

VA's Digital Decade: 10 years of transforming how the agency connects with veterans

The Department of Veterans Affairs launched the Veterans Experience Office (VEO) in January 2015 as part of broader efforts to turn the tide after the agency faced controversy and public scrutiny around access to care. Aimed at rebuilding trust with its customers – U.S. veterans, their families, caregivers, and survivors – VEO's mission has been multi-pronged and sustained by the dedicated efforts of VA employees, leadership, and policy.

In 2012, the Obama administration began pushing federal agencies toward more digital government. VA jumped in with a pivot from largely paper-based communications to using email, newsletters, and other digital channels. This move away from paper-based mass communications to more targeted digital communications laid the foundation for the future, starting to gather the subscribers and insights needed to guide veterans through key moments that matter.

A year later, VA launched an enterprise approach to digital outreach, developing a strategic plan to grow its subscriber base and improve communications as a key means of enhancing the veteran customer experience across the agency. Key to this subscriber acquisition strategy was deploying an enterprisewide digital communications platform, usable by VA employees of all skill levels to message directly to veterans and learn more about their preferences and interests.

VEO's early leadership in customer experience helped accelerate a governmentwide movement to improve the experiences of constituents at other agencies. Ten years later, CX remains a high priority as lessons learned, best practices, and emerging technologies bolster improvement strategies. Here's a look at how this work in progress has taken shape.

2015

The Veterans Experience Office is established to redefine veteran engagement and address notorious pain points like long wait times, poorly organized information, and confusing access. The office is given the mission to improve coordination across VA's multiple lines of service – the Veterans Health Administration, Veterans Benefits Administration, and National Cemetery Administration – to serve customers as one VA rather than individual services.

2016

VA establishes one of the first agency branches of the U.S. Digital Service to improve the technology veterans use to access care and get the information they need, including an overhaul of VA.gov. At the same time, VA prioritizes customer intimacy in digital communications to build trust with veterans and spread awareness about the new website and other offerings.

2018

The 21st Century Integrated Digital Experience Act (IDEA) becomes law, providing a bipartisan mandate and some guidelines for federal agencies to upgrade their constituents' experiences by modernizing digital services, including by leveraging cross-agency partnerships and shared best practices.

2019

VA expands its use of an enterprise digital communications platform for email, SMS, and social media. Dozens of unique communications programs across VA focus on increasing awareness of benefits and driving usage of those benefits for such critical issues as preventing veteran suicide, managing PTSD, and transitioning to civilian life. With the Solid Start program, for example, VA reached out directly to transitioning service members over email, engaging them at 90 days, 180 days, and 360 days after leaving active duty to let them know VA would be calling to check in on them during their transition. This proactive communications approach helped VA's first outbound call center maintain a 56% contact rate, well-above its initial goal of 40%.

2020

VA's new digital communications capabilities are put to the test as the COVID-19 public health emergency makes timely, empathetic digital communications more important than ever. The agency sends 1 billion messages with critical information, sparking a surge in sign-ups to more than 20 million total subscribers. In the same year, VEO releases the [Customer Experience Cookbook](#) to share its learnings and best practices with other federal agencies.

2021

The Biden administration issues the Executive Order on Transforming Federal Customer Experience and Service Delivery to Rebuild Trust in Government, calling for agencies to center their missions and efforts around the people they serve as they face life milestones. The sweeping EO offers a blueprint with 36 distinct improvement commitments across 17 federal agencies. Navigating the transition to civilian life is one of five cross-agency life experiences designated for collective governmentwide efforts.

2022

Congress passes the PACT Act, broadening access and eligibility for veterans exposed to toxic substances. The policy shift leads to the largest increase in benefits eligibility in VA's history, adding nearly 360,000 new enrollees and more than 1.7 million new claims. The Veteran Health Administration maintains a 92% trust score during this period of heightened enrollment, demonstrating the value of improved communications and the agency's focus on the veteran experience.

2023

The White House issues the Burden Reduction Initiative, calling for agencies to reduce the Time Tax and "enhance communication, navigation and outreach tools and processes." At the same time, VEO conducts human-centered design research across VA's various digital communications programs and discovers similar opportunities to reduce veteran burdens through better communication, such as streamlining the number of emails received by transitioning service members. Collaborating horizontally across the agency's various offices, VEO worked to bring to life its long-term vision of a communications experience centered on the veteran, not the agency's organizational structure. VA formalizes this effort by establishing the first VA communications governance council.

2024

VA launches its first unified communications experience for guiding service members through moments that matter in the transition to civilian life – from pre-separation counseling to creating a VA.gov login to Transition Assistance Program classes to VA Health Care Registration. The Transition Assistance communications program delivers dozens of personalized, segmented message streams, with intentional timing to guide veterans to take action on relevant education, employment, and physical and mental health benefits. Results from [VA's first-quarter Veteran Signals survey](#), or VSignals, show that veteran trust in the agency as a whole achieved a record high of 80.4%, a remarkable increase from the 55% score when the surveys launched in 2016.

2025

& beyond

As VA's unified digital communications program for transitioning service members matures and expands, the agency is exploring ways to further connect data from various sources, including VA systems of record, digital communications, website analytics, event management, and even health care appointment reminder systems. Maximizing interoperable technology platforms with the strength of the VA mission will further amplify veteran voices, reduce burdens, and improve the overall experience.

Learn more about how the veteran experience has improved and how they did it in this [GovLoop report](#).