All Hands: Platform Crew Strategy

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Platform Crew

CMS Core Application

Testing Tools

Front End Tools

Back End Tools

Operations

Service Design

Product Support

Content & IA

Analytics

Sitewide Crew

Facilities

VAMC Upgrade

CMS Product Support

Public Website

Search & Discovery

Sitewide Content

UX & Design System

Acct Experience Crew

Personalization

Login and Identity

Contact Center Support

Ask a Question

VANotify

VETText

Health Tools Crew

Health Care Applications

Patient Questionnaire

Digital Health Modernization Research

Online Scheduling

COVID Response

Benefits Tools Crew

Claims & Appeals

Debt Resolution

eBenefits Transformation

Education Application

Native Mobile Crew

Team 1

Team 2

this info is subject to change, but is provided here for visualization of the general structure

Platform Crew Chief: Rachael Roueche

Platform Crew Engineering Lead: Dror Matalon

Platform Crew OCTO-DE Leads

CMS Core Application: Mike

Testing Tools: Cory

Front End Tools: Dror

Back End Tools: Dror

Operations: Dror

Service Design: Rachael

Product Support: Rachael

Content & IA: Rachael

Analytics: Rachael

Agenda

1. Background (10 min)
2. High level strategy (15 min)
3. 2021 Objectives (20 min)
4. Next steps (5 min)
5. BREAK (5 min)
6. Q&A (25 min)

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BACKGROUND

Background

VA at a high level

22 M
total US Veterans

5 M
Veterans in receipt of VA disability benefits

4th largest health care system in the country with
145
hospitals and
1,243
outpatient facilities serving over
9 M
Veterans

380 K
VA employees

2nd largest federal agency with
$221 B
budget

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Background

VA at a high level

Health: Veterans Health Administration (VHA)

Benefits: Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA)

Burials and memorials: National Cemetery Administration (NCA)

Background

History of the Platform

state of VA technology

- Rigid, waterfall deployment practices
- Lotta Java
- Self hosted on VA infrastructure
- No usability or a11y testing, plain language content, or user-centered IA
- DS Logon only sign in option

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Background

History of the Platform

impact

- 3-6 months between deployments
- Customer satisfaction 53%
- Some months saw only 40% availability of online services

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Background

History of the Platform

"redesign the art of the possible in how our country serves our nation's veterans"

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Background

History of the Platform

README.md created for vets-website

Background

History of the Platform

< 2013   Jul, 2013   Mar, 2015   Aug, 2018

50+ interactive features, and 1.3 million unique user accounts

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Background

History of the Platform

state of Vets.gov technology

- From rigid, waterfall deployment process, to **CI/CD**
- From lotta Java, to **open source Ruby and React codebases**
- From self hosted on VA infrastructure, to **AWS (cloud!)**
- From no usability or a11y testing, plain language content, or user-centered IA, to **process and expertise in these areas**
- From DS Logon as the only sign in option to **multiple sign-in options including ID.me w/2FA**

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Background

History of the Platform

< 2013   Jul, 2013   Mar, 2015   Aug, 2018

impact

- Deployments no longer at 3-6 month intervals, but **daily**
- Customer satisfaction rose from 53% to **over 60%**
- Availability rose from the at-times-40% to **consistently above 99.9%**

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> It's one of the better websites than any gov agency...VA seems more user friendly than anything else.

> It's not quite what I expected - it's cleaner. I'm used to seeing a jumble of links that's hard to understand.

Background

History of the Platform

< 2013   Jul, 2013   Mar, 2015   Aug, 2018   Nov, 2018

vets.gov, but make it VA.gov

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Background

History of the Platform
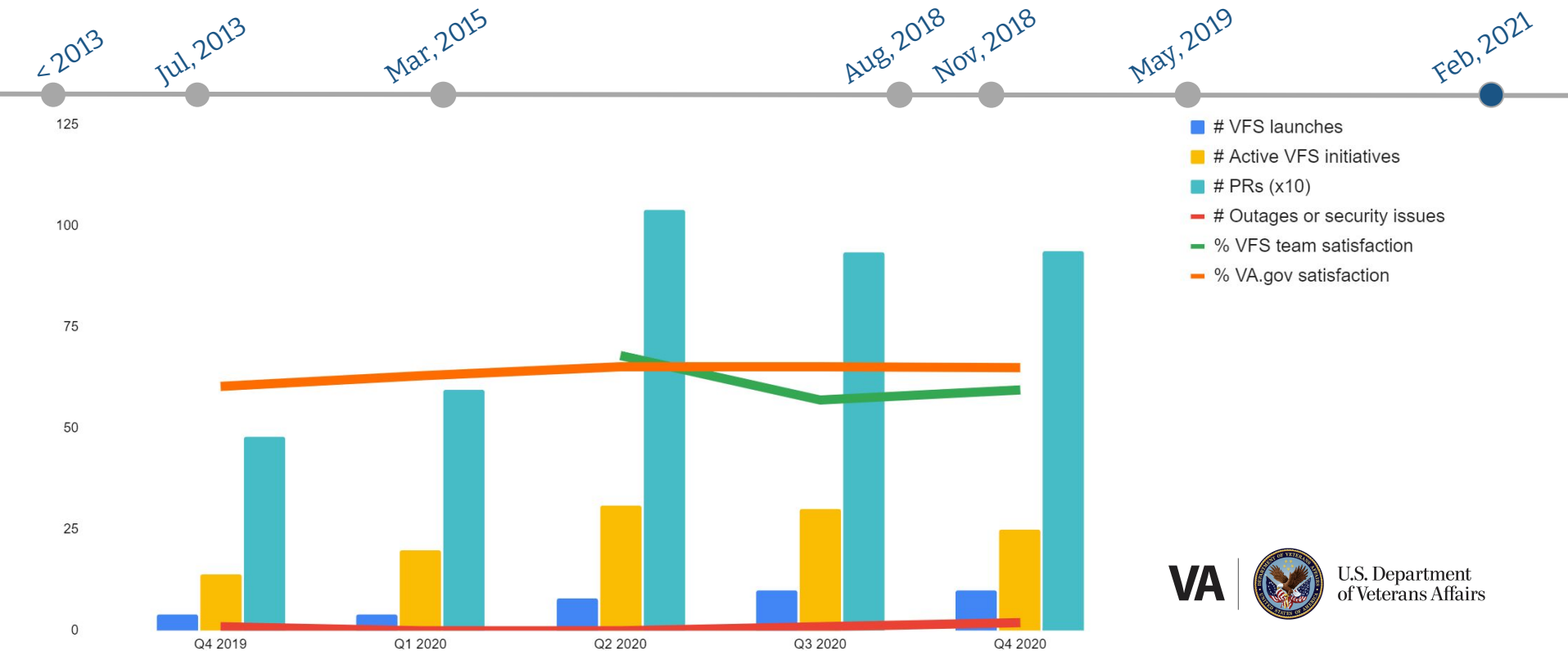
HIGH LEVEL STRATEGY

High level strategy

Framework

Element	Definition	Timeframe	Responsible for defining
Mission	Why we're here	ever-present	OCTO-DE
4 phase plan	High level strategic path for achieving mission	ever-present	OCTO-DE
Principle	What must always true about our work	ever-present	OCTO-DE
Objective	Desired VA outcome	yearly	OCTO-DE
Key Result	Benchmarks and monitors for how we get to an Objective	variable	Collab: OCTO-DE Leads and Platform crew teams
Initiative	A delivery goal a team plans to achieve in a quarter	quarterly	Collab: OCTO-DE Leads and Platform crew teams
Epic	A large body of work that can be broken down into a number of smaller stories	variable	Platform crew teams
User story	A short, simple description of a feature told from the perspective of the person who desires the new capability	variable	Platform crew teams
Sprint objective	A delivery goal a team plans to achieve in a sprint	sprintly	Platform crew teams

High level strategy

Mission

The platform helps VA build great Veteran-facing digital products and services by…
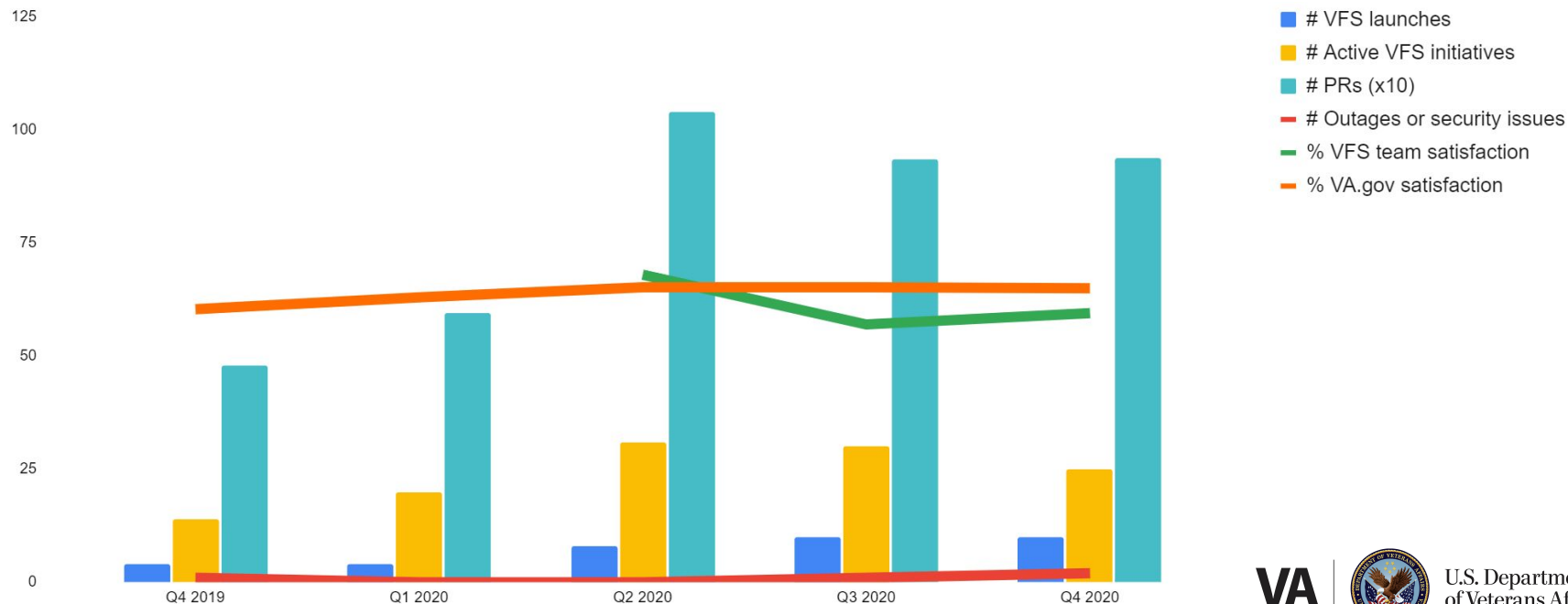
1. Keeping these products and services **available, stable, and secure**.

2. Ensuring they're **consistent and meet high standards of quality** in Veteran-centered user experience and technical approach.

3. Providing shared tools, software, support, and technical infrastructure to **accelerate their development**.

High level strategy

How are we doing?

High level strategy

4 phase plan

Phase 1:
Create foundation for successful deployment to VA.gov

- ✓ Open source docs repo
- ✓ Reliable infrastructure
- ✓ CI/CD pipeline w/daily deploys
- ✓ 24/7 monitoring and on call
- ✓ Design system
- ✓ Feature toggles
- ✓ Analytics services
- ✓ Orientation
- ✓ Hands-on support

Phase 2:
Optimize for Platform scalability and VA.gov quality.

- Platform website
- Scalable support model
- Containerization and isolation
- Automated quality checks
- Flexible governance
- Anytime, rapid deploys
- Vulnerability prevention
- KPI dashboards
- CMS content scaling

Phase 3:
Provide tools for accelerated VA.gov iteration

- Demo + preview capability
- A/B testing tools
- Frictionless analytics
- New MVP environment
- Customer support tooling
- Performance transparency

Phase 4:
Acquire new customer types

- Extend + iterate on feature set to meet needs of additional customer types
- Actively collaborate with OCTO's larger VA platform vision

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High level strategy

Summary

To date, we've really risen to the challenge of our mission. We've facilitated a doubling in the size of the VA.gov ecosystem, and have empowered VFS teams to do good work - such that VA.gov user satisfaction has improved over time.

However, this doubling of the ecosystem comes with a cost: we're experiencing bandwidth challenges, our platform stability and security are increasingly at risk, and VFS team satisfaction is trending downward.

These are all normal challenges that come with growth. And it puts us solidly in the second phase of our 4 phase plan: optimizing for Platform scalability and VA.gov quality. To overcome our current challenges, we have to invest in work that'll make our systems and teams more scalable and easy to use, and will keep VA.gov's performance and quality high. Our 2021 objectives reflect the desired outcomes we're prioritizing over the next year that we bet will have the largest impact on the Platform's ability to deal with this growth and continue executing on our mission.

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High level strategy

How we'll measure success

Leading metrics (causes)	Mission	Lagging metrics (affects)
↑ VFS team engagement w/ SS tools ↑ Production deployment rate ↑ Detection of vulnerabilities	**Available, stable, and secure platform.**	↑ Uptime ↓ Incidents
↓ Support volume ↓ Build failures ↓ Build time	**Consistent VFSs meeting high standards of quality**	↑ VA.gov satisfaction ↓ Quality standards issues
	Accelerate VFS team development	↑ VFS team satisfaction ↓ Avg time from kickoff to production, by initiative complexity

2021 OBJECTIVES

2021 Objectives

A note before we dive into the details

These objectives are not comprehensive of everything we do, or want to do, as a Platform. Rather, they represent the 4 things that are our top priority to achieve this year.

2021 Objectives

Objective 1 (of 4)

Info for all common VFS needs are findable in Platform Website

We'll know we're successful when canonical, easy-to-understand information is available for the top 70% of customer needs.

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How-tos guides and training videos
Clear quality standards

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VFS setup and deployment experience is autonomous

We'll know we're successful when VFS teams can get their environments set up within minutes, can deploy to any environment at any time without the aid of Platform personnel and without causing significant risk to the build or to the site.

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↓ Support volume
↓ Avg time from kickoff to production, by initiative complexity
↓ Build failures

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Security improvement plan
Audit trail for Fraud, Waste, & Abuse team
Move to loosely coupled services
Comprehensive resource monitoring + alerting

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Easy preview and demo functionality
Development CMS environments
A/B testing tools
Easy data access

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2021 Objectives

These are lofty goals

If we are to achieve them, we're going to have to be ruthless about prioritization and keeping scope narrow.

- Have convos about trade-offs
- Clearly demonstrate Objective progress and blockers
- Escalate early and often

NEXT STEPS

Next steps

1. Look at your team's mission, products, and services.
   a. How can your team help the Platform Crew achieve our 2021 Objectives?
   b. What might you need to cut, or reduce the scope of, to make room for Objective-related work?

2. Participate in crew-wide activities to determine how your team can collaborate to meet these objectives.
   a. Are there initiatives that your team could complete sooner to unblock another?

3. Work with your OCTO-DE Lead to turn those ideas into KRs and initiatives, and prioritize them into the Platform Crew roadmap.

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Merci! Time for Q&A

High level strategy

Principles

1. Service design, not bureaucracy.
2. Work in the open.
3. Assume competence and best intentions.
4. Trust, but verify.
5. More trust can be earned.
6. Carrots, not sticks.
7. Don't make perfect the enemy of the good.
8. Ask for forgiveness, not permission.
9. Be kind to each other.

From [Platform Principles document](#) in GitHub