Copied from [Github](https://github.com/department-of-veterans-affairs/va.gov-team/blob/master/platform/research/research-plan-template.md) for initial collaboration

# 526 Submission Research Plan: “526 Submission Status Evaluative Research” for Disability Experience Team, June 2024

## Estimated Timeline for Study

**This Sprint** (June 5-18)  
Complete research plan and conversation guide   
Wednesday, June 12th: Share research draft w/ OCTO  
Week of 6/17: Conversation guide

**Next Sprint** (June 19-July 2)   
*[Evelyn OOO 6/25-28]*  
Designs for prototype must go through Midpoint Review (delay will impact represented timeline)  
Submit research materials to Platform (research plan, conversation guide, prototype)  
Perigean Kick-off and Recruitment (Goal: start by June 25)

**Goal: Conducting Research in July**Research study takes place in early July (Goal: start date July 5).   
Share-out early insights to drive design  
Synthesis and reporting

## Background

Disability compensation is often the first VA "service" that Veterans will come into contact with, setting a precedent for their future experiences. 526EZ is one of the most-used and longest forms on VA.gov.

[Through recent Veteran shadowing research and discovery,](https://docs.google.com/document/d/15GAoSNIlhfXOkz8dKGUtZU0wVk2VHGMdmMJ_sPKmah4/edit#heading=h.dp3g862ggk40) we learned that Veterans don’t have timely and truthful information about their 526 claim submission. For example, Veterans shared that they expected to receive a confirmation email as soon as they hit “submit,” instead of 1-2 days later. This mismatch of expectations and reality could lead to Veteran distrust and confusion and must be addressed.

Research study will assess the clarity of the proposed submission model to see if Veterans have accurate expectations for the timeline. The redesign includes changes on the following artifacts:

1. Loading screen
2. Confirmation page
3. Confirmation email
4. Final submission email

[Link to product brief](https://github.com/department-of-veterans-affairs/va.gov-team/tree/master/products/disability/526ez/product).

### OCTO Priorities

Which [OCTO priorities](https://github.com/department-of-veterans-affairs/va.gov-team/blob/master/strategy/OCTO-DE%20Priorities%202024.md) does this research support? Work with your VA lead and product manager as needed.

**Objective 2: Our platforms are the best way to deliver products at VA.**

* Key Result 2: Our platforms measure and improve the satisfaction of their internal users.

### Veteran Journey

Where does your product fit into the [Veteran journey](https://github.com/department-of-veterans-affairs/va.gov-team/blob/master/platform/design/va-product-journey-maps/Veteran%20Journey%20Map.pdf)? Are there moments that matter?

* Starting up: Attending to health needs
* Getting out: Engaging VA to access benefits and services
* Taking care of myself: Managing primary care and chronic health issues

## Research Goals

Research Goal 1: Evaluate how effectively the submission model sets clear expectations for claim submission timeline.

Research Goal 2: Evaluate if submission touchpoints are timely and useful for Veterans.

Research Goal 3: Generate ideas for the next design milestone to improve the claim record.

* Understand which details Veterans want included in their claim receipt and the desirability of a full copy of their claim.
* Understand how Veterans would use provided claim information to get help if they think something goes wrong with their submission.

### Outcome

Research findings will inform the changes we make to the submission model as communicated through the confirmation page and emails. Insight learned about claim record and tracking will drive the next phase of design after the submission model is finalized.

We will share our findings with other teams also working on form submission, such as Veteran Facing Forms, Authenticated Experience (MyVA), Benefits Management Tools (Claim Status Tool), and Mobile App.

### Research questions

**Research Goal 1:** Evaluate how effectively the submission model sets clear expectations for claim submission timeline.

* Do Veterans have an accurate impression of their claim's status and the timeline to submission?
  + How effectively does the confirmation page set expectations for the submission process?
  + Does Veteran understanding of their submission status align with reality?
  + How confident do Veterans feel that their submission is where we say it is?
* What do Veterans think about the level of detail we provide about submission status? Is the language too vague? Too granular?
* How do Veterans respond to resubmission requests, if they receive them?
* What questions or lingering doubts do Veterans still have about their claim submission?
* If something goes wrong, do Veterans understand if/when they need to take action?

**Research Goal 2:** Evaluate if submission touchpoints are timely and useful for Veterans.

* How does the timing of our communication meet Veteran’s expectations for submission updates?
* How easy/difficult is it for Veterans to follow the submission process from touchpoint to touchpoint?
  + What additional touchpoints should be added to the communication, if any?

**Research Goal 3:** Generate ideas for the next design phase to improve claim record.

* What information do Veterans expect to receive in a record of their claim?
* How might Veterans use claim information to take action on failed submission?
* How might Veteran interest in a PDF of their claim change if they had to access it after submission (not synchronously)?

### Hypothesis

What do you intend to learn and measure from this study? Think through these prompts to develop a strong hypothesis.

* If the submission model is truthful and we communicate updates in a timely manner, Veterans will feel confident that their claim is submitted and moving on to processing.
* The added email touchpoint when the Veteran presses “submit” will give Veterans more confidence that their submission was successful/recorded.
* Even if the submission model is internally clear, Veterans might be confused when they look for updates in the Claim Status Tool before they are available.
* Veterans expect to have a complete record of their claim so they have it in case something goes wrong or they want to refer back to it.

## Methodology

We will be conducting usability/concept testing with a high-fidelity clickable Figma prototype. In 60 minute sessions, Veterans will participate in three test scenarios in which they “submit” a 526ez and walk through the user experience for each submission outcome.

* Task 1: Happy path scenario
* Task 2: Backup path scenario
* Task 3: Evidence failure scenario

We will encourage participants to think aloud while interacting with the prototype, which will include the review and submit page, confirmation pages, email communications and other current state pages. At each screen, the facilitator will be asking participants to share what they believe is happening to their claim submission; what might be missing or confusing about the language; how they felt about the timeliness of the touchpoints; and what they expect to happen next.

All research sessions will begin with introductory context-setting questions and close with reflection and follow-up.

### Location

The sessions will be conducted remotely over Zoom by Evelyn Hilbrich Davis.

### Research materials

*Note: your OCTO/VA lead must review and approve all research materials – including this plan – prior to submitting a recruitment request.*

Provide a link to any materials you need to run your study, including any materials needed for setup and recruitment.

For moderated interviews:

* Conversation guide
* Prototype

## Recruitment

OCTO works with Perigean, a small business, to handle the [recruitment](https://veteranusability.us/), scheduling, and compensation of Veterans and caregivers.

Before writing your recruitment criteria, be sure to review the following resources.

* [Refer to the Perigean Recruitment Guidance](https://depo-platform-documentation.scrollhelp.site/research-design/recruiting-participants) to learn how Perigean recruits, screens, and prepares participants for research.
* [Refer to the inclusive recruitment strategies](https://github.com/department-of-veterans-affairs/va.gov-team/blob/master/teams/vsa/accessibility/research/recruitment.md) to learn how to be inclusive of underserved Veteran communities.

### Recruitment approach

Who is your intended audience for this research (e.g. Veterans, caregivers, VSOs, SMEs), and how will you recruit them?

Which inclusive research strategies are you leveraging for this study? OCTO recommends using a lean maximum variation strategy for most studies. Refer to the resources above to learn more. Read this [introduction to inclusive research](https://github.com/department-of-veterans-affairs/va.gov-team/blob/master/teams/vsa/accessibility/research/introduction.md) and use the [recruitment checker (Google Sheets)](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1pq7TSHZonfpzAQBJj6B2geGHlNUwZEs4DzEvxcRgu0o/edit?usp=sharing) to understand OCTO's targets for inclusivity.

Yes, we would like to schedule a kickoff call with Perigean as soon as the research plan is approved, to review the survey and email content that will be sent to participants.

* By/Before June 25th, 2024

### Recruitment criteria

Recruit 9 Veterans (with target of speaking to 6 Veterans) guided by the criteria below.

**Primary criteria**

* 3 Veterans w/ cognitive disabilities
  + We will not have a screen reader-friendly prototype, so please do not recruit Veterans who are AT users for this study
* Mix of past experience filing
  + 2 Veterans who have used VA.gov to file for disability in the past (but not in the last 12 months)
  + 2 Veterans who filed for non-disability benefits on VA.gov, but never the 526
  + 2 Veterans who recently filed for Benefits Delivery and Discharge [BDD] on VA.gov
  + Mix of levels of trust in VA (see screener question)

**Secondary criteria**

Recruit a mix of race, gender, education, race, and military branch

**Screener Questions**

1. Have you ever used VA.gov to complete and submit a disability claim online?
   1. Yes, I filed online for disability benefits using VA.gov [Recruit at least 4]
   2. No, but I have filed for other benefits online using VA.gov [Recruit 2]
   3. No, I have never used VA.gov to file for any kind of benefits [Remove]
2. If you answered yes to question 1, what was your status when you filed?
   1. I filed as a Veteran [Recruit at least 2]
   2. I filed as a service member 90-180 days before my separation date (Benefits Delivery at Discharge program) [Recruit 2]
3. When did you last file for disability benefits on VA.gov?
   1. Under six months ago [Recruit if answered b on question 2]
   2. Between 6-12 months [Remove]
   3. Between 1-2 years ago [Recruit a mix]
   4. More than 2 years ago [Recruit a mix]
   5. I have never filed for disability benefits [Allow if answered c on question 1]
4. Do you find it difficult to remember or learn new things, focus on a task, or make decisions? We ask this question because we want to make sure that our tools work for people who live with challenges like these.
   1. Yes [Recruit at least 3]
   2. No
5. We are hoping to talk with Veterans like you who have had a mix of experiences filing for benefits from VA. How much do you trust Veterans Affairs to fulfill our country’s commitment to Veterans?  
   [Recruit a mix]
   1. High level of distrust
   2. Moderate level of distrust
   3. Neither trust nor distrust
   4. Moderate level of trust
   5. High level of trust

## Timeline

Please submit artifacts for [Research Review](https://depo-platform-documentation.scrollhelp.site/collaboration-cycle/Research-review.1781891143.html) 8-9 days prior to the first planned research day for remote studies so Perigean can begin recruiting one week prior. Perigean requires 2+ weeks for in-person.  
  
Submitted to Perigean: July 1  
Research dates: July 8-15  2024

### Prepare

When will the thing you are testing be finalized? Ideally, it's ready a week before testing begins and has also been through a [Midpoint review](https://depo-platform-documentation.scrollhelp.site/collaboration-cycle/Midpoint-review.1781039167.html).

A pilot session is required. Please indicate the date and name of a mock participant for a pilot session.

* Pilot participant email: Internal team TBD
* Date and time of pilot session: TBD

### Research sessions

* Planned dates of research: **July 8-16**

### Length of sessions

* Session length: 60 minutes
* Buffer time between sessions: 1 hour (can do 30 minutes if required)
* Maximum Sessions per day: 3 per day

### Availability

When would you like sessions scheduled? Please list the exact dates and times in EASTERN Standard Time. *Note: we recommend providing availability outside of work hours, as many Veterans are only available before and after working times, and live across the U.S.*

Please request enough dates and at *least double the amount of time slots for the number of requested participants*. (e.g. Monday 9-1, 3-6; Tuesday 9-6, etc.; *12-time slots for 6 participants*).

July 8: 10-11am; 12-1pm; 2-3pm EST

July 9: 10-11am; 12-1pm; 2-3pm EST

July 10: 10-11am; 12-1pm EST; 2-3pm EST

July 11: 10-11am; 12-1pm; 2-3pm EST; 4-5pm EST

July 12: 10-11am; 12-1pm; 2-3pm EST

July 15: 10-11am; 12-1pm; 2-3pm EST

## Team Roles

Please list the people who will be serving in each role. Include the primary phone number for the moderator and the emails for the moderator, notetaker, accessibility specialist, and observers. If you need Perigean to take notes for you, indicate that next to Notetaker

* Moderator: Evelyn Hilbrich Davis
* Research guide writing and task development (usually but not always same as moderator): Evelyn Hilbrich Davis
* Participant recruiting & screening: Perigean
* Project point of contact: Evelyn Hilbrich Davis
* Participant(s) for pilot test: Internal TBD
* Accessibility specialist (for sessions where support for assistive technology may be needed):
* Note-takers: Mike Eng, Kate Allbee
* Observers: List email addresses for those who should attend and observe the sessions: VA Stakeholders, engineering team members, design team members, any other people who might find this research relevant to their work. Spread observers across sessions so that there are no more than 5-6 total attendees (moderator, notetaker(s), observer(s)) per session on the VA side
  + TBD via sign-up