**Benefits Taxonomy Conversation Guide**

**Main Interview**

**Warm-Up**

1. For how long have you been out of active duty military? December of 2018.
2. Where, geographically, are you based right now? Minnesota , I think it’s really small but its urban I guess.
3. Can you tell me about a time you’ve utilized a VA service? I have 100 percent rating and my mother is my dependent and I get the GI bill. I am in school now. In the beginning went through all of it and had a social worker it was a round robin I guess I went through it all where they helped with my resume and translated my military credits over. I have bad memory so that’s why I had you prompt me.
4. Are you familiar with VA.gov, and if so, what do you typically use it for? I am very familiar with va.gov. So let me clarify so I reference the right thing, we are not talking about myhealthevet. I go my myhealthevet first then it takes me to va.gov. two days ago I accessed it to check my Gi bill because they say I owe money but it doesn’t look right so I went to see what it was tracked so and I couldn’t find it. I look to see my education but I use to go in there every day to make sure everything was uploaded. I just go see the updated and see how much more ill get paid or if there are updates I need to know as a whole.

First steps to get assistance on a hard question: This has actually happened before so I don’t need to make it up. When transitioning out I had someone helping me but I learned not to depend on someone else. I like to find out for myself so I was always on va.gov. I go online first I don’t like talking in person or on the phone. For the va its always a long wait time. I always search for find on page or go to FAQ. I would need to pull up va.gov to see.

I would go to va.gov then I would go to search at the top then type in post 9/11 Gi bill. I cant remember the chapter number. Okay then go to check the Gi bill status is where I go to. That’s pretty much the only helpful part is looking at it. then of course I would need to sign in. Well once you sign in you can see who many months you’ve used and how many you have left. I can’t remember in particular there was information I wanted like where the payments go and what it’s for they don’t display that on the site, you have to call it is useless.

Start research here then if needed you call: I have also sent messages, calling is the last resort. When I read the paper it said they could not respond for 3 weeks and it did take that long. I am started to think like an example, if you go to the home page I have actually when before I was transitioning out I helped other soldiers. If I click on those it routes me back to my HealtheVet. There I would check everyday for my claim, uploaded evidence and looked at the payments. I had a PEBLO, it is a liaison that helps a military member that is medically being discharged. I wouldn’t have gotten 100 percent without him; he tells you how to word the claims like for my neck to make sure I put limited mobility. They walk you through the process and I didn’t need to struggle with the information because they were there for me. They are provided by DoD. It is completely different then a VSO. So I needed dental procedures for my implant that requires me to go under, they require an escort because you cant drive. I am not from here and I don’t know people here so I haven’t been able to get an appointment so I reached out to a Vso and they said they don’t do that so they didn’t even provide me with a suggestion because now I don’t have anyone helping me I am P&T. I asked someone at the va and google and reddit. I went everywhere to see if there was a service to come with me to my appointment for an hour. Theres nothing it makes me feel like I am the only person without friends here, theres no way I’m the only one.

Wanted to find va location for the request, can you walk me through how you would do it: (I see find va locations. I think I used this because I didn’t know where the va was when I moved here. I jumped the gun and wanted to see where I would be going. I put in my zip code. The facility type was va health. Actually I sued this a few times, I looked for vso and id offices. I clicked down for primary care then I searched. Yupp and it came up like that and it was interesting. I don’t remember them having the mental health out like this. It is nice that its like that. I wrote down the information and saved it in my maps. Then I went onto va.gov St. cloud location. If I click on it does it take me there, then I dug around to see. I think I looked at this entire website.

Ever used the va benefits categories: yes.

Lists look familiar: Yes, it was applying for benefits. This portion is what I used in the very beginning. I remember going back to this and looking at everything even if it did not apply to me. I knew there was a lot of stuff. No results found probably because you cant start your claim there. I just remember I clicked on everything because I wanted to know. I know I looked up burial services to.

Surprised there were no location: no I am aware that government systems aren’t always user friendly and that’s why you are here. I am not computer smart, I guess this platform is not capable of the different. You cant file a claim at the va you have to go to the vso for me it was fort Leonard Wood. When it says no results then you need to look around, for me I was aware because I was already in the process.

For me I was active duty so my process was different then those that have been out for 180 days. there’s a different process depending on your discharge time. They had to fly me at an active duty post because I was active duty at a reserve center. If I was on a real army post I wouldn’t have had to go through it on my own. I had to be independent. At an active duty post it is feed to them whereas a reserve post you are fending for yourself depending on your leadership

Do you know where you would go where you are now: yesterday I sent another message on myhealthevet. That website is nice it gives so much infomration. I emailed a different person because I need to get that appointment. I sent them a message and my dentist. They response very quickly. They have to be the best va, I was on the phone with the nurse and I will get it right form them if I cant find it. if it has to deal with the education I go to the website.

Anywhere near here that should come up: lets see burial can up with nothing . oh what is that (reading name) oh they have a satellite office. I don’t think I ever clicked all because I went through each thing. When I am looking for something I have a habit of where I cant see obvious things because I am laser focused on the particulars. If it can help why doesn’t it come up when I select it. I would need to click on it to see what it does.

Once you are here what do you see, anything surprising: I didn’t know it existed. It is all closed. What’s the point I don’t understand. Uh. I don’t know how to answer your question because it seems pretty dumb if its closed every single day. Well if I were an older vet I would be cursing at the screen. With a lot of government sites you hit dead ends. Maybe I am missing something but it seems like this is frustrating because it’s a dead end. It cancels itself out and at this point I would call the number but it doesn’t even look like it works. That number isnt the main va even though the address is the main va the address isnt the same. I would go to the website but I would honestly just call because it doesn’t make sense. I would stop and take a breath then go to a different option. This page is useless. The online claim status btu why is that there when their services are Voc Rehab and employment. I wouldn’t spend this much time on the page. A lot of the government sites when covid hit the information went dead and not being updated because they wanted people to think everything was shut down. If I clicked this and saw this I would get a little frustrated and pick up the phone.

Baltimore reginal benefits office, looking at this and pending you live close, would they help: well it looks like they are at least open. The main number looks legit whereas the other didn’t. The other didn’t look right. This one ahs services listed. It had the hours, maps looks legit. This one makes me feel warm inside and helpful and updated.

Have you gone to a location before: well when you brought up the satellite office I was confused. I wouldn’t just go I would call the number. When I go to the website I expect to find a round about level of information for what I am looking for. On an ignored level when tis all closed and doesn’t make sense why have the page. Then you’d call the number and it does not work. I would just search again because I have faith on the website that if you use correct keywords, some systems for medical I couldn’t have spaces. I wouldn’t waste a bunch of time, te way this works I would just call someone.

What would make it nice make use feel like somethings official. Instead of leaving the veteran frustrated because you are hitting dead ends. Maybe have the temporary shut down banner instead of it just saying closed. Say temporary closed until further notice, if there were an informational banner it would have made up for this and answered questions.

I know they are good at this location, if I gave them this they would tell me why. I enjoy going to this va that’s why I still live here. Other veterans say that to. I have met some of the others in mental health. They have their own rooms and get room service. It’s like targeted for PTSD veterans and people come from all across the country to this location.

What else would you like to see here on this page: okay so like for a veteran. I am not trying to bash on them but they tell me that they hate the websites. If I were a veteran that I cant take the stress, this page pisses me off. Theres nothing, no explanation it cancels itself out. I would like to see something like the Baltimore page. It doesn’t look like a joke and it looks like someone took some care on the page and theres a purpose for the page. Don’t have a site if it wont help. You don’t even need to have a masters to look at it and say that’s stupid. Its not asking for much. If I went to the va nd it tells me it doesn’t do appointments then why are we here.

Baltimore page, what would you add: I would like a FAQ section. Typically when a veteran is looking for help or information there tends to be a subgroup, theres only so many unique inquires that would be different. we all want to know how much we are getting paid or how to get an appointment. The va already knows what we want. I had to wait 20 minutes for their call center, they don’t actually want you to call they want you to sue the website. Have a FAQ page. I wish messaging was better because you can call and they can just not answer like my GI bill I had to call for three weeks straight. I wish there were links because it says disability claim help, not everyone will know what it means. The VA language isnt common sense when looking around, I with they were active links to provide information at one stop. It seems basic and lazy.

**Scenario 1 - Category Name Evaluation**

*Take participants through a simple card sorting exercise.*

It is helpful to see a list of services at minimal. So I cant really say none of them are not helpful at all. Better to have then not have them. Nothing is clear cut when it comes to these terms when you are first starting, I am still learning so just having terms there is basic

Transition help is not clear, it doesn’t tell me or anyone anything. You would want it to have a link or just a really quick summary under each on. Like staff at the va can help veterans throughout their exiting services and transitioning into civilian life to help a veteran better adapt as a civilian. Then provide an example.

Family member claim help: what claims. My mom isnt able to apply for anything. It made me feel like I should come do this site. we like pictures, the less to read the better. Just have an example of services under each one

IDES: I know what it is because I use to work with it. it is unclear to the average person. The others that worked with the VA to do QA with the va. You didn’t know unless you are an actual person going through the process you wont know what it is. That doesn’t mean that they don’t need to know the information because they aren’t going through it. I didn’t know I was getting retired I thought I would do 20 but I got out at 20.

Pension is clear

Applying for benefits is not clear but I wish it had drop downs. I am still finding out about benefits I am entitled to. It is not helpful; they are assuming veterans know all of this and just looking for information

Homeless veterans help is not clear. what are you gonna do throw me a biscuit.

Education claim help: not clear either. I think of it as someone that is trying to do this on their own or minimal help. I just got lucky with all the help I got but I saw others struggle. It shouldn’t be where someone spends so much time to help someone. I legitimately had to set up a class to help people look at the website. I had to pull up va.gov and taught it for 2 hours because they had a tasker and soldiers had to go on and do something. It was really easy but they were being lazy. I am almost done my masters and I don’t know what they will help me on. The education claim process was frustrating it would ask which chapter you wanted to use. I feel like everything already assumes we know everything

Pre discharge help: not clear. burial claim help: not clear, I don’t know what I will get when I die. It would be nice to know

Ebenefits registration: clear.

Some of the things are complicated because of the regulations. It is frustrating because this isnt enough. There are a lot of loops or grey areas.

Okay so I am stuck here because everyone told me the biggest struggle was finding out how much time I had before I could move. I wanted to go back east coast. I wanted to know the cut off for them to pay for my move. They told me I had a full year because I was medically retired and I looked online and it all lined up. With the loopholes it comes to find out because I didn’t do the full retirement I only had 6 months to move. I had a quote that it costs 5k to move so I am just sitting here. I wanted to finish my mental health care so I needed that time to stabilize myself before picking up. That was the example I was trying to tell you. I was looking everywhere and no one could tell me. then finally when I started the claim, and they told me I was past the time by 6 months. It’s not easy to connect with a doctor. So I wanted to wait and they screwed me over to the retiree services they were like oh well. I even had it in writing and they didn’t care. That information they should know they didn’t know. I am upset at that because it is very impactful I don’t have kids or a husband so its not big for me but others do. I have an expectation that it had a FAQ or the VA/DoD/Army they know what we screw up the most so when I go on the site I want to see solutions to the common mistakes.

Disability clear enough. Listening to lower enlisted you tend to hear the truth because they don’t want to complain the most. They all are worried about the amount they will get paid because the word on the street is getting a disability pay is that the va works against you as a veteran. There is some truth to that so people panic about that. When they see that even me knowing as a new person going in any solider going through a disability exam they are aware it is hard and want to know all of the information on how to maximize the benefits. It comes down to what you say on the sheet. The VA well va.gov use to publish the forms.

Updating direct deposit: clear enough

Va home loan clear enough it is an easy process

Insurance: clear

Voc rehab not clear because the term enough when I heard it I was like what.

**Closing**

Thank you so much for your time and for your help today!

* Did you have any questions for the team?

We're excited to take this information into developing easier to use systems for veterans everywhere.

* Did you have any resources or other contacts that you believe we should talk with?

**STOP Recording**

* Was there anything you wanted to tell us about Benefits and services that we didn't get to cover today?