

# VBA Veteran Facing Research

Readout

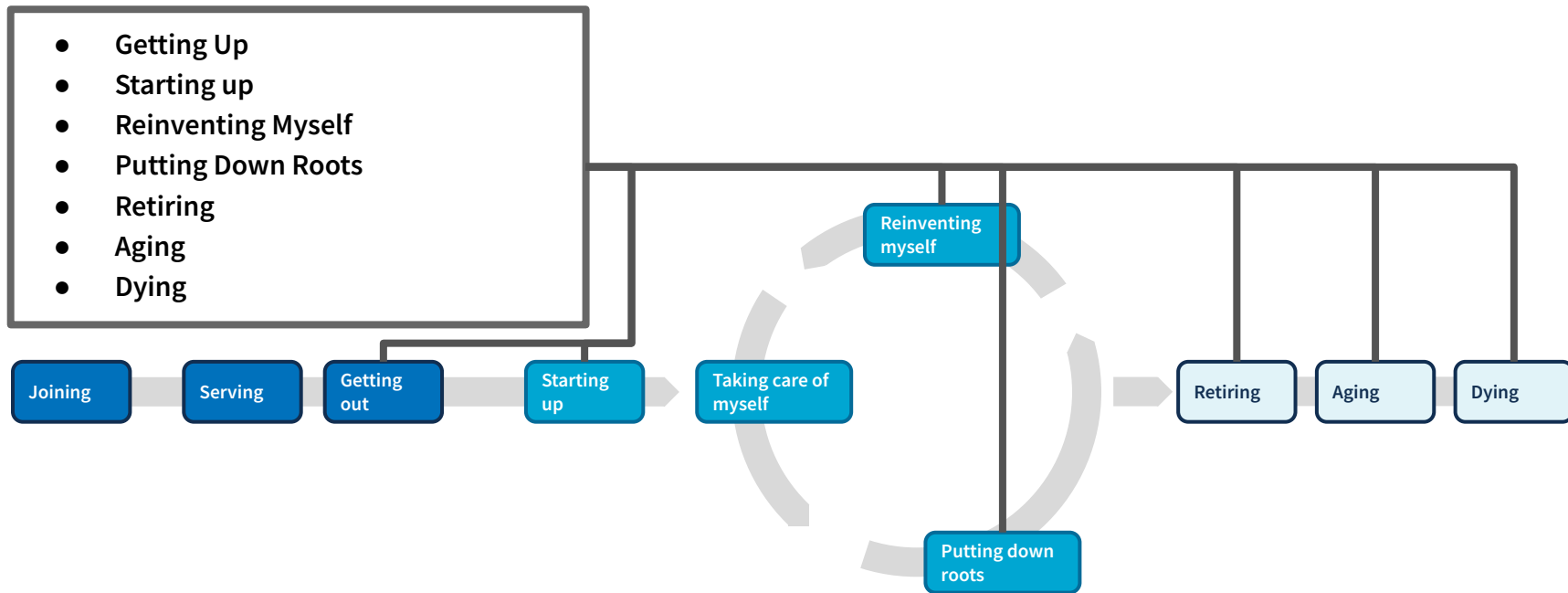
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# How this research maps to the Veteran journey

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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

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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

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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		
<b>Veterans</b>		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	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	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		
<b>Race</b>		Based on VA's projected statistics																						
Black	15.00%	3	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	n	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	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	1	0	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	1	0	0		
<b>LGBTQ+</b>		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		
<b>Secondary</b>																								
District Northeast		1	2	0	0	1	0	0	n	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	n	0	0	1	0	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	1	1	1	1	1		
Education/Career Counseling		2	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	n	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		

[Participant Tracker on Google Sheets](#)

# Key findings

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1. Veterans want to speak with a human when they are discovering what's possible.
2. Veterans want to complete tasks online when tasks are clear.
3. Veterans encountered problems with authenticated experience.
4. Veterans found the information they wanted on the VBA website or Google Maps.
5. Veterans expect Benefit Centers to be “one stop shops” for services.

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## Finding #1: Veterans want to speak with a human when they are discovering what's possible.

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- Doesn't like being treated like a number.
  - Veterans want to know that their concerns matter to who they are speaking with.
  - Veterans express a perception that their concerns get lost in the shuffle of bureaucracy.

This may stem from a lack of clear information on their application status.
- Veterans don't trust automated systems such as webpages or phone tree systems, and express feeling frustration when interacting with those systems.
- Questions are dynamic and complex and not easily slotted into reviewing an FAQ page online.
  - Questions are often exploratory "What benefits can I get?", "Can I use my education benefits to start a new career?"
- Veterans want the trust that comes from a real human speaking with them.

*"It's faster to just go in and hand them a paper form" -p5*



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## Finding #2: Veterans want to complete tasks online when tasks are clear.

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- 10/12 rated online 1st preference for completing task.
  - Tasks include things like raising their disability rating, securing a home loan, seeking funding for further education.
- Convenience was frequently stressed.
- Veterans want up to date access to all their paperwork and forms, and the status of everything.
- 4/12 rated phones as their second preference and 7/12 rated as 3rd preference.
- People do not want to call because they feel like they never can find the right person and are easier to deflect

*“When I call I just get stuck in a phone tree” -p4*

*“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*

## Finding #3: Veterans encountered problems with authenticated experience.

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- No one reported any difficulties finding hours or location information on the VA website
- Veterans reported problems with difficulty logging in, tracking the status of their applications, submitting applications digitally, which are all authenticated parts of the website.

*"I was looking to see if they could get me a copy of my case file, but they can not do that. I was trying to find out if my disability was static and the folks wanted nothing to do with me. I felt like I was interrupting their conversation that had nothing to do with the VA." - p13*



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## Finding #4: Veterans found the information they wanted on the VBA website or Google Maps.

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- No one reported any difficulties finding hours or location information on the VA website
- Veterans often didn't check the VA websites, and instead relied solely on Google Maps.

*"I had been there before because it is in the Satellite Office in the Department of Labor I had been there before when I got laid off. I Googled map to remind me of where it is at. Satellite I have in my phone, so I just had to click on the contact info and it popped up in my Google Maps." - p9*



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## Finding #5: Veterans expect Benefit Centers to be “one stop shops” for services.

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- Only 1/12 Veterans interviewed expressed interest in knowing what specific services were available at the location they visited.
- Veterans preferred to get the location information and immediately go and walk in and start asking questions with a human.
- 9/12 Veterans visited a Regional Office and had no problems finding the services they needed.
- 1/12 visited an IDESS location but they already knew what specialized service they were pursuing.

*“No, those guys are pretty good about all that stuff. When I set up the appointment, he had an idea of what I was coming in with. I asked him if I needed to bring anything in with me, he told me no. If he needed something he could request it online, very rarely did I need to come home and grab records from home. Whoever is setting up the appointment will tell me if I need to bring anything” - p9*

## **Finding #6: Veterans demonstrated a sophisticated use of ad hoc social media communities to inform their relationship with the VA.**

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- A Veteran reported using a subreddit called VeteranBenefits to inform their seeking a Disability benefit upgrade.
- A Veteran reported following a Youtuber who was a disabled Veteran.

*"I first found out about it on a subreddit, VeteranBenefits" - p13*



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# Recommendations

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1. Create VBA pages to follow existing facilities patterns
  - a. No reports of people not finding the info they wanted on the website
  - b. Most Veterans got information from Google Maps and didn't really need much more than that.
  - c. Veteran pain points had to do with authenticated experiences, not public pages.
  - d. Facility location patterns serve basic information on Services. More can be done here but may be out of our scope as a team.
2. Follow up on potential research into synchronous and asynchronous human 2 human communication solutions
  - a. Veterans consistently cited a desire to speak to a person in person when they visited the locations. The actual relationship aspect of this is key.
  - b. Veterans sought out and used unofficial social media communities to great effect.
3. Follow up on potential research into Veteran awareness of what services are available to them.