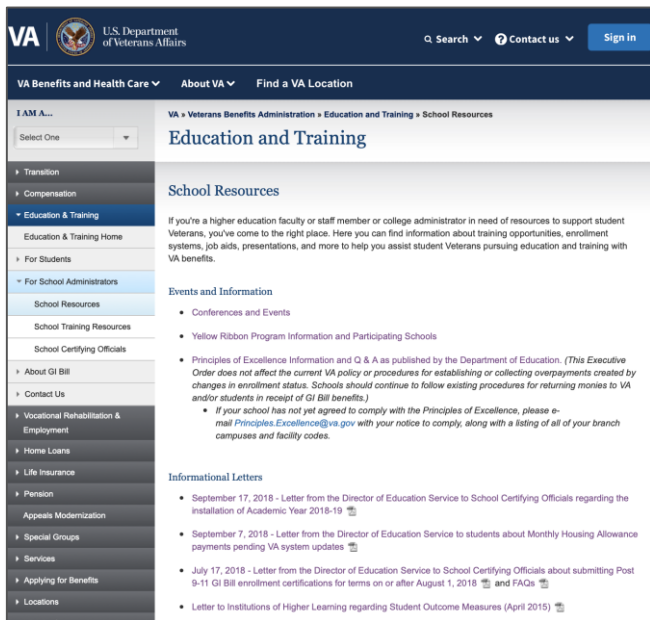
- P1

Recommendation

- Craft additional content and provide improved access to help SCOs perform their jobs better.
- Where feasible and advisable, provide access to additional content that SCOs and School Administrators access frequently.

Finding 5

Novice users visit the School Resources pages more frequently



- Novice users find more value in the existing school resources content as they have a greater need for guidance than seasoned SCOs who already know how to support students.
- SCOs from schools with a small GI Bill student population may forget how to do certain things, such as how to certify for Yellow Ribbon Program, as they do it infrequently.

“Once I’ve gotten more comfortable in the role, I’ve started using the VA website less. It’s the same with the SCO Handbook, I used to always have that out.”

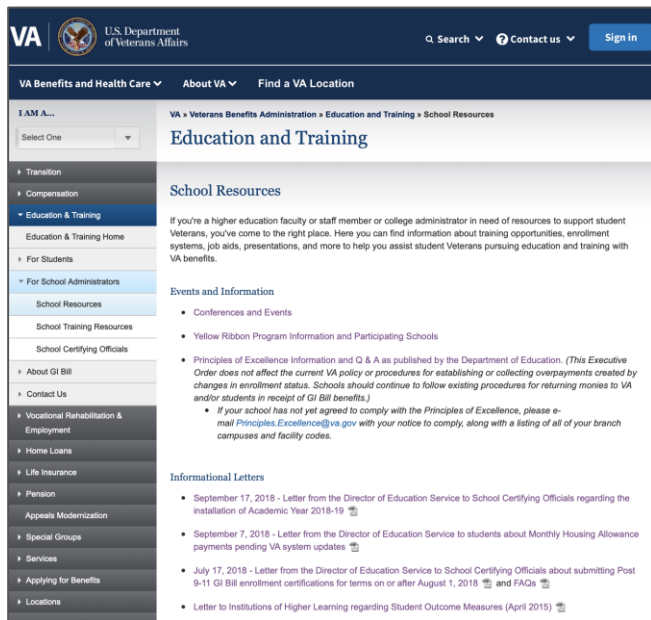
- P8

Recommendation

- Ensure the resources new SCO's need are easy to identify and easy to find.
- Archive outdated content and add announcements so both frequent and occasional users perceive the site's content as up-to-date, relevant, and valuable.
- Ensure that new content is identified so repeat visitors, in general, and experienced SCO's, in particular, find value on the page.

Finding 6

New and experienced SCOs have trouble finding the training



- Appreciate training and would like to be able to find it easily
- Find value in the Webinar Q&A's and would like more of them to be posted
- Would like to know about webinars in advance so they can set aside time for training
- Are unable to participate in training webinars due to participant caps

“We brought in some new hires last year. As far as the training we needed to complete, we weren’t sure which one they were supposed to be completing. That would be one suggestion I’d have for the SCO page, just a little more information on the training and the links to training.”

- P4

Recommendation

- For easy access, consolidate and streamline training for new and experienced SCOs (online resources, webinars, conferences, events).
- Display an up-to-date list of conferences and training events so SCOs can plan and obtain approval in advance.
- Consider providing additional training materials, such as webinar Q&As, to supplement the educational experience.

Next Steps

Next Steps

1. Review prototype design with stakeholders
2. Begin development
3. Conduct usability testing on prototype



DIGITAL SERVICE at VA

Thank you

Appendices

Useful Resources | Additional Resources | Findings for Other Projects

Appendix A: Useful Resources

Additional resources SCOs find useful include the following:

- eBenefits link
- VA Benefits page
- Apply for Benefits page
- GI Bill Comparison Tool
- Payment Rates
- "Adult College Completion Toolkit"
- Scholarship
- Financial Aid
- "Payment and Debt Information Resources"
- "Common causes of school overpayments"
- "Online Training Instructions" link for Colmery
- "VA-ONCE Quick Reference User Guide"
- Yellow Ribbon (Pull FAQ language once a year)
- GI Bill phone # for students
- GI Bill annual maximum amount table
- VA semester to reference rate of pursuit
- Semester credit equivalency table.
- Link to vets.gov
- Cut sheets
- Education & Training page
- Certification (VA-ONCE info?)
- In SCO Handbook: Reporting, Benefits Assistance
- ELR Contacts (novice)
- Information on Participating schools
- Vocational rehab, survivors and dependents.
- Link to dependent & military members
- GI Bill Comparison tool link

Appendix B: Additional Content

Additional content that would help SCOs better assist military-connected students include the following:

- Recent updates (For SCO Handbook, training, Policies, procedures, forms brochures/pamphlets, etc.)
- Advanced notice of webinars
- List of approved non-profits who assist beneficiaries
- TA Top up
- VA Work Study
- Tutoring Assistance
- Ch 31 certification procedures
- Vocational Rehab & Employment certification
- GI bill annual maximum amount table
- VA Semester credit equivalency table to calculate rate of pursuit for anyone who is not Ch33 (SCO Handbook Pgs 63 & 64)
- List of email lists SCOs can subscribe to
- Infographic of education benefits application process
- Current processing times
- Chart of school and student responsibilities

Additional content that would help SCOs better assist military-connected students include the following:

- Links to external portals and resources for pre-certification and grade submission (GoArmy.ed, Navy portal, DOD)
- WEAMS link to see the exact program names
- List of approved nonprofits or other nongovernment organizations that are trusted by the VA to support veterans
- Table of dates when new legislation goes into effect. For Colmery, what goes into effect in 2018, 2019, 2020. Include Hybrid change
- List of association training or national conferences that are approved to meet the new certification requirements (unless listing associations would show preference)
- In addition to subjects and headings, would like to see the date when changes take effect

Findings for Other Projects

The participants reported challenges and requested enhancements that are beyond the scope of this project

1. Add an accurate effective date to the Statement of Benefit.
2. Help students understand that VocRehab will count towards Post 9/11 benefit time.
3. Provide students with additional information on benefits caps.
4. Consider enhancing VA.gov search functionality.
5. Consider improving the UI of the GI Bill Comparison Tool and it's data.
6. Consider updating VA_ONCE.
7. Re-introduce page number in the SCO Handbook (SCOs appreciate the changes since last version section.)
8. If there is a desire to reduce the number of SCO Hotline calls, determine if SCOs can be given electronic access to student-specific entitlement data (benefits remaining, %, exhaust date, delimited date, etc.).