**Benefits Taxonomy Conversation Guide**

**Main Interview**

**Warm-Up**

1. For how long have you been out of active duty military? I got out in 2013 so it’s been 9 years
2. Where, geographically, are you based right now? I am currently in MI. Its on the edge of urban and suburban so more urban than anything.
3. Can you tell me about a time you’ve utilized a VA service? I used Voc rehab. I finished the year before last in December.
4. Are you familiar with VA.gov, and if so, what do you typically use it for? Yes. Um I don’t really use it a lot but I know of it. Um, its just myhealthevet and I just go straight there. It is what I am used to.
5. Access same resources on myhealthevet: Yes

**Scenario 1 - Category Name Evaluation**

Applying for benefits is definitely helpful

VA home loan help I think it is helpful and it might need better wording to be more appealing of a choice. If it was VA loan benefits help or something similar to say it is a benefit and its not some sort of hard to qualify benefit it would help.

Direct deposit is fairly clear.

Disability claims help I think it could be worded better like benefit claims help or claims help.

Transition help is clear and useful.

Ebenfits I don’t know if it has changed but I had to go to the va. to register. If you come to a page where it tells you to go to the va that’s not helpful

Voc rehab/employment I think all of that could be lumped into a better and clear category.

Move all to education: yes and you could there to determine which program you will use or qualify for instead of guessing and picking

IDES, I don’t know what that is but if it is helping with the rating or something maybe that could go under disability claim help.

Burial claim help is very useful

Pension is clear

Predischarge claim help is clear

Family member claim is clear

Help for homeless veterans, I don’t know if its it own page instead of a drop down. If it were a page it would be clear, I wouldn’t search a map I would look for a resource page or a link at the top to click on.

What some other resource other than map: yes I would assume I could go to any VA location and get homeless help. To look at a map to see where I can go isnt useful. I think it deserves its own page. It would be more useful with its own page.

Insurance claim and financial counseling is kind of poorly worded I don’t know if its talking about third party insurance or my VA benefit insurance. Financial counseling shouldn’t me lumped together.

How does this look for you: I assume it will be the same and point to the regional office in Detroit. I guess it has use on the map but I think it would be better without just a location and map but I assume I could go to any location for homeless help and they could point me to the right place.

Notes wanting to group, how do they map to your understand, familiar: they are all familiar but like employment/education when I first heard it they were listed at a chapter or title it was not Voc Rehab or GI bill. I think something that would say education and employment help or benefits would be more useful then determining form there which one you are eligible or participating in would be better. Benefit claim help is better working then disability claim help. I don’t know that a lot of people want to click on it. VA home loan help I think I don’t know I think it just needs better wording it seems like something you need to be highly qualified for or is highly selective. Then ebenefits registration I had to go to the va so I had to show my DD214 and get my medical records to them. If I went online it would have told me the same.

Anything that is missing: As far as benefits maybe something with resources for what you would be eligible for as far as medical benefits for a service connected disability. Something like that would be good for the insurance claim to give a better explanation of what is service connected and what’s not. Something that would make me want to go to the VA rather than a hospital in network going 5 miles instead of 20 miles down the road.

If they could help with insurance makes it more appealing: yes.

Anything else that is missing from the list: If it ever became a thing the veterans ID card, I am supposed to me a pilot in the program but I never heard back from them. Instead of having to go around if I could get the Veteran ID card with me served and disability. Instead of showing my va card when I didn’t get a haircut for 6 months.

Does the VA ID show your disability rating or is that new: It’s just a card with a magnetic strip and a photo. I don’t think it needs to be updated like a drivers license. Maybe a resource to where you can apply or print out a confirmation of benefits. I don’t recall what it was called.

**Scenario 2 - Search Page Evaluation**

Step to get help: It happened with Voc rehab and the GI bill but I has sources at school. If I had a similar issues I would go talk to the va rep at the school

How was working with them: excellent.

How did you get connected with them: I signed up for the student veteran club and he was there. I got to know him and what he did and used the resource the best I could.

What other steps did you use in the past: When I first got out and didn’t know anything out the VA I had a veterans rep assigned to me I cant remember their title but it was for transitioning IOF vets. The other resources used was a patient advocate once

How were they instead of the school VSO: The school VSO was convenience, easy to get ahold of. He gave me his address, email, number, and fishing holes so I could find him if I needed to.

Any online resources: There was not like a FAQ page but some sort of semi-inactive page that I would use.

Any resources here on va.gov: I could get basic questions answered with education and checking the disability status and then eligibility. Theres not a lot of resources here that would give me help or point me to a solution.

Mentioned a FAQ or interactive: I think FAQ are to broad for most questions people have it is really tailored to basic questions and normally when I have a question it is beyond the FAQs.

VA locations finder: location, benefits, Voc rehab/employment. There is a lot of overlap with education/career counseling, education claim help. The first one here is the actual location.

What about the others, did you expect this: Yeah I knew about them. I applied there and knew they had a Veteran Rep there and then there’s the VA I knew about that. I didn’t know I could go to Detroit to ask questions but it’s a good one to list.

First ones were the cool VSO, other than him how confident are you they could help: Very confident. I don’t know if he is directly with eh va or if he’s just a VSO but then there were 3 people with the va there that specialized in benefits. They send out emails and have signs all over the office about questions and the resources or who to talk to.

Tell me about this page: I see a map that I was given originally to find it on campus, a good number, google maps, claim status, I think if you are this point you may not need it but its good to have. The hours are good but I don’t know how updated they are but it is good to have.

Overlap in service names: Voc rehab and employment is obviously the alternate for the GI bill. Then education career counseling, Education claim and Voc Rehab/ career are the same. I assume if I clicked on them I would get similar results. It could be overwhelming if I didn’t know which was which and if the people didn’t have the answer because it falls under a different one

Don’t know which question fall un education vs RVE: when I first started back when I didn’t know which one I fell under I went between both then was given further clarification. I spent 2 semesters not knowing which one.

How did you know: VSO.

Once known what did it do for you: it helped me understand the benefits and what I was entitled to for school supplies and workshop resources that I used. I didn’t know I was eligible first because I didn’t know which program I fell under.

Anything else stand out: I don’t see anything.

Click on all benefits and search again, results aren’t much different but did you expect more: I wouldn’t expect anything I think there are outpatient clinics to me but I don’t know the services they provide its good to know that I cant go there for benefits services.

How confident are you that they would be able to help: B and C I am fairly certain I could g3et the answers.

Why: The va in Ann Arbor and the VSOs in Lower also work out of that office so if they can come out with the level of knowledge they have I am certain that they will possess the ability to assist.

Thoughts or noticed: can you show if it is mobile responsive. Okay. That is pretty useful. Maybe the map would be a better first presentation instead of the list. If I had a map and I was knew to the area I could choose which was closer.

Anything else you would change: dark mode would be very helpful. I work in software and in front of the screen all day. Someone that doesn’t have a good monitor would need to stare at the white screen, its not pleasing to the eyes and if you are trying to find an appointment first thing the white screen is not something you want to see. It is also called a high contrast mode.

What do you do in software: QA for a medical device company and look at complications for FDA and validation for paths of least resistance. It not the most enjoyable reading a 300 page document but it is simple and straightforward. The hardest part is driving 30 minutes to work. We generally have been working remote since Covid but theres still stuff that we need to do in person like adults. When we work from home we don’t do a lot of electronic documents but we switched over so things that were in process we have to scan in and transfer over, we still need to stamp and file it down as transferred to electronic documents. I think by now we have most of it completed.

Is that what you used VRE: yes and I got my BA in computer science and then got an internship and was hired on full time.

Location page that stood out or needs improvement: The map box is not useful some people are used to apple maps or google maps. I think an option to view on a different map service would be better like seeing the traffic instead of having to switch between maps. I don’t know if they map box offers that. If I have to sign in it should know generally where I am and tells me an estimated drive time, some VA’s have bad parking, if I have time to do paperwork and I go in when something happens and I need to park somewhere else I would like to know that in advance if possible.

Anything else you’d want to know: The status of visitation or making sure theres a mask policy in place. IF they have special procedures in place, it would be helpful. Some maps you can click on it tells you if they are busy or not, that would be helpful.

How does going on person vs online resources compare: I have called in and have had the virtual appointments. I think for me the virtual appointments are appealing because until the new location opens the va is 40 minutes away. It is more convenient not to take time off or if I am at work I can be working and still participate in my appointment.

Virtual appointments for benefits offices: I have not.