



VA CUSTOMER PERSONAS

VETERANS EXPERIENCE TOOLS
MAY 2016

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MAY 2016**



Improving Veterans' Experiences

A PROJECT BY THE VETERANS EXPERIENCE OFFICE

The Veterans Experience team traveled across the country to meet and learn more about Veterans from all eras and branches of service. We listened to stories about their diverse military experiences and lives as Veterans. The stories we heard emphasized Veterans' deeply positive relationships with VA, an organization dedicated to the well-being of Veterans and their families. We also heard about opportunities to improve the way VA delivers benefits and services, so we might form trusting lifelong relationships with Veterans on their own terms.

The purpose of this effort is to catalyze action through analysis of customer insights, so we can align what we do with the needs and expectations of who we serve.

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IDEATION CARDS

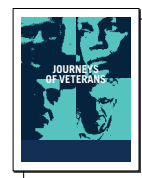
Veterans Experience Tools

VA is taking a new and innovative approach to solving some of our biggest challenges. By understanding Veterans' end-to-end journeys as they engage (or not) with VA, the actual lived experiences of Veterans are central to the design of relevant products and services. These tools provide VA employees with foundational language based on customer insights, framing our services through the lens of Veterans' journeys and personas. As immediately actionable tools, they can be used to evaluate and improve the services we offer to Veterans. To that end, we hope our collection of Veterans Experience Tools will continue to expand over time.



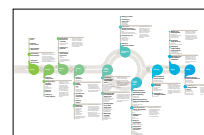
JOURNEYS OF VETERANS

A deep dive into each phase of Veterans' journeys, including descriptions of each life stage and moment, actual Veterans' stories, and Moments that Matter.



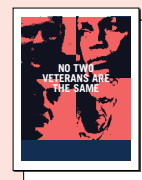
JOURNEY MAP

The Journeys of Veterans Map shows ten life stages Veterans may encounter, from pre-service to end-of-life, across three major phases of Veterans' lives.



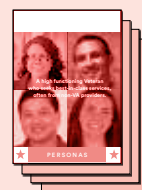
VA CUSTOMER PERSONAS

An exploration of VA's set of ten customer personas, e.g., fictitious characters combining qualities from many different real people to represent VA's actual customers in an aggregated form.



VA CUSTOMER PERSONA IDEATION CARDS

A translation of VA's Customer Personas into user-friendly Persona Ideation or "playing" cards which can be used as a tool to generate new ideas, helping VA employees generate concepts for processes and products that directly affect VA customers.

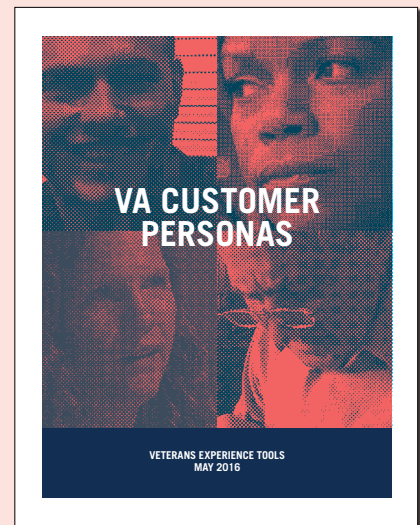


ABOUT THIS DOCUMENT

To understand the many different ways people need and use VA, we conducted research to understand broad trends and expectations, as well as individual Veteran perspectives and motivations. As a result of the research conducted by VA teams over the past two years, we have identified 10 types of VA users - known in the private sector as “personas.” Personas are fictitious characters combining qualities from many different real people who represent VA’s actual customers. Personas are not the same as market segments. Instead, personas capture attitudes, needs, and expectations of potential users of VA’s services.

The personas are derived from hundreds of ethnographic interviews with Veterans, their families, and their service providers. This research included visits to their homes and places of work, as well as rich discussions about their lives. Qualitative research of this kind provided incredibly detailed data about not just what Veterans do or want, but why and how they live their lives and try to achieve their goals. This research also revealed how Veterans’ military and personal experiences shape their needs of and attitudes toward VA. We believe these ten personas represent a comprehensive view of today’s Veterans, reflecting nuances across age, gender, era of service, military branch, geographical location, and ethnicity.

In this document you will meet each of the ten personas to get a sense of who they are, how they feel, what they need, and opportunities to improve their VA experiences. VA Customer Persona Ideation Cards, a playing card version of the personas, are also included to be used as a tool to generate new ideas for VA products or services. The cards do not offer immediate, tangible answers to Veterans’ most pressing needs, nor do they offer recommendations for better tools, services, or interactions. Rather, they are a starting point, or inspiration to design better products and services to benefit Veterans.



HOW TO USE:

- » Understand the diverse needs and attitudes of VA’s primary set of customers
- » Segment Veterans into actionable groups to improve service design
- » Develop fluency in describing Veterans’ experiences and a shared understanding of Veterans’ needs across the spectrum
- » Recognize where VA services do a great job at or fall short of meeting Veterans’ expectations and needs
- » Identify which services have a broad impact on multiple personas and which services are more targeted
- » Reference personas as starting points for generating new products or services



The background is a solid red color with a fine halftone dot pattern. Scattered across the background are numerous white stars of varying sizes. There are also several white, irregular streaks and smudges, particularly in the upper left and lower right areas, giving the impression of a starry night sky or a cosmic theme.

MEET THE PERSONAS



TEN PERSONAS

REPRESENTING THE DIVERSITY
OF THE VETERAN COMMUNITY

VETERANS



STILL SERVING

Veterans who serve in active duty, Reserves, or National Guard and navigate competing civilian and military systems, cultures, and providers



FAST TRACKER

Veterans who seek best-in-class services, often from non-VA providers



DAY BY DAY

High-need, low-income Veterans struggling with addiction, homelessness, incarceration, or long-term unemployment



FORGING AHEAD

Resilient, self-sufficient Veterans who have life-planning and health needs related to mental, physical, and/or sexual trauma



PROUD PATRIOT

Veterans, often low-income or in poor health, who identify as Veterans and have positive feelings about VA's comprehensive care



IN-TRANSITION

Veterans separated from service, but still strongly connected to military friends and culture and not yet on a firm civilian footing



UNAFFILIATED

Veterans who have little interaction with, awareness of, or interest in VA services or Veteran issues

SUPPORTERS



FRONT-LINE PROVIDER

Administration staffers or medical professionals with whom Veterans interact with when seeking benefits or care from VA or third-party services



KNOWLEDGEABLE BUDDY

Trusted friends and mentors who help Veteran peers access the services and benefits they need



FAMILY MEMBER

Spouses, parents, siblings, or other close family members of a Veteran, particularly those in a caretaking or support role



STILL SERVING

**VETERANS WHO SERVE IN ACTIVE DUTY, RESERVES, OR NATIONAL
GUARD AND NAVIGATE COMPETING CIVILIAN AND MILITARY
SYSTEMS, CULTURES, AND PROVIDERS**

STILL SERVING

These servicemembers are doing their best to balance the responsibilities of serving in active duty, Reserves, or National Guard, establishing their careers and (re)engaging with their families and community networks. All of this balancing can easily take a toll on these servicemembers as they do their best to balance demanding professions and parenthood.

“
VA ISN'T FOR ME.
IT'S FOR ELDERLY,
MORE DISABLED
PEOPLE.”

TIMOTHY, NEBRASKA



NEEDS

- » Civilian life tools for career and financial planning
- » Behavioral health services
- » A balance within a dual-cultural lifestyle



ATTITUDES

- » Want help navigating unfamiliar workplace expectations
- » Hesitate to seek behavioral health resources since it might put current security clearance at risk

BENEFIT USE

VHA 

VBA 

NCA 

VA RELATIONSHIP

ABILITY
TO ACCESS
SERVICES 

SUPPORT
NETWORK
STRENGTH 

LIKELIHOOD
TO SEEK
SERVICES 

VA OPPORTUNITIES

- Connect them with a local mentor
- Help them understand how VA can serve them now and in the future (e.g. VA Home Loan)
- Meet them where they are by understanding the constraints on their schedule



FAST TRACKER

**VETERANS WHO SEEK
BEST-IN-CLASS SERVICES, OFTEN
FROM NON-VA PROVIDERS**

FAST TRACKER

These Veterans successfully leverage their military training, especially their discipline and work ethic, to navigate life after active duty, Reserves, or National Guard successfully. They are proud of their service and continue to maintain a strong network of military friends. These Veterans are willing to go the extra mile to answer VA benefits questions for their military friends, and although they know what VA has to offer, they do not let VA's shortcomings slow them down. They have no issue utilizing the best that private care has to offer.

“
VA IMPLIES BEING
STUCK AND NEEDING
HELP. THAT'S NOT
HOW I SEE MYSELF.
”

CYNTHIA, NEW YORK



NEEDS

- » Processes that are streamlined, flexible, efficient, and effective
- » Career development resources
- » Tools empowering their continued success



ATTITUDES

- » Uses best-in-class private sector services as a benchmark and expects VA to work as seamlessly
- » Want easy self-service transactions with VA
- » Will use VA if it is easy, otherwise they will move on and find services elsewhere

BENEFIT USE

VHA 

VBA 

NCA 

VA RELATIONSHIP

ABILITY
TO ACCESS
SERVICES 

SUPPORT
NETWORK
STRENGTH 

LIKELIHOOD
TO SEEK
SERVICES 

VA OPPORTUNITIES

- Offer specific ways for them to help other Veterans with transition-related questions
- Tailor access to digital services and touchpoints to enable quick and effective interactions
- Communicate VA can support them if times get tough or their health declines



DAY-BY-DAY

**HIGH-NEED, LOW-INCOME VETERANS STRUGGLING
WITH ADDICTION, HOMELESSNESS, INCARCERATION,
OR LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYMENT**

DAY-BY-DAY

These Veterans have had a difficult journey throughout their lives, often struggling with addiction, homelessness, incarceration, or unemployment. Their number one priority is finding stability in their lives and they often look to VA to provide structure and support. These Veterans are frequent users of VA services to help them find shelter, recover from addiction, or secure a job.

“
**VA IS LIKE FAMILY.
A DYSFUNCTIONAL
FAMILY.**

”
RANDY, CALIFORNIA



NEEDS

- » Personalized wrap-around support without judgment for their specific housing, addiction, medical, or behavioral-health needs
- » Help creating a stable routine to maintain upward progress
- » Community connections and tailored coping skills



ATTITUDES

- » Open and willing to change
- » Need consistent encouragement and support
- » Feel mixed about VA services; some have been very dehumanizing, but they know they are reliant on them and have little variety in choice
- » Want to get healthier physically and emotionally

BENEFIT USE

VHA 

VBA 

NCA 

VA RELATIONSHIP

ABILITY
TO ACCESS
SERVICES 

SUPPORT
NETWORK
STRENGTH 

LIKELIHOOD
TO SEEK
SERVICES 

VA OPPORTUNITIES

- Expand accessibility of successful high-touch, wrap-around services such as homeless PACTs
- Continue to integrate with social service providers (e.g., Medicare or Social Security) across Veterans' networks
- Track high-risk individuals early in their military careers, paying close attention during transition



FORGING AHEAD

**RESILIENT, SELF-SUFFICIENT VETERANS WHO HAVE
LIFE-PLANNING AND HEALTH NEEDS RELATED TO
MENTAL, PHYSICAL, AND/OR SEXUAL TRAUMA**

FORGING AHEAD

These Veterans are doing their best to move past negative experiences from their time serving in the military. Although the dark moments in these Veterans' lives remind them they need to access healthcare services (including VA), they often feel self-sufficient enough to create their own paths and live life without support and guidance from others.



NEEDS

- » Non-traditional care pathways
- » PTSD, TBI, and/or MST support
- » Small-business support or Vocational Rehabilitation



ATTITUDES

- » Consider challenges as fuel to move forward
- » Wish for positive change and healing
- » Forge their own paths, but may feel isolated

“


I FEEL THE VA HAS AN ANTI-ENTREPRENEURIAL OUTLOOK. THEY JUST WANT TO THROW MEDICINE AT US. YOU CAN'T MEDICATE SOMEONE OUT OF UNEMPLOYMENT.

”

HEATHER, CALIFORNIA

BENEFIT USE

VHA 

VBA 

NCA 

VA RELATIONSHIP

ABILITY TO ACCESS SERVICES 

SUPPORT NETWORK STRENGTH 

LIKELIHOOD TO SEEK SERVICES 

VA OPPORTUNITIES

- Acknowledge MST and create better support programs
- Provide flexible Vocational Rehabilitation services for non-traditional careers
- Tailor care to meet women Veterans' needs



PROUD PATRIOT

**VETERANS WHO IDENTIFY STRONGLY AS
VETERANS AND HAVE POSITIVE FEELINGS ABOUT
VA'S COMPREHENSIVE CARE**

PROUD PATRIOT

These proud Veterans are most likely in later stages of life, doing their best to manage with a fixed retirement income. Although they are heavy users of VA services, which they believe to be their best option for health care, these Veterans’ abilities to access the care they need is relatively low.

“
VA PROVIDES
GREAT CARE.
REALLY GREAT.
”
VICTOR, MICHIGAN



NEEDS

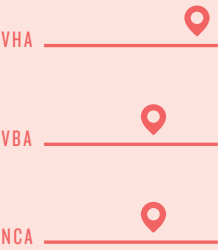
- » A connected community and support
- » Help managing on a limited retirement income
- » Support managing the growing demands of multiple evolving health conditions



ATTITUDES

- » Convey visible pride of military service and loyalty to VA
- » Remain patient with the routines and wait times of VA hospital visits
- » Consider trip to VA Medical Centers as outings and a time to visit with friends

BENEFIT USE



VA RELATIONSHIP



VA OPPORTUNITIES

- Develop programs with third parties to deliver on the social inclusion needs of the elderly
- Schedule appointments smartly to enable patients to see multiple doctors in one day



IN-TRANSITION

**VETERANS SEPARATED FROM SERVICE, BUT STILL
STRONGLY CONNECTED TO MILITARY FRIENDS AND
CULTURE AND NOT YET ON A FIRM CIVILIAN FOOTING**

IN-TRANSITION

These Veterans recently left military service and are transitioning back into school and civilian life. Although many are likely to make it through transition successfully, some Veterans find it difficult to translate their military skills to civilian life. In particular, these Veterans have witnessed many of their friends using drugs or alcohol to self-medicate for depression, PTSD, TBI and/or MST.

“
HIRE MORE PEOPLE
THAT UNDERSTAND
WHAT YOU’RE GOING
THROUGH. USE
MILITARY TERMS -
EXPLAIN WHAT
YOU MEAN.
”

JEANINE, MAINE



NEEDS

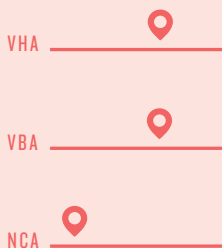
- » Continuity between military and civilian culture, via mentors or Veteran community groups
- » Financial support for education
- » Veteran-oriented education and employment placement or other career services



ATTITUDES

- » Consider education as a needed competitive edge for professional development
- » Expect the military to do more to help servicemembers cope with the challenges which arise from deployments post-separation
- » Understand that being a Veteran helps when working with other Veterans

BENEFIT USE



VA RELATIONSHIP



VA OPPORTUNITIES

- Develop programs with partners to tackle the complex path of military-to-civilian transition, particularly for high-risk Veterans
- Look at Veterans holistically (i.e., family needs as well as individual needs)
- Pair Veterans training in mental health fields with VA professionals for mentoring



**VETERANS WHO HAVE LITTLE INTERACTION WITH,
AWARENESS OF, OR INTEREST IN VA SERVICES
OR VETERAN ISSUES**

UNAFFILIATED

These disengaged Veterans, for whatever reason, have little connection with VA, its services, or its community. Few of their coworkers are Veterans, they do not keep up with anyone from their unit, and they do not belong to any Veteran-related groups or organizations. They are relatively uninformed about the opportunities available to them and are somewhat reluctant to explore VA further because they do not identify as Veterans.

“
I DIDN'T KNOW
ANYONE RECEIVING
VA BENEFITS...
I FELT WEIRD
BECAUSE I DIDN'T
SEE MYSELF IN
THAT PARTICULAR
SETTING. I WAS NOT
ONE OF THEM.
”

LEE, MARYLAND



NEEDS

- » Better information on VA's benefits and services
- » Treatment for undiagnosed or untreated service-related health conditions
- » Reassurance VA is easily accessible and welcoming



ATTITUDES

- » Do not particularly identify as Veterans
- » Are not confident VA offers useful services, or VA Medical Centers are good places to seek care

BENEFIT USE

VHA  _____

VBA  _____

NCA  _____

VA RELATIONSHIP

ABILITY
TO ACCESS
SERVICES  _____

SUPPORT
NETWORK
STRENGTH  _____

LIKELIHOOD
TO SEEK
SERVICES  _____

VA OPPORTUNITIES

- Develop outreach programs through community and professional organizations to inform Veterans of VA services and benefits
- Create financial empowerment programs, perhaps in affiliation with banks, to assist Veterans with retirement and college savings



FRONT-LINE PROVIDER

**ADMINISTRATION STAFFERS OR MEDICAL PROFESSIONALS WITH
WHOM VETERANS INTERACT WHEN SEEKING BENEFITS OR CARE
FROM VA OR THIRD-PARTY SERVICES**

FRONT-LINE PROVIDER

These people, although not Veterans, want to do meaningful and impactful work for the Veterans they serve. They are usually administration staffers or medical professionals who feel the system's constraints force them to prioritize operational metrics over optimal Veteran care. They are vaguely aware of resources and programs to assist their patients, but they do not have much access to formal professional development or networks of other medical administrators that could provide the information they need.

“
I KNOW WHAT I
WANT TO GIVE A
VETERAN BUT I DONT
REMEMBER WHERE I
HEARD IT.
”

EDUARDO, FLORIDA



NEEDS

- » A clear picture of all the in-system and out-of-system options that might best help the Veterans they serve
- » Venues for learning and exchanging best practices with a supportive community of professional peers



ATTITUDES

- » Want to do work that is meaningful and has a positive impact on the Veterans they serve
- » Feel system pressure to treat Veterans quickly, limiting their abilities to spend meaningful time with Veterans

BENEFIT USE (AS A SUPPORTER)

VHA 

VBA 

NCA 

VA RELATIONSHIP

ABILITY
TO ACCESS
SERVICES 

SUPPORT
NETWORK
STRENGTH 

LIKELIHOOD
TO SEEK
SERVICES 

VA OPPORTUNITIES

- Create opportunities for peer-to-peer learning for VA staff (e.g., administrative personnel)
- Train staff how to refer Veterans for specialized care, specifically how to share appropriate information with Veterans and their colleagues
- Develop systems of care to support providers maintaining relationships with Veterans



KNOWLEDGABLE BUDDY

**TRUSTED FRIENDS AND MENTORS WHO HELP VETERAN
PEERS ACCESS THE SERVICES AND BENEFITS THEY NEED**

KNOWLEDGEABLE BUDDY

These supportive Veterans are trusted friends and mentors to their peers, often hiring them into their organizations and helping them gain access to the care and benefits they need. These knowledgeable Veterans know how hard it can be to get help, which is why they take extra responsibility to steer their peers into treatment. Despite all this, the system does not formally recognize these Veterans' important, self-selecting roles.

“
GOVERNMENT
PROGRAMS ARE
JUST GAMES WITH
NO RULES...
THE COMMON MYTH
IS THAT THE SYSTEM
IS THERE FOR YOU,
BUT IT'S NOT.
”

REMY, LOUISIANA



NEEDS

- » Trustworthy service “front doors” where they can direct Veteran buddies with health or other needs
- » Easy-to-find information to help friends struggling with depression, TBI, PTSD, addiction, and other challenges
- » Recognition that, while not a family member, they play a critical caregiving role
- » Educational and career resources to direct to other Veterans



ATTITUDES

- » Feel deeply connected to the Veteran community, but may be ambivalent about VA due to bad word-of-mouth stories
- » Feel responsibility to help struggling buddies get good care, whether from VA or a third party
- » Understand that being a Veteran helps when working with other Veterans

BENEFIT USE (AS AS SUPPORTER)

VHA 

VBA 

NCA 

VA RELATIONSHIP

ABILITY
TO ACCESS
SERVICES 

SUPPORT
NETWORK
STRENGTH 

LIKELIHOOD
TO SEEK
SERVICES 

VA OPPORTUNITIES

- Provide information about benefit and care options that are targeted directly to supporters, as well as to Veterans
- Create follow-through systems that give supporters confidence to “deliver” a Veteran to VA for care, knowing VA will not fail



FAMILY MEMBER

**SPOUSES, PARENTS, SIBLINGS OR OTHER CLOSE FAMILY
MEMBERS OF A VETERAN, PARTICULARLY THOSE IN A
CARETAKING OR SUPPORT ROLE**

FAMILY MEMBER

These family members are closely tied to a Veteran who likely has physical and mental-health needs related to their time in service. Family members play a critical role in the Veteran's daily life, often taking the lead in getting benefits and care for them, as they are sometimes unable or unwilling proactively to find their own care. Too often, this family member feels isolated, guilty, or that they are the only one who is trying to care for their Veteran loved one. They want to be heard and to trust the system will provide the care their families' need.



NEEDS

- » A return to a new normal, balancing family and work responsibilities
- » An easy learning curve for how to engage with VA services
- » Role-based access to data and records that may need to be shared



ATTITUDES

- » Worry about their Veteran family member and feel an urgent sense of responsibility to rally whatever support is needed
- » Think the process of dealing with VA is complicated and frustrating
- » Want to see their Veteran family member on a new healthy path

“

**VA IS A MEANS TO AN
END - A NECESSARY
STRUGGLE TO DEAL
WITH.**

”

HANNAH, CALIFORNIA

BENEFIT USE (AS AS SUPPORTER)

VHA 

VBA 

NCA 

VA RELATIONSHIP

ABILITY
TO ACCESS
SERVICES 

SUPPORT
NETWORK
STRENGTH 

LIKELIHOOD
TO SEEK
SERVICES 

VA OPPORTUNITIES

- Offer support to primary caregivers of Veterans with physical or mental-health challenges
- Provide targeted benefit and care information directly to supporters, as well as to Veterans
- Create follow-through systems that give supporters confidence to “deliver” a Veteran to VA for care, knowing VA will not fail

THE UNIVERSITY OF CHICAGO PRESS

APPLY THE PERSONAS

VA Customer Persona Ideation Cards

VA's Customer Persona Ideation cards are an actionable tool useful in generating new ideas to serve Veterans and their supporters.



WHAT ARE THE CARDS **GOOD** FOR?

The cards' primary use is to **help designers ask idea-provoking questions and generate innovative solutions.** People should use the deck to: imagine and invent new possible tools and services; identify gaps in current tools and services; and think of new ways to evaluate the utility of tools and services for different types of Veterans. For example, product owners could potentially re-design VA benefit handbooks, personalizing them according to different Veteran personas, or service owners could design less-burdensome enrollment processes to align with particular Veterans' needs.



WHAT ARE THE CARDS **NOT** GOOD FOR?

The cards neither offer immediate, tangible answers to Veterans' most pressing needs, **nor do they provide specific direction on how to serve a given individual Veteran** or offer recommendations for better tools, services, or interactions. For example, the cards should not be used to train front-line VA staff members to categorize Veterans into specific persona types.



WHO SHOULD USE THE CARDS?

The cards will be most immediately **useful for people throughout VA who are in the process of designing better products, services, and experiences for Veterans.** Whenever possible, experienced human-centered designers should facilitate use of the cards with teams who have limited day-to-day experience with creative ideation.

A CARD DECK WITH FOUR SUITS

The ideation card deck contains four “suits,” including Veteran personas, life stages, military experiences, and personal qualities.



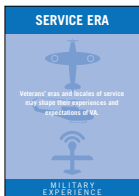
PERSONAS

These cards highlight the varied nature of the Veteran community by illustrating the way in which Veterans, and their supporters, navigate competing civilian and military systems, cultures, and responsibilities.



LIFE STAGES

These cards capture the goals Veterans try to achieve at different stages of their lives. Used in combination with the persona cards, these cards can help product owners think about Veterans’ needs as they access VA services and benefits.



MILITARY EXPERIENCE

These cards detail aspects of Veterans’ military service experiences that may affect their perceptions and expectations of VA. These cards, in combination with the persona or life stage cards, can help product owners imagine the preferences or desires of different Veterans.



PERSONAL QUALITIES

These cards reflect demographic and other personal qualities that impact Veterans’ experiences with VA. As with the military experience cards, these cards help with testing whether a potential design direction will meet the particular preferences or desires of different Veterans.

How can I use these cards in my everyday life? What can I do with these cards? What ideation games can I play?

GETTING FAMILIAR WITH THE CARDS

Before diving directly into gameplay, you are encouraged to browse through the cards to get familiar with the content. In particular, sort through each “suit” of cards to understand their differences and the ways you can combine them to create nuanced, hypothetical, yet realistic customers.

USING THE CARDS WITH PURPOSE

Once you have developed a familiarity with the cards, we encourage you to begin playing one of the three predetermined games. These games range in difficulty and will help you build empathy, diagnose issues within the Veteran experience, or facilitate VA service improvements.

BUILD EMPATHY FOR USERS

BEGINNER

PLAYERS

3 to 10 players

WHY

Play to create empathetic connections with Veterans' service experiences.

WHEN

Just after starting an improvement effort — like redesigning a form, improving a waiting area, or launching a new digital tool.

- 1 Dealer gives each player, including him or herself, a persona card.
- 2 Dealer places one life stage card in the middle of the group, asking all players to consider how that life stage relates to their assigned persona card.
- 3 Dealer begins play by describing how their assigned persona might navigate the life stage and its associated goals.
- 4 Other players do the same for their assigned personas.
- 5 In subsequent rounds, players might describe their personas' hopes or aspirations, their service needs from VA, their preferred channels for service, and so on.

DIAGNOSE THE CURRENT STATE

INTERMEDIATE

PLAYERS

1 to 10 players

WHY

Play to identify existing service users and explore their associated goals, needs, and qualities.

WHEN

Before selecting a product, service, or tool for improvement.

- 1 Identify a VA product, service, or tool to improve.
- 2 With input from other players, dealer sorts persona cards into three user groups for the product, service, or tool that needs to be improved: 1) primary targets/users, 2) secondary targets/users, and 3) non-users.
- 3 For each of the three card piles, players prioritize cards by how applicable or meaningful that product, service, or tool would be to the persona.
- 4 A new player can take the roll of dealer, repeating a similar sorting and ranking process with the life stage cards (i.e., how applicable is that product, service or tool to Veterans in that life stage).
- 5 All players reflect on the sorting and ranking of personas and life stages, discussing how the product, service, or tool could be improved to meet their needs.
- 6 (Optional) If useful, players can follow a similar process of sorting and ranking the military experience and personal quality cards to further nuance the current state diagnosis.
- 7 (Optional) Players ask themselves the following questions:
 - » What are Veterans trying to accomplish by using this service?
 - » What is currently blocking them from using this service?
 - » How does this service compare, in terms of user experience, to other services we have similarly investigated?
 - » Is this service a good candidate for improvement?

GENERATE SERVICE IMPROVEMENTS

ADVANCED

PLAYERS

2+ players

WHY

Play to identify specific, actionable ways to improve VA services to match Veterans' preferences better.

WHEN

After doing preliminary research on a service and its users, but before generating initial prototypes for improvements.

- 1 Dealer places a life stage card in the center of the group, asking each player to consider the goals within the life stage.
- 2 Identify some specific VA products, services, or tools that could be improved for Veterans and their support networks during that stage of life.
- 3 Dealer distributes one persona card to each player, including him or herself, to be considered in tandem with the life stage card in the center of the group.
- 4 Players take turns describing how their assigned persona would navigate that particular life stage and its goals, considering the persona's priorities and needs from VA as well as VA's ability to meet those needs.
- 5 Dealer distributes military experience cards to each player, including him or herself, which should be combined with persona cards.
- 6 Players take turns describing how the military experience card nuances their persona and life stage cards, specifically considering if any of their previous assumptions, priorities, or needs have changed.
- 7 (Optional) Repeat steps 5 and 6 with the personal qualities cards, continuously adding nuance to the scenario.
- 8 Players generate ideas about the challenges and opportunities highlighted in the discussion of life stages as they relate to personas, military experience, and personal qualities.



ABOUT THE PROJECT

Building upon a strong foundation of past VA initiatives, this research amplifies Veterans' voices and clarifies their needs

Over the past several years, VA has engaged in a series of successful research efforts to understand how Veterans and their communities engage with VA. Building on the insights and themes cultivated through these research efforts, the Veterans Experience Office embarked on a new project in September 2015 founded on the question: “How might we improve the experience of Veterans and their support networks through life transitions in a manner that anticipates and is responsive to their well-being?”

RESEARCH PROCESS

As part of the Veteran Experience Office's commitment to keep Veterans at the center of every VA initiative, the team utilized a Human-Centered Design process to begin improving Veterans' experience. Beginning with qualitative research—interviews, stimuli activities, and environmental observations—the team generated a comprehensive perspective of the life and needs of Veterans across multiple geographies, life stages, and areas of service. Ethnographic field research on Veterans and their support networks provided the team with a detailed perspective of Veterans: who they are, what they need and hope for, and how they behave.

The resulting qualitative data, coupled with expert and stakeholder interview data, provided us with Veteran-centered insights, empowering the Veterans Experience Office to develop actionable Veterans experience tools and make insightful recommendations related to the design of new or enhanced products, services, and offerings for Veterans and VA.

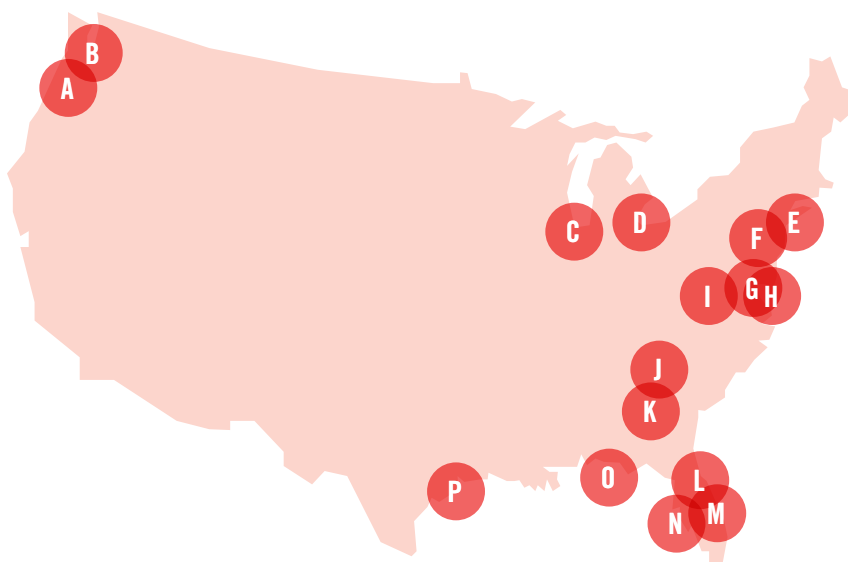
RESEARCH GOALS

This research effort explored behaviors, attitudes, and perceptions of Veterans and their support networks through the lens of “life transitions” to achieve the following goals:

1	DEEPEN OUR UNDERSTANDING OF VETERANS’ LIFE GOALS AND NEEDS THROUGHOUT THEIR LIVES
2	UNDERSTAND KEY “MOMENTS THAT MATTER” IN VETERANS’ INTERACTIONS WITH VA
3	DESIGN AND PROTOTYPE INTERVENTIONS TO COLLECTIVELY WORK TOWARD SYSTEMIC CHANGE

RESEARCH PLAN

To achieve our goals and generate a comprehensive understanding of Veterans’ experience, the research team curated a research sample of over 150 Veterans from around the country, and conducted a new round of in-depth ethnographic interviews with 39 participants. Out of the field research, the team developed a collection of Veterans experience tools (Journeys of Veterans Map and VA Customer Persona Ideation Cards) as a first step towards creating or enhancing new products or services to benefit Veterans.



- A** Portland, OR
- B** Seattle, WA
- C** Chicago, IL
- D** Detroit, MI
- E** New York, NY
- F** Bethlehem, PA
- G** Arlington, VA
- H** Washington, D.C.
- I** Grotoes, VA
- J** Charlotte, NC
- K** Atlanta, GA
- L** St. Augustine, FL
- M** Orlando, FL
- N** Tampa, FL
- O** Pensacola, FL
- P** Houston, TX

THANK YOU

Thank you to the Veterans, families, connectors, and community members who opened their homes, shared their stories, and gave us a glimpse into their experiences with VA. Thank you also to the VA Subject Matter Experts and stakeholders across the organization who guided and supported this project from beginning to end. Your insights and feedback were invaluable.

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Research respondents participated willingly. Names have been changed to x data.



