VA: Health and Benefits

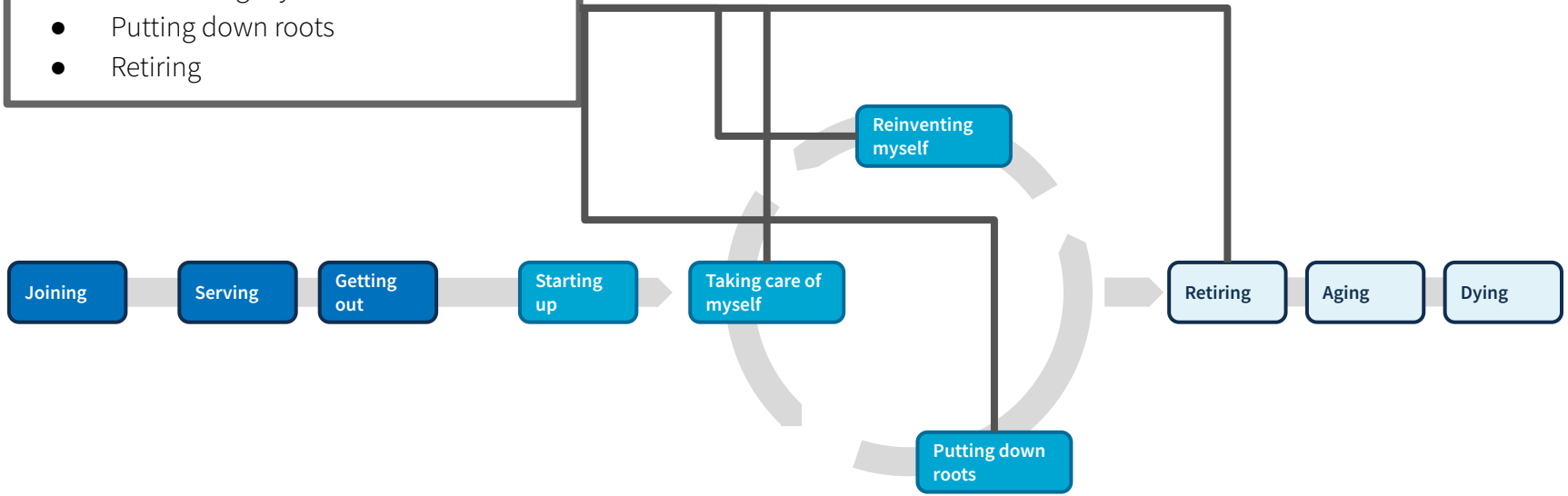
Information Architecture Research Findings

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

How this research maps to the Veteran journey

Information Architecture Research Findings for VA: Health and Benefits | 11 04, 2021

- **Taking care of myself**
- Reinventing myself
- Putting down roots
- Retiring



For a fully detailed Veteran journey, go to
https://github.com/department-of-veterans-affairs/va.gov-team/blob/master/platform/design/va-product-journey-maps/Veteran%20Journey%20Map.pdf

Serving and separation | Living civilian life | Retiring and aging

VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

OCTO-DE goals that this research supports

Information Architecture Research Findings for VA: Health and Benefits | 11 04, 2021

Supported | Not supported

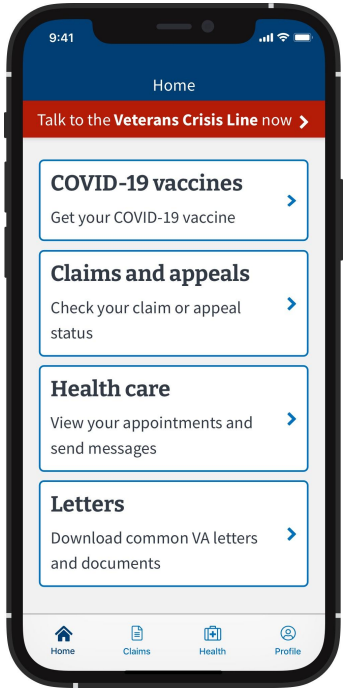
Veterans and their families can apply for all benefits online	Veterans and their families can find a single, authoritative source of information	Veterans and their families trust the security, accuracy, and relevancy of VA.gov	**Veterans can manage their health services online**	VFS teams can build and deploy high-quality products for Veterans on the Platform	**Logged-in users have a personalized experience, with relevant and time-saving features**	Logged-in users can update their personal information easily and instantly	**Logged-in users can easily track applications, claims, or appeals online**
Measures to increase	**Completion rate of online transactions**	Percent of applications submitted online (vs. paper)	Veteran satisfaction with VA.gov Benefit use and enrollment, across all business lines	Benefit value (in $) delivered from online applications or transactions	Number of VA.gov users as a function of total Veteran population	**Usage of digital, self-service tools**	
Measures to decrease		**Time to successful complete and submit online transactions**	Time to process online applications (vs. paper)	**Call center volume, wait time, and time to resolution**	**Time from online benefit discovery to benefit delivery**		

VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Background

Information Architecture Research Findings for VA: Health and Benefits | 11 04, 2021

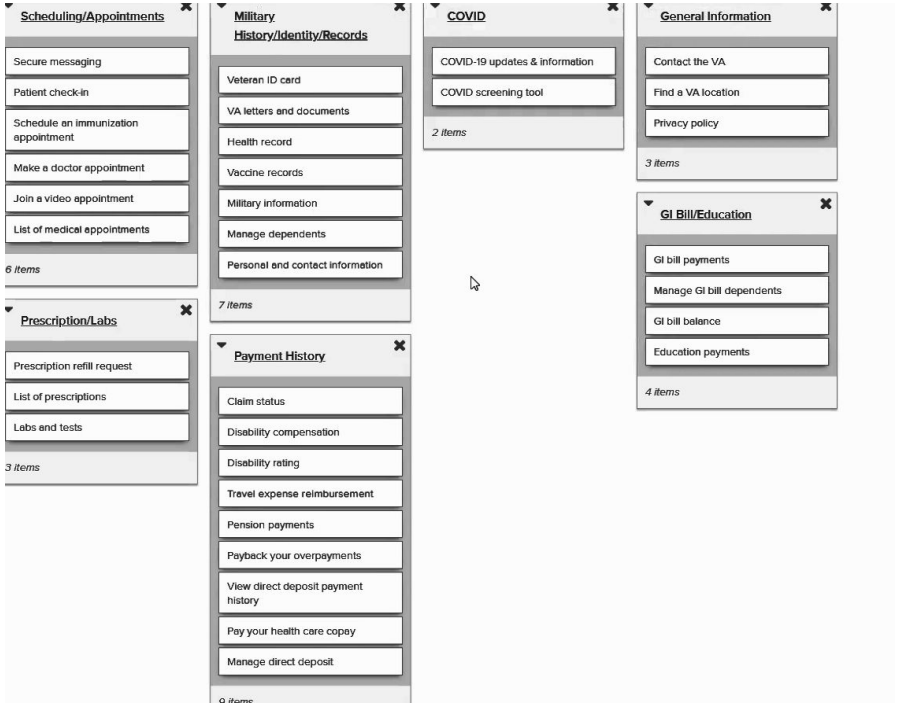
We conducted research in order to **validate** our current IA and to **“future-proof”** the structure to accommodate important new features with minimal disruption.



VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Background

In order to understand how Veterans would **organize** the featureset on our existing "*next-18-months*" roadmap, we conducted a **moderated card sort**.



Participant Demographics

Information Architecture Research Findings for VA: Health and Benefits | 11 04, 2021

Findings include the perspectives of the following underserved Veteran groups:

- 6 participants live in rural areas
- 3 participants were above the age of 55
- 3 participant don't have a degree
- 3 participants identified as Latinx, Biracial, Asian, Native, or Black

IA Card sort VA Recruitment Checker

# of participants		9		# of AT users				6			# of no shows				0	
Category	%	Target	Study	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14
Veterans		Based on current VA statistics															
Age 55-64+	50.00%	5	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1
Cognitive Disability	50.00%	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mobile user	50.00%	5	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Rural	25.00%	3	6	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0
No degree	25.00%	3	3	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Other than honorable	21.00%	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Immigrant origin	17.00%	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Women	10.00%	1	3	1	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Expat (living abroad)	0.40%	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Race		Based on VA's projected statistics															
Black	15.00%	2	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hispanic	12.00%	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Biracial	3.90%	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Asian	3.00%	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Native	0.30%	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Participant Tracker on Google Sheets

What we learned

Key findings

1. Veterans needs are unique and change over time.

Features and services can be more or less important depending on the specifics of their situation. These specifics can change over time.

> *"There are some things that I won't touch or ever look at again" (ex: GI bill)*
> – Participant 11

Key findings

2. Some features *were* organized into clear categories.

Veterans seemed to find some value in adjacency.

Common groupings

- *Health care*
- *GI Bill*
- *Payments*

> *"Any managing education stuff goes all together. Easier to have it separate from ebenefits area."*
> – Participant 5

Key findings

3. Veterans did not always place features in the same categories.

Some features have a less definitive home than others. *For example,* ***Payments*** *and* ***Secure Messages*** *were categorized into the "****Me****" category,* ***Benefits*** *and* ***Health*** *respectively.*

Observation: The participant initially tried to separate "payments to the Veterans" vs "payments to VA", but "travel reimbursement" threw her off.
– Participant 6

Key findings

4. Veterans do not all use the same language for things, and don’t always understand VA language.

*For example, **Contact VA** ranged from “a list of phone numbers” to assumptions of messaging or chat features.*

Observation: Was unsure what 'join a video appointment' was, also had questions about what biometric settings were.
– Participant 11

Recommendations

1. Take a layered approach to findability.

Veterans find value in grouping features and information to support accomplishing tasks. But these groups may not be mutually exclusive.

We think that any IA will be more successful when backed by things like thoughtful cross-linking, bubbling of information in context, and search.

Draft: **IA Variant** (in Mural)

Recommendations

2. Use personalization to better surface relevant information and cut across silos.

Timely surfacing of data may facilitate users in completing tasks within the app.

Recommendations

3. Do additional research into naming and search

Consider ways to redefine items in a way in which makes sense to Veterans. Consider if and how a search feature might work within the context of the app.

Observation: The participant usually spends about 10 minutes trying to find it on his own on the website, and then gives up and calls the call center.
– Participant 11

Next steps

1. Run a tree test study with 50 Veterans to try out some different approaches to IA.

While we found some strong groupings in participant sorts, there are several ways we could respond to this data. In effort to explore possible solutions, we suggest running an unmoderated tree test study with ideally 50 participants.

Next steps

2. Use prototypes to explore different interaction models

There are several ways we could respond to the insights we gained from our participants. We should prototype as a fast way to explore different ways to expose the IA, or try out different personalization strategies.

Next steps

3. Continue discovery around adding personalization to the app.

Veterans mentioned wanting the ability to only see what they frequently use. When asked why this would be useful the general response was to make it easy to find. **The issue seems to be in finding what they need in order to complete a task.**

Thank you

Appendix

Research plan

Conversation guide

Interview notes

Participant Tracker

Card List

Prototype

Tool used for synthesis:
Mural board