**Conversation Guide: Veterans' Experiences at VA Benefit Offices**

Start recording.

* **I have started recording.** I'd like to confirm: Are you comfortable if I record my screen and audio as we talk today?" Yes, it is perfectly fine.

## **Warm-up Questions - 2 min**

* Can you tell me a little about yourself and your relationship to the VA? I am a disabled Veteran, and I am an employee of the VA. I make sure that the Veterans come in for their appointments, and I work with the providers to ensure they are providing excellent care to the Veterans.

## **Baseline Questions - 3 min**

* In the pre-interview survey, you indicated that you had visited a VA Benefits Office in the last 6 months. Specifically, you visited a **[Answer to Screener Question #1 - type of facility]**, is that correct? Yes.
* In your own words, could you briefly describe the reason for your visit to that office? They had an event that we were hosting here. It was a community event where they were handing out their services. I was trying to get information on how to go from 90% to 100%. They came down to the cbot here and they were a mobile office.
* [Confirm benefit-related service(s)] Okay, so just to confirm, it sounds like this visit was related to [benefit type], correct?
  + This should line up with answer to screener question #2. If not, ask to follow up.
  + On the survey, you also listed **[answer to screener question #2 - benefit type]**, could you tell me about that?
* Before visiting the office, did you try to complete this task via another method (phone, online, etc.)?
  + Follow up to understand how they came to decide that visiting the office was the best way to complete the task

## **Preparing for the Visit Questions - 8 min**

My first set of questions is about the steps you took to prepare yourself for visiting the office.

* How did you first learn about this office? I didn’t know about them until they came here. There was a state lady here, VSOs, and some other people here that provide counseling. My place of work. I was trying to work to give out our services and then also get information to help myself as well.
  + Skip or rephrase based on answers baseline questions
* When you were preparing, did you research any other benefit office locations?
  + If so, what factors led you to pick one over another?
* What sources did you consult to get ready for your visit?
  + Did you talk to any VA employees?
    - Did you speak to anyone who works at this location?
  + Did you talk to other Veterans/beneficiaries?
  + Did you call a phone number?
  + Did you look at the website? Yes, I do. I use the VA site when I am checking my claim status, education benefits, and my healthcare needs. That is about it. It was a mixture of Vet Center employees, VSOs, and VRE state agencies. They’re not technically a mobile office, but they do have a bus that they drive around to different events. They also have an in-house office.
* What information did you gather from these sources?
  + Directions? Hours?
  + Details about benefit services/tasks?
* What tasks did you complete before your appointment?
  + Making an appointment?
  + Any paperwork forms?
* Did you feel prepared for your visit?
  + Were you actually prepared, or was there a surprise when you got to the office?
* Is there anything else you wish you had known before your visit? Yes, I wish there were more educational resources besides the Voc Rehab. I was told by the educational benefits once and what if what you have is not enough.

## **Visiting Questions - 8 min**

Okay, now we're going to talk specifically about the day you visited the benefit office.

* Where is this office located?
  + How far away is that from where you live?
* How did you travel to the office?
  + Method of transportation (car/bus, etc.)?
  + Wayfinding/directions (landmarks, GPS, printed)?
* Did anyone accompany you on the visit?
* Did you have any issues getting to the building (directions, parking, etc.)?
  + Was the address and hours accurately represented?
* Once you were inside the building, how did you find your way to the floor/room you needed?
  + Was there any signage that guided you?
  + Did you speak with any employees? (e.g., receptionist)
  + Was there a waiting area of any kind?
  + How did you know when you were at the right place?
* Did you have a pre-scheduled appointment, or did you just walk-in? No appointment. I just walked up to them and started networking.
* Was there anything you wish you had on that day that would have made your visit easier?

## **Benefit Task Questions - 8 min**

For this next part, we're going to talk about the **[benefit-related task]** you wanted to complete at the office.

* Were you able to complete the task during the visit? Not really, they didn’t give me anything. They did not have anything they could do because I don’t have anything left. They provided me with what I needed to know. I am starting my doctorate degree and I wanted to see if there were any more resources that I could use further. I wanted to see if there was anything else I could use. I am getting a DHA for healthcare.
  + Did you visit multiple offices?
  + Did you have to visit the same office multiple times?
* Was there another way you could have completed the task?
* If you had the option of completing this task online / by phone / or in-person, what would your preferences be? Calling, online, and then in-person. Due to my disability, I get nervous when there are a lot of people. I get anxiety when I must speak. I just feel more comfortable sharing my thoughts over the phone and online.
  + Rank 1st, 2nd, 3rd
* Is there any information specific to this task/benefit that you wish you had before your visit?
* [Repeat questions if there are multiple tasks or benefits]

## **General Benefit Office Questions - 5 min**

For this last section, I'm going to ask you some general questions about VA benefit offices. There are no right or wrong answers, I'm just interested in your perspective.

* In addition to the [benefit task] that brought you to this office, can you think of other reasons you or another Veteran might visit this location in the future? I feel like the information should be provided to the active-duty individuals prior to their discharge. I run into Veterans that do not/did not know their benefits they were entitled to prior to losing them. I think that it is better to educate them without them having to find out information blindly like I did.
  + What other tasks might be completed here?
* I'm going to share my screen and show you a list of benefit offices. [Share screen] **Can you see my screen?**
* As we go through this list, for each office type I'd like you to tell me if you've heard of it before.
  + Regional Benefit Office: Yes, it is where it depends where you live. The process claims for where that Veteran lives.
  + Satellite Benefit Office: I am assuming it is the benefit office that are working virtually.
  + Integrated Disability Evaluation System Site: I have no clue neither.
  + Pre-Discharge Site: I am thinking those are the ones who work with the active-duty members prior to them discharging. It is a transitioning program that works with the members as they are getting out.
  + Veteran Readiness and Employment Office: That is like the people who work with the state agencies that help them find jobs.
  + VetSuccess On Campus: Those are the Veterans coordinators that work on campus.
* Follow up for each office type they know in your words, what can Veterans do at this type of office?
* If they indicate having heard of at least two types:
  + Based on your understanding of these different office types, are there any important connections between them? They are both working under the same mission under the VA. Once would tell if they are eligible for the program they are trying into.
  + The Satellite and the VRE, the Satellite office is just working virtually.
    - For example, have you ever been referred from one office to another?
* Are you involved in any Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs)? My job I was the appointed VSO.
  + If you wanted to learn more about VSOs in your area, where would you look? I would go to the VA website, Ebenefits first and look up claims information and that would tell me what individuals are in my area. I know there is a new way, but I do not know that way yet.

## **Thank-You and Closing - 3 min**

* Ask any additional follow up questions from #feedback-backchannel
* That's the end of my list of questions. Is there anything we talked about today that you have additional thoughts you want to share? It was a pleasure talking with you all. Thank you for talking with me because some of the stuff I didn’t know.

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.

Thank you again, and I hope you enjoy the rest of your day.