**Conversation Guide for a Board Appeal (NOD) Usability Study, March 2021**

**Intro - 5 minutes**

Start recording.

* I have started recording. I'd like to confirm: Are you comfortable if I record my screen and the audio as we talk today? Yeah, sure.

**Warm-up Questions - 5 minutes**

Before we look at the website, let's start with a few warm-up questions.

* Can you tell me a little about yourself or your service history?
* Have you used the VA.gov website before?
* If yes, what was the last thing you were doing or looking for on the site?
* How was that experience?
* Have you ever tried to file a claim for a disability with the VA?
* If yes, how was that experience?
* Have you ever filed an appeal on a decision you received from the VA?
* If yes, how was that experience? In 1985 I was doing my physical training and was hit by a pickup truck on fort Meade, I broke my back and was laid up in the army hospital, placed in a brace. They didn’t throw me out I wanted to stay in but I could run or swim for the pt. test. When I retired and put in my claim they gave me a 10 percent and I couldn’t walk. I went back and put in an appeal for another look at and they told me you needed to have all of these letters and people you know. This was in 2008, my back worsened so in Jun 2011 I requested it again. The va wanted my records ad they already had them I had a break in service , they didn’t have anything about my service beforehand, I didn’t have the records. I had to go to PT and I had to take medicine to relieve the pain, I cant sit for a long time. Then he asked about my sex life, he went into details, I don’t think I was married at that time. I asked what I needed to do with the documents I brought with me. He told me that he didn’t know what to do with them, send them to the VA in Baltimore on your way home. He didn’t want them, why did I go through all of that. I mailed them to the Baltimore VA. They did receive them because I have the certified mail receipt, I got a letter that they are evaluating it but do to the amount of claims it may take a lone time, then they denied it even though I had the supporting evidence. The VA provided an Xray from 2008. Then they asked if I wanted to reopen a claim for my left foot. My left foot had nothing to do with my claim. I sent this to everyone I could think about, the congressmen, VA, I have papers and papers. If finally went back one more time and they gave me 30 percent for hearing loss. The VA last year finally gave me hearing aids. As far as I am concerned, making adjustments, it is crazy. If you have PTSD you are 100 percent. I am 79 and have terrible arthritis then they tell me they will send a VSO to help but I haven’t heard from anyone. The only respect I have for the VA is that it seems the last year they have taken more interest in the veterans, I had a check up by the doctor. It was a good exam.
* Let’s take a look at the prototype now. Since this is a prototype, some buttons and features will work, some will not.

**Task 1: [Request a Board appeal]:**

Imagine that you have logged in to VA.gov and you have navigated to this page (Board Appeals Info page) because you disagree with a decision VA has made about one or more issues you have submitted a claim for.

Starting on this page, please walk me through how you would request a Board Appeal (also called Notice of disagreement). Please tell me what you see on each page, what you think the purpose of it is and what you would do on the page. (It is helpful if you think out loud, so I can follow what you are thinking, trying to do, and experiencing).

**Board Appeals info page**

* Take a look at this page and tell me what you see here, and what you would do on this page: (reading page), You cant request to reviews in a row and if they say no you are screwed. I tried twice and here I am 20 years later. I am looking at the note to opt into the new process(reading note). This is instructions on why to do it. It sounds like it wipes out what you had before. I think it is a lot of red tape paperwork and there would be no paper trail from before and you have to start all over again.
* Is anything on this page unclear or confusing? Let me read it quick (reading page) I never had a representative, they said there is someone with the American legion. I signed up for it but no one contacted me and I didn’t know who to call. One year, you could be dead by then. Let me readd it again. It says you cant use the same evidence again, doesn’t that contradict it? More than a year, this is the part where I said the hell with it. For in person go to Washing, D.C are you kidding me. If I click on request a board review what would happen.
* What is the most unclear: it takes a whole year for anyone to react. By that time things change, people you talked to could have moved, retired, or died.
* Anything to make it clear or pick the option: the first one says veteran law judge will review what you have already submitted and have a hearing. That doesn’t make sense to me. If I were to resubmit this that I submitted in 2012 and its 2021. My condition has expanded, I would be able to mention that it wouldn’t make sense.
* Other comments: When I see the words veteran law judge, that turns me off. In the army I sat on review board and some people didn’t care what was in front of them and didn’t care about the person. I don’t see the humanity of the judge or review board would be.
* How to continue: mail, it may take a year to get to them, let me check out the PDF. In person, yeah right. Download va form, there’s nothing to go to the VA office near you, its hard to get into them with COVID. For Fort Meade you have to make an appointment then wait outside. Last time I was there, there was 2 people in there and separated 10 feet apart.

**Veteran detail pages**

* Comments: No problem with that, then continue right. That is very easy. You can click no; I was supposed to but I didn’t have one. Representative names, john smith he’s still around.
* Having to input the name/email: this is easy to navigate, it is simple questions I don’t see an issue.

**Issues eligible for review page**

* Tell me what you think the purpose of this page is and what you would do on this page: Why aren’t all of my issues listed here, okay I can add an issue here. Clicked add and click save. Okay look at that. (reading check box) So now it seems to me they are going back and taking a look at previous records.
* When you read that and the following sentence, what do you think when you read it: Reading page: So that means if I submitted in 2012, they wont look at that but they will look at the new stuff. That’s the way I understand it. I have to resubmit everything I did in 2012 so they can start from scratch is how I read it.
* Is anything on this page unclear or confusing? Yeah I don’t like withdrawing any issues. That tells me they wont look at it and anything in your files they wont look at and start all over again. The funny part is the last phrase, the board will consider your claim then let you know in a year should be added in there. No, it is easy to fill out but the bottom part for understanding, that’s well.
* Do you understand what opting into the new appeals process means, term clear: legacy appeals process, I think what I went through in 2008 and 2012, it was a long process and doesn’t look like they got anything done. When they told me in April it would take awhile and three days later they denied it. I don’t think they looked at anything.

Imagine that you see only half of the issues you have previously registered, on this page. What would you think and do?

Imagine now that you want to make a Board Appeal for 2 issues: let's say for Tinnitus and Arthritis (in your left ankle). Let's assume you have all the info and documents at hand to make a Board Appeal: I would click the box for I understand, and then they would get the form talking about arthritis and tinnitus and click continue , wait a year and a half to get an answer.

Was it clear you needed to check the box: it seems to me I just forgot to check the box.

What it that you didn’t see it or think you didn’t need to: I just failed to, I thought I was just looking at arthritis but I guess they wanted tinnitus to.

Why aren’t my issues listed here link, thoughts: It is a bail out. It says they will get to it when they can if they get to it at all. It doesn’t provide warm fuzzy feels, that for sure.

6 issues in va system, come here and you only see 2 of the issues, how would you react, thoughts: You mean like headaches not checked.

Clarification, coming to the page with these three listed but you know you have a total of 6: I would go to add issue I guess. That tells me to add them that I don’t see here.

Thoughts: Yeah there’s no problem with that. It seems like it makes sense.

You are saying that is just because it takes a while to get to it: eyes or if they ever get to it.

How to continue: Click I understand and continue.

**Board review option page**

* What do you see on this page and what would you do here? Select a board review option. The first one looks at current evidence, look it over and make a decision. The second one, now it will take two years. Third option: It is basically what I did initially from 2008, I pout in more then told me they didn’t know what to do with it and to drop it off at the va. I didn’t know there was a judge, someone behind the counter said thank you. I should have asked them what record they said they didn’t have my military record.
* Is anything on this page unclear or confusing?
* Is there any information missing on this page? Other than the law judges I know how to do it.
* Infomration was good: Yes.

Imagine that you have learned from your VSO (Veterans Service Organization) or attorney, that you need to submit new evidence, but that a hearing is not necessary. What would you do on this page?

**Additional evidence page**

* What do you see on this page and what would you do here? You can submit it by mail, fax. I would submit more evidence. I know how to do all of this stuff.
* Is anything on this page unclear or confusing?  No, I understand all of that.
* Is there any information missing on this page?

Imagine you have one piece of evidence you want to submit. What would you do on this page?

**Review application page**

* Tell me what you think the purpose of this page is and what you would do here: That’s easy.
* When you see the edit button, would that be edited here or take you back to the page: Good questions, I don’t know it is always a surprise when you open it up. For example if I am looking at tinnitus I would think there it says it has bold letters, I should be able to add there. That’s how I look at it right now.
* Is anything on this page unclear or confusing?  No, not really.
* Thoughts of last page and what you can do: when I say print this for your records, what comes up if I hit that. Does the blue box?
* What do you expect to see: I don’t know it only gives you your name, submitted and reviewed. It doesn’t tell me where it went or who got it, no phone numbers, or emails.
* What would you like to do: I would like to see my records, who to contact, contact numbers and emails. A burb on the issues.
* Are all the information you need on this page?
* Any other comments?
* Track status or claim button, did you see it: Yes.
* What do you expect to see when it is clicked: where my appeal is at this point in the system. I don’t know the process but it may go trough accepted, then sent to another office then on going review stages and maybe a decision or appeal. 4 -5 steps there.

Imagine that you come to the page called Review Application. You review all the info on this page and notice that your old phone number is listed here. What would you do?

**Post-Task Interview - 5-10 minutes**

* Having gone through the form, how was that experience? Other than the comments I made about the 1 year and the judges. I don’t like some of the reason you can or can’t submit and the legacy files. The form is self-explanatory, you may not agree but it is not difficult to do. My personal thing because I am a dinosaur in this, I don’t trust online things such as online banking if I don’t have to. I would rather sit down and talk to a human. Normally you get menus and you have to press it and don’t know if anyone is actually listening to you. If this form works great, but you would need to submit and test it.
* What was most unclear or confusing in the form? The thing is told you about and how they were worded.
* Was there any information that were missing?
* What was most helpful in the form? It was easy to navigate
* What is one thing that could be improved in the form?
* To the issues page, if you scroll down a little more, lets focus in on the opt in information, is there any information that could be added to this page to make it easier or clear to understand: let me read it one more time. This is telling me that the issues I selected form the leafy page, it is okay to use in the new process. Then it tells me that it is withdrawing the issues. It contradicts it, select the files form legacy, you are allowing into the new decision. That tells me that they are going to look at the legacy appeals but below that it tells you that you are withdrawing it form the legacy process, it cancelled out the above. Someone has to go into the English language and have a meeting on that one.
* Any other comments? No, but I hope what I talked to you about has some value. The va from when I started to today, there has been a 100 percent turn around in how they contact you and talk to you. At least the doctor in Fort Meade took a taking to you, ear clinic and eye clinic was good.

**Thank-You and Closing - 2 minutes**

We really appreciate you taking the time to share your thoughts with us today. Your feedback is so helpful to us as we continue to work on the site and make sure it really works for Veterans.

Thanks! Lastly, do you know any other Veterans, caregivers, or service members who might be willing to participate in a future user research session? If Yes: Thank you! I'll have our team send you an email with a little blurb that you can pass along.

Great, well thank you so much again, and enjoy the rest of your day!