**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? Yes.

**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? Basically my service history is I wen in in 86 which was right in the hard times of Vietnam. My earlier time was uneventful than I came down with orders to Vietnam, my MOS wasn’t what I ended up doing which was fine with me. I ended up being a bit away from Cambodia. Just that I really don’t have hard feelings, matter of fact if push came to shove I would’ve went back if I needed. When I came back was when I got out of the service. I did another year in the reserves; I made another rank.
* Have you used the VA.gov website before? Yes.
* If yes, what was the last thing you were doing or looking for on the site? Yeah, I was trying to catch up on the latest VA information that they have down as far as claims/appeals. I try to read up on the bills passed that could affect us, I try to read up on those as much as I can. I use it for my health stuff to like going into ebenfits and doing a lot of that. I also hand my claims and appeals through there if I disagree or approve of the claim. I have two pending right now, one in DC and one on diabetes that I had a C&P on last week.
* How was that experience? Since I have been digging into it the last few years it is not frustrating. Sometimes it takes me a little while if I don’t put the correct sentence structure, I may have to go through it before I find the right one. I tailor my search to specific if I can that way it gives me what I want without having to scroll through to see which ones I want or don’t want.
* Have you ever tried to file a claim for a disability with the VA? Yes
* If yes, how was that experience? Probably the same as all of the others. Not much deviation from the ones from a year or two years ago to what it is now.
* Frustrating with time and lack of communication: Yes and I think they could do a little more like have more personal to handle the claims. there’s no reason why in a months’ time you should have another 122-20 thousand claims that are starting to add on to the new program than legacy that you haven’t done yet. Some of the easier ones that don’t need to sitting there a long time are the ones that are not complicated with operations, cancer, those you have to look at carefully but there are a lot of claims that go to the appeal board that could be done in a weeks’ time or less that should not have to wait that long. They should have separated them out.
* If yes, how was that experience? Yes, I still have one pending in Washington. It is long and frustrating. When I put in my notice of disagreement and filed it. it went to the regional and form there is went to the board of appeals. There wasn’t much I could do after that expect wait, it was well over a year before I heard something from there, it may have been closer to two years.
* Did you get a result you wanted or not: No I did not, they did not give me a decision. They remained it back down. When they did that, a month later they sent me a letter with details of what they would do when remained it. I did another C&P; from there it went back up to the board of appeals. I have not heard a decision yet; the board down here didn’t agree either so it went back up. They did the same thing as they did originally which was deconvolve everything. For a final on it a few months. Maybe before January, it ahs been there for a few months so far. Its not the decisions, its how long it takes. There are 400, 500 thousand people ahead of you. If they are ahead of you there will be a long time before you get anything. There are veterans that could get sicker or pass away. That’s the truth of it.
* 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: I see the first one down here that I read and it talks about COVID. Then scrolling down, can I reschedule a board appeal. Knowing me I would read it all so I know if it is for it. You cannot request two board review at the same time and then have it say 1 year from your letter to appeal. My issue is contested claim, what does that mean.
* What do you expect it to mean: possibly have a lawyer do something with it. I am not sure what a lawyer could do with it. There would still be a claim, it is contested anyways if we decided to do a board review. Isn’t that the same as a contacted claim.
* What are your first impressions of this page?
* Is anything on this page unclear or confusing? It is about opting into the new VA process. (reading box). Is it saying this is a paper form or is the request form now online and come up when you go into the process that says appeal process.
* Is this self-explanatory and easy to understand or not: when I read the note just then it put the question of is this part of the online process or do we need to revert back to the paper form. Maybe they need to state that you need to check the online process instead of it being confusing.
* Other changes: no everything else is good.
* Anything confusing or unclear: Reading page, I have a rep but my representative wherever has never contacted me about anything. I have done everything myself since 2006.
* Would you have liked them to contact them or prefer to do it alone: I would prefer if my representative would contact me if I did I it wrong and suggest a way to make a point in my claim. I see where I get a decision letter it goes to my rep at the veteran organization. No one ahs ever contacted me and I don’t know if they have copied, none of the reps have contacted me about anything so I have been forced to do it on my own.
* Option 1-3 does anything stand out: (reading page), That means that’s where things start to pile up. I have no issues with the law judge but they don’t do it in a timely fashion, having it there since 2014 then it having to go back up, is it just sitting on the desk, or sitting in a cabinet until they get there. Option 2 says submit more evidence. Option 1 says you cannot and cannot have a hearing. Option 3 says the law judge will look at the new evidence and have a hearing.
* What would you do to continue the process: I would still eb confused on option 1-3 based on option 1 , 2 says the same thing but submit evidence, and three says hearing and evidence but option1 says neither. I don’t understand, is it other than a law judge doing it. direct review, only a law judge can do that. You can request online, mail, you can download the PDF, they provide the address to mail or fax it which is better than mailing.
* What about online, how would you do that: I have not done it online, here on this page it doesn’t tell you.
* Hard to notice the button: Yeah I saw it but I wasn’t sure it would let me click it.
* Do you think any information is missing on this page?

**Veteran detail pages**

* Page: I can see how it provides the details and ask for personal information. Once it is filled out you continue, It looks to be general information and the third page is about the rep. I would have to put no. Even though I have one, I have never been contacted so I would say no. then put in the information and I have never had their contact information.
* Is anything unclear or confusing on these pages?
* Do you think any information is missing on this page?
* Any other comments?

**Issues eligible for review page**

* Tell me what you think the purpose of this page is and what you would do on this page: on this page I see tinnitus and headaches. It says you can add issues, if they aren’t want you wanted you can add the issue. Then you would put the date of decision, would it be the current date or the date of the decision it was rated.
* What do you expect: since I reread it. I see now I understand it. on some paper ones it may have given that but it wasn’t exactly. You would see that they want the date they wanted from the letter in the mail, then save it.
* How to continue: click on tinnitus and arthritis.
* If you see 2 of the issues listed but you know that you have 6 issues within the system, where would you try to find more information as why there are issues not listed: Looking at this you can add the issue. So you would click on that and add all three of the issues to put on the page.
* If you are on this page and only saw some and some were missing, you would add them: Yeah. It is easier to see because it is under the last one. If you have diabetes, you can see add issue so click on that and add the issues. That part of it comes up and type in the issues, and then its add. It looks simple and easy to do. No changes.
* Do you see anywhere that you can learn more why some issues are missing on the page: The only place is see would be in your VA record and if an issue is missing you can add it by clicking add issue button. Then why aren’t all my issues listed here, they tell you the issue is not in the system yet if it is recent claim decision and they could still be processing it.
* What are you think: I like the information but is someone that is not computer literate figure it out.
* Some people may not see it: I definitely think some people would not see the link to use the drop down, why not have the why aren’t my issues in bold blue letters and provide a dropdown. Someone will get frustrated because what to they do and where do they go. They may not know that you can click on it.
* What next to continue: click the box (reading page), I like that.
* Is that self-explanatory: yes it is.
* Is there any information missing on this page? No, I think it is good like it is.
* Terms that is confusing or unclear: some people may question what the legacy appeal is. That may be the only word that may need to be explained more. I think most people would get it.

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.

**Board review option page**

* What do you see on this page and what would you do here? (reading page) I think this is sufficient I don’t think you need any more information. It is self-explanatory. It is written good here, you must read it to make sure you get it right. If you have a lawyer doing it they should automatically know if you have a veteran law lawyer doing it. Normal people would look at it and go through the options. Some people may do that one and look it up to know what it means.

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? (reading page), see this is the same thing again that may need to be in bold letters. The drop down box says you can submit it by mailing it or you can send by fax.
* Is anything on this page unclear or confusing?  No. The only thing is the last part where it asks if you would like to submit now or later. If you do it down you have to go download it. There it is, you can upload the documents in PDF, JPEG, or PNG. (reading page), they provide the guideline which is what most people use anyways and it is mostly pdf. It is explanatory.
* 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: lets see, okay you have to go in and click on the gray area if you want to look at the details. You can click on it and it will take you back to make sure you didn’t make a mistake. Okay, good.
* What do you think: this page is your contact information which is good and have to make sure it is correct, representative information, then it goes to your issues for review. Board review options submit evidence information. It is self-explanatory.
* Submission: Yes it is and the fact that you can print it for your records. Will it print the entire appeal form itself.
* Would you like to print the page or the whole form: I think the whole form would eb more beneficial.
* Any other comments? See the blue for learn more, I like that because it tells you that you can click on it. the ones in all black it may be hard to figure out to click on it or not. The biggest part is tracking, tracking status on appeal or claim. That is 60-70 percent of people are looking for. We can go in and track the status of what’s going on with it, we know it won’t be over night.
* What do you expect or hope to see when click track: that they are processing it and at a certain stage in the process instead of telling me it is still there. That’s what the old system did, it just told you, you are in this 350000 people ahead of you but not if someone is looking at this part or processing this part or if a law judge is looking at it and has questions. None of that is on the status.

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? I like it a lot. The only problem I see is what I gave you at the beginning and end about some of the drop down information needs to be in blue and bold so people know they can click it. Other than that this should not be tough to do, I like all of it other than those changes and the fact that you can track the status. it will be interesting when I do one because I have one coming up.

**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!