VA Notify Playbook

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Our team

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Need help? Contact us in slack at #va-notify-public or email us at **VA Notify**(oitoctovanotify@va.gov).

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Contact us

Find us on slack!

VA Notify: #va-notify-public
Forms Strike Team: #va-notify-forms-strike-team

If you're not on slack, you can email us at **VA Notify**(oitoctovanotify@va.gov).

New to VA Notify?

If you're new to VA Notify please read the playbook so you know what to expect. Once you're ready to get started, please submit an intake form.

Current user with a new notification?

If you're already using VA Notify and you want to add a new notification simply create your new template and reach out to us for a quick consultation. You do not need to submit a new intake form.

Who we are

VA Notify is a notifications platform dedicated to improving the veteran's notification experience by providing actionable, unified communications on the VA services they utilize. Our notification service is available to any business line/team inside the VA or with an ATO.

What we are

VA Notify is designed to be a passthrough system. We do not store veteran information, but we do store your notification templates and settings. We partner with VA Profile and va.gov to provide communication preferences that the veteran can see and manage. VA Notify checks these preferences before notifying a veteran.

VA Notify is located within the VAEC. We provide a REST OpenAPI, which your system can call each time a notification is needed. We also provide a Self Service web application so you can directly create and maintain your notification templates. Aggregated message metrics are provided. Google Analytics (UTM trackers) can and should be used for all message links that point to va.gov, so clicks can be captured.

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If you have forms on va.gov and need help developing a notification trigger (ex., submission confirmation, reminders to complete forms, etc.), our Forms Strike Team can help!

What we aren't

VA Notify does not…
- Pull data to trigger notification events
- Provide notification scheduling services, though we may throttle or queue notifications based on volume concerns
- Support newsletter notifications
- Store veteran data
- Track analytics per veteran

Supported notification types

Currently we support email and text messaging (SMS). You can find the VA Standard Operating Procedures for SMS [here](#).

Coming soon we will also have push notifications and va.gov onsite notifications, which are alerts on the website.

Onboarding to VA Notify

Welcome! Please submit an [intake form](#) to kick off the process. This lets us know a little bit more about you and what you're trying to accomplish to ensure VA Notify is a good fit. From there we may schedule a kick-off meeting to learn more and guide you through next steps.

Timeframe

The exact timing depends on your team's schedule and the type of notification.

Email is much quicker to launch than SMS because there are less steps. SMS requires us to acquire sender phone numbers for your use case (short codes or 10DLCs), which can take up to 12 weeks. If communication preferences are needed, we must account for scheduling with the VA Profile and Authenticated Experience teams to add this. Outside of these tasks, the timeline really comes down to your engineering effort and how quickly a Privacy Officer can do a content review. Please note we collaborate with all of our users on their content to ensure it meets standards. For SMS, please review our standard operating procedures.

If your notification requires VA Notify engineering work, we will review and provide a schedule.

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General Steps

Please note, this may differ based on your use case.
(*) = Your team, (**) = Joint effort

1. Submit the intake form *
2. Kick-off with VA Notify **
3. Have your technical team review the VA Notify API docs *
4. Get access to the Self Service UI (SSUI) **
5. Budget approval for notifications *
6. Create your notification content (Privacy Officer review required) *
7. VA Notify submits a communication preference intake for your team (if applicable)
    a. Please note, if you have a new communication preference your team will need to determine a plan to communicate this to veterans so they know a new notification is available to opt into.
8. SMS only: VA Notify requests applicable phone number(s)
9. Build your notification code to call the VA Notify API *
10. Test your notification *
11. Launch your notification **
12. Evaluate business outcomes and make revisions as needed *

Reviewing our API docs

Your technical team can review the [API documentation](). You will be focusing on utilizing the **notification** endpoints.

View this with [Swagger]() by replacing the text field at the top of the page containing https://petstore.swagger.io/v2/swagger.json with [copy this link] and click on the "Explore" button.
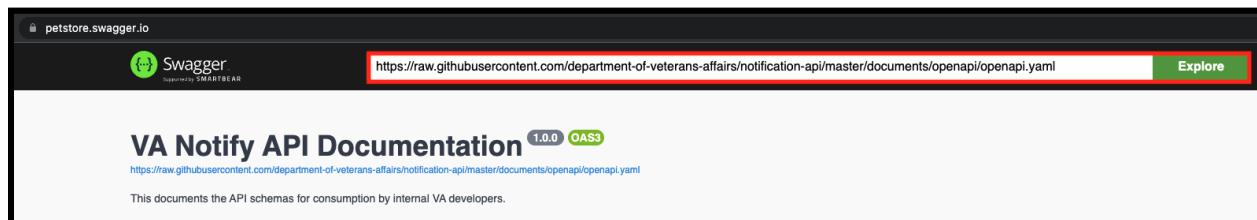
Callbacks provide status information per notification sent. They can be set up via webhook or SQS. More information on callbacks is [here]().

To use our system, you must first create a template in our Self Service Portal. There are different template types available (email/SMS). Once created, you can find a template ID under template details. This will be used in the API call to trigger the notification. Please note, if you

use personalisations (dynamic content) in your template(s) you must include them in the notification request body.

Info for getting started

- We offer a REST API
- VA Notify is located in the VAEC, but we do offer both public and private URLs for API calls
- Our API authentication method is JWT
- We will provide an API key to your team via encrypted VA.gov email
- We have postman collections that can be used for testing
- You will only need to use our API for notification specific actions:
  - Triggering a notification send
  - Getting message status or configuring a callback via webhook/SQS
- VA Notify integrates with MPI and VA Profile to lookup deceased status, contact information, and opt-in status via a person identifier you provide.
- Template and Service IDs differ by environment.

Using Postman

You must populate the following variables:
- service-api-key = [api key we provided via encrypted email]
- service-id = [id for your service in the Self Service Portal, we can provide this to you]
- sms-sender-id = [this will be provided to you if you are using SMS]
  - Helps identify what phone number to send from along with other relevant metadata
- template-id = [template id, which you can find in the Self Service Portal]
  - Check which variable is referenced in the applicable POST
- email-template-id = [template id, which you can find in the Self Service Portal]
  - Check which variable is referenced in the applicable POST
- sms-template-id = [template id, which you can find in the Self Service Portal]
  - Check which variable is referenced in the applicable POST

Sample Email request with personalisation
{{notification-api-url}}/v2/notifications/email

```
{
  "template_id": "{{email-template-id}}",
  "email_address": "sample@gmail.com"
  "personalisation": {
    "Name": "Jane"
  }
}
```

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Sample SMS request with personalisation
{{notification-api-url}}/v2/notifications/sms

```
{
  "template_id": "{{template-id}}",
  "phone_number": "+11234567890",
  "sms_sender_id": "{{sms-sender-id}}",
  "personalisation": {
     "Name": "Jane"
  }
}
```

Get access to the SSUI

The VA Notify self-service portal is an important step to empower business lines to create and manage their own notification templates.

We provide Staging and Production access. Staging should be used for testing purposes. Once you feel everything is working as expected, you can copy and paste content into Production.

To get started, you must log in once with github per environment to auto-create your account. Once your account exists, **please notify the VA Notify team** so we can find you in the system. We will provision your user and provide an API key per environment via an encrypted VA email to one of your technical team members. We may provide initial access via our Test Service on Staging depending where you're at in the process.

Please note: your GitHub account must be a member of the GitHub VA Organization. If it is not, you will receive an error message that says "Account not found". To gain access to the VA Organization please follow these [instructions](#). You must log in to VA Notify after access is gained to create your account.
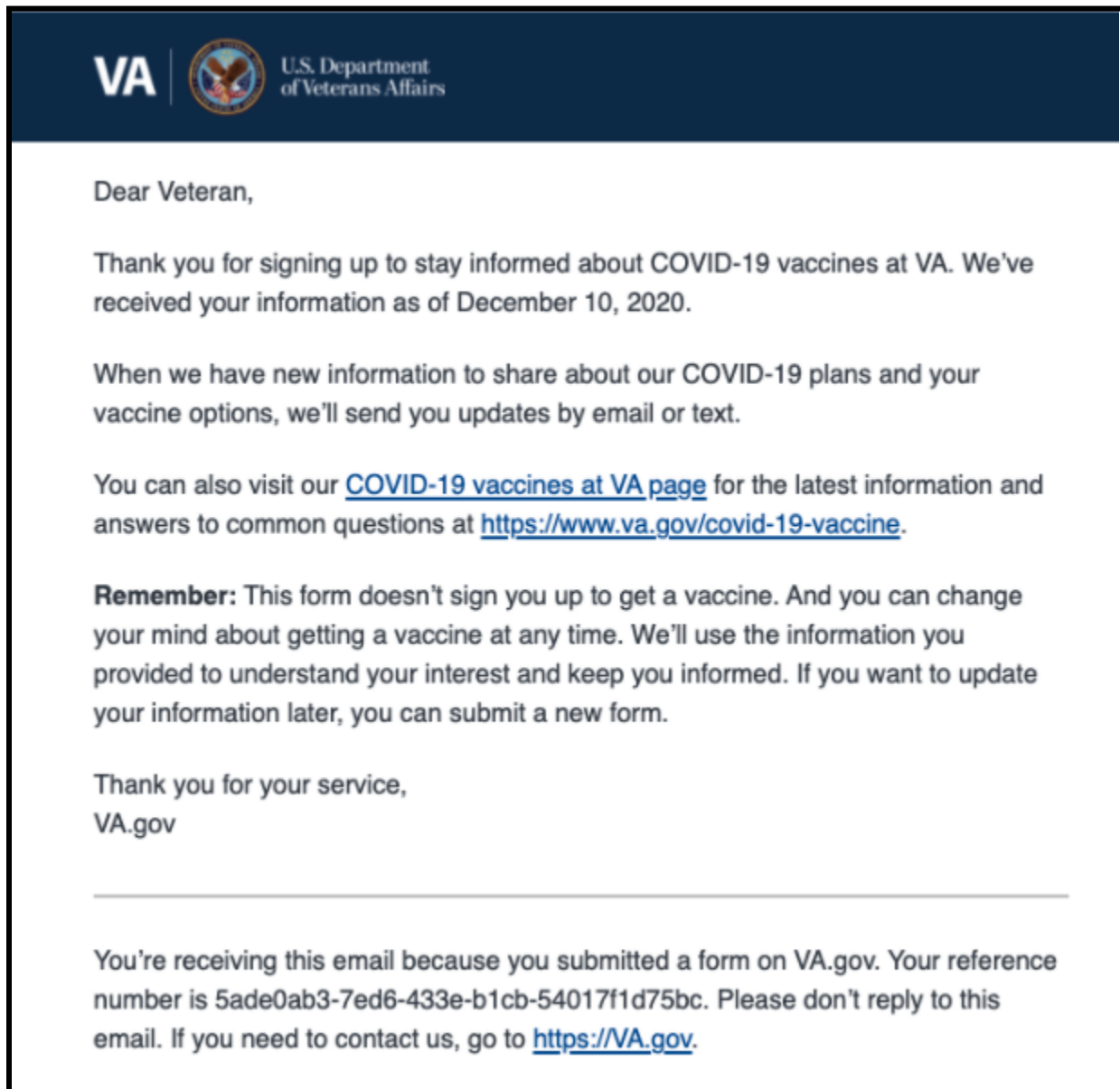
How do I sign in to staging?
- Go to https://staging.notifications.va.gov while connected to the VA Network
- Sign in with your GitHub account using the button at the top right
- Let us know you've signed in and we will assign you to the right team.

How do I sign in to production?
- Go to https://notifications.va.gov while connected to the VA Network
- Sign in with your GitHub account using the button at the top right
- Let us know you've signed in and we will assign you to the right team.

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Sample Notifications

Dear Veteran,

Thank you for signing up to stay informed about COVID-19 vaccines at VA. We've received your information as of December 10, 2020.

When we have new information to share about our COVID-19 plans and your vaccine options, we'll send you updates by email or text.

You can also visit our COVID-19 vaccines at VA page for the latest information and answers to common questions at https://www.va.gov/covid-19-vaccine.

Remember: This form doesn't sign you up to get a vaccine. And you can change your mind about getting a vaccine at any time. We'll use the information you provided to understand your interest and keep you informed. If you want to update your information later, you can submit a new form.

Thank you for your service,
VA.gov

You're receiving this email because you submitted a form on VA.gov. Your reference number is 5ade0ab3-7ed6-433e-b1cb-54017f1d75bc. Please don't reply to this email. If you need to contact us, go to https://VA.gov.

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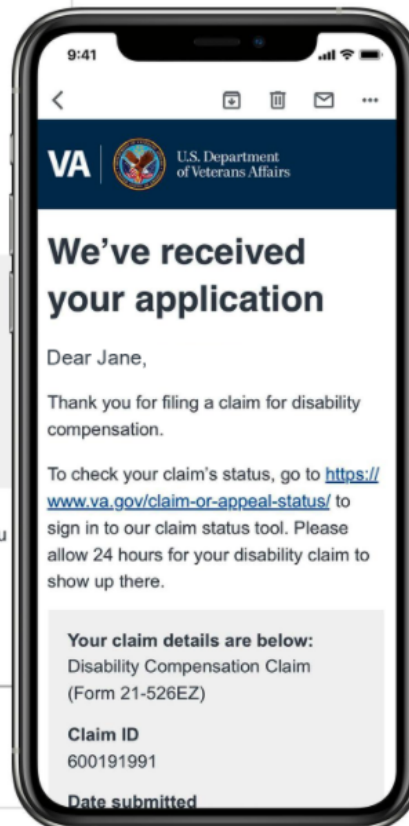
Launched

email - 526EZ submission confirmation

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