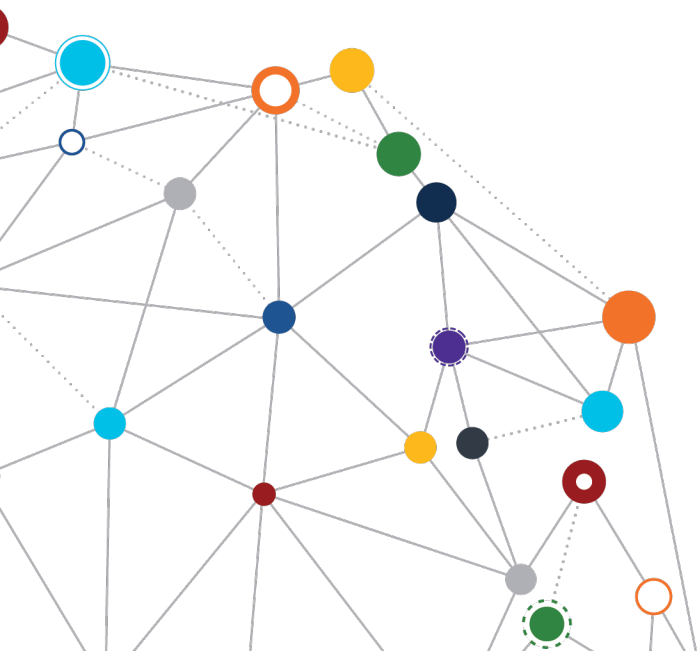


OFFICE OF
INFORMATION
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CIO Whitepaper

Overcoming Bureaucratic Barriers to Digital Transformation

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Overcoming Bureaucratic Barriers to Digital Transformation

VA's Modernization Commitment

Consider the following scenario:

Imagine you work at VA. You and your team have just identified a new software solution that many of your peers in the private sector use to promote real-time collaboration. This software solution would enable your team to work in an agile development environment, saving countless email exchanges, all while keeping everyone up-to-date on the latest iteration of the project plan. You are eager to procure the software, only to be informed by IT that procurement will take three to six months. A victim of an outdated, bureaucratic process, the solution is abandoned. Your team remains mired in the endless exchange of emails, roles become muddled, and projects continue to be delayed. This creates a negative customer service experience for our Veterans and their families, and is also frustrating for the dedicated staff on your team who work tirelessly to deliver solutions.

VA's Office of Information and Technology (OIT) is making scenarios like this a thing of the past.

We are evolving to meet VA's current needs, as well as the needs of the future, and leaning into our roles as innovators—delivering services that create a seamless customer and Veteran experience. Tearing down bureaucratic barriers to innovation has been a prime focus over this past year. Our congressional partners also recognized the need to adapt, and provided VA with many of the necessary authorities to tackle some of these challenges. For example, thanks to the breakthrough *Veterans Appeals Improvement and Modernization Act of 2017*, VA has been able to restructure the convoluted benefits appeals process for the first time in nearly 90 years. Launched in spring 2018, VA's [Appeals Status Tool](#) now allows Veterans to see current and past claims, the status of these claims and any necessary actions to take, and approximate wait times. And while the Appeals Status Tool provides Veterans with a greater visibility into the status of their appeals, VA is also developing a Caseflow suite of products as a new system to create a better, more efficient process for managing Veterans' appeals.

Integration of U.S. Digital Services (USDS) Playbook

Leveraging best practices from both the public and private sectors, VA is utilizing digital technology to serve the needs of Veterans and their families. VA is reducing bureaucratic hurdles that have hampered large-scale projects in the past, and has deployed strategies to reduce red tape and deliver solutions. Eschewing the traditional waterfall design process, VA has embraced an agile, iterative approach that leverages experienced teams and limits redundant organizational layers. In practice, this allows VA to deploy a high-performing team utilizing iterative solutions to tackle challenges like the new VA.gov within a test environment to quickly address potential bugs before the site goes live.

In line with the [President's Management Agenda](#), the new VA.gov provides Veterans with a single gateway to access all VA services; the launch of this site was made possible by applying lessons learned from USDS. By integrating software developers, engineers, designers, and UX researchers into the very beginning of the process, VA [made good on our promise](#) of a site designed with Veterans, for Veterans. This is the first major redesign of a public facing federal government website since the healthcare.gov failure. The successful launch of the new VA.gov shows that a government organization can successfully utilize an agile approach to project management.

Increased Collaboration

VA's OIT is committed to streamlining and strengthening knowledge sharing across the Department because we know that operating in a silo reduces efficiency and runs the risk of misidentifying critical solutions. To increase collaboration within and across teams, we adopted technology solutions such as GitHub. This commercial off-the-shelf (COTS) technology allows VA team members to break out of knowledge silos and engage with thousands of developers across a variety of industries. This free flow of information allows VA OIT to deliver modern solutions that may not have otherwise been identified. By combining the use of COTS products with an agile solution development approach, VA has employed a user-centered design framework to build and deliver solutions that fit the needs of actual users, as opposed to systems.

Micro-purchasing

Recall the scenario described earlier wherein a software solution has been identified, only to be stifled by a prolonged procurement process. Micro-purchasing seeks to mitigate issues like this. VA OIT is seeking out innovators and to do this we must source talent and capabilities from a variety of providers. Understanding that the cumbersome federal procurement process of the past can't help us best serve Veterans, we've begun leveraging our micro-purchasing program. This program allows us to efficiently award contracts to the "micro-consultants" and small businesses that are coming up with the cutting-edge solutions we need.

VA is open for business, and we invite innovators to come and explore the art of the possible. A clear manifestation of this is VA's Application Programming Interface (API) Management Platform. VA's API establishes a Veteran-centric approach to creating APIs that are managed as products and used by both internal and external developers. Consistent with VA's Digital strategy, these same APIs are provided to approved third parties to build products that can take advantage of VA data to help us better serve Veterans. VA has been using APIs for mobile and web apps for many years, but there has never been one platform to manage APIs and ensure standardization of data. VA's API Management Platform addresses this gap by standardizing and streamlining the way VA and our partners leverage APIs.

All users, both internal and external to VA, will be able to use the same APIs, see the same information, and deliver a consistent experience across all channels. Veterans will be able to use third-party digital tools to do things like track their claims, view their medical records, schedule an appointment, verify their Veteran status, find a specialty facility—all without having to log on to a VA-specific tool or leave the third-party website or mobile application.

APIs built and managed by the platform will be done in partnership with VA core business owners, developers, and Veterans to ensure VA isn't creating APIs as a solution in search of a problem, but rather as a direct result of an identified issue.

The Future of Service at VA

We are at a pivotal time in our IT modernization and we are headed for greater places. As our environment evolves, we must also align with our business partners' and users' expectations and drive more efficient, agile processes. VA remains committed to providing all our users with a seamless, integrated experience for navigating VA benefits and services and we recognize bureaucratic processes of the past won't get us there.

VA's leadership team will continue to make the necessary changes and empower VA employees to overcome the bureaucratic hurdles that stand between us and our mission. Thanks to the hard work and dedication of our team members across the enterprise, VA is making major progress towards our goal of delivering digital tools that meet or exceed our users' expectations. We are proud of the work we do and we are proud of the positive impact these efforts are having on Veterans, service members, and their families.

These efforts reflect the VA's commitment to modernization and are supported by our core principles of transparency, accountability, innovation, and teamwork. Our core principles are vital to the success of the transformation we began in 2015 and [the IT modernization strategy](#) we embarked on in 2017. They are the foundation upon which we are building an organization laser focused on customer service and improving the Veteran experience.

We invite you to [follow our progress](#).