



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

Personalization and Profile

Comparative Analysis

Background

Through the course of working on improving the logged-in experience for Veterans, we've identified an opportunity to expand our knowledge on best practices in personalized and authenticated experiences. We frequently solicit screenshots and log into our own accounts to learn from other sites, but haven't formalized any documentation around this.

The goal of this comparative analysis was to answer specific research questions and create a knowledge base of authenticated experiences to share with our team, especially those who are new to this field of user experience.

We want it to be clear that moving forward in these findings, we're referring to **personalization** not **customization**. What's the difference? We're glad you asked.

Customization is done by the user.
Personalization is done by the technology.

Research goals

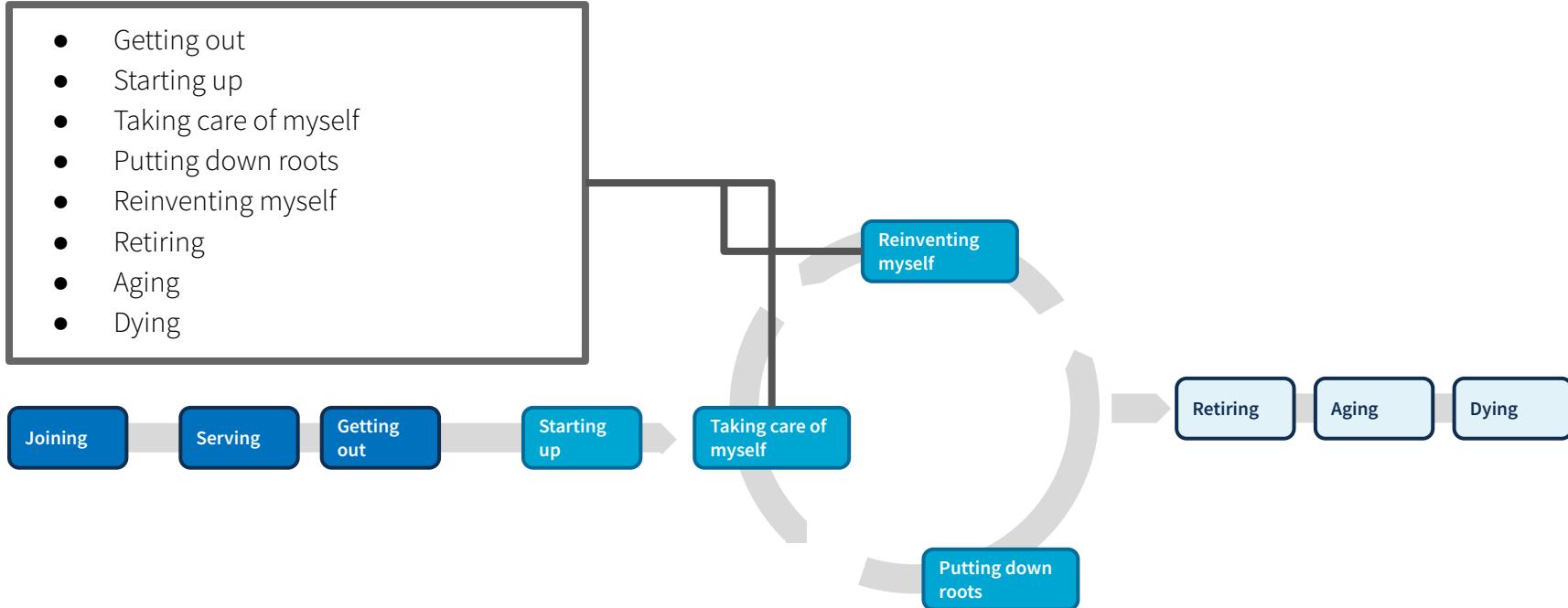
- Get a sense for differences in personalized experiences for civic services compared to the private sector
- Understand content and language commonly used in a logged-in state
- Compare aspects of the VA.gov authenticated experience to the logged-in state of other sites
- Learn how sites encourage profile completeness

Research questions

1. What is different about personalization of civic services compared to the private sector (banking, insurance)?
2. What information about users do sites commonly show in a logged-in state?
3. How do the conventions we see align with what we're doing on VA.gov?
4. How do sites encourage profile completeness?
5. How do sites handle removing/deleting profile information?
6. How do our Profile nav/section labels align with other sites?
7. What are other governments doing?

How this research maps to the Veteran journey

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For a fully detailed Veteran journey, go to

<https://github.com/department-of-veterans-affairs/va.gov-team/blob/master/platform/design/va-product-journey-maps/Veteran%20Journey%20Map.pdf>

Serving and separation

Living civilian life

Retiring and aging



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OCTO-DE goals that this research supports

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Supported

Not supported

Veterans and their families can apply for all benefits online

Veterans and their families can find a single, authoritative source of information

Veterans and their families trust the security, accuracy, and relevancy of VA.gov

Veterans can manage their health services online

VFS teams can build and deploy high-quality products for Veterans on the Platform

Logged-in users have a personalized experience, with relevant and time-saving features

Logged-in users can update their personal information easily and instantly

Logged-in users can easily track applications, claims, or appeals online

Measures to increase

Completion rate of online transactions

Percent of applications submitted online (vs. paper)

Veteran satisfaction with VA.gov
Benefit use and enrollment, across all business lines

Benefit value (in \$) delivered from online applications or transactions

Number of VA.gov users as a function of total Veteran population

Usage of digital, self-service tools

Measures to decrease

Time to successful complete and submit online transactions

Time to process online applications (vs. paper)

Call center volume, wait time, and time to resolution

Time from online benefit discovery to benefit delivery



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

Reviewed websites

We first planned our research by categories and tasks we wanted to evaluate. Then, we identified sites that made sense to look at based on those groupings:

Manage benefits, claims (view / history) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• CareFirst Blue Cross Blue Shield• State Farm• USAA• Healthcare.gov	Payments, transactions (view / history) <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Bank of America / Merrill Lynch• Fidelity Investments• Chase• Citicards• Federal Student Aid
Government <ul style="list-style-type: none">• USA Jobs / Login.gov• Global Entry• GOV.uk	Personalization, identity* <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Google• Reddit• Facebook <p>* In multiple user interviews, Veterans have stated that they use or reference these sites</p>

Research Findings

Key findings

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1. Personalization

- 1.1 Both civic and private personalized services seek to establish a sense of trust and familiarity.
- 1.2 There are key differences in how private sector and civic services provide personalization.
- 1.3 There are 3 common personalized items shown in a logged-in state.
- 1.4 One difference in the authenticated experience (AE) on VA.gov compared to other sites is the logged-in homepage.
- 1.5 Another key difference in the AE on VA.gov compared to other sites: the information architecture.
- 1.6 There isn't a clear best practice or trend for using "My" or "Your" in a personalized experience.

2. Profile

- 2.1 Interrupt modals and notifications are common approaches to encourage people to complete their profile information.
- 2.2 Most sites don't allow people to remove primary contact information from their profile.
- 2.3 The sections of the VA.gov profile are well aligned with other sites.

3. GOV.UK

- 3.1 GOV.UK is in early stages of personalized user experience.



U.S. Department
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1. Personalization

Research Findings

Both civic and private personalized services seek to establish a sense of trust and familiarity.

They build a sense of knowing the user's needs and motivations by:

- Reflecting known information about a user, such as their name, recent activity, and an overview of their accounts or items in-progress.
- Surfacing tailored recommendations, as well as relevant content and tasks. Examples include:
 - Offering the ability to set an alert or notification for an important task.
 - Recommending relevant services to complement something the user is already engaging with.

USA Jobs adds the user's first name (removed for privacy) to their navigation and uses a personalized welcome message as their page heading.

Their landing page has a tabbed interface focused on content specific to the user, and prioritizes in-progress applications by defaulting to having that tab open.

They also provide easy access to user-defined saved jobs and searches and build trust with the user by offering notifications about important in-progress items.

An official website of the United States government

USAJOBS

Home Profile Documents Preferences

New job status feature
We will now display a job status instead of the application status to help you understand what's happening with the job. The job status tells you where the job is in the hiring process. You can still check for application updates by clicking "Track this application". [Learn more about the job status and how it helps you track jobs and applications.](#)

Welcome [REDACTED]! [Sign Out](#)

Your profile is complete and you're able to apply for jobs on USAJOBS.

2 APPLICATIONS 1 SAVED JOB 0 SAVED SEARCHES

Active Archived

Find & filter applications

Find by job title, agency, or job announcement number

Filter by job status

Accepting applications (0) Hiring complete (0)
 Reviewing applications (2) Job canceled (0)

Sort by

IT Specialist (SYSANALYSIS)
Reviewing applications
Technology Transformation Service
Multiple Locations
Closed 5/14/2021

Email me when a job I've applied for or started an application for will close in three days.
 Email me when a job I've applied for or started an application for has closed.

[Track this application.](#)

Customer Experience Strategist
Reviewing applications
Vet Customer Experience (VCE)
Location Negotiable After Selection, United States
Closed 5/18/2021

Application status
You didn't submit your application.

Notifications

There are key differences in how private sector and civic services provide personalization.

Private Sector	Civic Services
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• One-to-one marketing<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Includes retargeting users with ads or providing recommendations on similar products based on what they've already looked at.• Can have a "creepy" factor• Dedicated real estate on web pages for marketing and services, such as reward programs and special offers.• More robust options for managing personal information such as the ability to add multiple addresses, phone numbers, account nicknames, etc.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The variety of touchpoints across agencies in the government can make integration challenging and cause a lack of cross-departmental links and access points.• Typically face more significant security and technology constraints than the private sector.• Take a basic approach to personalization that reflected 2-3 personalized items (recent activity was most common) upon logging in, compared to 4-5 items on private sector sites.• A focus on only 1-2 primary tasks. This makes sense given that the sites typically provide specific civic services that users cannot receive elsewhere.

Example: Private sector site

On their dashboard, USAA:

- Gives customers the ability to customize their view (add a tile, reorder and customize)
- Dedicates space for marketing in the sidebar
- Serves up suggested products within the account summary in the main content area of the page.

The screenshot shows the USAA dashboard with several key features highlighted:

- Welcome Bar:** Displays "Welcome, [REDACTED]" and "USAA Number. [REDACTED]". It includes a "Last visit: [REDACTED]" timestamp and a "Learn More" link for a volatile market update.
- Header:** A red circle highlights the "ADD A TILE" button in the top right corner of the main content area.
- My Accounts Summary:** This section lists "Non-USAA Accounts" and "Reorder and Customize Groups and Accounts". It displays "Insurance (3)" and "Services (0)".
 - Insurance:** Shows three items: "Auto & Property Bill", "HOMEOWNERS", and "Auto Insurance Policy (TX)". Each item has a dropdown menu labeled "I want to".
 - Services:** Shows two items: "Services Home Value Monitoring" (with a sub-note about getting free monthly estimates) and "Services Car Buying Service" (with a sub-note about shopping for vehicles). Both services have "Learn More" buttons.
- Inbox: My Alerts & Actions:** A callout box highlights "Big changes are coming to the Inbox experience. To access your inbox, select the envelope icon at the top of the page." It also includes a "Edit Account Messaging Preferences" link.
- Your Top Picks:** A large red circle highlights this section, which features a "Because pets are family, too." headline and a "Learn More" button for pet insurance. It also includes a photo of a boy and a dog.
- Pay Bills & Transfer Funds:** Shows a "Pay Bills or schedule a transfer between accounts." section with a "Learn More" button.

Example: Civic service site

Healthcare.gov focuses the user on the primary task of completing their application in progress immediately after logging in.

As a secondary focus, other important applications are surfaced to make it easy for the user to find.

You've almost finished your 2022 application

You've almost finished your application, but you need to take a few more steps to get coverage for 2022:

1. Finish making updates.
2. Submit your application.
3. View your "Eligibility Results."
4. Enroll in a plan by **December 15** to ensure you have coverage for January 1, even if you want to keep the same plan. January 15 is the last day to enroll in coverage or change plans for 2022.

[FINISH MY APPLICATION](#)

Moving to a new state in 2022?

If so, you need to start a new 2022 application. Select "Start New State Application," then select 2022 and your new state from the drop-down list.

[START NEW STATE APPLICATION](#)

[Learn more about how moving to a new state can affect your coverage](#)

Want to stop your coverage for 2022?

Click the button below to go to "My Applications & Coverage," then select your 2021 application, where you can end all of your Marketplace coverage on December 31, 2021.

[GO TO MY APPLICATIONS & COVERAGE](#)

Need to do something else?

Click the button below to go to "My Applications & Coverage," where you can take actions like continuing or updating a different application, or picking up an application from your state or the Marketplace Call Center.

[GO TO MY APPLICATIONS & COVERAGE](#)

Research Findings

There are 3 common personalized items shown in a logged-in state.

Across the sites we reviewed, the user's first name, account summary and action items/notifications were displayed on a user's logged-in homepage to create a sense of personalization.

We counted 20 points of personalization in total, but most were one-offs and not common across sites.

Personalized info	# of sites (of 15)
First name	10
Alerts / notifications	8
Overview of accounts	9
Member id	4
Greeting (e.g. Welcome)	4
Recent activity or status	4
Transactions	3
Earned rewards	3
Group number	2
Custom feed	2
Recommendations	2
Enrollment date	2
Last name	2
User name	1
Membership level	1
Email address	1
Custom ads	1
Language preference	1
Groups	1
Additional user settings to further personalize	1

Research Findings

One difference in the authenticated experience (AE) on VA.gov compared to other sites is the logged-in homepage.

Almost every site (Google being the only exception) we visited had an authenticated homepage with personalized content upon logging in, which was very different from the unauthenticated homepage.

The authenticated homepage on these sites was very similar to My VA:

- Focused on the user's account
- Provide direct access and to in-progress tasks
- Surfacing other relevant, helpful links.

Research Findings

Examples of logged-out vs logged-in homepages

Two screenshots comparing USAJOBS.gov before and after logging in. The logged-out state offers search at the top, followed by a large banner with calls to action to create a profile, learn about the process and explore jobs and hiring paths. The logged-in state is completely different, with a personalization navigation at the top, hidden search, and a dashboard featuring application focused tasks.

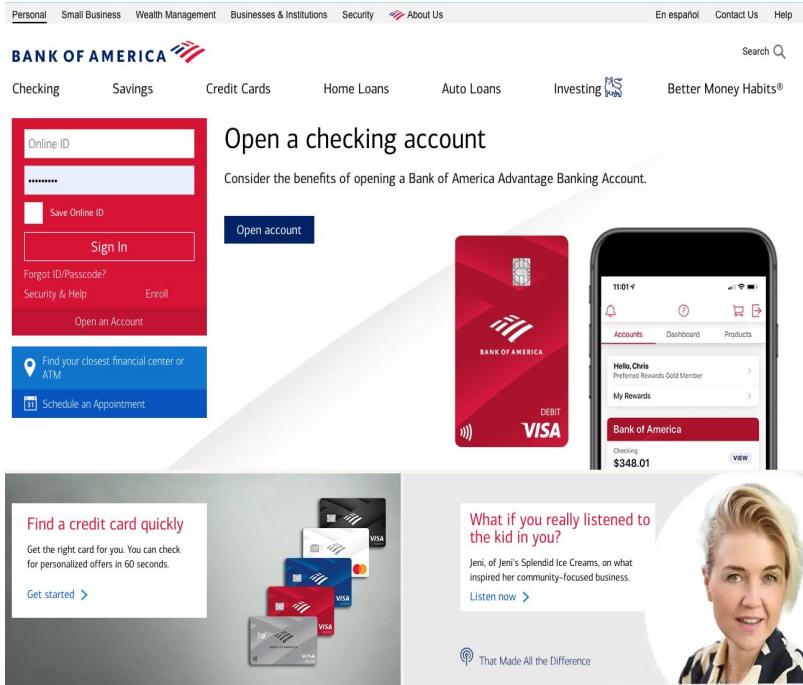
The screenshot shows the USAJOBS.gov homepage. At the top, there are search fields for 'Keywords' and 'City, state, zip or country'. Below these is a large banner with the text 'SHAPE AMERICA'S FUTURE' and 'Find your fit in the federal government'. A red button labeled 'Create profile' is prominently displayed. Below the banner are three tabs: 'Create a USAJOBS profile', 'Federal application process', and 'Explore opportunities'. Under the 'Create a USAJOBS profile' tab, there are four sections: 'Save your favorite jobs and searches', 'Upload your resumes and documents', 'Make your resume searchable', and 'Apply for jobs in the federal government'. Each section has a small icon and a brief description. At the bottom of this section is a red 'Create profile' button and a blue 'Sign in' link. The footer contains a section titled 'Explore hiring paths' with links to various categories like 'Open to the public', 'Federal employees', 'Veterans', etc.

The screenshot shows the USAJOBS.gov homepage for a logged-in user. At the top, there is a personalized 'Welcome' message and a 'Sign Out' link. Below this is a dashboard summary showing '2 APPLICATIONS', '1 SAVED JOB', and '0 SAVED SEARCHES'. There are two job applications listed: 'IT Specialist (SYANALYSIS)' and 'Customer Experience Strategist'. Each application entry includes a status bar indicating the application was submitted on 5/14/2021 and provides a 'Track this application' link. At the bottom, there are links for 'Account' (Home, Profile, Documents, Saved Jobs, Saved Searches, Sign Out) and 'Help' (Help Center, About USAJOBS, FAQs, Get Started, How to..., Working in Government). The footer contains the USAJOBS logo and links to 'Terms and Conditions', 'Budget and Performance', 'FOIA', 'Inspector General', 'No Fear Act Data', 'Privacy Policy', and 'USA.gov'.

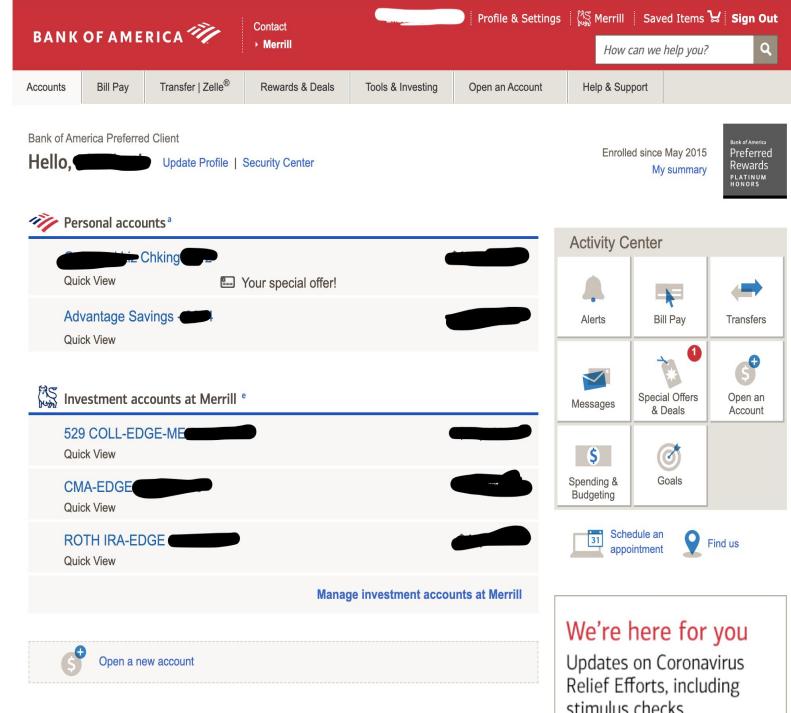
Research Findings

Examples of logged-out vs logged-in homepages

Two screenshots comparing Bank of America's website before and after logging in. The logged-out state has two different navigation menus, one for banking type and one for products. It prominently features a sign in form and large calls to action to engage with banking products. The logged-in state is completely different, with a personalization navigation at the top, a dashboard featuring account management.



The screenshot shows the Bank of America homepage in its logged-out state. At the top, there are two horizontal navigation menus: "Personal", "Small Business", "Wealth Management", "Businesses & Institutions", "Security", and "About Us" on the left, and "En español", "Contact Us", and "Help" on the right. Below the menu bar, the "BANK OF AMERICA" logo is centered. The main content area features a large red call-to-action button with the text "Open a checking account". Above this button, there is a form for entering an "Online ID" and a password, with a "Save Online ID" checkbox. Below the button, there is a sub-section titled "Consider the benefits of opening a Bank of America Advantage Banking Account." On the left side of the main content, there are two blue buttons: "Find your closest financial center or ATM" and "Schedule an Appointment". On the right side, there is a mobile phone displaying the Bank of America mobile app interface. At the bottom of the page, there are two promotional banners: one for "Find a credit card quickly" showing several credit cards, and another for "What if you really listened to the kid in you?" featuring a woman's portrait and a quote from Jeni of Jeni's Splendid Ice Creams.



The screenshot shows the Bank of America homepage in its logged-in state. The top navigation bar is now personalized with the user's name and account information: "Contact Merrill", "Profile & Settings", "Merrill", "Saved Items", "Sign Out", and a search bar. Below the navigation, the "BANK OF AMERICA" logo is followed by "Contact Merrill". The main content area is a dashboard titled "Personal accounts" which lists "Chking" and "Advantage Savings" accounts with "Quick View" buttons. To the right of this is the "Activity Center" which includes sections for "Alerts", "Bill Pay", "Transfers", "Messages", "Special Offers & Deals", "Open an Account", "Spending & Budgeting", and "Goals". At the bottom of the page, there is a callout for "We're here for you" with updates on "Coronavirus Relief Efforts, including stimulus checks".

Research Findings

Examples of logged-out vs logged-in homepages

Two screenshots comparing USAA's website before and after logging in. The top portion of logged-out state features a slideshow with different product information, followed by links under a heading reading "See how we can help today". The logged-in state is completely different, with a personalization navigation at the top, customization options, and a dashboard focused on account management.

This screenshot shows the USAA website homepage in its logged-out state. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for Insurance, Banking, Investing, Retirement, Advice, and Membership. Below the navigation is a search bar and a "Log On" button. The main content area features a dark blue background with a yellow horizontal bar containing the text "CUSTOMIZED AUTO INSURANCE" and "Drive Less. Pay Less.". Below this, there is a sub-headline "Save on auto insurance that fits your budget and needs." and a prominent yellow "Get a Quote" button. A small navigation slider with arrows is visible at the bottom left. The bottom section contains a large banner with the text "See How We Can Help Today" and several promotional cards for different products like Auto Insurance, Checking Accounts, and Preferred Cash Rewards Credit Card.

This screenshot shows the USAA website homepage in its logged-in state. At the top, there is a navigation bar with links for MY USAA, MY TOOLS, PRODUCTS, ADVICE, CLAIMS, and HELP. There is also a search bar, a notification icon with a red "1", and a user profile icon. The main content area features a dark blue background with a yellow horizontal bar containing the text "Welcome, [REDACTED]" and "USAA Number: [REDACTED]". Below this, there is a "Last visit: [REDACTED]" message and a "ADD A TILE" button. A message at the top right reads "During a volatile market... Turn to us for insights." with a "Learn More" link. The central part of the page is titled "My Accounts Summary" and shows sections for "Insurance (3)" and "Services (0)". To the right, there is a sidebar titled "Inbox: My Alerts & Actions" with a message about changes to the inbox experience. Below this, there are sections for "Your Top Picks" (featuring a pet insurance offer) and "Banking" (with a "Pay Bills & Transfer Funds" button). The bottom of the page has a "View All Products and Services" button.

Research Findings

Examples of logged-out vs logged-in homepages

Two screenshots comparing Healthcare.gov before and after logging in. The top portion of logged-out state features a navigation menu with 4 items, search, a large “Last chance for coverage heading” followed by two links; one to apply and one to log in. Under the heading, there are several links to get help, tips, and learn about the application process. The logged-in state is completely different, with a personalized navigation to see applications, coverage, profile, and messages. The heading includes the user’s first name and asks “What would you like to do?”, and is followed by sections for getting coverage and managing existing applications.

HealthCare.gov

Get Coverage Keep or Update Your Plan See Topics + Get Answers

ESPAÑOL LOG IN

Last chance for coverage that starts Jan 1 – enroll by Dec 15

First time applying here? Take the first step to apply

Already have a Marketplace plan? Log in to renew/change plans

Looking for coverage for a small business? Learn more

Marketplace coverage & Coronavirus Learn more

A Find local help

Quick start guide

\$ New law, save more

Act by Dec 15

See options Get tips Get more savings See deadlines

Get important news & updates Sign up for email and text updates to get deadline reminders and other important information.

Sign up

ESPANOL LOG IN

Healthcare.gov blog December 02 Attention: Less than 2 weeks left to get Marketplace coverage that starts Jan 1

HealthCare.gov

Anton Weiss Logout Español

Anton, what would you like to do?

Get coverage for:

Select Year Select State APPLY OR RENEW

Don't see your state? Visit the website of your state-based Marketplace, or call the Marketplace Call Center at 1-800-318-2596 (TTY:1-855-889-4325). [Find your State's website.](#)

Not sure which year to choose? You may qualify for 2021 coverage through a Special Enrollment Period or your state's Medicaid or Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP). [Learn more about Special Enrollment Periods.](#)

Your existing applications:

2022 Alabama application for Individual & Family Coverage	Status: In progress ID#: 6982614	REMOVE
2022 Virginia application for Individual & Family Coverage	Status: In progress ID#: 6939397	REMOVE

Need to find your application? Take the next steps here if you applied with a paper application or the Marketplace Call Center, or you were referred by your appropriate state agency. [Find my application.](#)

If you were referred here by your state agency and something's changed since you applied, like your income or family size, select "APPLY OR RENEW."

If you think you may be exempt from the requirement to enroll in coverage, [get more information and download applications here.](#)

Another key difference in the AE on VA.gov compared to other sites: the information architecture.

Another difference we noticed was in the information architecture after logging in – most sites had more distinct breakdown for personalized content at the main navigation level than we do on VA.gov. Of the 15 sites we reviewed:

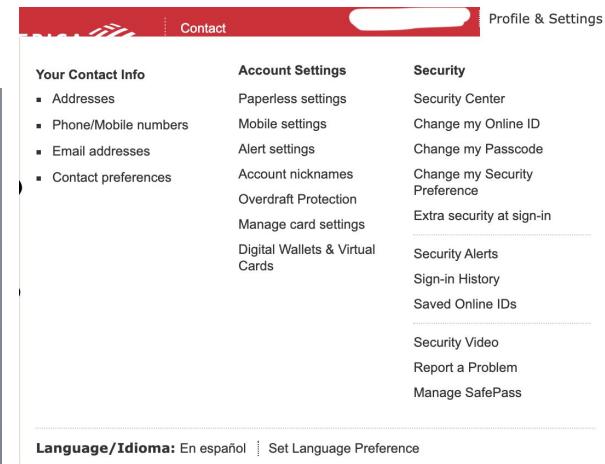
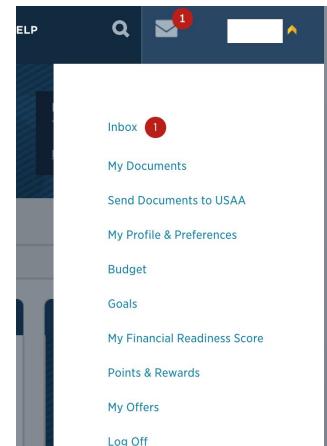
- 7 had a navigation point with the label "Profile" in the authenticated main menu.
 - 3 of these included an additional label to add more information about what lives in that section. Examples include "Profile and Settings" and "My profile & preferences"
 - 3 others had a separate navigation point for settings and preferences.
- Instead of "Profile", 8 used alternate labels such as "User settings" or "Personal information"

Most of the sites also had completely different navigation after logging in.

Research Findings

Examples of authenticated navigation show how profiles are structured.

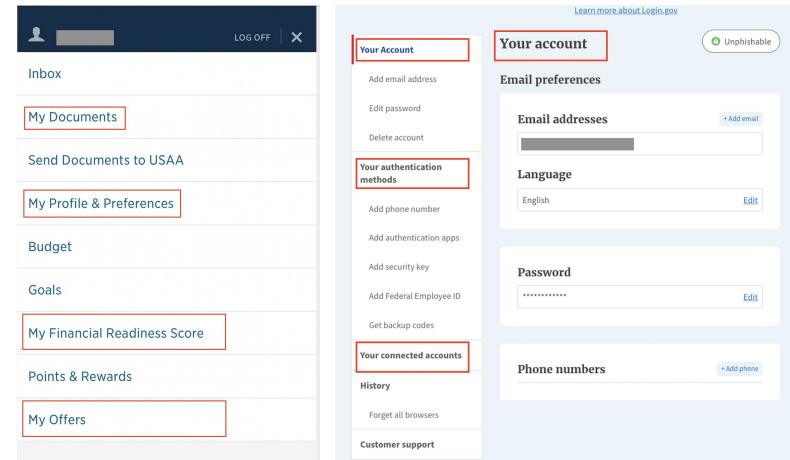
- **USAJobs:** Home, Profile, Documents, Preferences
- **Healthcare.gov:** My applications & coverage, My profile, Messages
- **USAA:** Inbox, My documents, Send Documents to USAA, My Profile & Preferences, Budget, Goals, My Financial Readiness Score, Points & Rewards, My Offers, Log Off
- **Bank of America:** 4 sections under a Profile & Settings menu
 - Your contact info, Account Settings, Security, Language
 - Each section sub-navigation containing between 2-12 links



There isn't a clear best practice or trend for using "My" or "Your" in a personalized experience.

Of the 15 sites we reviewed:

- 3 use "My"
- 4 use "Your"
- 2 mixed the terms, using "My" in navigation points, and "Your" for section labels in the page body
- 6 didn't include either one, or any other variation



USAA (left) uses "My" in their navigation; Login.gov (right) uses "Your".

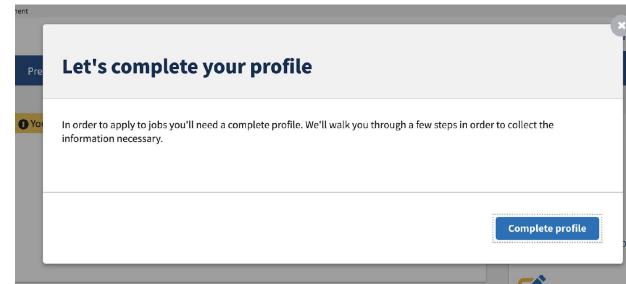
2. Profile

Research Findings

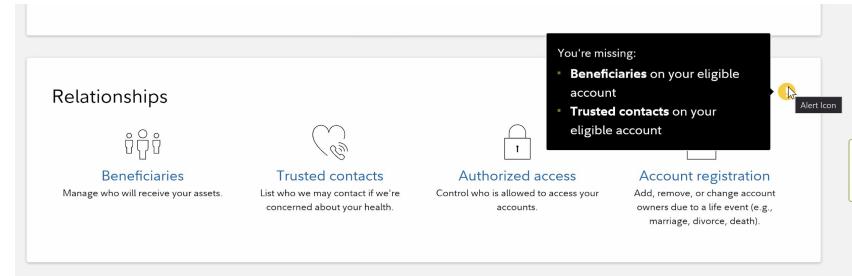
Interrupt modals and notifications are common approaches to encouraging people to complete their profile information.

8 of the 15 sites we visited had a UX to encourage profile completeness. The approach was varied across the sites, from a small warning icon next to missing information to redirecting users to a full page or modal dedicated to providing missing information.

Almost all allowed users to proceed onto other tasks by closing notifications or choosing a "remind me later" option.



Screenshot of modal with heading that reads “Let’s complete your profile”



Screenshot of tooltip containing a list of missing information from the Relationships section of a user’s profile

Example of site takeover to encourage profile completeness



Log Out



Review your profile

Keep your profile current so you don't miss any important information about your account.

Please review and confirm your information to continue uninterrupted access to your account.

[Continue](#)

[Legal Information](#) | [Privacy & Security](#) | [Software Requirements](#) | [Web Accessibility](#) | [ATM Locator](#)
[Financial Information](#) | [Routing & Executions](#) | [Business Continuity](#) | [Deposit Account & Money Fund Rates \(PDF\)](#) |
System availability and response time are subject to market conditions and possible unscheduled outages.
Investing involves risks. There is always the potential of losing money when you invest in securities.
Bank of America, Merrill, their affiliates, and advisors do not provide legal, tax, or accounting advice. Clients should consult their legal and/or tax advisors before making any financial decisions.
Merrill Lynch, Pierce, Fenner & Smith Incorporated (also referred to as 'MLPF&S' or 'Merrill') makes available certain investment products sponsored, managed, distributed or provided by companies that are affiliates of Bank of America Corporation ('BofA Corp.').
Merrill, Merrill Lynch and Merrill Edge investment advisory programs are offered by MLPF&S. MLPF&S and Managed Account Advisors LLC (MAA) are registered investment advisers. Investment adviser registration does not imply a certain level of skill or training.
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NEED HELP? CALL 877.653.4732. We are available for you 24/7

Example of site encouraging profile completeness

Citicards lets the user know the text notification is not available because the user doesn't have a mobile number on file. However, this falls short because they do not provide an easy way to add one.

The screenshot shows two sections of a website:

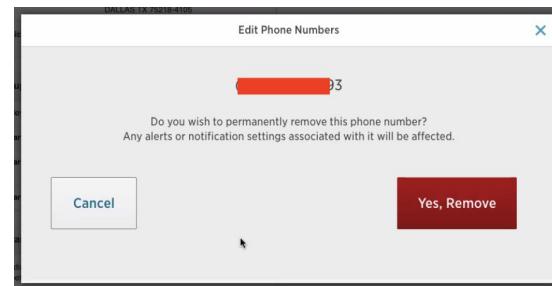
- Balance**: A section titled "Balance" with a "Remove My Selections" link. It says "See your current balance or get notified when your account exceeds or falls below a specific amount." Below this, under "Account Balance", there are two options: "Email" (unchecked) and "Text" (unchecked). The "Text" option is labeled "Not Available" with the message "No mobile number on file. Please add a mobile phone number." followed by a question mark icon.
- Balance Amount Exceeds**: A section titled "Balance Amount Exceeds" with a question mark icon. It has similar options for "Email" (unchecked) and "Text" (unchecked), both labeled "Not Available" with the message "No mobile number on file. Please add a mobile phone number."

Most sites don't allow people to remove primary contact information from their profile.

Primary contact information (email, phone, address, etc) couldn't be removed from the profile on 11 of the sites we looked at. 3 of those sites did allow removal of secondary contact information, such as a second phone number.

Recently, VA.gov exposed the remove functionality by moving it outside of edit mode, so we wanted to see how that compared to other sites. Of the sites we looked at that allow removal of contact information:

- 2 had the remove functionality next to an edit button.
- 3 had the remove functionality nested within the edit function.
- All showed something similar to VA.gov's "Are you sure?" modal, explaining the consequences of the removal action.



The sections of the VA.gov profile are well aligned with other sites.

VA.gov's profile has 4 sections that are aligned with sites we visited:

- Account security
- Personal information
- Contact information
- Notification settings

Terminology and IA was slightly different in some cases (e.g. "Security settings" instead of "Account security", or "Personal and contact information in one section"), but not so different that changes are recommended. Generally, these are sections people would expect to find in a modern, personalized experience.

Some sites had a "Documents" section in their personalized section; this is the only section we identified that could be a useful addition to the VA.gov profile.

3. GOV.UK

GOV.UK is in early stages of personalized user experience.

Our VA.gov team frequently looks to GOV.UK for inspiration, so we wanted to learn more about how they approach personalization. Their Accounts team is in the beginning stages of that work, which includes:

- A "Save your work and return" flow for applications
- Letting people sign up for notifications on certain pages (e.g. COVID travel updates)
- Running experiments to refine technical execution by putting work-in-progress on staging and only testing internally or with a private, invite-only beta testing group.
 - Since personal data comes up, they frequently do audio-only calls and monitor analytics during testing to track activity
- Exploring how they might reflect the fact that some content is relevant and some isn't (e.g. if you live in Scotland vs. England)
- Exploring how to handle accounts across government agencies.

Recommendations

Recommendations

Personalization and profile comparative analysis | December 2021

1. Continue working toward making My VA the logged-in homepage.
2. Reevaluate the way we encourage people to complete their profile information.
3. As a team, let's consider and discuss questions about personalization and civic services.
4. Incorporate transparency into personalization.



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

Recommendations

Continue working toward making My VA the logged-in homepage.

The [goals we've outlined for My VA](#) are aligned with Veteran's needs, and modern public and private sector site experiences. We should continue working toward the goal of providing Veterans with a task-based, personalized landing page upon logging in.

Recommendations

Reevaluate the way we encourage people to complete their profile information.

To start this process, we'll need to consider how complete profile information can improve a Veteran's experience with VA, and how that aligns with OCTO's North Star goals.

Our current approach is light, with a simple "Edit your profile to add a [missing data]". While this has the benefit of being unobtrusive, it's easy to skip over it. We can use design and content to make missing information clearer and better communicate the value to Veterans of adding missing information.

The image shows a screenshot of a VA.gov profile page. It features two sections: 'Preferred name' and 'Pronouns'. Each section includes a descriptive text, an 'Edit' button, and a small circular icon. The 'Preferred name' section also includes a placeholder text 'Edit your profile to add a preferred name.' The 'Pronouns' section includes a placeholder text 'Edit your profile to add a pronoun.'

Preferred name Edit your profile to add a preferred name. Edit
Pronouns Edit your profile to add a pronoun. Edit

VA.gov profile blank state, December 2021

Recommendations

As a team, let's consider and discuss questions about personalization and civic services.

Personalization is a sensitive and important aspect of the Veteran experience. When it's done well, it can foster trust and greatly improve Veteran self-service. As a team, we have an opportunity to make a dedicated effort for learning more about the work we're doing. This would be particularly valuable when kicking off larger initiatives.

For example, here are some thought provoking questions we encountered in our research:

- What are the ethics in government delivering services based on predicting people's needs?
- Which information and services do Veterans actually need to live their lives better?
- Is it acceptable if some people choose to opt-in to personalized services, and everyone else gets the standard version? Would this lead to two-tier public services? (And would it matter if it did?)

If it's not appropriate for product teams to spend time on this directly, it could still be beneficial for teams to hear how OCTO considers these types of questions as they establish business objectives.

Recommendations

Incorporate transparency into personalization.

In order to build and maintain trust, we should be transparent about how we know things about Veterans and how their data is being used. It can feel creepy when websites seem to know things about you and it's not clear how they know that. And, it can feel invasive when websites ask for your information without making the reason for asking clear.

In our recent personal information update, we added an FAQ to let Veterans know why we're asking for this information. This is a good example of transparency and what we can continue to do moving forward. As we add roll out features related to personalization, we should ensure to get Veteran feedback to understand the level of transparency they expect and need to maintain trust in VA.

Appendix

Articles

- [5 things to think about when personalizing government digital services](#)
- [Reimagine an age of more personalized services for citizens](#)
- [Accenture's 2019 Tech Trends, Trend 2 "Get to Know Me" \(page 29\)](#)
- [What if public services could be more like Amazon's?](#)
- [Creating a personalized, digital experience in government](#)
- [Introducing GOV.uk accounts](#)
- [Using accounts to personalize the experience on GOV.uk](#)
- [How we designed the GOV.uk accounts trial](#)
- [Five things we learned from researching the GOV.uk account](#)

Documentation

[Research plan](#)