

Veterans Experiences at VA Benefit Offices

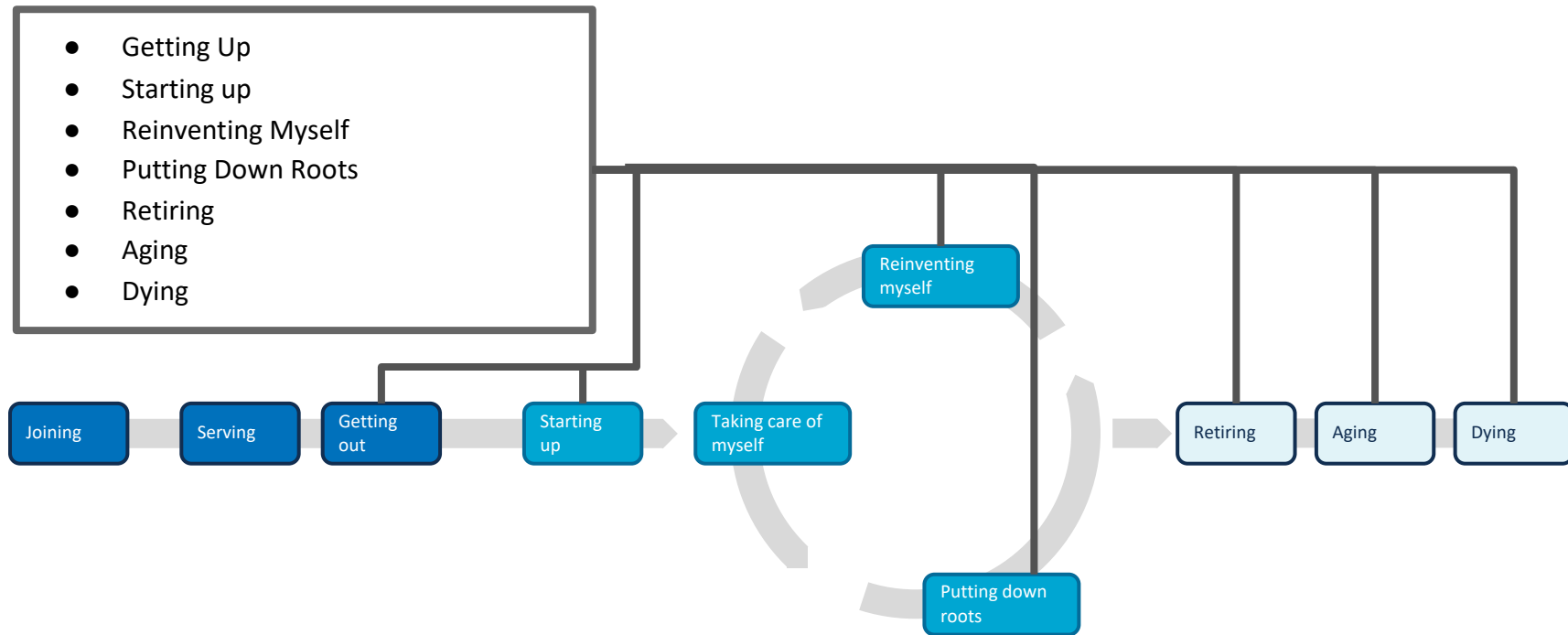
Research Findings

VA



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How this research maps to the Veteran journey



For a fully detailed Veteran journey, go to

<https://github.com/departement-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

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OCTO-DE goals that this research supports

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

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Participant Demographics

Findings may not include the perspectives of the following underserved Veteran groups:

- Continental District
- LGBTQ+
- Asian
- **Below 45**
- Rural
- Veterans visiting offices other than Regional

We recommend studies with these underserved groups in the future.

Facilities Veteran Facing																								
final # of participants		19	12 # of AT users					0	# of no shows										7					
Category	%	Target	Study	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19		
Veterans		Based on current VA statistics																						
Age 55-64+	50.00%	10	7	1	1	1	0	1	0	0	n	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1		
Cognitive Disability	50.00%	10	3	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	n	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		
Rural	25.00%	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		
No degree	25.00%	5	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	n	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		
Immigrant origin	17.00%	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		
Women	10.00%	2	3	0	1	0	0	0	0	n	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0		
Expat (living abroad)	0.40%	1	0	0	0	0	0	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%	3	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	n	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0		
Hispanic	12.00%	3	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		
Biracial	3.90%	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0		
Asian	3.00%	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		
Native	0.30%	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	n	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0		
LGBTQ+		LGBTQ+ Veterans are 5 times as likely to have PTSD																						
Gay, lesbian, or bisexual	--%	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		
Transgender	--%	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		
Nonbinary, gender fluid, gender	--%	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		
Secondary																								
District Northeast		1	2	0	0	1	0	0	n	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	n	0	0	0	1	0		
District Southeast		1	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	1	1	0	1		
District Continental		1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	n	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		
District Pacific		1	5	1	1	0	1	1	0	n	1	n	0	n	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		
Burial		2	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		
Disability		2	9	0	1	1	0	0	0	n	0	1	n	1	n	1	0	0	1	1	1	1		
Education/Career Counseling		2	2	1	0	0	0	0	n	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	n	0	0	0	0		
Home Loan		2	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		
Caregiver/Family Member		1	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	n	0	n	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0		

Key findings

1. Veterans would like to use the website to complete tasks when the steps are clear
2. Veterans prefer to speak to a person on-site if they can't find clear information online
3. Veterans expect Regional Benefit Offices to be “one-stop shops” for services
4. Veterans aren't sure of what tasks they can complete at the various VA offices



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Finding #1: Veterans would like to use the website to complete tasks when the steps are clear

- Most Veterans (10 / 12) prefer to complete their tasks online if the information and instructions are clear
 - Tasks include: raising their disability rating, securing a home loan, seeking education funding
 - Veterans cite convenience as necessary for completing their tasks
 - No one rated phone as their preferred contact method:
 - 7 / 12 rated phone as their last preference for contact
- Most Veterans used the website first to get information about their benefits and tasks to be completed
 - Half of the sample expressed that the information they need is not easily found on the website



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Finding #1: Veterans would like to use the website to complete tasks when the steps are clear

“If they offer it online, I would do it online. I do everything online. I have done request for records online, and that is way easier because before you had to go to the VA.” -p4

“I guess I wish that information was easier found out there [the website]. It may be, but I haven’t found it.” -p3

“Depending on what the task was I would rather do it online if I trusted it would get done properly” -p17



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Finding #2: Veterans prefer to speak to a person on site if they cannot find clear information online first

- Veterans are more likely to visit the benefits office when they need additional information to complete their tasks
 - Tasks include: job placement services, education benefits, forms assistance, and determining access to mental healthcare benefits
- Half of the Veterans interviewed attempted to find answers to their questions online first
 - Even if the Veteran went in-office, they expressed that they did some initial research on the website to start the process
- When Veterans couldn't complete every step in the process themselves, they had confidence that the in-office staff could help them figure out next step(s)
 - Veterans expressed a high level of trust with the staff at the Benefits Office



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Finding #2: Veterans prefer to speak to a person on site if they cannot find clear information online first

“I did go to the benefits website and it gave me a little information on what programs are available, but I do like sitting down with someone to get the information.” -p14

“One-stop shopping is why I picked this one [regional benefits office]. I knew I could do everything in this office. I did some researching, and you could click on a toggle and this one popped up with everything I needed to handle I could do it at this site.” -p2



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Finding #3: Veterans expect Regional Benefit Offices to be “one-stop shops” for services

- Veterans used the website or Google prior to visiting a location to get a baseline understanding of offerings
- Veterans have a high level of trust in staff at the Regional Benefits Office and most expressed satisfaction with their experience in-person
- Veterans understood what they could expect at a Regional Benefits Office, but were less familiar with other types of locations
 - **Note:** 83% of Veterans sampled had never visited another office
- 9 / 12 Veterans visited a Regional Benefits Office and had no problems getting information on the services they needed while there

Finding #3: Veterans expect Regional Benefit Offices to be “one-stop shops” for services

“I think what gives them a 5-star rating is that they are a one stop shop. They can help you with everything that you may need assistance with” -p1

“There is one [satellite benefits office] that is closer to my house, but I prefer to go to the one I went to initially because I have always had success there.”-p1

“The thing about going to the regional office is that is where all the information is available.” -p9



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Finding #4: Veterans aren't sure of what tasks they can complete at the various VA offices

- The differences between offices and what Veterans can accomplish at each isn't obvious
 - When in doubt, Veterans default to the Regional or Satellite Benefit Offices
- Veterans were most confident about what they could accomplish at Regional Benefit Offices

"I would think that the information is pushed from Regional to Satellite and that they would recommend other offices if they thought it would benefit you more" -p1



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Additional Insights

- Many Veterans cited frustration with phone assistance and ranked it as their third preference out of receiving assistance via web, in-person, or over the phone
- Phone trees and directories posed a level of frustration for Veterans, therefore they would rather show up in-person to ask questions about their specific needs
- Phone assistance often left the Veterans without the answers they need to complete their task

Additional Insights

“I did check the website, and I did try calling and I was on hold forever. I think after 30 minutes of being on hold I gave up.” -p.13

“I haven’t always had good experiences with talking to people on the phone with giving out incorrect information. I just don’t trust that over reading or talking face to face.”-p.14

“When I called to get clarification, I got no answer. You still find yourself trying to get there in person so you can get clarification.”- p.17



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Additional Insights

Benefit tasks Veterans sought to complete:

- Increasing disability rating
 - This was the most common in our sample with 9 / 12 participants
- Seeking VA license plate
- Seeking guidance with education needs
- Seeking help getting name change in database
- Securing a home loan
- Seeking education funding
- Job placement services
- Forms assistance
- Determining access to mental healthcare benefits



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Recommendations

1. Create VBA Regional Office pages to follow existing facilities patterns
 - a. Most Veterans got preliminary information from VA website or Google
 - b. Veterans were comfortable looking up information on facility pages
2. Implement clearer content when the steps to complete a task are complex or multi-step
 - a. Veterans consistently cited a desire to speak someone if they felt their situation was complex
 - b. Clearer content about what the requirements are for each benefit could save time and frustration for Veterans
 - i. Share insights with Content Team and Benefits Team
3. Follow up with research into the types of services available at each facility
 - a. Make further distinctions about what services are available at what facility type



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Further Research

- Deep dive into what Veterans are visiting facilities for
 - What do Veterans need to accomplish most often?
 - What questions are they answering?
 - Do their websites have the appropriate information for frequently asked questions?
 - What is the Veteran experience at each facility type?
- Additional research on how and when Veterans use their peer network for support
- Forms usability and accessibility discovery
- Content audit on accuracy and completeness of benefits processes listed on VA website