

Dependency Verification Process

Research findings & low-fi prototype | December 10, 2020

Agenda

1

Share the rationale behind the lo-fi prototype, and walk through the prototype step-by-step.

2

Review combined insights from Veteran, Veteran Service Representative, and VA stakeholder research that informed the prototype.

3

Address prototype and research questions, and discuss next steps to take towards a production application.

4

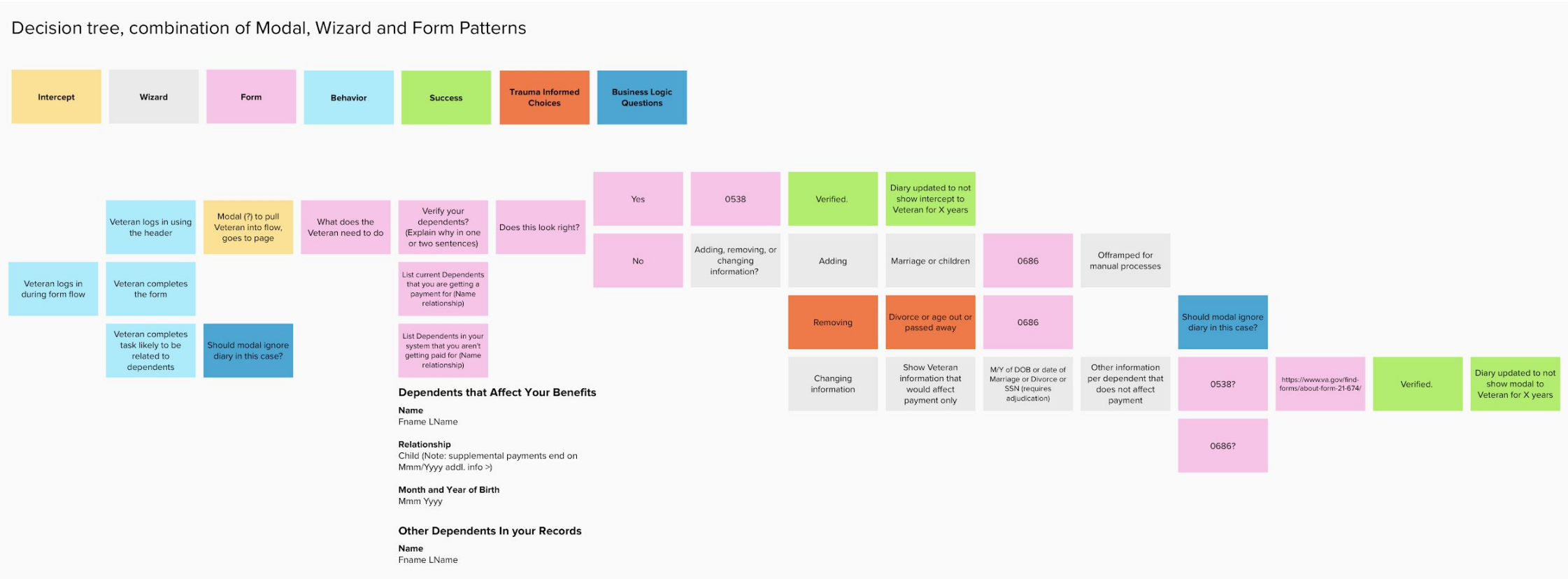
Provide an overview of the research process, as well as detailed notes from research sessions.

Lo-fi prototype rationale

- Provide a Veteran with a fast, self-service, “**happy path**” to **confirm when there are no changes** to information regarding their dependents
- Provide the Veteran with an end-to-end, self-service **path to make changes** to their dependents if asked to confirm that information, and changes are needed
- Ensure that **complex dependent scenarios** are addressed in a way that is not distracting, but provides a path to understanding and resolution
- Use **only the existing VA design system** and related REACT components, so that it can be **built quickly** by an engineering team familiar with the code without excessive iteration
- Keep it simple (mobile first) and focus on steps in the **user flow and the hierarchy** of the page, not the visual details of each page.

Lo-fi prototype walkthrough

Lo-fi prototype flow (initial IA sketch)



[View this page in Mural.](#)

See attached PNG file.

Combined research findings






Primary topics (actionable in the design)

- How often to ask
- Guidelines for the confirmation page (what content is necessary)
- Feedback on communicating about overpayment
- User experience flow and sensitive topics
- Where to cross link to this process in the larger VA.gov navigation
- Unique scenarios to address with supporting content

Secondary topics (related, may not actionable in this work)

- Feelings regarding the current 0538 process/letter
- Relevant Veteran device usage behaviors
- Topics for future research and application improvement

How often should we ask them to verify?

- Once a month to once a year 
- 90 days before school age children, once a month 
- After any change initiated by VA, once a month 
- Once a year to every other year 
- Once a year 



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Veteran Service Representative
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Recommendation: Once a year.



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Guidelines on confirmation page content

- Add school enrollment status and school type for school aged children 
- Add disability status for a dependent beyond the age of 18 
- Change date of birth to date of marriage for spouse 
- Add contact information, e.g. cell phone number 
- Consider showing possible change in benefit 
- Display a reminder of the consequence of not keeping information up to date 
- Do not show dependents that don't affect total payment 
- Change wording of headings to be more clear 



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All Veterans and VSRs were shown this content as a starting point for dependency confirmation screen information, and asked if they would make any changes.

Dependents that Affect Your Benefits

Dependent name

John Doe

Relationship

Child

(Note: supplemental payments end on Jan 2028
addl. info >)

Month and year of birth

Jan 2010

Other Dependents In your Records





Dependent Name

Fname LName



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How to communicate about overpayment?

- Possibility of overpayment warning should be on the dependency confirmation page 
- They prefer both emails and letters, and would like to have hard copies 
- Also prefers phone call with a human for personal conversations to address questions when an overpayment exists  



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User experience flow and sensitive topics

- Isolate sensitive questions in the flow until after they've said there's a change  
- A step by step guide through school age child changes 
- Some prefer a personal tone, others prefer a more direct tone around sensitive issues.  



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VA



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Where to cross link in VA.gov navigation (+)

- From relevant benefit hubs (e.g. Disability, Education) 
- From Records 
- Ensure good Google placement for landing page
- VAMC kiosks via QR code 
- Veteran mail correspondence via QR code 
- VA Notify  
- In e-benefits 
- VA.gov search 
- "Update your dependents" page 
- Facebook groups 



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Unique content scenarios

- 100% Disabled Veterans 
- Branch specific interactions (e.g. Air Force) 
- Spouse collection of benefits after a Veteran death  
- Chapter 35 and school age children conflicts 
- Children that are incapable of self support 
- Divorce dates, it's difficult for them to remember exact dates (month and year is good) 
- How were you married? (ceremony type confusion) 
- Stepchild of current or previous spouse 



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Secondary topics

Feelings regarding the current 0538 process/letter

- Don't remember it 
- "I've never gotten it." 
- It's a bad process, because they don't see the information that they are supposed to confirm. 



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Relevant Veteran device usage behaviors

- Most Veterans use any device 
- Some older Veterans that are technically literate prefer tablets or laptops/desktops 

Future research and application improvement

- DFAS, DEERS, VADIR redundancies 
- Technical accessibility or tech literacy for other Veterans who cannot access this (cohort 3) 
- Updating your preferred email address with the VA 



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Research methodology & overview

Research methodology & subjects

Methodology & subjects

We conducted this research via remote, fully moderated ethnographic interviews with VA staff, Veterans themselves, and Veteran Service Representatives (VSR). We began with VA stakeholders, and developed our Veteran and VSR scripts based on those conversations. We also integrated observation of Veteran usage of VA.gov as it relates to making an update to their dependency status to inform where this application should live in the navigation structures of VA.gov, including cross references.

Secondary topics (related, may not actionable in this work)

[Read the research plan and discussion guides in GitHub.](#)

Research transcripts & synthesis

[VA stakeholder interview transcripts in Mural \(5 interviews\).](#)

[Veteran interview transcripts \(scrubbed\) in Mural \(7 interviews\).](#)

[Veteran Service Representative interview transcripts \(scrubbed\) in Mural \(4 interviews\).](#)



Discussion dog loves decisions!

VA



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