**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? Absolutely.

**Warm-up Questions - 5 minutes**

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

* If yes, what was the last thing you were doing or looking for on the site? I would have to ask my wife. I am sorry sir I don’t use it my wife does. It was about a week ago she printed something for me. Benefit letters.
* Easy for her: It was, she says it was.
* If yes, how was that experience? The last time we did that, what we did was we found out through the 10th command. My wife is my caregiver, she makes sure the details like bills, I am not good with anymore so she does that. We negotiated it and found out entry level are the ones that you give the original claim to, appeals and other things. No background, just someone with a high school education. Its not math, its medical records. We went to the top; we made our own relationship with the people in charge. The last time we got it, we talked to the one in charge and they went through and said what they would do and its what we needed.
* Have you ever filed an appeal on a decision you received from the VA? Not a board appeal but we have appealed. My wife had to become an expert in the va systems and we mentor other veterans. It is a nightmare, it is just simply put, when you get out you have 90 days. They rush you through the process and depending on your town, you go to the rep and they kind of walk you through and if you don’t go through the DVA program you are a little fish in big water. No disrespect but right now the va is known for not knowing when you will get, make it hard, make you and, and make you feel like you don’t deserve it, I mentor 4 people right now that have been denied and going through appeals. The person that appeals it doesn’t have medical background and just stamps it. I think any thing to help these vet3erans and walk them through it. I was Marine Corps special forces, I have PTSD, 2 TBI and a broken back, it took me 13 years of my wife going back and fourth to get me to 100 percent, this has to stop and any way I can help I will. Right now it is crap.
* Are you helping other appeals or claims: Helping with their appeals, not a board appeal but an appeal. Is it the same thing. Not going up in front of the judge with a lawyer.
* 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: For some reason, this first paragraph sticks out at me. It is almost overkill. (reading page), Why do you have to put a judge for veteran law will be put there. When you mention Washing DC. That’s basically the big mother fucker in charge. They are already being told now, see what I am saying. If it is worded in a delicate way, you want them to come back not say bad things. They have been consistently told no. Ill put it this way, I had a pa look at my skull and was like you should be over that by now. It is like they are designed to make you mad or like you need to suck it up and you are making them waste their time. (reading page), What’s another word to appeal, out of curiosity. (reading page), as a veteran it is like oh another big hurdle, I better lawyer up and spend this money. Anyone that gets a lawyer isn’t good. Then they take a percentage that the vet gets.
* What are your first impressions of this page?
* Is anything on this page unclear or confusing? (blue box), sorry I am reading it for the third time. What does it mean you cant request a board review twice in a row for the same claim. Is that if they say no on one claim you can’t request another.
* What do you expect: at first I thought it was two board reviews in a row for the same claim, you would not do another one on it. Or you can’t have another board review, for some reason and have a claim and not pursue it after it ahs been started, you wouldn’t be able to start another one because you changed your mind. If that’s the deal then say only one board of appeal for each claim. There are a lot of people with brain injuries. It has to be delicate so you aren’t talking down. A wise man in SF told me that an intelligent man can explain quantum math but a brilliant man can explain it to a 4 year old kid.
* New process thoughts: That is a lot of information. Can you break it down into bullets. This is important information that is just slammed into on paragraph. I am sorry I am being constructive. (reading page), okay so can we break it down if you receive va decision before February 19,2019 do the following. The reason why is because all of this is starting to confuse me and it boils down you need to do this if you received it prior to February 19th, 2019. Yes so guys don’t burn their brain power, I get tired after 15 minutes then get confused. Not everyone has an awesome wife that does it for me.
* Any comments: No.
* How to continue to next page: Well honestly I look at this is for information and it is very good. I can’t help but I like looking at the margin, it is eye candy for me because it is quick links. I would be reading on the main page but I would like for the main page to give me those same letters from the margin. So there’s option 1 then click that. See what I am saying. You click there and bam it goes.
* What if you scroll down: It is good, it is short and sweet to the point. But I like that you can request a review. I am trying to wrap my head around it to give you the best. Okay, you are telling us how to do it as far as request direct review, you are telling us how to do it and what to do it. You’re just saying this is a direct review one year cant submit it. then submit more then request a hearing. Where is it about talking to the DAV or talking to a lawyer, you want them to go in front of a judge, they need a layer. We don’t have a lawyer at the va and the ones we do you have to begged and kiss as for. You are mapping it greatly; the staff don’t care or are overwhelmed with he amount of troops. The meat and potatoes is beautiful and I know it will be beefed up for how to do it and expect but you have to give them ammo.
* Link to vso and lawyers: Yes. Also a link for them where it links and sub links to local assets. Maybe this may be off left field, there are a lot of people who support the va and have a link for all of the lawyers, medical professionals that can help and walk you through it. it’s not because they are stupid, if you don’t follow an order they will die. They are going to follow your orders sir so you need to make sure it is good.
* How to start the appeal from this page: before or after I have called my lawyer. I don’t mean to sound like a smart butt but I would let the lawyer do it. if it were just me I would click request a broad appeal.

**Veteran detail pages**

* Thoughts: Continue. Look at that, you have bated me. Do you have a representative. That is awesome, representative name and email.
* Why is that good to have: It is because these guys again, they are going to do one of two things. Go with what you said or they are gonna go with what you said. They will follow chain of command. If they are a combat vet like they are 9 of 10 times. The spirt of no is not good, if you are told no its not good. You follow it, it is trust. The more you can emulate the trust and structure and less of talking down that the va is accustomed to by treating us like we are still in and talking down. The guidance we have learned to love without talking down it is great. I personally love the va because I am in a great center, I like it right now. I am not treated badly and I am asked, given more information on certain things. If they see an issue they will go out of their way and tell me what I qualify for and can be helped with. Legal representative isn’t something to shun form or be scared of and it should be encouraged for the veterans. They are getting into something and don’t know, that’s expecting a VA doctor to pick up a gun and go to work.
* 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: so this is already filled out for me. I would add issue and the name of issue and date is required. What if the decision came back no rating. That’s where going back and forth, me personally that’s were the lawyer needs to get into it or the DAV or Vso. We have to think a lot of these issues either haven’t been rated or some reason like it took a while for my back and my head to be rated. I don’t know I am sorry.
* What next: let me save it just in case. Oh I like that.
* What do you like: well it didn’t give the current rating so he had to look at it himself. That is really good because the decision date. You want the board to be able to ask the investigating questions as well. I like that you can add it. I was wondering if there are humans out there, you cant just add whatever you want to add.
* What do you expect: I would think if we were already going to an appeals board, we would not be able to add any new findings. So when I type in my stuff it should pull everything from the va records. I have problems that I am not rated for and that’s fine. If the guy can’t put everything bothering him to gum up the system. Checks and balances.
* How would you find why your listed are listed: I wouldn’t react badly but I would try to find a point of contact where I can talk to them and do it. phone okay, between hours of 9- to wherever. If they can walk me through and let me know what they see and we could work that out, that would be great like a help desk.
* 3 or 4 issues on a list, show what it could on this page or rather it didn’t show anything and you type it in: the first one because you are giving them an understanding of where they are at. If there stuff is popping up they are looking at it and if this is what we have listed in other issues and word it in a way that that is prominent, that you believe should be there. With this if you don’t put it there and say add your issue to the person that just got out, they will add as much BS as you can so you can get paid.
* What next: I like that. I press continue.
* If you wonder why your issues here is there somewhere you can find it: the 1800 number. I have a feeling you are trying to walk me through something. I didn’t know it was a link.
* Thoughts on the text, was it clear: It was not clear that it was a link, the arrow and everything. I look for the blue. I also have one eye that doesn’t work.
* Text helpful: it is informative but doesn’t give me an action, what if you’re not processing it. what would you do, maybe a status report, or a link to where you can go to see if it is still being processed. Then from there a reroute to a veteran help desk and they can tell me why it is where it is now. Like if they need an organ taken out and it was caused my a service injury. Like myself I didn’t know I could be rated for hat after the organ was taken out. I am just trying to think because we are representing veterans right now.

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? Oh god, I think of Texas hold em. How big do you want to go. The first step, second step, third step. That is the last step. So I am wondering why I am getting the option, obviously I just want to go form step one to step 3. (reading page), my heads about to drain out of my body.
* Do you see them as steps in the process or options: No, the website told me that the veteran law judge is the last and a review is the first. They aren’t really an option, wait let me back up. I was thinking this was for the veteran law judge to look at it. that’s a long shot. I misunderstood, I thought this was the last thing you can do. If we can I would make this clear we should make the veteran judge is the last option.
* Three different options: I just thought they were the last ones you can do.

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? So my question is this, I did how do I submit later, walks me through it. Would you submit more evidence, why is that there. Again, I am answering it as honest as I can, I want to give you the I am the busted vet, I don’t think like I use to. If I can give you inside on how veterans can think I would just answer it honestly.

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: I like all of that.

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 think you walking me through it and explain it was on point and is the spirt of what you do. The rewording, absolutely. You will get it down. The process sis good and I cant wait to see what it will become. Treat it like you are giving food to a kid. Like you let them sit back you let them mix it up and then start eating it. Same thing with infomration. It is in a way that they see they want to eat and then start processing.

**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!