



**THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON**

October 10, 2019

**The Honorable Mark Takano
Chairman
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515**

Dear Mr. Chairman:

Enclosed for your review are the recommendations of the Veterans and Community Oversight and Engagement Board Advisory Committee and the Department of Veterans Affairs response to these recommendations.

The Committee's recommendations, which reflect the outcome of its April 2019 meeting, contribute to identifying the goals of the community and Veteran partnership; improving services and outcomes for Veterans, members of the Armed Forces, and the families of such Veterans and members; and on the implementation of the draft master plan.

Thank you for your continuing support of our mission. A copy of the recommendations has been sent to leaders of the House and Senate Committees on Veterans' Affairs.

Sincerely,

/s/ Robert L. Wilkie

Robert L. Wilkie

Enclosures



**THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON**

October 10, 2019

**The Honorable David P. Roe, M.D.
Ranking Member
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515**

Dear Congressman Roe:

Enclosed for your review are the recommendations of the Veterans and Community Oversight and Engagement Board Advisory Committee and the Department of Veterans Affairs response to these recommendations.

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/s/ Robert L. Wilkie

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Enclosures



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WASHINGTON**

October 10, 2019

**The Honorable Jon Tester
Ranking Member
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510**

Dear Senator Tester:

Enclosed for your review are the recommendations of the Veterans and Community Oversight and Engagement Board Advisory Committee and the Department of Veterans Affairs response to these recommendations.

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WASHINGTON**

October 10, 2019

**The Honorable Johnny Isakson
Chairman
Committee on Veterans' Affairs
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510**

Dear Mr. Chairman:

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/s/ Robert L. Wilkie

Robert L. Wilkie

Enclosures



**THE SECRETARY OF VETERANS AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON**

October 10, 2019

**Lt. Gen. John D. Hopper, Jr., USAF Ret.
Chairman
Veterans and Community Oversight and Engagement Board
1550 Crystal Drive
Suite 809
Arlington, VA 22202**

Dear General Hopper:

Thank you for your May 31, 2019, letter conveying five recommendations of the Veterans and Community Oversight and Engagement Board (VCOEB). Federal Advisory Committees such as VCOEB provide an invaluable service to agencies and their beneficiaries by bringing a fresh perspective to Government policies and programs. I am particularly grateful to VCOEB for helping me and other VA leaders identify goals for the community and Veteran partnership; improve services and outcomes for Veterans, members of the Armed Services and their families; and implement the draft master plan for the VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System's West Los Angeles Campus.

I am pleased to learn that VCOEB has been well-supported by the Veterans Experience Office (VEO) and the Integrated Project Team (IPT). I encourage you and your fellow Board members to continue to work with VEO to coordinate with other Federal advisory committees whose responsibilities or areas of inquiry may be relevant to the VCOEB's charter and charge. I also encourage you to continue to work directly and informally with the IPT, to the full extent permissible under the Federal Advisory Committee Act, so that the VCOEB members' expertise and perspectives can provide real-time influence on the IPT's ongoing work to implement the draft master plan. Continued collaboration between VCOEB, VEO, and the IPT teams will reap lasting benefits for Veterans and their families in Los Angeles and across the Nation.

I have reviewed VCOEB's very thoughtful and specific recommendations to improve VA's processes with respect to land-use decisions, change management, communication, metrics, and strategic partnerships. My responses to the recommendations are enclosed. Please convey my sincere gratitude to all members of your board for their time, expertise, and commitment to improve the lives of Veterans and their families.

Sincerely,

/s/ Robert L. Wilkie

Robert L. Wilkie

Enclosure

**Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)
Response to Veterans and Community Oversight
and Engagement Board (VCOEB)
April 2019 Recommendations**

Recommendation 1: Implement a dual track land use application review process prior to executing new short-term permits and revocable licenses at VA West Los Angeles.

This recommendation is in direct response to Recommendation 3 found in VA OIG Report #18-00474-300: "The Acting Under Secretary for Health in conjunction with the Director, Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System create a process to allow the Veterans Community Oversight and Engagement Board an opportunity to provide input to the executive leadership on West LA campus land use."¹

VCOEB recommends that the Secretary of Veterans Affairs provide the federal advisory committee an opportunity to submit formal comment as to whether third-party land use applications at VA West Los Angeles are principally veteran focused. In addition, VCOEB recommends that no short-term permits or revocable license agreements are executed without receiving formal comment from the federal advisory committee.

The current land use approval process requires third parties to submit a "VAGLAHS Land Use & Event Proposal" form to Office of Asset Management at least 90 days in advance. The VAGLAHS Land Use Committee then offers a formal recommendation to the Medical Director before proceeding to the Network Contracting Office and Office of General Counsel. This process lacks community engagement as there is no public comment period. Furthermore, there is no oversight as VAGLAHS is not required to report revocable license agreements to Congress. Our recommendation seeks to remedy both shortcomings with input from VCOEB for the Medical Director's consideration.

VCOEB requests that the Secretary of Veterans Affairs direct VAGLAHS to provide third-party land use applications – with the intent to execute short-term permits or revocable licenses – to the federal advisory committee for public discussion. VCOEB will report back to the Secretary of Veterans Affairs, Under Secretary for Health and VAGLAHS Director with a "Concur" or "Do not concur" opinion for each application. VCOEB requests that land use applications are distributed at least fifteen (15) days prior to the next scheduled meeting in order to enhance informed decision making.

This recommendation does not attempt to usurp VA's decision-making authority. VCOEB acknowledges that all land use approvals are inherently governmental decisions. Rather, this recommendation offers the Department an avenue to comply with OIG Recommendation 3 improving transparency between VAGLAHS leadership and the veteran community in Los Angeles.

¹ VA OIG 18-00474-300 | Page 86 | September 28, 2018.

Finally, VCOEB requests that all current and future short-term permits and revocable licenses be added to the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) reading room within 30 days of approval.

VA Response: Concur-in-principle. VA agrees that additional Veteran and community input is needed to ensure that land-use decisions at the West Los Angeles (LA) Campus meet the highest-priority needs of Veterans and their families. VA also agrees that the West LA Campus land-use decision process must be transparent and informed by the campus' various overseers, such as VCOEB, the VA Office of Inspector General (OIG), and Congress. However, pursuant to the Federal Advisory Committee Act (5 U.S.C. App.), the West Los Angeles Leasing Act of 2016 (Public Law (P.L.) 114-226), the VCOEB Charter, or any other relevant authority, VA does not believe that VCOEB is authorized to provide pre-decisional input into inherently Governmental land-use decisions.

While the VCOEB recommendation asserts that it “does not attempt to usurp VA’s decision-making authority,” the requirement to seek VCOEB’s concurrence before VA officials make decisions would, in fact, constitute exactly that action. Currently, the VA Greater Los Angeles Health System (VAGLAHS) Medical Center Director decides whether to grant or deny a revocable license or other permit to use the West LA Campus on a short-term, non-exclusive basis. The Medical Center Director’s authority to make such decisions is derived from a 38 United States Code § 901, which authorizes the VA Secretary to prescribe rules for conduct on VA property and 38 Code of Federal Regulations § 1.218, which authorizes VA facility directors to determine whether, when, and under what conditions the public may access a VA facility. The Medical Center Director’s decision to grant or deny a license or permit is informed by the advice provided by the VAGLAHS Land Use Committee, which is comprised of representatives from the various VAGLAHS services (e.g., engineering, housekeeping/groundskeeping, public affairs, police, and safety) that may be required to support or facilitate a requested third-party land use. The committee members – many of whom are Veterans – assess the extent to which a requested third-party land use will benefit Veterans and their families, as well as the extent to which that use might burden limited VAGLAHS resources or interfere with VA’s mission of caring for Veterans.

VCOEB also asserts that revocable licenses on the West LA Campus are not subject to oversight because the annual Congressionally-mandated reports required by the West Los Angeles Leasing Act pertain to only leases and not licenses. This assertion is inaccurate. While it is true that § 2(j)(2) of the Act requires VA to report to Congress only on “leases and land-sharing agreements carried out at the Campus,” oversight of licenses is provided under § (2)(j)(3)(a) of the Act, which requires OIG to audit both leases and “the use of land at the Campus.” In fact, the OIG audit report VCOEB cites in support of its recommendation listed 19 licenses and made specific findings about 8 of them.² Moreover, VA has provided VCOEB with information about the VAGLAHS process for licensing and specific license approval and revocation decisions.

² VA OIG 18-00474-300 | Pages 12-21| September 28, 2018.

VAGLAHS has also revamped its West LA Campus-related Web site (<http://westladraftmasterplan.org>) in 2018, in part, to afford VCOEB access to the revocable licenses that are now in effect on the Campus.³

By statute, VCOEB is authorized to coordinate locally with VAGLAHS leadership to (A) identify the goals of the community and Veteran partnership; (B) provide advice and recommendations to the Secretary to improve services and outcomes for Veterans, members of the Armed Forces, and the families of such Veterans and members; and (C) provide advice and recommendations on the implementation of the draft master plan approved by the Secretary on January 28, 2016, and on the creation and implementation of any successor master plans. (P. L. 114-226, § 2(i)(1)). VCOEB is also authorized to conduct public forums on the West LA campus and to focus on local issues regarding the Department that are identified by the community. (*Id.*, § 2(i)(3).)⁴ Consistent with these authorities, VA will continue to engage with VCOEB on the impact of VA's land use decisions on the community and Veteran partnership; on services and outcomes for Veterans and their families; and on the implementation of the January 2016 draft master plan and any successor document(s). VA will also continue to support and assist with VCOEB public forums and community outreach activities, including those related to third party uses of the West LA Campus. VA's engagement with, support of, and assistance to VCOEB in this regard will be transparent and pro-active and will include post-decisional information-sharing about VA officials' inherently Governmental land-use decisions, but cannot include soliciting VCOEB concurrence before, or as a procedural prerequisite to those decisions.

Status: Ongoing

Target Completion Date: N/A

Recommendation 2: Create a GLA Change Management initiative / team / resources to enhance and coordinate communications across the West LA VA Campus.

Why: The VCOEB FAC has identified that the GLA Public Affairs (PA), IPT change and communications management team, West LA VA Campus communication and outreach initiatives, websites, etc. do not:

- Adequately understand the breadth of ALL stakeholders impacted (both directly and indirectly) by the West LA VA Campus (e.g., Veterans engaging the VA for service on campus, Veterans not engaging VA for services on campus, Veteran advocates, Veterans across GLAs entire service area, groups that use the campus for different Veteran focused events, GLA, IPT, CVEB, VCOEB, VSOs, foundations, nonprofits, press,

³ VCOEB has recommended that revocable licenses be posted in VA's Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) Reading Room, a VA Privacy Service-maintained online repository in which VA posts materials that are frequently requested under FOIA. Although long-term leases for the West LA Campus have been posted in the FOIA reading room, VAGLAHS believes its own West LA Campus-related Web site is a more apt repository for short-term licenses, which are far more numerous and inherently ephemeral than leases.

⁴ These statutory authorities are reflected in VCOEB's Charter.

immediate neighbors, Developer / Prime Contractor, City Veteran initiatives, County Veteran initiatives, University Veteran initiatives, local military bases, the press, congressional staffers, neighbor groups, etc.).

- Adequately engage ALL stakeholders impacted by changes to the West LA VA Campus (e.g., strategically, early enough, often enough, etc.).
- Have a clear communications strategy and plan, outreach and community engagement strategy and plan, and/or change management strategy and plan.
- Have a clear and consistent story, narrative, and message with reinforcing talking points.
- Meet the communication needs of most stakeholders impacted by ALL changes happening at the West LA VA Campus (including both GLA and IPT).

The scope, scale, level of complexity, confusion, and historic distrust of VA in the Los Angeles (LA) community and across stakeholder groups impacted by the West LA VA campus have highlighted this as a huge gap and need that should be addressed immediately.

The VCOEB has heard numerous stories and witnessed a pattern of behaviors over the past 19+ months during VA Town Halls, FAC meetings, public comment sessions, formal information gathering session with VA leadership and staff, informal meetings with VA leadership and staff, in sidebar conversations with congressional representatives, in dozens of stories in the LA press, in the VA IG's report in October 2018, etc. that reinforce this consistent theme and immediate need for this recommendation.

A specific example of this unacceptable Veteran Experience played out on the ground in front of our FACs own eyes during a VA Town Hall, throughout an emotional public comment session at a recent VCOEB meeting, and follow-up letters to Secretary of Veterans Affairs (SECVA) from congressional representatives where the majority of comments and questions came from stakeholders impacted by changes (e.g., programmatic, staff, relocation, building privacy concerns) to a large PTSD group articulating their alarming concerns about their relocation, lack of time to prepare for their changes, lack of visibility into the rationale for the changes, lack of necessary facilities in their new building to address their concerns, and the potential disastrous negative impact this will make on an extremely vulnerable population of Veterans (especially when Veteran suicide is a priority for SECVA). Our board was informed that these changes we're not driven by the redevelopment of the West LA VA Campus (i.e., were not in the purview of our scope) but in the eyes of the Veteran any changes made at the West LA VA Campus are one and the same (being made by the VA and in the eyes of the Veteran in the purview of our FACs scope).

Another example of this was demonstrated in a news article in the LA Times on March 31st, 2019, titled "In gentrifying Echo Park, the VA is forcing these homeless veterans to leave," (<https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-homeless-veterans-billets-va-closing-20190331-story.html>) which clearly shows the direct impact of a lack of a communications strategy and ineffective change management creates confusion and negatively impacts VA's reputation and reinforces a negative VA brand in the eyes of LA Veterans and the broader LA community. We wish that this was the anomaly, but we must report that it is the norm in LA. In the eyes of the LA community, they do not differentiate between GLA, the IPT, VBA, VHA, NCA, or any other VA entity operating in LA, and therefore the scope for this recommendation should be considering to be inclusive of both. The IPT and GLA do have communication focused individuals and initiatives but the VCOEB has identified that their efforts need additional help / resources / expertise and that this should be a priority with the clear leader. The additional complexity of VA's PA organization, reporting relationships, ownership of content management on the local West LA VA Campus website, etc. has created the perfect context for additional confusion and lack of clear ownership.

How: An initiative, project, should be chartered with new dedicated resources of change and communications professionals focused on managing change of all the activities happening across the West LA VA Campus (not only the IPT, but also GLA). This effort should have the necessary resources, authority, autonomy, and access to leadership with scope dedicated to educating and engaging ALL impacted stakeholders of the major transformation of the West LA VA Campus.

This initiative could potentially be added to current scopes of work (e.g., IPT, GLA PA, etc.) but should be executed by a firm that is an expert at PR / Communications, has deep experience working in LA due to the complexity, scale, and number of impacted stakeholders of the VA West LA campus. VA should prioritize its efforts on Veteran stakeholder groups that will be immediately impacted by near term changes (e.g., PTSD clinic) and on the needs of Veterans over others (e.g., principally Veteran focused on the unmet needs of Veterans prior to the needs of other impacted stakeholders -- Brentwood School, UCLA, etc.).

What: This initiative, team, and resources should serve to accomplish the following objectives:

- Develop an understanding of all stakeholder groups, their concerns, the degree to which they are impacted.
- Develop a communications strategy and engagement plan that engages all impacted stakeholders prioritizing the concerns of Veterans first.
- Execute the communications strategy and plan that should at minimum include the following activities:
 - a. Engage ALL stakeholders directly and indirectly impacted by ALL changes to West LA VA Campus to improve engagement.

- b. Gather input and feedback from directly impacted stakeholders to define the number of days that would be considered “timely notice.”
- c. Serve as a dedicated mechanism to issue ALL VA (e.g., GLA, IPT) press the releases and distribute ALL timely notices.
- d. Create change champions that understand the breadth of stakeholders' groups and their concerns, engage and educate stakeholder groups, use empathy as a tool to uncover unmet needs, synthesize feedback from stakeholder groups into actionable recommendations, and track / measure change management.
- e. Define change management objectives / outcomes, goals, KPIs and metrics, and plan to measure and report change management measurement, initial ideas on potential objectives / outcomes could be:
 - i. Number of change champions.
 - ii. Individuals impacted by changes.
 - iii. % of people educated / informed about the changes.
 - iv. # of comments / input received.
 - v. Actions taken by VA leadership to address concerns.
 - vi. Impacts (positive or negative) on Customer Experience scores.
 - vii. Impacts (positive or negative) on Employee Experience scores
 - viii. Impacts (positive or negative) on CAHPS / SHEP scores
- f. Provide timely notice to individual Veterans who may experience service interruptions and both stakeholder groups impacted directly and indirectly as a result of any changes at VA West LA campus (including but not limited to master plan implementation), that should at a minimum include:
 - i. Description that identifies the individuals and groups impacted by the change (who).
 - ii. Description that explains the proposed change (what).
 - iii. Timelines and expectations for the proposed changes (when).

- iv. Justification for the interruptions and goal of the change (why).
 - v. Remedies that will enhance the Veteran experience throughout the change (mitigation strategies).
 - vi. Impacts on the higher-level goal of building a thriving Veteran community (impact on vision).
 - vii. Contact information for a dedicated a point-of-contact / "change."
 - viii. "champion" (two-way communications / close the feedback loop).
- g. Provide ad-hoc and recurring updates to the community, across all channels (e.g., website, mail, in-person, call centers, etc.) and amplify the message through the use of PR and engaging with the local press, that should at a minimum include:
- i. Definition of "Principally Veteran Focused."
 - ii. Announcements about VA Town Halls, VCOEB meetings.
 - iii. NEPA / SEPA public comment sessions.
 - iv. IG Report findings.
 - v. Announcements of milestones achieved (e.g., selection of principal developer).
- h. Increase collaboration and alignment around a outcomes / objectives common set of goals amongst a high number of stakeholder groups that are currently engaged and operating on the West LA VA Campus and conducting their own outreach and communications.
- i. Gather, consolidate, and synthesize stakeholder input and feedback from impacted stakeholders, prioritizing the unmet needs of Veteran above all others.
- j. Follow-up with all stakeholders that provided input and feedback with specific actions, timelines, dedicated owners (leadership oversight), dedicated point-of-contact with contact information that will address their concerns.

- k. Feedback loop to communicate Veteran stories, challenges, pain-points, themes, opportunity areas, and ideas to GLA leadership, IPT leadership, VCOEB, CVEB, etc.
- l. Feedback loop to communicate Veteran stories, challenges, pain-points, themes, opportunity areas, and ideas and the VA's plan to address the communities' concerns.
- m. Reporting mechanism / dashboard that provides transparency and measures the progress for all change management objectives / goals / metrics (as defined in e.); updated on a recurring basis -- ideally quarterly but not less than annually.
- n. Reporting mechanism / dashboard that provides transparency and visibility into the communities' concerns, the VA's plan to address their concerns, and the VA's progress towards addressing the community's concerns -- ideally quarterly but not less than annually.

Recommendation: Create a GLA Change Management initiative / team / resources to enhance and coordinate communications across the West LA VA Campus.

We recommend that the SECVA implements this recommendation as soon as possible.

VA Response: Concur-in-principle. VA agrees that the pace and extent of the ongoing and planned future changes at the West LA Campus require expert change management capabilities, to include strong and proactive internal and external communications and Veteran/stakeholder outreach. VAGLAHS leadership has requested and received a commitment from the Veterans Health Administration and VA senior leaders to fund a robust Program Management Office (PMO) to support the West LA draft master plan implementation effort and other ongoing and planned changes at West LA. The PMO will include resources dedicated to improving VAGLAHS communications, outreach, and change management capabilities. VAGLAHS and the Integrated Project Team (IPT) leaders will determine whether those resources should or will be VA employees or expert contractors, as well as how they will carry out and measure the effectiveness of their work.

Status: Ongoing

Target Completion Date: June 30, 2020

Recommendation 3: Create communications portal, content management platform to enhance knowledge management, increase engagement with the LA Veteran Community, and rebuild trust that has been lost.

Why: The VA and the Greater LA Healthcare System has lost the trust of the LA Veteran Community and impacted stakeholder groups. This sentiment has been validated in the VCOEBs public comment forums since December 2017, by attending the West LA VA Campus Town Halls, in discussions with Veteran advocates and leaders across LA including leadership from multiple organizations operating on the

West LA VA Campus, in conversations with clinicians/nurses/and others who work full time at the Greater LA Healthcare System, and in the press -- including multiple scathing reports in news outlets including the LA Times in 2018 and 2019.

The West LA VA Campus needs to over communicate, needs to be overly transparent with the LA Veteran Community and impacted stakeholders, and needs to hold itself accountable to the specific dates and goals it communicates to the community.

The VA's local healthcare system websites -- and the LA VA's website in particular (<https://www.losangeles.va.gov/index.asp>) are aging, not keeping up with modern website design practices, are not centered around local user needs, do not empower Veterans to find the information they need locally, further confuse Veterans, and remove the opportunity to educate Veterans (and other stakeholders) from learning about the redevelopment of the West LA VA Campus. The current Master Plan website (<https://www.losangeles.va.gov/masterplan/>) is primarily a "push" system which is outdated, unappealing, sends Twitter updates to people signed up for information vs. updates about the West LA VA Campus and its redevelopment, and does not create a two-way dialogue with Veterans or the community.

The IPTs own contractor was scoped to create a website / content management system for the redevelopment of the West LA VA Campus, and attempted to do so under an official VA .gov webpage nested under the GLA .gov website, but they were unable to get this done due to the complexity of VA's ownership / control of local websites / content management systems. This group ultimately created a different website for the redevelopment for the West LA VA Campus / Master Plan (<http://westladraftmasterplan.org/>) which further confuses the Veteran and impacted stakeholders on where to go for what, what is official from what is not, etc.

On March 29th, 2019, after 19+ months of board meetings, conversations, discussions, questioning, etc., the West LA VA sent out an email to its website's distribution list with information about our upcoming VCOEB's FAC meeting in LA. This improvement is a signal that are questions, ideas, and suggestions are starting to be listened to locally, but the changes have been too slow, incremental, and do not address the core underlying issues.

To start to rebuild trust with the local community, the VA should take action on two major opportunities identified below:

1. Create a West LA VA Campus specific website / content management system that accomplishes the following objectives:
 - a. Approaches the content from a holistic approach, similar to the approach laid out in our FAC's Change and Communications recommendation (i.e., in a Veteran focused / one VA brand / non-VA siloed approach).
 - b. Replace (i.e., not be in addition to) all LA VA and West LA VA Campus

associated websites.

- c. Serve as the platform for community engagement to share information / reports (e.g., IG Report), transparency and updates to increase accountability (e.g., responses to IG Reports), event information (e.g., VCOEB meetings, Town Halls), track change management, provide visibility into current initiatives / future Actions.
 - d. Should at a minimum have contact information for specific point-of-contacts (e.g., change champions) but could ideally serve as a forum / place where people can contribute information, create dialogue with the VA, and engage in conversation.
2. Take immediate action to improve outreach and communications with Veterans by addressing specific “quick wins” that accomplishes the following objectives:
- a. Improve outreach and community engagement by automatically subscribing Veteran patients in GovDelivery email updates upon enrollment in VA healthcare Services
 - b. Improve community engagement by publishing all GovDelivery email campaigns as a “Local Feature” on the VAGLAHS official website
 - c. Improve outreach and communications by sending specific communications under the topic “VISN 22 - VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System - News & Announcements” in Granicus’ GovDelivery Communications Cloud
 - d. Improve transparency and accountability by submitting a “Quarterly Email Communications Report” to VCOEB FAC on the performance of VAGLAHS GovDelivery email marketing campaigns

How: The VA should hire a contractor to understand the unique needs of the LA Veteran community, develop and deploy a website / content management system by following user-centered design and Agile practices widely adopted across the federal government, design relevant content that aligns with the objectives / outcomes as defined in our Communications and Change Management recommendation, and should follow the practices laid out in the US Digital Service Playbook (<https://playbook.cio.gov/>). The VA has the opportunity to create a content management platform for relatively low cost with high return on investment. Specific examples of how this will address West LA pain points are addressed below:

- A strong VA Product Manager should be engaged and lead the design and development of this website / content management system, should coordinate across relevant existing stakeholders’ groups across (e.g., GLA

PA, West LA VA Campus, IPT, etc.), and should own and manage the platform moving forward.

- A clear “business owner” with the necessary leadership buy-in and “air cover” can connect dots, remove roadblocks, and empower the contractor to get the job done.
- User Experience Researchers / Designers can uncover unmet LA Veteran user needs (e.g., LA has the largest Hispanic Veteran population), opportunities (e.g., given the location, complexity, and scope of the West LA VA Campus the users of this website are much broader than Veterans), and create designs to address Veteran and other impacted stakeholder needs.
- User Interface Designers can create information architecture and user interfaces that will transform content currently delivered into a delightful user experience (e.g., this should help Veterans solve their problems faster, make their lives easier, give them the information they need when they need it, and ideally improve engagement / trust / and customer experience scores for LA Veterans).
- Content creators and communication designers can create meaningful and engaging content (e.g., this content can reinforce the narrative and story about the redevelopment of the West LA VA Campus, highlight specific events, call awareness to new service offerings on the campus, etc.).
- Data and analytics teams can use traditional web-analytics to measure the number of visits, participants, engagements, and overall web-traffic (e.g., this information can be reported back to the community to show how the VA is taking actions to improve the LA Veteran Experience).
- Digital marketing teams could also easily measure number of organizations participating, the amount of registrations to events, and additional CSR metrics. Additionally, the West LA VA can take immediate action to improve communications with Veterans by addressing specific “quick wins”, identified below. Each item is called out in detail as Veteran advocates DO NOT trust the Greater LA Healthcare System will follow through (to give an example of how much trust has eroded).
- Automatically subscribe Veteran patients in GovDelivery email updates upon enrollment in VA healthcare services
 - a. This is intended to increase customer satisfaction by creating greater awareness of opportunities to engage VAGLAHS in dialogue

- b. VCOEB believes implementing an "opt out" email marketing policy is the first step in improving communications between VA and its Customers.
- Publish all GovDelivery email campaigns as a "Local Feature" on the VAGLAHS official website
 - a. This allows any online visitor, who may not be a current VA customer or subscribed to email updates, to review an archive of past VAGLAHS events and email communications.
- Send specific communications under the topic "VISN 22 - VA Greater Los Angeles Healthcare System - News & Announcements" in Granicus' GovDelivery Communications Cloud, outlined below:
 - a. Send all Draft Master Plan public notices and event details.
 - i. Significant actions related to the Draft Master Plan are distributed to the broadest possible audience and reduces confusion among stakeholders regarding enrollment in master plan implementation updates.
 - b. Send all VCOEB Notice of Meetings, and proposed agendas at least fifteen (15) days prior to the next scheduled federal advisory committee meeting.
 - i. This empowers stakeholders to participate in the federal advisory committee process and improves VCOEB's ability to receive public comment on matters before the federal advisory committee.
 - c. Send notice of all campus construction activity happening on the West LA VA Campus.
 - i. The notice should include a description of the construction project, justification for any potential service interruptions, remedies to enhance the Veteran's experience while visiting, receiving treatment or residing on campus and the project's contribution to building a thriving Veteran community at VA West LA.
 - d. Send notice of all Veteran Town Hall events and Stand Down events held on the West LA VA Campus.
 - i. This is intended to provide Veterans with an opportunity to receive updates on programs and services from the joint VA

Greater LA Executive Leadership Team, including
representatives from VHA, VBA, NCA and Vet Centers

- e. Send notice of all VSO and Elected Officials events held on the West LA VA Campus.
 - i. This is intended to provide Veterans with an opportunity to attend meetings and interact with VA leadership, VSO leadership, as well as representatives of elected official.
- Submit a “Quarterly Email Communications Report” to VCOEB FAC on the performance of VAGLAHS GovDelivery email marketing campaigns.
 - a. The report should include, at minimum, the following data:
 - i. Number of subscribe.
 - ii. Subscriber growth quarter over quarter.
 - iii. Open rate per campaign.
 - iv. Unique opens per campaign.
 - v. Total opens per campaign.
 - vi. Click rate per campaign and unsubscribes per campaign.

What: The SECVA should direct VA Greater LA Healthcare System, IPT, GLA PA, etc. to collaborate with the VA Digital Services to build a content / knowledge management platform (i.e., website) to serve as the digital “front door” for all information involving the West LA VA Campus (including both the redevelopment of the campus and all services offered on the campus). This will likely become the first stop for information about the redevelopment of the West LA VA Campus, identify upcoming events to engage, understand the portfolio of services offered on the campus, identify points of contact for how to engage, and instructions on how to get things done on the West LA VA Campus. This knowledge management, content management, and communication portal should at minimum include information, data, updates, and reports back out to community.

This site can also address a number of the objectives outlined in the Change and Communications recommendation (e.g., comment section for the West LA VA and IPT Leadership to gather community input on specific questions, as a feedback loop back to LA Veteran Community, etc.).

The SECVA should direct VA Greater LA Healthcare System, IPT, GLA PA, etc. to take action on all of the “quick wins” outlined above. This recommendation will ensure that a content management system and community engagement tool will be in place to push information (increased communications) to the community, start to help the VA engage

the LA community in more efficient, productive, and empowering ways (increased engagement), and lay the foundation for a new era in the VA's relationship with LA built on trust, transparency, and communication.

Recommendation: Create communications portal, content management platform to enhance knowledge management and increase engagement with the LA Veteran Community.

We recommend that the SECVA implements this recommendation as soon as possible.

VA Response: Concur. VAGLAHS has already implemented all appropriate aspects of this recommendation. While the VCOEB acknowledges the creation of the new master plan-related Web site (<http://westladraftmasterplan.org>), its recommendation does not acknowledge the many hours that IPT members and their supporting contractors have spent, and will continue to spend, in direct communication and collaboration with VCOEB members to incorporate their suggestions into the Web site's layout, content, and related push content delivery processes. The Secretary need not intervene to "direct" VAGLAHS or IPT leaders to heed and implement sound and feasible VCOEB input that is within those leaders' authority to implement.

VA appreciates VCOEB interest in and input into the ways it uses online and social media resources to inform Veterans and the public about the West LA Campus and the draft master plan, and will continue to engage with VCOEB members at the local and IPT levels to iteratively improve those resources.

Status: Ongoing

Target Completion Date: N/A

Recommendation 4: Develop specific metrics to measure the degrees of "principally benefiting Veterans and their families," and communicate these metrics, as well as a corresponding timeline to meet its specified metrics and the deliverables to the community.

Why: There are many reasons for determining the appropriate leases at the WLA campus. Yet, no matter how constructive, analytical and proactive these decisions may be in favor of our Veterans, there remains no way to communicate a clear and objective purpose to the public. Recent media coverage highlights an inherent concern that leaves open the VA to criticism of arbitrary decision-making based on unclear definitions. It is therefore recommended that a metrics be developed for measuring what it means to "principally benefit Veterans and their families" and that the metrics, a timeline to qualify within those metrics, and deliverables be communicated to the community.

How: The WLA Leasing Act defines "principally benefit Veterans and their families" as meaning that with respect to services provided by a person or entity under a lease of property or land-sharing agreement—

1. Means services—

- a. Provided exclusively to Veterans and their families; or
- b. That are designed for the particular needs of Veterans and their families, as opposed to the general public, and any benefit of those services to the general public is distinct from the intended benefit to Veterans and their families; and
- c. Excludes services in which the only benefit to Veterans and their families is the generation of revenue for the VA.

It is recommended that item (b.) in the definition needs further measurement because it is potentially open to interpretation and, arguably, there has been much controversy about its usage in both implementation and in the media.

Our committee has explored precedence for this matter, it should be noted that the term “principally benefit” is used by the Federal Government in other matters. 1 What is clear here is the need to design reasonable, measurable and client-based criteria that can be widely communicated.

It is recommended that the metrics properly address the complexity of serving Veterans, through housing as a primary focus, and through provision of on-campus services that are fundamental to Permanent Supportive Housing as is the charge. Thus, it is essential that entities be considered that provide Veteran-centric therapeutic services, job training, and other health and wellness programs. It is clearly stated in the West LA Leasing Act of 2016 (Public Law 114-226) that ONLY Veterans will be housed on the West LA VA Campus. It is also clear that the metrics for supportive programs must focus on the measurement of whether the use of the property is designed for the particular needs of Veterans and that any benefit of the services to the general public are distinct from those to the Veterans and their families.

What: The recommendation of this committee is that the following criteria be measured to address those requirements:

- To what degree (scale of 1-10) does the program have a Veteran Centric Mission as measured in its mission statement? (In other words, to what extent was the entity designed to serve Veterans and their families?).
- To what degree (scale of 1-10) does the program have a Veteran Centric Purpose as measured in its purpose statement, program description and/or online material? (In other words, to what extent was the program designed to serve Veterans and their families?).
- Of the hours the programs are open, what percent (%) of those hours are Veterans and their families being served in a program distinct from non-Veterans and their families? (extract that % to the nearest 10th) (Measures degree of distinction).

- What percent (%) of the training, jobs and program related benefits are directly for Veterans and their families exclusively? (extract that % to the nearest 10th) (Measures degree of distinction).
- What is the cost/benefit ratio in terms of amount of space to be used relative to the (number of Veterans served x hours of service per year)? If this property could instead be used for housing, how does this ratio compare to housing Veterans in terms of (# of Veterans x 365).

Hence it is recommended that the SECVA:

1. Assign this scoring to the VCEOB, inclusive of VA staff leadership.
2. Develop a timeline for continuous quality improvement plan to allow current entities to meet the criteria of the metrics.
3. Score and act.
4. Communicate outcomes and plans to the public. Full transparency is essential to regain trust and develop an understanding of the accountability and transparency that is the foundation of the West LA VA Campus.

It is posited that there is not a fundamental impediment to any lessee in the process of creating metrics that are meaningful and Veteran/Veteran family specific. However, it will require substantive consideration and partnership in some cases since the goal will be to reach some proportional outcome that favors Veterans in a measurable way. This is based on a review of CDBG Block Grants and legal definitions of the term “principally,” which includes “ab initio,” “as a rule,” “first and foremost,” etc.

Some cases are areas of exceptional opportunity to answer a call for services from the Veteran community. Others are more of a challenge, and perhaps a reasonable timeline can be established to meet set goals.

Through transparency, clarity and quantification, it is believed that all populations in the community—Veterans and the local stakeholders alike—will feel empowered to understand the expectations and impartiality with which the process is proceeding. The goal is for all parties to turn their attention to mutually beneficial outcomes and understanding of the enormous benefits that can be brought to the housing. This is the rationale for the recommendation that a metrics be developed for measuring what it means to “principally benefit Veterans and their families” and that the metrics, timeline and deliverables be communicated to the community.

1 Of considerable relevance is that it is used to specify guidelines in Community Development Block grants (CDBG) and other housing programs of the Secretary for Community Planning and Development. It is recommended that such other Federal programs be considered in developing the metrics for the West LA VA. One set of

metrics should be developed by which all leases are judged. In the case of the CDBG, the simple metrics of 51% of the dwellings in a single project is used. This simple calculation may be insufficient in attempting to retrofit such consideration to existing institutions, such as a school. In another precedent, the Code of Regulations for NASA (1985-99) regarding funded educational projects requires that a payload experiment “principally benefits students” and is measured by whether or not the experiment involves “students in all phases of the project, including concept development; initial planning, design, conduct, and analysis of the results of the experiments.”

Recommendation: Develop *specific* metrics to measure the *degrees* of “principally benefiting Veterans and their families,” and communicate these metrics, as well as a *corresponding* timeline to meet its *specified metrics* and the deliverables to the community.

We recommend that the SECVA implements this recommendation as soon as possible.

VA Response: Concur-in-principle. VA agrees that leasing decisions at the West LA Campus should be informed by a comprehensive, quantitative, and qualitative assessment of the needs of Veterans and their families, and of the extent to which those needs are met by current or potential lessees and enhanced-use lessees. VA does not agree that VCOEB can or should be tasked with establishing the criteria for these assessments, or with scoring the services of lessees, because these are inherently Governmental activities that are solely within the purview of VA officials who carry out VA’s leasing and enhanced-use leasing programs.

As noted with Recommendation 1, VCOEB is authorized to coordinate locally with VAGLAHS leadership to: (A) identify the goals of the community and Veteran partnership; (B) provide advice and recommendations to the Secretary to improve services and outcomes for Veterans, members of the Armed Forces, and their families; and (C) provide advice and recommendations on the implementation of the draft master plan approved by the Secretary on January 28, 2016, and on the creation and implementation of any successor master plans. (P. L. 114-226, § 2(i)(1)). The VCOEB is also authorized to conduct public forums on the West LA campus and to focus on local issues regarding the Department that are identified by the community. (*Id.*, § 2(i)(3)). Consistent with these authorities, VA will continue to engage with VCOEB to understand and meet the needs of Veterans and their families to ensure that prospective lessees and enhanced-use lessees are evaluated based on their ability to meet those needs, and to hold lessees and enhanced-use lessees accountable to meeting appropriate Veteran-centric metrics throughout the term of their respective leases. VA will also continue to support and assist with VCOEB’s public forum and community outreach activities, including those related to leases on the West LA Campus.

Status: Ongoing

Target Completion Date: N/A

Recommendation 5: Given the lack of appropriated funds associated with the implementation of the Draft Master Plan, the Secretary should both encourage and make available all relevant financial and fundraising resources including the Offices of Veterans Experience and Strategic Partnerships, MOUs for nonprofit and Veteran Service Organizations, Special Purpose Funds and other possibilities to support the rehabilitation of the West Los Angeles Campus and the Veterans and Community Oversight and Engagement Federal Advisory Committee's efforts to support the same.

VA Response: Concur. VA understands this recommendation to encourage the Secretary to aggressively pursue innovative partnerships and funding sources to carry out the draft master plan. VA will convene an ad hoc working group of representatives from VAGLAHS, the IPT, VA's Veterans Experience Office, and the Office of the General Counsel to identify and pursue appropriate funding and partnership opportunities.

Status: Pending

Target Completion Date: June 30, 2020