**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. It is okay to record.

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

* Can you tell me a little about yourself and your relationship to the VA? I am a 24-year military Veteran of the Air Force. I have been receiving care since 2014. I have tried to use the Tricare, but VA has been easier.

## **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, I did. We have one right here.
* In your own words, could you briefly describe the reason for your visit to that office? This was the 2nd time I have been there. This time I went to find out about educational benefits. I called and made some what of an appointment. I was just trying to get some information about going to the community college here. The guy there had a lot of information and was very helpful. He had all the information I needed, and it went pretty well.
* [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? I was trying to find out about how I would go about getting the VA to pay for my education. He was just giving me all the information on what to expect from the VA. I am starting with Psychology with hopefully transferring to a 4-year school to learn more on what is going on with me.
* Before visiting the office, did you try to complete this task via another method (phone, online, etc.)? I did go to the benefits website, and it gave me a little information on what programs are available, but I do like sitting down with someone to get the information. I think it is called Ebenefits website. It still left me with a few questions, but after talking to the individual he filled in the blanks I had.
  + 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? It is the same office I went to for my tax break when I became 100%. It is like 3 miles from my house. When you go to the tax office to get the letter to fill out to get the tax break.
  + 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? I talked to friends before going.
  + Did you talk to any VA employees? No, I didn’t. I just went on the website and read information there.
    - 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?
* What information did you gather from these sources? It had the address on the website, but I did not look at the hours I just figured they are opened regular business hours. I just went there when I was out and about and made an appointment. I went on a Monday and saw them on a Thursday. It is somewhat of an appointment. You show up, put your name on a list, and you wait for the person to see you. I don’t know if it is written in stone because it was nothing like that. They have a secretary there.
  + 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? I printed out the same letter from Ebenefits, but when I was there the first time, I knew they could log in and look at online right there. I figured he could get anything he needed. I was somewhat prepared by bringing the letter.
  + Were you actually prepared, or was there a surprise when you got to the office? Yes.
* Is there anything else you wish you had known before your visit? Nope.

## **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? I don’t know the address, but it is off College Ave. I can look up the address, but it is off College. There is a Driver license office, they are in the same complex.
  + How far away is that from where you live? Maybe 3-4 miles away, so 10 minutes.
* How did you travel to the office? By car.
  + 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.)? Plenty of parking there because there is multiple business in the complex.
  + 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? Once you walk into the building the Veterans’ office is right there. The secretary is there most of the time, if not she will place a sign there.
  + 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?
* 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? I got all the information I needed to complete. I also went to the college to talk to the counselors. They set me up to get that ball rolling.
  + 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? I was speaking with the guy, and he told me I could have just gone to the Veteran office individual at the school.
* If you had the option of completing this task online / by phone / or in-person, what would your preferences be? In-person, online, and phone. I haven’t always had good experiences with talking to people on the phone with giving out incorrect information. I just don’t trust that over reading or talking face to face. I think people give you the whole story when you are face to face with them. If they don’t know they will ask someone for that information.
  + 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?
  + 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.
  + Satellite Benefit Office: No, I haven’t. It seems like it would be like it would be in the college or something.
  + Integrated Disability Evaluation System Site: Nope.
  + Pre-Discharge Site: That doesn’t look familiar, but I think when you are going through TAPS.
  + Veteran Readiness and Employment Office: I think that is at the main VA when you do the training.
  + VetSuccess On Campus: No, I haven’t.
* What is the school you are going to? Hillsboro Community College.
* 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? No, I don’t.
    - For example, have you ever been referred from one office to another?
* Are you involved in any Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs)? Yeah, I am involved in the Wounded Warrior Project.
  + If you wanted to learn more about VSOs in your area, where would you look? Doing searches on the internet. That would lay the groundwork for finding anything about Veterans’ program.

## **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? No, this is different from what I thought.

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.