



ADMINISTRATION & OFFICE CONTENT MODERNIZATION: STRATEGY PROPOSAL FOR TIER 3 CONTENT

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June 2021

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Agenda

- Where we are today
- Problem statement
- Strategy and high-level plan
- What we need to move forward
- Appendix



Where we are today: Digital Modernization & Web Brand Consolidation

We began modernization of tiers 1 and 2 content and tools.
We're about to begin tier 3 modernization.



Web Brand Consolidation so far...

- Created distinct places and products in the site IA (information architecture) for consolidated tier 1 and 2 content and tools. (Product iterations on tiers 1 and 2 will always be ongoing.)
- **Veteran impact:** Strategy enables Veterans to have clear, recognizable, findable areas in the site IA for “their” stuff vs. sifting through everything all over the site.

Tier 1 (2018 -)	VA Benefits & Health Care Content and Tools Primary users: Veterans and other beneficiaries (family, caregivers, service members) Content examples: Benefits eligibility, digital forms, and tools; user homepage and profile; VAMC websites
Tier 2 (2020 -)	Resources, Support, and Engagement Content Primary users: Veterans and beneficiaries, Veteran sub-groups (e.g., women, LGBT, etc.), caregivers, VSO, career counselors Content examples: Resources and support articles, campaign landing page template, Events hub in Outreach and Events product

See the appendix for more information about tiers.



Web Brand Consolidation: Next

- Similarly, need a distinct place for “corporate” tier 3 audiences: Congressional staffers, journalists, NGOs, businesses, and members of the public interested in transparency.
- **Veteran Impact:** Creating a distinct tier 3 product helps VA serve the government and transparency needs of tier 3 users with a best-in-class, modern experience; AND also helps support VA’s mission to be laser-focused on customer-facing, Veteran top tasks, benefit support, and tools in the tiers 1 and 2 products.

Tier 3 (2021-2022)	Corporate Office and Other Program Offices Content Primary users: Non-Veteran audiences (e.g., Congress, press/media, members of the public, researchers, vendors, etc.) Content examples: About our office pages, contact info for doing business with VA, corporate annual reports, leadership bios, program office policy notices
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See the appendix for more information about tiers.

Problem statement

Huge footprint compounds site performance and content duplication issues.



Problem statement

With the mega volume of content:

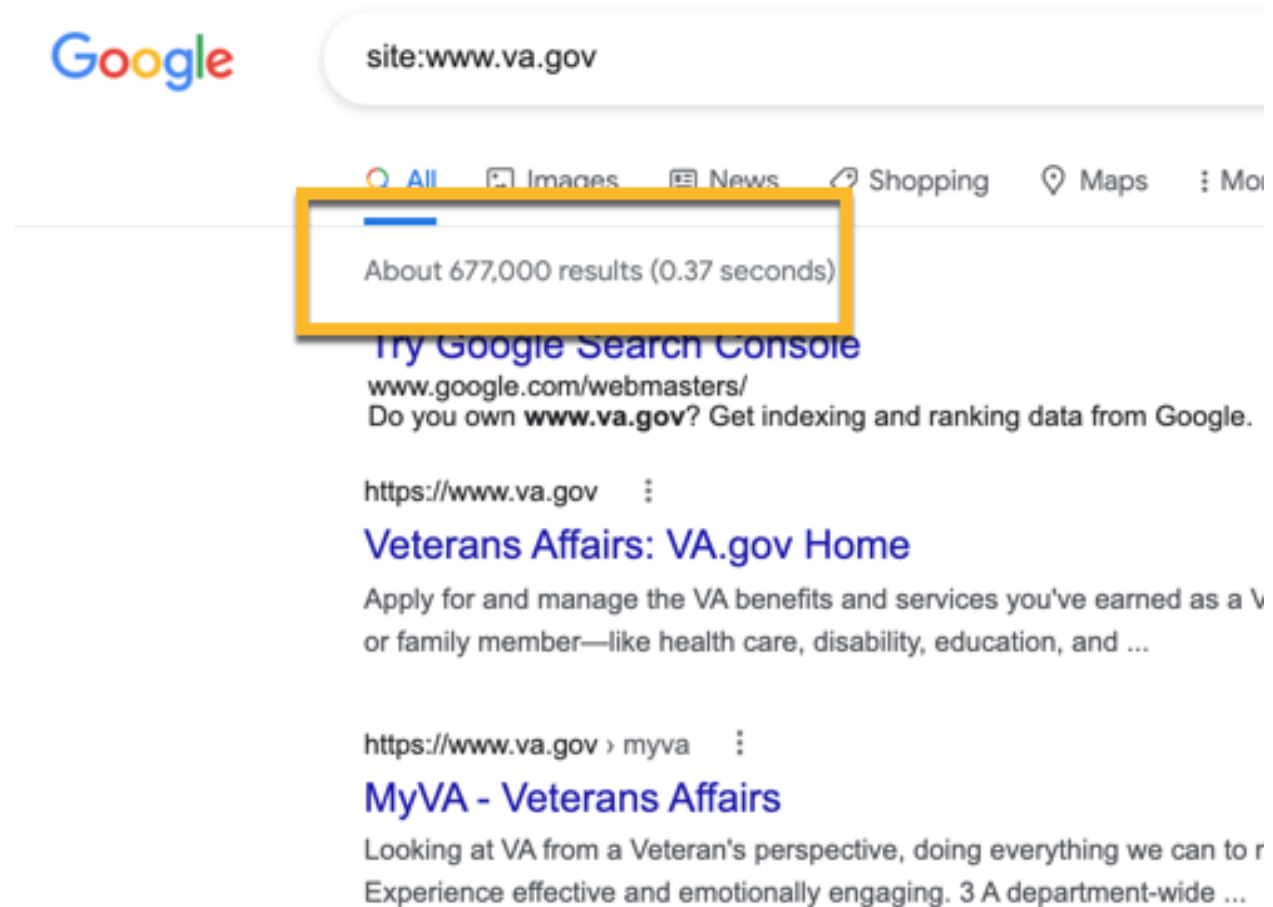
Content lifecycle management and governance is unfeasible.

Preventing duplicative content is unfeasible.

Knowing what we have, and where, is unfeasible.

We don't know what we have.

Approximately 450,000 to 677,000 URLs (as of July 12 ,2021)



See the appendix for government and private sector comparisons for context.



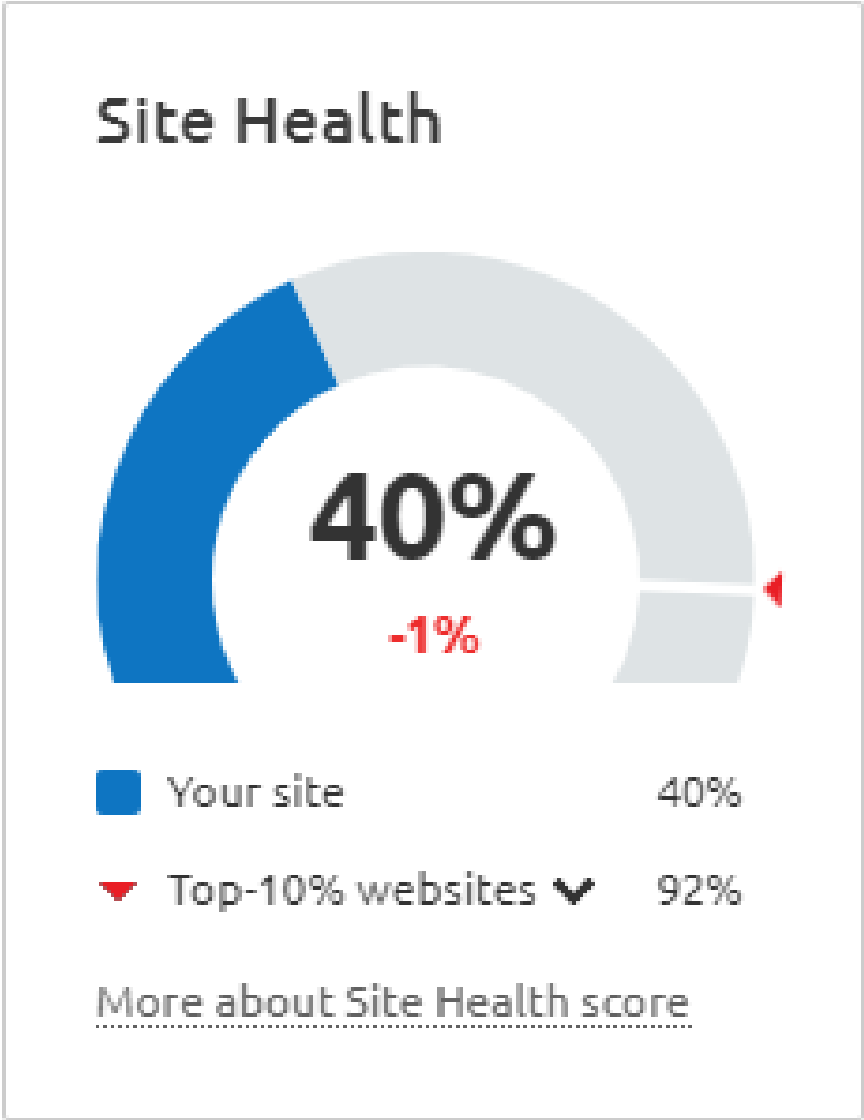
80% - Avg government score

92% - Avg private sector site score

32% to 54% - Avg VA score

The score as of (July 12, 2021) is based on the number of errors and warnings on your site, and the uniqueness of each URL.

Reference: <https://www.semrush.com/kb/114-total-score>



A way forward: Strategy for tier 3 modernization



We have a major opportunity to modernize tier 3

Not a 'lift-and-shift' 1-to-1 migration.

Not a surface design 're-skin.'

Modernization and reset, similar strategy of VAMC modernization.

- Backend: Taxonomy-driven systematic approach to minimize manual creation and duplication of information
- Frontend: Marry tier 3 user needs with new mix-and-match components desired by businesses

VA medical center website modernization

300 → 40

Streamlined total site pages from 300 to 40 search-engine optimized, Veteran-first pages

350k → 46k

Streamlined total site word count from 350,000 to 46,000 plain-language words

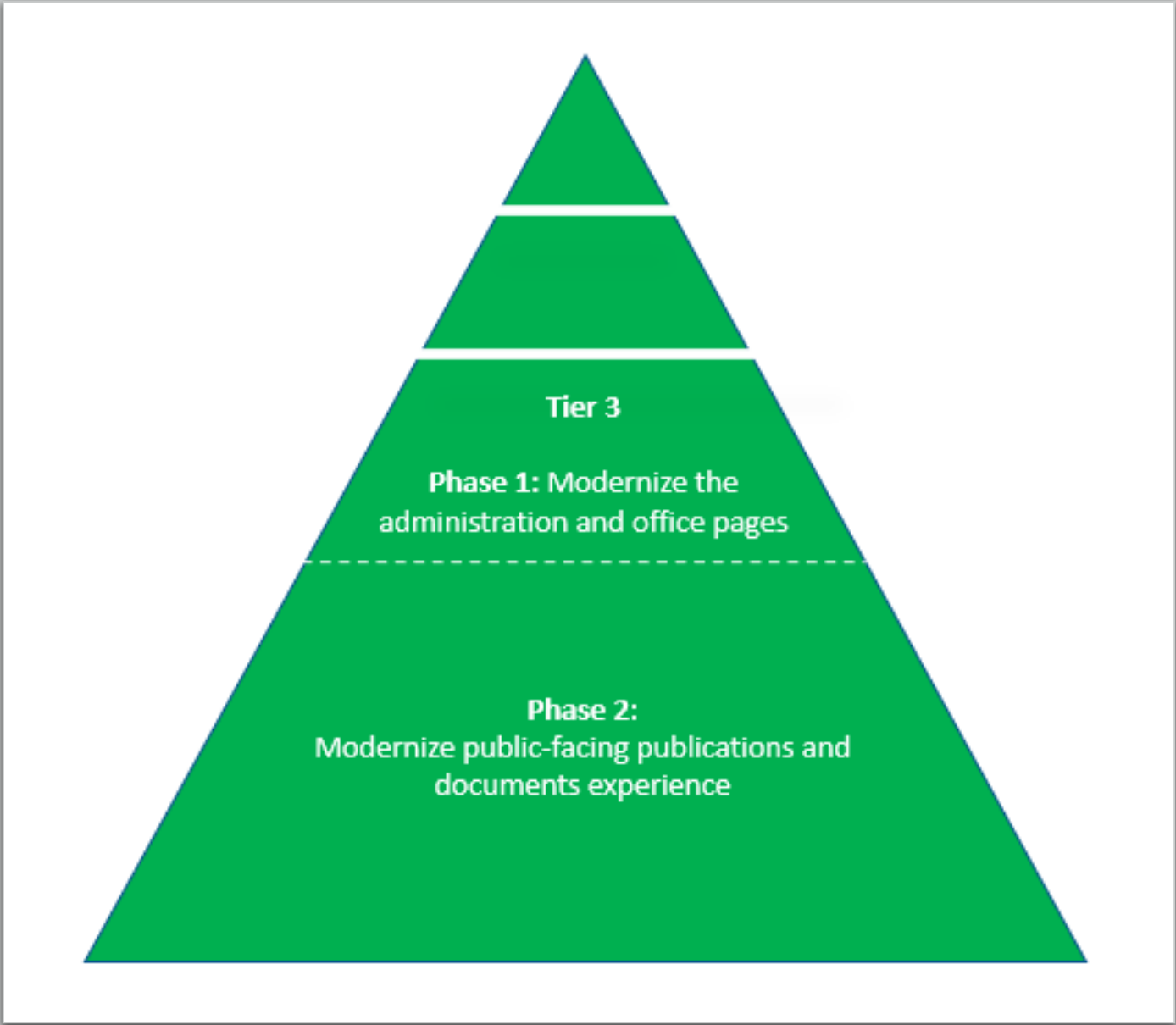
High-level plan for tier 3 modernization



**Create a fair,
comprehensive, and
systematized path for
modernizing tier 3.**

First, tackle office landing pages
first, using Salesforce org data.

Second, tackle public-facing
publications and documents
experience.





Phase 1: Modernize administration office landing pages

- EOY 2021 - Q1, 2022: Establish the Salesforce data connection and taxonomy functionality via API or a data end point. (Establishes systemized baseline inventory of official orgs inside the Department.)
- Q2-3, 2022 - Levels 0-3 offices: Train and onboard identified site editors.
- Q3-4, 2022 - Levels 4-6 offices: Train and onboard identified site editors.
- 2022 ongoing: Work with VHA, VBA, NCA and central staff web comms teams to identify office site owners. Identify offices with duplicate or missing data in the Salesforce, and work with offices to resolve.



Phase 2: Modernize the public-facing publications and documents experience

Create no content orphans, and create a path to 95% compliance with WCAG 2.0 standards for 508

Near future – 2022

1/ Create initial (limited) - set of templates for known publication content types (e.g., fact sheets, annual reports...)

2/ Using the Salesforce driven taxonomy, create a dynamic taxonomy-based tagging system. (Create no document orphans.)

This will be the foundation for filtered document searchable list pages – similar to our RS “All articles tagged: X” listings → e.g., “All reports from: Office Name” / “All fact sheets from: Office Name” / etc.)

Future future – 2023+

3/ Find/license or create a technology solution to automate getting text out of PDFs and Word files.

4/ Create a documented formal exemption process: 508 waivers should have a clear legally justifiable business need, and should still get an HTML landing page that provides the public the ability to request the same information in an accessible format.

What we need to move forward

Socialize and solidify strategy.

Fund a product development team.

Create a change management communications working group.

1. Get input and socialize the strategy.
2. VA support (funding, people's time) to build a cross-functional OCTO product team dedicated to tier 3 modernization, phases 1 and 2.
3. Central VHA, VBA, NCA, and staff office web comms teams collaboration will be needed on change management activities--such as identifying the right site owners and editors for tier 3 user administration and training.
4. Need central VHA, VBA, NCA and staff office web comms teams to commit to ongoing communications to their administration offices.

Why this matters

A distinct tier 3 product will help VA serve the government and transparency needs of tier 3 users such as Congressional staffers and members of Congress; NGOs such as VSOs; vendors and businesses who want to do business with VA; and the public.

By creating a distinct product for tier 3 audiences, we can also help protect and ensure VA's goals for tiers 1 and 2 products to stay laser-focused on customer-facing, Veteran top tasks, benefit support, and tools.

**We have a major opportunity
to modernize tier 3**

Appendix

Examples of tiers 1, 2, and 3 content

Tier 1 Veteran-facing benefits content and tools

Primary users

Veterans and other beneficiaries (like surviving spouses, dependents)

Examples

- Eligibility content
- Online applications and tools
- Authenticated (signed in) experiences like My VA dashboard

Quality assurance

- Inter-administrations and DEPO collaboration
- Centralized quality assurance and process management by DEPO and VACO levels
- VA.govv Content Team white-glove support

How to apply for VA health care

Find out how to apply for VA health care benefits as a Veteran or service member.

How do I prepare before starting my application?

- [Find out if you're eligible for VA health care benefits](#)
- Gather the documents listed below that you'll need to fill out an Application for Health Benefits (VA Form 10-10EZ)

What documents and information do I need to apply?

- Your most recent tax return
- Social Security numbers for yourself and your qualified dependents
- Account numbers for any current health insurance you already have (like Medicare, private insurance, or insurance from your employer)

How do I apply?

You can apply online right now.

[Apply for health care benefits](#)

[Obtenga instrucciones para esta solicitud en Español.](#) ▼

Tier 2: Benefit support

www.va.gov/resources

Product summary:

VA call centers currently receive about **40 million calls** per year, and **600,000+ web mail inquiries** through IRIS.

Hypothesis: Can we help Veterans get answers to some of their questions faster? If we had good support content, can we reduce the number of calls or web mail inquiries--for specific high-volume topics (like sign in, claim status, etc.) and in general?

Examples

- [What your claim status means](#)
- [What if my school closes temporarily because of a natural disaster?](#)
- [Commissary and exchange privileges for Veterans](#)
- [Are service dogs allowed in VA facilities?](#)
- [How to change direct deposit information for VA education benefits](#)

What your claim status means

Your claim status tells you where your claim is in the review process. Read below to learn about the terms we use for each stage of the process.

[Check your VA claim status](#) [Sign in or create an account](#)

Claim status	What it means
Claim received	We received your claim, but it hasn't been assigned to a reviewer yet.
Initial review	We assigned your claim to a reviewer, who will determine if we need any more information from you.
Evidence gathering, review, and decision	We're getting evidence from you, your health care providers, governmental agencies, and other sources. We'll review the evidence and make a decision.
Preparation for notification	We've made a decision on your claim, and we're getting your decision letter ready to mail.
Complete	We've sent you a decision letter by U.S. mail with details about how we made the decision on your claim.

Tags [Claims and appeals status](#) [All Veterans](#)

Related information

[Claim status tool FAQs](#)

[How to check your VA claim, appeal, or decision review status online](#)

VA benefits

[Health care](#)

Apply for VA health care, find out how to access services, and manage your health and benefits online.

Need more help?

MyVA411 main information line: [800-698-2411](tel:800-698-2411)

Tier 3 administration and office content

Primary users

Press/media, Congress, vendors, suppliers, business partners, job seekers...

Examples

- Administration 'mission/history' pages
- Program office 'about us' pages
- Corporate pages (legal, regulatory, executive bios, financial/compliance reports...)

Quality assurance

- Set by each administration and business office
- Templates, training, VA.gov design system and content style guide resources

Select One ▼

Office of Acquisition, Logistics, and Construction

INTERESTS SKILLS
CAREER
VALUES EDUCATION
GOALS VISION

Interested in a Federal Acquisition, Logistics, or Construction and Facilities Management career?

View a listing of job opportunities available throughout the Office of Acquisition, Logistics, and Construction.

[Read more »](#)

June 2019 AWIS A Huge Success! VA Hospital Voted "Best of the Best" in Engineering News Record Magazine OALC Career Opportunities OALC Organization

Veterans Crisis Line
1-800-273-8255 PRESS 1

eBenefits
Your VA & DoD Benefits. Online.
[Register Now](#)
www.ebenefits.va.gov

Acquisition
[Architect/Engineer](#) | [Information Technology](#) | [Major Construction](#) | [National Healthcare](#) | [Non-IT Enterprise-Wide Solutions](#) | [VA Federal Supply Schedules](#) | [VA Forecast of Contracting Opportunities](#) | [Small Business](#)

Major Construction
[Technical Information Library \(TIL\)](#) | [TIL Alerts](#) | [Cost Estimating](#) | [Consulting Support Services](#) | [Historic Preservation](#)

RESOURCES

- [OALC Home](#)
- [About OALC](#)
- [OALC Organization](#)
- [OALC Executive Biographies](#)
- [OALC Career Opportunities](#)

Site performance issues

The mega volume of URLs compounds site performance issues

- CSS, javascript, and HTML issues
- 40Xs broken links
- 30X redirect chains and loops
- 50X errors
- Broken images
- Duplicate meta properties
- Duplicate content
- Slow loading
- And more

Site Audit: va.gov

va.gov | Device: Desktop | Last update: Tue, Mar 16, 2021 | Pages crawled: ⚠ 5,000/5,000

Re-run campaign

Google Data Studio

PDF

Export

Settings

Overview

Issues

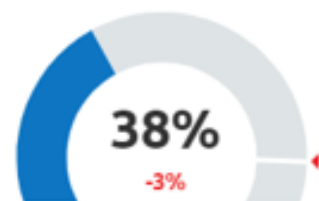
Crawled Pages

Statistics

Compare Crawls

Progress

Site Health



■ Your site 38%
▼ Top-10% websites 92%

[More about Site Health score](#)

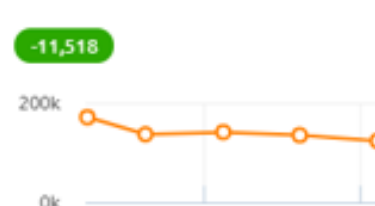
Errors

5,592 +1,420



Warnings

123,549 -11,518



Notices

24,772 -6,620



Thematic Reports

Crawled Pages

5,000



Crawlability

49% -3%

[View details](#)

Site Performance

HTTPS

81% +3%

[View details](#)

Internal Linking

International SEO

International SEO is not implemented on this site.

Core Web Vitals

To Improve

[View details](#)

Markup

Comparison of private sector and other government sites by volume



Some industry and government sites for context

IRS – **152,000** pages

SSA – **52,100** pages

Geico – **3,580** pages

Adobe – 120,000 pages/**2,000 pages per site** (includes 60 localized country sites)

Southwest Airlines – **16,400**

Mayo Clinic – **110,000** pages

Kaiser Permanente – **549,000** pages (includes subdomains and translated sites)

2019 stakeholder and tier 3 user research synthesis summary

Outline

1. Study Goals
2. Research Method
3. Stakeholder learnings
4. Findings + Recommendations
5. Next Steps

We wanted to learn how OPIA's website could be relevant with those who have influence over VA's public perception, such as VSOs, reporters and journalists, and Congressional staffers.

One day, dedicated to alignment.

Activities:

- Content exercise
- Rounds of scenario-based sketching
 - VSOs
 - Journalists
 - Congressional Staffers

Dominique Ramirez, *Digital Media Specialist*

Gary Hicks, *Director of Digital Media Engagement*

James Hutton, *Deputy Assistant Secretary for Public Affairs*

Joshua Tuscher, *Digital Media Specialist*

Mark Ballesteros, *Director of Field Operations*

Michael Taylor, *Director of Homeless Veterans Outreach Program & Strategic Comms*

Randal Noller, *Deputy Director of Media Relations*

Susan Carter, *Director of Media Relations*

Tom Thomas, *Deputy Director of Field Operations*

DSVA: Jeff Barnes, Jennifer Lee, Meghana Khandekar

Facilitators: Andy Lewandowski, Jodi Leo, Howie Brande

7 semi-structured interviews

- 30-45 minutes
- Remote (Zoom.us)
- Conversational

Participants:

- 3 VSOs
- 3 Journalists & reporters
- 1 Govt agency public affairs lead

Content exercise

We asked everyone to first prioritize content areas from the provided list, then list what other content areas they would want prioritized that were not present.

Right (table): terms ranked in weighted order.

- Term**
- Press releases
 - Blogs
 - Bios
 - Choice Act
 - Social Media
 - Media Advisories
 - Videos
 - Key Initiatives
 - Apps
 - Fact Sheets
 - Policy documents
 - Mission Act
 - Publications/reports
 - Benefits Link
 - Internal Comms
 - Contacts
 - Special Events

MISSING
1. Vantage Point link
2. FACT SHEETS
3. Benefits links

News Releases
Choice Act
Videos
Special Events

Top 3
Choice Act
Press Releases
Reports / Publications
Michael

MISSING
Social media/Blog (more prominent)
MISSION Act
OCLA / Congressional Docs
Media Advisories
Less Useful
Sec Travel Schedule
Randy Waller

MISSING
Fact Sheets
about Key Initiatives
Michael Taylor

Dom: Missing info
Content from
Vantage point
and social
most important:
Bios

Gary H.
MOST IMPORTANT:
News Releases
MISSING:
SOCIAL MEDIA
FACILITY SOCIAL MEDIA
PRO CONTACTS

Top 3
1. News/Media Releases
2. Blog Posts
3. Internal Comms

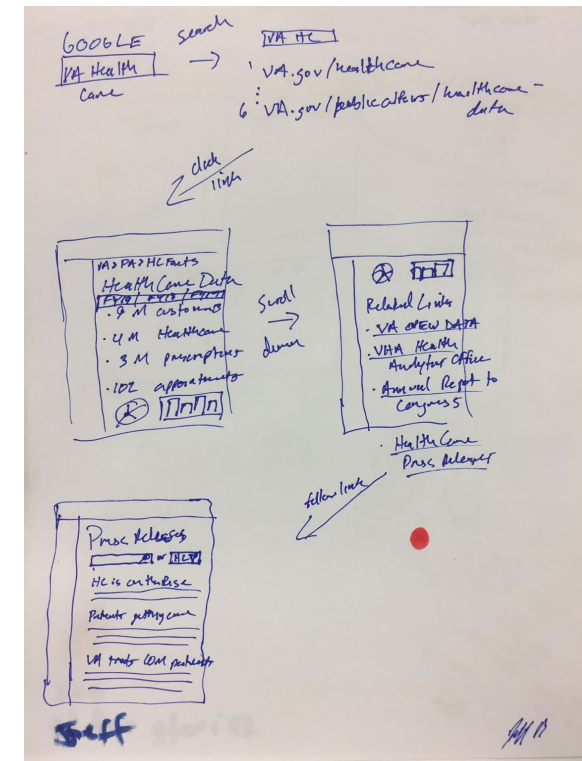
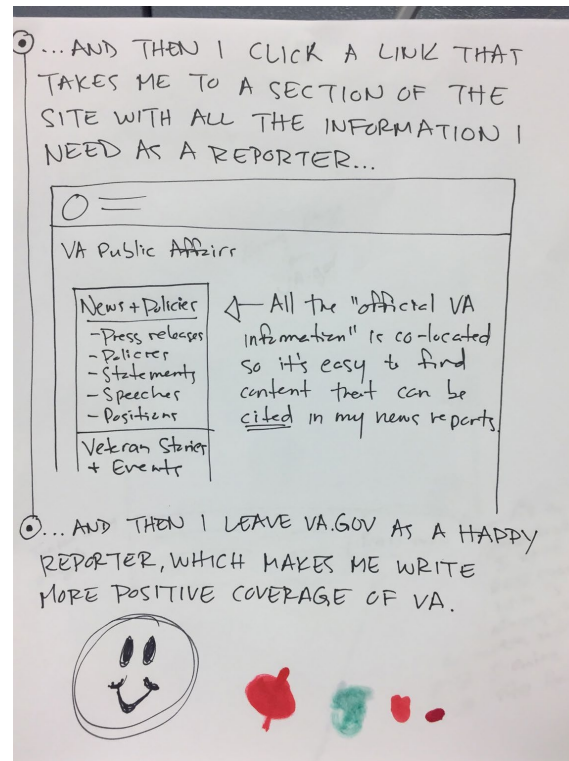
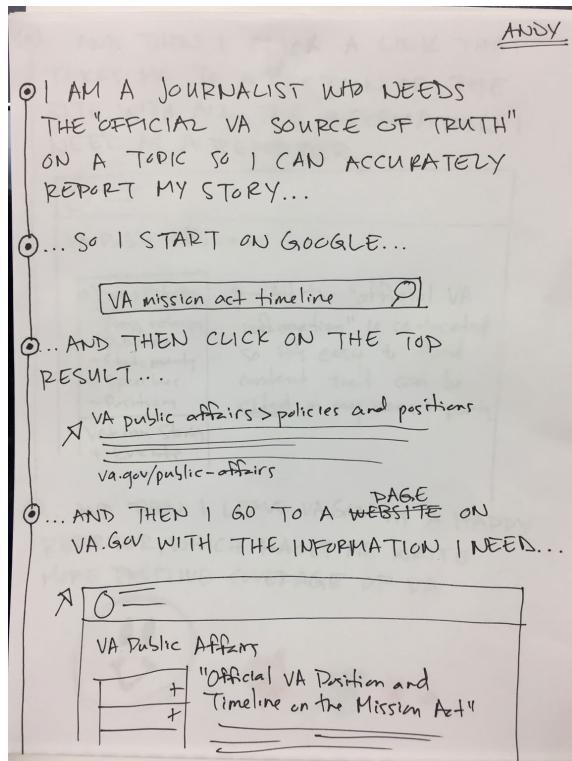
MISSING
1. Media Advisories
2. Social Media
3. Internal Comms
Unneeded
1. Choice Act as a stand alone

Press Releases
VIDEOS
Reports
Speeches
Choice Act

App (3)
Bio
Episodic Content - C
Publications
Sec VA Travel Schedule
Special Events
Vet. Day

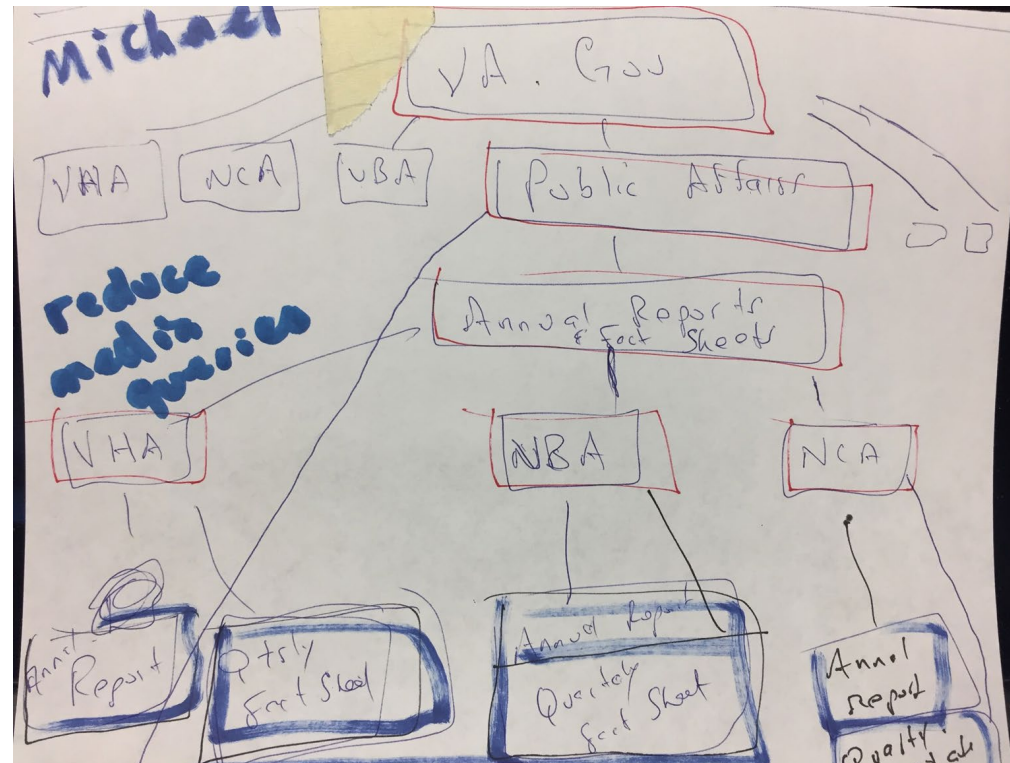
Stakeholder sketches

Assumption User Story: As a journalist, I should be able to find relevant content for my news story no matter where I come from (i.e from Google).



Stakeholder sketches

Assumption User Story: As a VA stakeholder, I want to make transparent all the work that VA does so that we get fewer media queries.🤖



Scenario: Congressional Staffer

Assumption User Story: As a Congressional Staffer, I need to easily obtain information that is necessary for the committee or member that I work for to conduct proper oversight.

- *How do they begin their search for this information?*
- *If they could have their ideal, at what point in journey would they arrive at the OPIA and what activities would they be doing?*

Pain point: I'm not sure if the VA is as transparent as they say they are and I need to be able to go to one location or one search result to find all the information that is required to help my busy committee and Congressperson succeed.

Scenario: Journalist with government/military beats

Assumption User Story: As a journalist who covers government and military beats, I am writing my annual fact-based article about how the VA is providing care for Veterans – including challenges, successes and breakthroughs.

- *How do they begin their search?*
- *If they could have their ideal, how would the OPIA or support their work?*

Pain point: There is no centralized location for gathering news across all VA and I need to know the latest updates that are happening within the VA.

4. Findings

Overview:

1. Reporters rely on sources that feel timely, actionable, and comprehensive.
2. Staying relevant on most “topical” administration initiatives is paramount to external perception.
3. Who exactly is the Office of Public Affairs meant for, these days?
4. Communication channels still work, even with the new etiquette for public communications.
5. Activity on legislation and initiatives currently feels decentralized and, as a result, relatively inaccessible.
6. Visibility of social initiatives seems inconsistent.

FINDINGS

Reporters rely on sources that feel timely, actionable, and comprehensive.

Information that the current site has is out of date and does not deliver value to reporters in trying to support stories with VA information. While speeches and bios were seen as useful, the content about major policy initiatives felt hard to find and hard to use: any available numbers and facts are buried within linked documents, such as spreadsheets.

- “I really just want to be able to track progress using the VA’s numbers.” - Reporter
- “Under transparency, I see ‘Secretary Shulkin Delivers His First ‘State of the VA’ Address’... He was fired a while ago and it just doesn’t need to be here...” - Reporter
- “It would be great if there were just a one-stop-shop to find things for media. I can’t find a press kit anywhere.” - Reporter

Who exactly is public affairs content meant for these days?

While the intended audience for the OPIA page may feel clear to the internal team, it wasn't obvious to users.

- “We generally don't see Vets visiting the public affairs webpage. They will ask us about things that might be relating to benefits and we will use Benefits Hub or something to get them their answers.” - VSO
- “This website seems to want to do everything for everyone... [the VA] needs to figure out who exactly this is intended to serve.” - Reporter
- “I support any tool that opens the door to seeking help. Tools that are somewhat accurate to help them [...] in understanding themselves.” - VSO, on Veteran depression

FINDINGS

Activity on legislation and initiatives currently feels decentralized and, as a result, relatively inaccessible.

Major legislation and initiatives have significant impact on Veterans, their families, and service providers.

- “There is movement on policy all the time... you have to know someone [in the Secretary’s office] to help you keep on top of it.” - VSO
- “It could be a simple feed of what is going through Congress. When are the hearings? Why do we have to go to Congress’s [web]page to figure this out?” - Reporter
- “The Mission Act has milestones: they have to report to Congress... there’s a report on hiring - it’s all in the law. When you try to find that, it’s really hard... - Reporter

CHALLENGE

Participants and internal stakeholders have separate ideas of success for content.

While participants focused their needs around:

- transparency on how VA.gov provides accountability
- key initiatives
- connecting with the VA (contact info)
- timely content

... the outputs of the design studio with internal stakeholders prioritized press releases and more curated messaging, such as blogs and bios.