**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?"

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

* Can you tell me a little about yourself and your relationship to the VA?
  + **“I go to the VA hospital near me, I use the Veterans service office near me for different benefits.”**

## **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?
  + **“My father recently passed away and he was a Veteran. It was a little bit rough because I lost him. The people there were extremely helpful. They were able to help us recover his records and made the process smooth. It was an easy process except emotionally for me.”**
* In your own words, could you briefly describe the reason for your visit to that 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.)?
  + **“I did everything in person. They have a computer but it was easier for me to drive down and take care of everything in person.”**
  + 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?
  + **“My mother had done some research and found the office online. At first I didn’t know it was a regional office. Past experience with military it’s easier to go in person than do it online. In the military we were taught if you need something done, you go in person and take care of it. I would rather go in and talk to a human being instead of going to a webpage I don’t know about.”**
  + 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 don’t know how she came about. She had an address not a contact or name. I don’t know if she called someone before she arrived. I live in California, and they were in Florida.”**
  + 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?
* What information did you gather from these sources?
  + **“It was the closest location to us at the time. I figured normal business hours and we drove over to the office.”**
  + Directions? Hours?
  + Details about benefit services/tasks?
* What tasks did you complete before your appointment?
  + **“We just did a walk in, and they were super helpful. No wait. Walked in and immediate help.”**
  + Making an appointment?
  + Any paperwork forms?
* Did you feel prepared for your visit?
  + **“I felt like I was well prepared. I knew the questions to ask.”**
  + 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?
  + **“No.”**

## **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?
  + **“It was probably about 25 mins away.”**
  + How far away is that from where you live?
* How did you travel to the office?
  + **“We drove by car. No trouble finding location or parking.”**
  + Method of transportation (car/bus, etc.)?
  + Wayfinding/directions (landmarks, GPS, printed)?
* Did anyone accompany you on the visit?
  + **“My mother.”**
* Did you have any issues getting to the building (directions, parking, etc.)?
  + **“No.”**
  + 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?
  + **“Yes. There was signage and reception. It was taken care of right up front.”**
  + 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?
  + **“No. I went with hardly anything except for my father’s death certificate, name, SSN. That was pretty much it. They helped us and got us in contact with the national cemetery. There was nothing else I needed.”**

## **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?
  + **“Yes.”**
  + 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?
  + **“No.”**
* If you had the option of completing this task online / by phone / or in-person, what would your preferences be?
  + **“1: in-person, 2: online, 3: over the phone.”**
  + 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?
  + **“If they need to acquire personal documents, have their service-connected disabilities looked at again, file a claim, looking for work. I learned about the VSO near me when I retired through the transition director. The came in and presented services they offer to us.”**
  + What other tasks might be completed here?
    - **“I would assume they offer veterans assistance for the same things: filing claims, obtaining paperwork, assistance with jobs, mental health care for people, manage finances, find housing. I assume they all do that.”**
* 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
  + Satellite Benefit Office
    - **“I’m not sure if I know the difference between regional and satellite. I assume they are smaller community.”**
  + Integrated Disability Evaluation System Site
    - **“No.”**
  + Pre-Discharge Site
    - **“Actually no.”**
  + Veteran Readiness and Employment Office
    - **“Yes. The director of the VSO here sent an email a while ago talking about this office. I read through the email, and I guess it’s helping Veterans with employment.”**
  + VetSuccess On Campus
    - **“No.”**
* 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:
  + **“Regional would be for a large area. The other offices are more specific as their services go. I think of it as a chain of commands. Generally I find the naming of the offices is close to the services they perform for you.”**
  + Based on your understanding of these different office types, are there any important connections between them?
    - For example, have you ever been referred from one office to another?
* Are you involved in any Veteran Service Organizations (VSOs)?
  + **“In California. I don’t know any in the Florida area. Having not lived in Florida in a long time, my dealings with the VA will be out here in California.”**
  + If you wanted to learn more about VSOs in your area, where would you look?

## **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?
  + **“The VA here floods us with so much information. If I have a question, I can pick up the phone and call them. I’ve used the VA website, and everything is pretty easy to find. I don’t have anything bad to say about the VA.”**

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.