

VA



U.S. Department  
of Veterans Affairs

# Find a Form PDF Downloading

Research Readout

# Agenda

- Background and Research Goals
- Methodology
- Participants
- Key Findings
- Recommendations

# Background

Veterans can access many VA forms from **Find a VA form** tool

- Some forms: fill out online
- Others: download a fillable PDF form

Known issue: **Download link** may download the form, or **open the form in the user's web browser**, where it *CANNOT* be filled out and digitally signed

## Find a VA form

Search for a VA form by keyword, form name, or form number.

Enter a keyword, form name, or number

disability

 Search

Showing 1 – 10 of 15 results for "disability"

Sort By Closest match

Form 21-526EZ

[Application for Disability Compensation and Related Compensation Benefits](#)

Form last updated: 12-17-2020

Related to: Disability



[Go to online tool](#)



[Download VA form 21-526EZ \(PDF\)](#)

Form 21-4192

[Request for Employment Information in Connection with Claim for Disability Benefits](#)

Form last updated: 06-07-2021

Related to: Disability



[Download VA form 21-4192 \(PDF\)](#)

# Research Goals

1. **Understand how Veterans download fillable PDF VA forms** and what challenges they encounter

# Research Goals

1. **Understand how Veterans download VA PDF forms** and what challenges they encounter
2. **Get feedback on 3 designs** for advising users to download a PDF form and then open it with Acrobat, rather than viewing it in a web browser

# Research Goals

1. Understand how Veterans download VA PDF forms and what challenges they encounter
2. Get feedback on 3 designs for advising users to download a PDF form and then open it with Acrobat, instead of viewing it in a web browser:
  - a. Instructions at top of search results
  - b. Instructions repeated above every download link in a light blue box
  - c. Instructions repeated above every download link in gray help text

Showing 1 – 10 of 41 results for "health jobs" Sort By Closest match

**i We recommend that you download PDF forms and open them in Adobe Acrobat Reader**  
[Get instructions for opening the form in Acrobat Reader](#)

Form 10-252  
[Authorization to Release Protected Health Information to State/Local Public Health Authorities](#)  
Form last updated: 11-26-2020  
Related to: Health care, Records  
[Download VA form 10-252 \(PDF\)](#)

Form 10-2850C  
[Application for Associated Health Occupations](#)  
Form last updated: 11-17-2016  
Related to: Employment or jobs at VA  
[Download VA form 10-2850C \(PDF\)](#)

Form 10-0094f  
[Dental Education Affiliation Agreement](#)

Showing 1 – 3 of 3 results for "jobs"

Form 22-8865  
[Employer's Application to Provide Job Training](#)  
Form last updated: 01-25-2021  
Related to: Education and training  
You'll need to download this form and open it in Adobe Acrobat Reader. [Read More](#)  
[Download VA form 22-8865 \(PDF\)](#)

Form 22-6553d-1  
[Monthly Certification of On-the-Job and Apprenticeship Training](#)  
Form last updated: 02-03-2021  
Related to: Education and training  
You'll need to download this form and open it in Adobe Acrobat Reader. [Read More](#)  
[Download VA form 22-6553d-1 \(PDF\)](#)

Showing 1 – 10 of 20 results for "employee scholarship" Sort By Closest match

Form 10-10154  
[Employee Incentive Scholarship Program—Mobility Agreement](#)  
Form last updated: 01-26-2018  
Related to: Veterans Health Administration  
**i We recommend that you download PDF forms and open them in Adobe Acrobat Reader**  
[Get instructions for opening the form in Acrobat Reader](#)  
[Download VA form 10-10154 \(PDF\)](#)

Form 10-0003k  
[Employee Incentive Scholarship Program \(EISP\) Application](#)  
Form last updated: 09-24-2019  
Related to: Veterans Health Administration  
**i We recommend that you download PDF forms and open them in Adobe Acrobat Reader**  
[Get instructions for opening the form in Acrobat Reader](#)  
[Download VA form 10-0003k \(PDF\)](#)

# More on the Designs

**i We recommend that you download PDF forms and open them in Adobe Acrobat Reader**

[Get instructions for opening the form in Acrobat Reader](#)

You'll need to download this form and open it in Adobe Acrobat Reader. [Read More](#)

[Get instructions for opening the form in Acrobat Reader](#) and [Read More](#) links opened a **Resources & Support page with more details**

## How to download and open a VA.gov PDF form

We encourage you to download PDFs to your computer or other device instead of opening them in your browser. This is because some browsers have trouble opening PDFs. And sometimes browsers open a PDF but important form fields are missing. Follow these steps to download and open a VA.gov PDF form in Adobe Acrobat Reader instead. You'll need to have the latest version of Adobe Acrobat Reader installed.

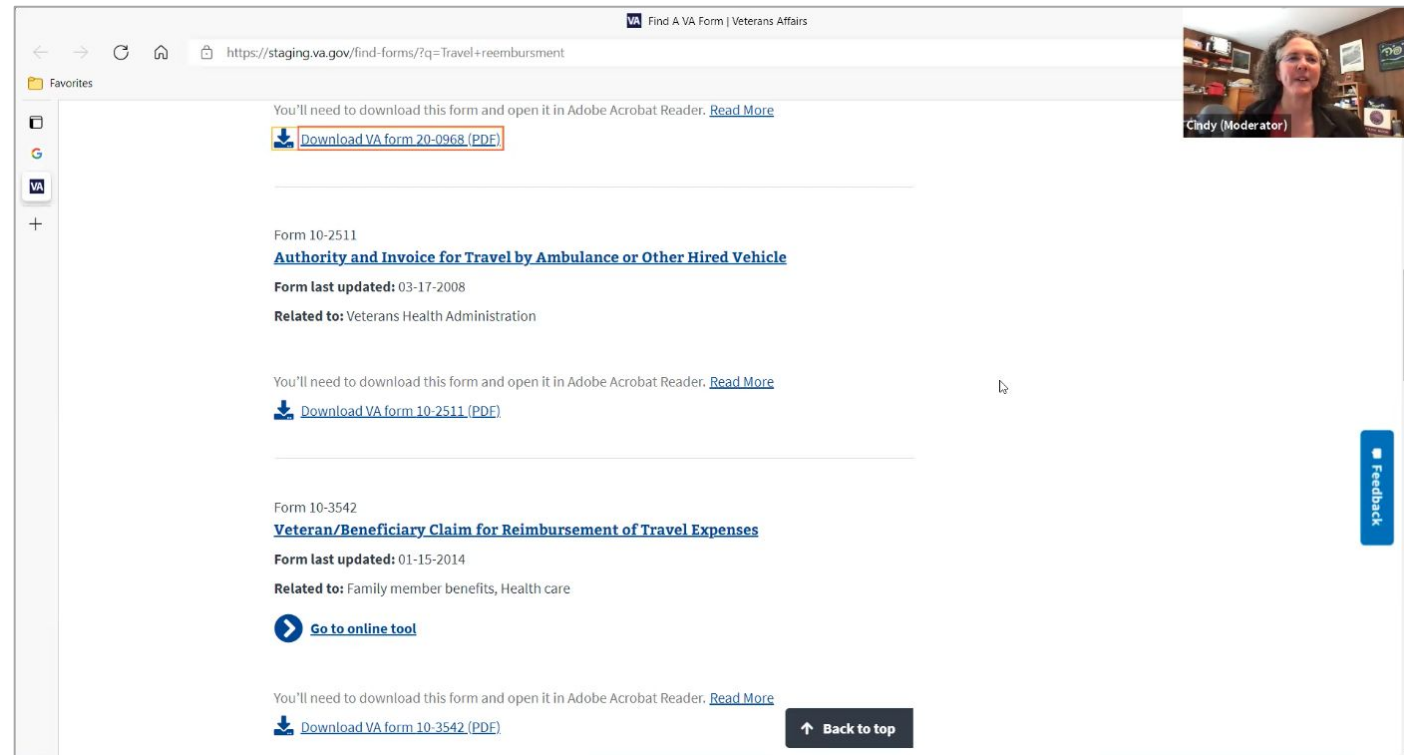
[Get Acrobat Reader for free from Adobe](#)

- 1** Click the **Download VA form** link for the form you want to fill out. The PDF will download to your Downloads folder. You can save it to a different folder if you'd like.  
**Note:** If the PDF form opens in your browser automatically or if you get a "Please wait" error message, you'll need to take one more step to download the PDF: Click on the download icon in your browser. Save the PDF to your device.
- 2** Open Adobe Acrobat Reader.
- 3** From the File menu, choose **Open**.
- 4** Go to your Downloads folder or the location on your device where you saved the PDF. Select the PDF and your form will open. Now you can fill out the form.

# Methodology

## Remote moderated 1-hour sessions over Zoom

- Participants asked to **search for 4 forms** using Find a Form page on Staging:
  1. [10-2850c](#) (has digital signature)
  2. [10-0003k](#) (has digital signature)
  3. [20-0968](#) (hosted on vba.va.gov)
  4. [20-0995](#) (hosted on vba.va.gov)
- **Each participant saw 1 of the 3 versions** of the Find a Form search results page





# Participants and their Technology

## 11 participants

- 10 Veterans, 1 family member
- **3 male, 8 female**
- **3 participants with a cognitive disability**
- **4 screen reader users**
- Age:
  - 25-34: 1
  - 35-44: 2
  - 45-54: 1
  - **55-64: 6**
  - 65-74: 1

## Devices:

- **9 desktop** (7 Windows, 2 Mac)
- **3 mobile** (2 iPad, 1 iPhone)

## Web browsers used during sessions:

- 5 Chrome
- 5 Safari
- 3 Edge
- 1 Firefox

Some participants used more than one device or browser

# Key Findings Summary

1. Most participants **ignored the instructions** provided
2. For most participants, ***Download VA form* link opened forms in web browser** instead of Adobe Acrobat
3. Most participants were **unable to fill out and digitally sign *any of the forms*** without help
  - a. **Impossible on mobile devices** because the forms require a version of Adobe Acrobat only available on desktop
4. **Digital signature field was invisible** to screen reader users
5. **Form fields were difficult to fill out** using a screen reader
6. **Find a Form search results were hard to scan** with a screen reader

Accessibility-  
Related

# Key Finding #1

**Most participants (9 of 11) completely ignored the instructions**--no matter which of the 3 designs they saw on the Find a Form search results page

- Many participants (8 of 11) opened form detail page, and there weren't any instructions there
- Only 2 ever mentioned the instructions
- Only 1 clicked on link to learn more w/o prompting

*So, most participants doing tasks w/o the benefit of the instructions we were testing*

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Enter a keyword, form name, or number

health jobs

Search

Showing 1 – 10 of 41 results for "health jobs"

Sort By Closest match

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Form 10-252

[Authorization to Release Protected Health Information to State/Local Public Health Authorities](#)

Form last updated: 11-26-2020

Related to: Health care, Records

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Form 10-2850C

[Application for Associated Health Occupations](#)

Form last updated: 11-17-2016

Related to: Employment or jobs at VA

[Download VA form 10-2850C \(PDF\)](#)

# Key Finding #2

**For 9 of 11 participants, the *Download VA form* link opened forms in a web browser instead of Adobe Acrobat**

- Can't fill out, digitally sign, or save the form
- Need to manually download the file and open it in Acrobat
- Forms auto-downloaded for 1 participant for all 4 forms (Edge on Windows)
- 2 of 4 forms auto-downloaded for 1 participant (Chrome on Windows)
  - The other 2 forms didn't download, no error message--nothing happened
  - Then tried in Firefox but saw "Please wait" error instead of form

Form 10-252

[Authorization to Release Protected Health Information to State/Local Public Health Authorities](#)

Form last updated: 11-26-2020

Related to: Health care, Records



[Download VA form 10-252 \(PDF\)](#)

## Please wait...

If this message is not eventually replaced by the proper contents of the document, your PDF viewer may not be able to display this type of document.

You can upgrade to the latest version of Adobe Reader for Windows®, Mac, or Linux® by visiting [http://www.adobe.com/go/reader\\_download](http://www.adobe.com/go/reader_download).

For more assistance with Adobe Reader visit <http://www.adobe.com/go/acrreader>.

Windows is either a registered trademark or a trademark of Microsoft Corporation in the United States and/or other countries. Mac is a trademark of Apple Inc., registered in the United States and other countries. Linux is the registered trademark of Linus Torvalds in the U.S. and other countries.

Many participants saw the above error message instead of form 10-0003k or 20-0968 and misinterpreted it

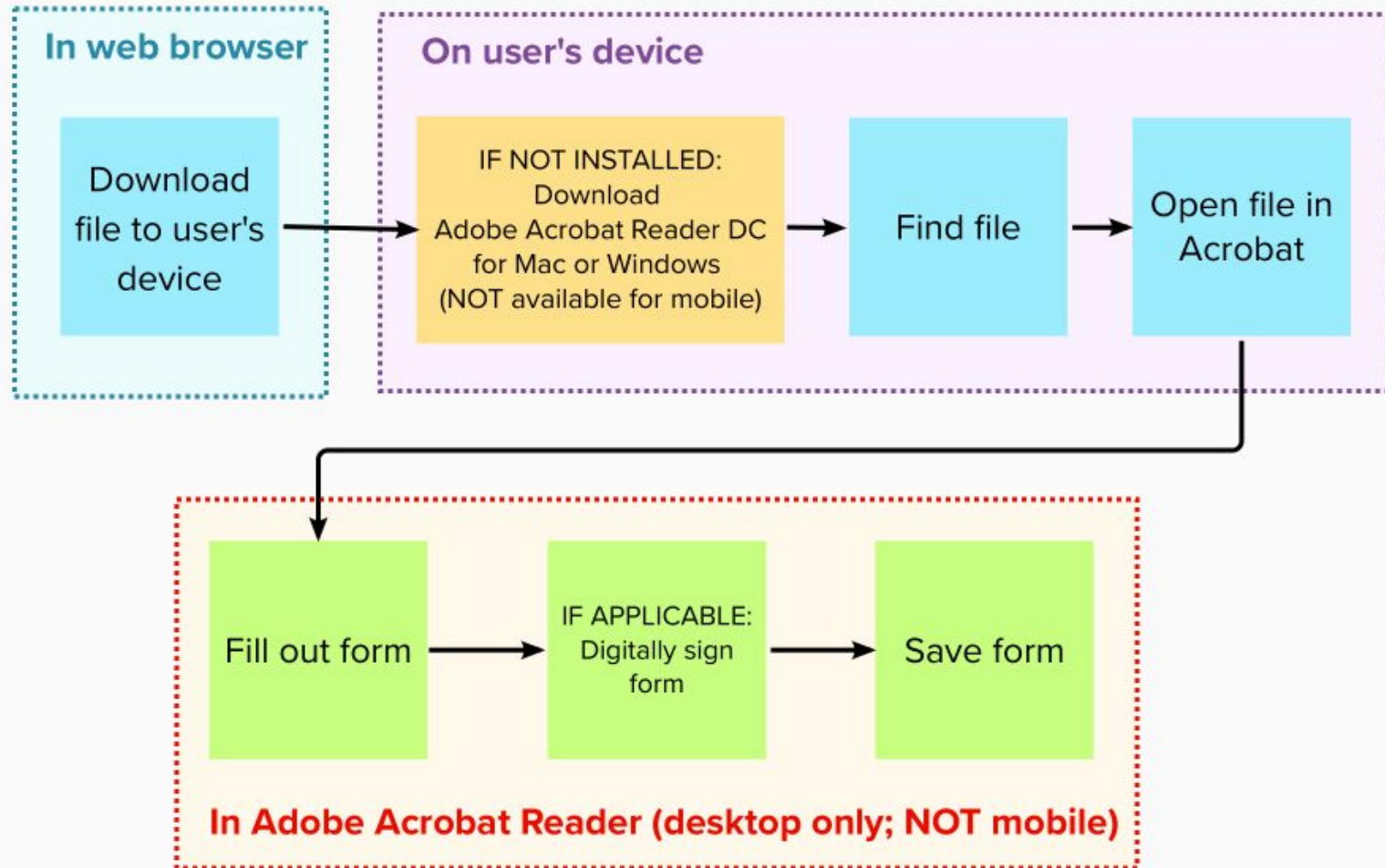
# Key Finding #3

**Most participants (9 of 11) were unable to fill out and digitally sign ANY of the 4 forms** without a lot of help from the moderator, and many participants were unable to succeed even with all the help provided

Issues encountered depended on

- device (**must be desktop**)
- operating system (Mac/Windows)
- web browser
- whether Adobe Acrobat was installed
- default application to open PDFs

## Steps to fill out a PDF Form

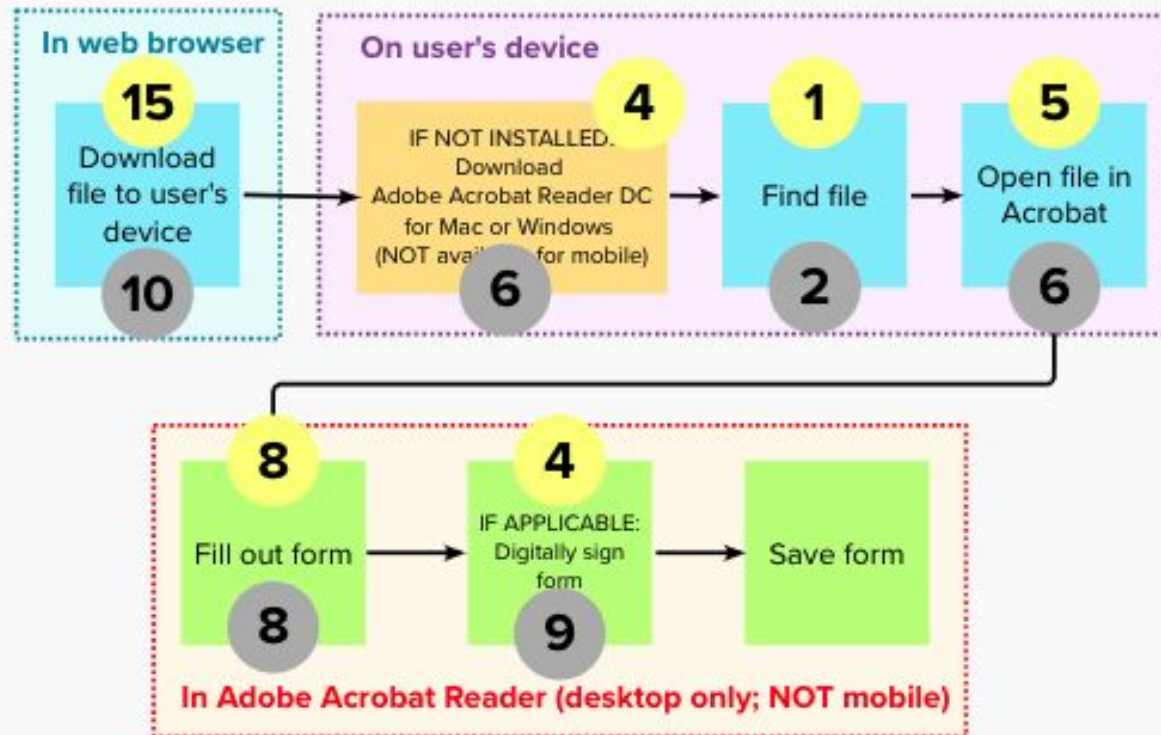




# Key Finding #3 (cont'd)

**Downloading the PDF form to the user's device** was the most problematic of all of the steps

Steps to fill out a PDF Form with # of issues (yellow) & # of participants affected (gray) per step



Steps that affected the greatest number of research participants:

1. **Download file to device**
2. **Digitally sign** in Acrobat
3. **Fill out form** in Acrobat
4. Open file in Acrobat
5. Download Acrobat to device

# Issues with **Download File** step

**Only 4 of 11 participants knew to download the PDF file and open it in Adobe Acrobat Reader.** The other participants didn't understand this (didn't read instructions provided) and got stuck, so moderator explained

**8 of 11 participants had difficulty downloading the file from the web browser.** Issues encountered:

- Many didn't know there was a *download* button in the browser
- In **Firefox** on Windows, tried *Save Page As* → Form not fillable in Acrobat
- In **Safari** on a Mac, tried saving file → Opens a non-editable version in Preview application
- In **Chrome** on Windows, participant started filling out form, clicked *download* button, selected *with your changes* → Info entered not saved
  - Right-clicked on *Download VA form* link, selected *save link* → Not fillable in Acrobat
  - **Had to use the download button in the browser before filling out anything in the form**
- In **Edge** on Windows, tried *Save* button → Not fillable in Acrobat. Same results with *Print > Save as PDF* and *Download > Show in folder > right-click to open with Acrobat*
  - Right-click to open with Edge → Fillable PDF but without digital signature
  - Right-click on the *Download VA form* link → Not fillable
  - Right-click on *Download VA form* link and choose *Save link as* → Fillable but missing visual indicators (shading) for the fillable fields so difficult to figure out where to type

# Issues with Digitally Sign step

**5 of 11 people were unable to digitally sign the two PDF forms that required it.**

Here's what they did instead:

- 3 participants used the *Draw* tool in Edge to sign their name
- 1 participant saw a big "X" in the signature box and said they would print the form and sign below the "X"
- When one participant saw the digital signature field prompt open up in Acrobat, they dismissed it and then clicked the *Fill & Sign* button at the top to add her drawn signature

The image displays two screenshots of a PDF form titled "vha-10-2850c-fill". The top screenshot shows the "IX - SIGNATURE OF APPLICANT" section, which includes a "CERTIFICATION" statement and a signature field (38A). A large "X" is drawn across the signature field. The bottom screenshot shows the same section, but with a "Fill & Sign" button circled in red in the top left corner. A tooltip for the digital signature field is visible at the bottom right, stating: "SECTION 9 - SIGNATURE OF APPLICANT. NOTE: A false statement on any part of your application may be grounds for not hiring you, or for terminating you after you begin work. Also, you may be punished by fine or imprisonment (U.S. Code, Title 18, Section 1001). CERTIFICATION. I CERTIFY THAT TO THE BEST OF MY KNOWLEDGE AND BELIEF, ALL OF MY STATEMENTS ARE TRUE, CORRECT, COMPLETE, AND MADE IN GOOD FAITH. 38. A. SIGNATURE OF APPLICANT. DIGITAL SIGNATURE. (Click to sign)".



# Issues with **Fill out the Form** step

One participant on a Mac was able to fill out the forms in Safari and Preview, but the fillable fields weren't shaded until they moused over them, so difficult to know what to fill out

→ Resolved when forms were opened in Adobe Acrobat

**Accessibility issues** with the PDF forms encountered by the 4 screen reader users will be detailed later...

Department of Veterans Affairs

SEE LAST PAGE FOR PAPERWORK REDUCTION ACT, PRIVACY ACT AND INFORMATION ABOUT DISCLOSURE OF YOUR SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER.

INSTRUCTIONS: Please submit this application furnishing all information in sufficient detail to enable the Department of Veterans Affairs to determine your eligibility for appointment in Veterans Health Administration.

Type, or print in ink. If additional space is required, please attach a separate sheet and refer to items being answered by number.

1. OCCUPATION FOR WHICH APPLYING

A ☐ CERTIFIED RESPIRATORY THERAPY TECHNICIAN E ☒ LICENSED PHARMACIST ☐ OTHER (Specify)

B ☐ REGISTERED RESPIRATORY THERAPIST F ☐ PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT

C ☐ LICENSED PHYSICAL THERAPIST G ☐ EXPANDED-FUNCTION DENTAL AUXILIARY

D ☐ LICENSED PRACTICAL/VOCATIONAL NURSE H ☐ OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST

2. NAME (Last, First, Middle)

3. APPLICATION FOR (Check one)

☒ GENERAL PRACTICE ☐ SPECIALTY (Identify Below)

4. PRESENT ADDRESS (Include ZIP Code) STREET ADDRESS 2 APT. NO.

CITY STATE ZIP CODE COUNTRY

5. TELEPHONE NUMBER (Include Area Code)

5A. RESIDENCE 5B. BUSINESS

6. DATE OF BIRTH 7. PLACE OF BIRTH (City) STATE COUNTRY

8. SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER

9A. CITIZENSHIP

☐ U.S. CITIZEN BY BIRTH ☐ NATURALIZED U.S. CITIZEN ☐ NOT A U.S. CITIZEN (Complete item 9B)

9B. COUNTRY OF WHICH YOU ARE A CITIZEN

10A. HAVE YOU EVER FILED APPLICATION FOR APPOINTMENT IN THE VA

☐ YES ☐ NO (If "YES" complete items 10B and 10C)

10B. NAME OF OFFICE WHERE FILED 10C. DATE FILED

11. WHEN MAY INQUIRY BE MADE OF YOUR PRESENT EMPLOYER 12. DATE AVAILABLE FOR EMPLOYMENT

# Issues with **Open File in Acrobat** step

**Mobile device users are unable to open fillable PDF forms** because they require a desktop-only version of Adobe Acrobat Reader

- Adobe Reader mobile app opens files in read-only mode if able to open at all
- One participant tapped on the pencil icon to try to fill out the form
  - error about it being a Protected document

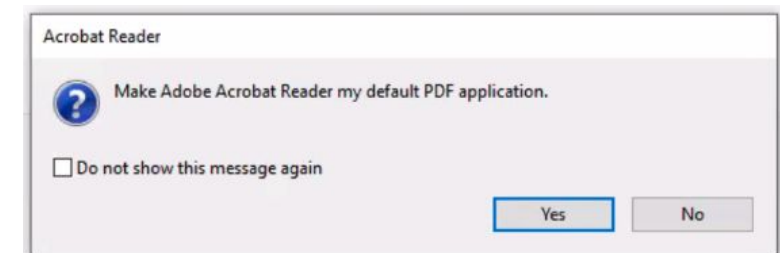
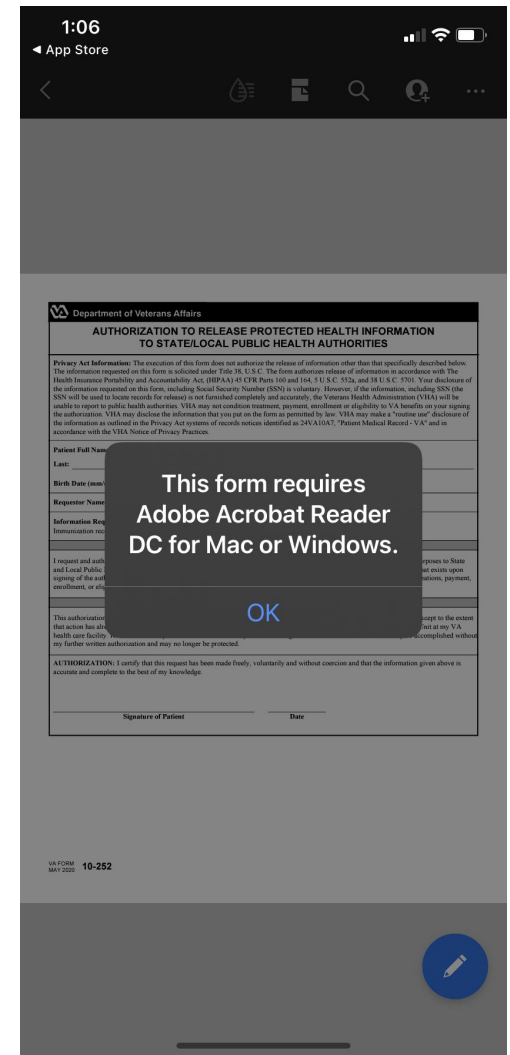
2 participants clicked the downloaded files shown at the bottom of their browser

- files opened in the browser (instead of Acrobat)

2 participants downloaded forms from Chrome → files opened in Edge (default application in Windows to open PDF files)

When 2 participants opened files in Acrobat, they were prompted to set Acrobat Reader as their default for PDF files

- Both appeared to not read the prompt and declined

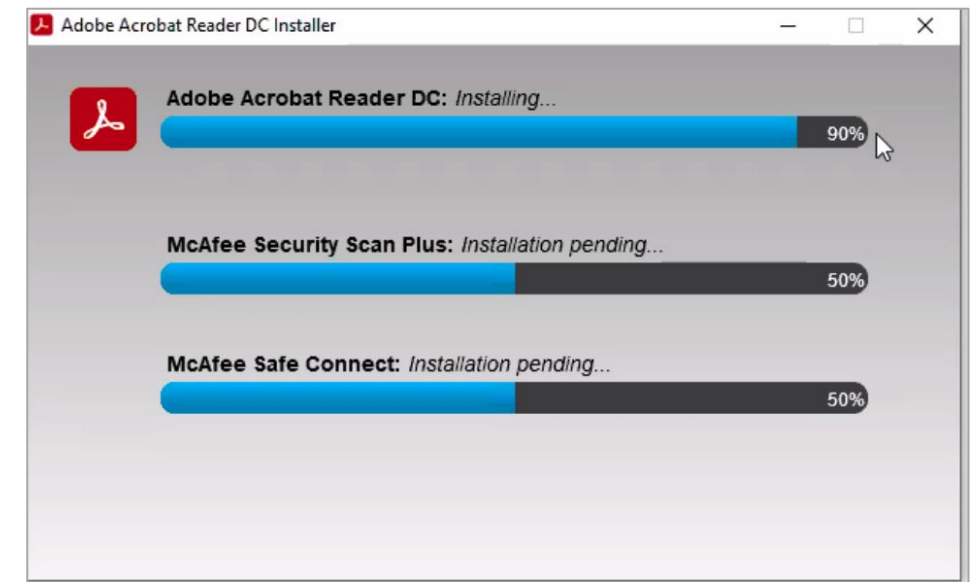
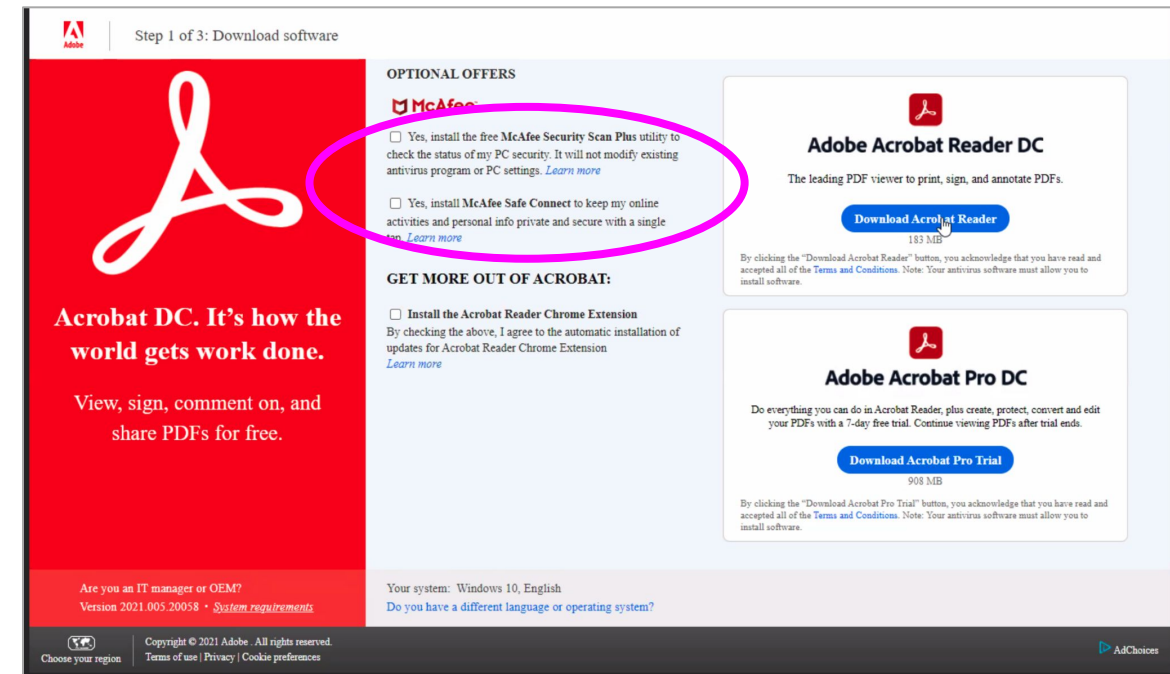


# Issues with Download Adobe Acrobat step

**Mobile:** The 3 participants on iOS mobile devices couldn't find Adobe Acrobat but only "Adobe Acrobat Reader PDF Maker" (wrong app)

**Desktop (Windows):** A participant's download and installation took a long time (~6 min) because McAfee Security Scan Plus and McAfee Safe Connect are also installed by default (unless you un-check the option at the beginning of the install)

**Desktop (Mac - Big Sur):** The installation's progress bar looked stuck, so participant force quit the install and then started it again; looked stuck again but finally finished after 15 min



# Issues with **Find Downloaded File** step + iOS/Mac

**2 iOS users didn't know how to find files they downloaded**

**3 iOS/Mac users were surprised and annoyed that they had to use Adobe Acrobat to open VA forms**

*"It is a pain that you have to use Adobe for some of the forms...I am getting a third master's degree, and **I have not needed Adobe up until this point.** I have been able to fill out all forms in Safari until today" (p12).*

*"As soon as I see Adobe Acrobat, I know enough from using Apple products that that's going to be a problem. It may or may not work. I understand that there are more PCs in the world than there are Macs, and so you get the largest audience by programming for the PC, but **there is a substantial number of people on Macs who use their cell phones and iPads that, to me, it's rather unbelievable** that somebody wouldn't be consciously programming for the Mac" (p2).*

# Key Finding #4

**Participants using a screen reader were unable to digitally sign** because screen readers (e.g., JAWS) don't announce location to sign

The signature field wasn't an editable field or a button, and there wasn't a label on the field

SECTION 5 - APPLICANT AUTHENTICATION & FACILITY ENDORSEMENT/RECOMMENDATION		
<b>ELIGIBILITY:</b> I certify that I am currently a permanent VA employee and have been continuously employed by the VA, for a period of not less than one year immediately preceding submission of this application.		
<b>CONSENT TO RELEASE INFORMATION:</b> For the purpose of administering the Employee Incentive Scholarship Program (EISP) award, I hereby authorize the educational institution in which I am or will be enrolled, to release to VA representatives, information regarding my student account and education information. This authorization includes information on bills, statements, charges, credits, balances, payments, past due amounts, collection activity, grades, courses, credits, GPA, registration, student ID number, academic progress, enrollment status, attendance, communications with school representatives deemed relevant for the administration of my scholarship, and any other information necessary to determine my status. This release is valid for any information supplied during my application for EISP, while participating in the program, and should any liability arise from program participation and become recoverable by the United States. I understand, that if I voluntarily withdraw this authorization after the EISP award is executed, I will be in breach of agreement and liable for the damages in accordance with the provisions of title 38 United States Code Section 7675. My signature below is my explicit written consent and authorization for the disclosure of the above information to VA representatives upon their request.		
<div><div></div><div>Print Name of Employee (Applicant)</div></div>	<div><div></div><div>Signature of Employee (Applicant)</div></div>	<div><div></div><div>Date</div></div>
I certify that I have reviewed this application and recommend the applicant named above for participation in the Employee Incentive Scholarship Program.		
<div><div></div><div>Print Name of VA Facility Director or designee</div></div>	<div><div></div><div>Signature of VA Facility Director or designee</div></div>	<div><div></div><div>Date</div></div>
<b>Note:</b> All applications signed by a designee must have authorization documentation on file with S&CE or submit written authorization with the application.		
VA FORM SEP 2018 10-0003K		Page 3 of 3

*Digital signature isn't accessible!*



# Key Finding #5

**Screen reader users found it challenging to fill out forms** in Adobe Acrobat

- Missing field labels
- Incorrect tab order
- Multiple input fields under one label (i.e., last name, first name, and middle name)

**Note:** Above feedback was spontaneous from participants while filling out a few random fields on the forms. A full accessibility review was out of scope for this research.

**Department of Veterans Affairs** **APPLICATION FOR ASSOCIATE MEMBER**

SEE LAST PAGE FOR PAPERWORK REDUCTION ACT, PRIVACY ACT AND INFORMATION ABOUT

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Please submit this application furnishing all information in sufficient detail to determine your eligibility for appointment in Veterans Health Administration. Type, or print in ink. If additional space is required, please attach a separate sheet and label.

**1. OCCUPATION FOR WHICH APPLYING**

A <input type="checkbox"/> CERTIFIED RESPIRATORY THERAPY TECHNICIAN	E <input type="checkbox"/> LICENSED PHARMACIST
B <input type="checkbox"/> REGISTERED RESPIRATORY THERAPIST	F <input type="checkbox"/> PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT
C <input type="checkbox"/> LICENSED PHYSICAL THERAPIST	G <input type="checkbox"/> EXPANDED-FUNCTION DENTIST
D <input type="checkbox"/> LICENSED PRACTICAL/VOCATIONAL NURSE	H <input type="checkbox"/> OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST

**2. NAME (Last, First, Middle)**

**4. PRESENT ADDRESS (Include ZIP Code)** **STREET ADDRESS 2** **APT. NO.**

**CITY** **STATE** **ZIP CODE** **COUNTRY**

*Hard to fix because the 400+ VA forms are owned by different groups*

# Key Finding #6

## Find a Form search results were hard to scan with a screen reader

- No headings for each result
- So screen reader users had to tab down 6 lines through each search result before they could see the next one.

*RECOMMENDATION: Add an H3 heading above each search result (now FIXED!)*

[Home](#) > **Find a VA form**

## Find a VA form

Search for a VA form by keyword, form name, or form number.


Enter a keyword, form name, or number

Showing 1 – 3 of 3 results for "jobs" Sort By

---

Form 22-8865  
**[Employer's Application to Provide Job Training](#)**  
**Form last updated:** 01-25-2021  
**Related to:** Education and training


You'll need to download this form and open it in Adobe Acrobat Reader. [Read More](#)

 [Download VA form 22-8865 \(PDF\)](#)

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Form 22-6553d-1  
**[Monthly Certification of On-the-Job and Apprenticeship Training](#)**  
**Form last updated:** 02-03-2021  
**Related to:** Education and training

You'll need to download this form and open it in Adobe Acrobat Reader. [Read More](#)

 [Download VA form 22-6553d-1 \(PDF\)](#)

# Recommendations from the Research

1. Encourage VA form owners to **replace every fillable PDF form with a more accessible format** across devices, platforms, browsers, and screen readers (e.g., web form or maybe DocuSign). Start with the most frequently downloaded forms. [GOV.UK is doing this.](#)
2. Since fillable PDF forms will continue to exist at least in the near term, **add instructions above every download link**, including those on form detail pages (as already planned)
  - Detailed instructions should be device-, operating system-, and browser-specific ([ex](#)). Ideally auto-detect the user's setup and then show the most relevant instructions.
  - Be clear that *mobile devices cannot be used* (even though **15%** of Find a Form visits and **46%** VA.gov visits are from mobile devices, per analytics 1/1/2021-8/11/2021)
  - Some users (esp. Mac) may be unfamiliar with how to use Adobe Acrobat or resistant to using it (**12%** of Find a Form visits are from Macs, per analytics 1/1/2021-8/11/2021)
3. Encourage VA form owners to **fix the accessibility problems encountered in these forms**, especially the digital signature fields. Recommend 508 compliance for all forms.



# Next Steps per Dave Conlon

- ❑ Discuss 508 compliance with Martha Wilkes and how to set up a conversation with the 508 office to address Key Findings #4-5 (details on #5 can be found in [Cindy's report on github](#), Recommendation #4). Might involve Josh and Angela doing a walkthrough/demo.
- ❑ Add more device/platform/browser-specific instructions to *Download VA form* links
  - ❑ Investigate interrupting the download user flow with a modal box or something more accessible to provide instructions that are less likely to be ignored (backlog)
- ❑ Encourage replacement of fillable PDFs--start with most accessed & most problematic
  - ❑ Explore DocuSign and other similar products
  - ❑ Continue investigating VA forms re usage, issues, last revision, burden, etc. (Marci)
  - ❑ Add KPIs for analytics to track successful downloads, re-attempts, etc.
- ❑ Confirm with Angela that Find a Form search results heading issue is fixed from a screen reader user's perspective

Questions?