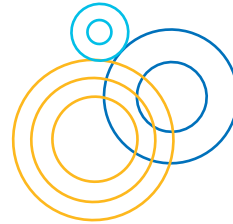# "Buy a Feature"

Determining Goals for the Year Ahead

U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA)

Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA)

Strategic Engagement (SE)

Aptive Resources

VA | U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs

aptive

Contents

Methodology

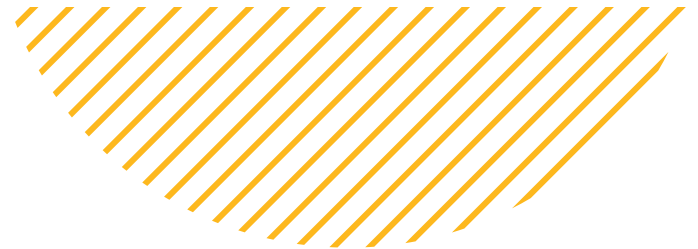Day 1: Identifying Goals

Day 2: Reviewing Goals

Next Steps

Methodology

Methodology

What were the goals of the offsite and the "Buy a Feature" session?

On September 9 and September 10, 2021, SE hosted a virtual offsite to enhance team dynamics, review processes and procedures, set fiscal year (FY) 2022 goals, and identify customer experience areas of improvement.

On the first day of the offsite, Team Aptive facilitated a comprehensive human-centered design (HCD) session designed to help SE develop **sustainable**, **reasonable**, and **impactful** performance goals. This session, called "Buy a Feature," allowed the team to brainstorm performance goals together and then build on those ideas during the second day of the offsite.

HCD Session Goal
Define metrics and performance goals to achieve in FY 2022.

Methodology

What is HCD?

Commonly used in design and management frameworks across a variety of industries, HCD approaches problem solving by involving the **human perspective** in all aspects of the process. Through HCD, a problem is observed within context and findings of those observations are then used to brainstorm, conceptualize, develop, and implement a solution. When used successfully, HCD improves effectiveness, efficiency, user satisfaction, accessibility, and sustainability of products and organizations.

Desirability
People want it

Feasibility
You can make it happen

Viability
It makes economic sense

HCD Thinking Approach

Methodology

How did the "Buy a Feature" session work?

Step 1: Generate goals

Step 2: Discuss ideas

Step 3: Assign a "price"

Step 4: "Buy" the goals

Generate a series of goals. Team members worked individually to write down two to three goals they thought SE should pursue in FY 2022.

Discuss and consolidate ideas. Working as a group, the SE team discussed their ideas and consolidated them into the goals they wanted to explore further.

Determine the value. As a group, SE assigned either a $100, $300, or $500 value to each of the final goals.

Purchase the most valuable goals. In a round robin format, the team bought the goals they believed would provide the most value for both SE and stakeholders in FY 2022.

Methodology

What did the team consider when identifying goals?

Throughout the session, SE considered several questions as they identified and discussed potential metrics for FY 2022.

- Are there current metrics that we want to change?

- How can we can make our metrics more meaningful?

- Do our goals accurately reflect our mission and vision?

- Are these S.M.A.R.T. (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, timely) goals?

- Are we including a mix of stretch and attainable goals in our final list?

- How can we measure this goal? How do we get the data?

- Which goals are most aligned with the Front Office's vision for SE?
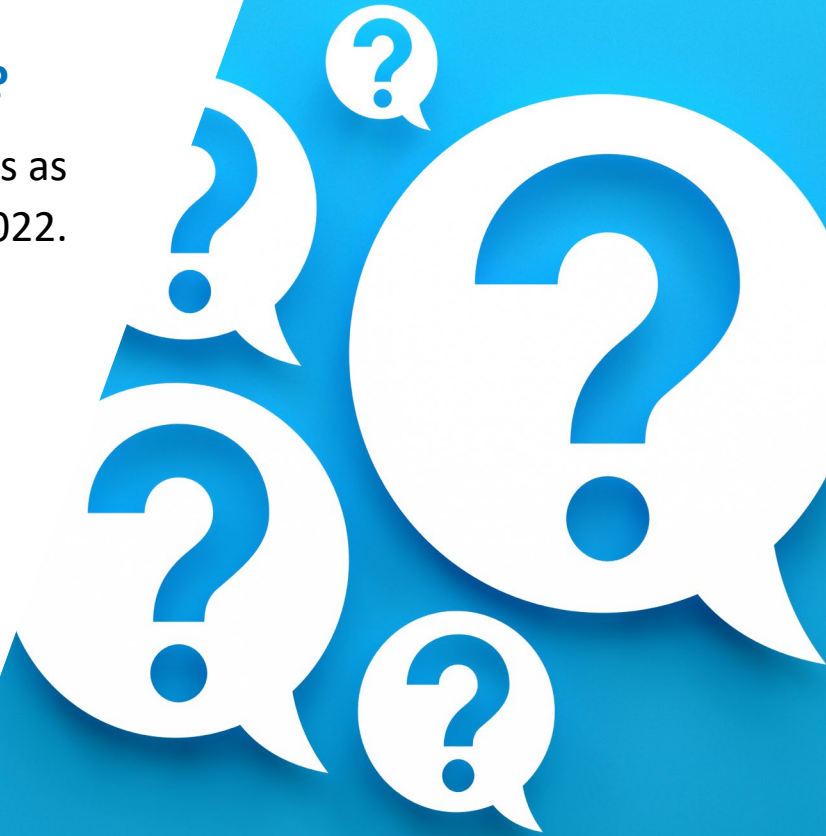
Day 1: Identifying Goals

Step 1: Generate Goals

Initial list of goals

Team members worked individually to write down a few goals they thought SE should pursue in FY 2022. When they were done, their list consisted of **26 potential goals**.

1. Ratio of interviews/subject requests tied to a news release
2. Double the number of blogs published
3. Number of satellite media tours (SMTs) and their resulting engagement metrics
4. Publish 12 news releases a year
5. Complete more national and local interviews/placements
6. Increase communications with regional offices
7. Use targeted social media at the regional office level
8. Track, record, and report interview execution by regional office leadership (two to three times per quarter)
9. Update regional office directors once a quarter
10. Number of business line feature stories
11. Number of targeted article placements (six per year)
12. Number of campaigns with social media influencers
13. Number of interviews on podcasts
14. Decrease the number of issues Veterans have with accessing online systems

15. Collect and evaluate data from QR codes or custom URLs
16. Number of special bulletins sent through GovDelivery and the click-through rate and open rate associated with them
17. Collect data from graphic intake form (to evaluate workload management)
18. Ratio of internal/external graphics
19. Number of bulletins and engagement metrics from GovDelivery emails not sent by SE
20. Number of executive and public affairs officer (PAO) media trainings completed
21. Number of participants in executive and PAO media trainings
22. Number of new speakers added the bench (Speakers Bureau)
23. Collect and evaluate data from Google Analytics
24. Number of LinkedIn postings and resulting analytics
25. Social media engagement metrics by business line
26. Amount of social media content created

Step 2: Discuss Ideas

Consolidated list of goals

Working as a group, the SE team discussed the ideas and consolidated them into the goals they wanted to explore further. At the end of this step, the team had **15 goals** they deemed important to pursue in FY 2022.

1. Double the number of blogs published
2. Focus content on highlighting business lines[1]
3. Decrease the number of issues Veterans have with accessing online systems
4. Collect and evaluate data from QR codes or custom URLs
5. Number of targeted article placements (six per year)
6. Number of executive and PAO media trainings completed
7. Number of participants in executive and PAO media trainings
8. Number of new speakers added to the bench (Speakers Bureau)

9. Number of bulletins and engagement metrics from GovDelivery emails not sent by SE
10. Complete more national and local interviews/placements[2]
11. Number of SMTs and resulting engagement metrics
12. Publish 12/24 news releases a year[3]
13. Number of LinkedIn postings and resulting analytics
14. Social media engagement metrics by business line
15. Amount of social media content created

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[1] This goal was adapted from the original goal of "Number of business line feature stories."
[2] The SE team agreed that they needed to do more research on a platform that could be used to get measurable data for this goal.
[3] The number of press releases was thoroughly discussed. Ultimately, the team decided to leave it as 12 or 24 news releases per year during this step. This was decided because the original goal of 12 was significantly lower than what SE is currently producing and something they are currently reporting to the Front Office.

Step 3: Assign a "Price"

Identified value of goals

Working together, the team assigned a value of **$100**, **$300**, or **$500** to each goal. Those in higher value categories were deemed as the most meaningful or important for SE.

[1] The team agreed to combine all media training goals into a single item.

[2] After a discussion, the team agreed to add op-eds to this goal.

[3] The team added a goal about the editorial calendar after reviewing the 15 original goals in more detail and realizing that had not been something that was discussed previously.

$100

1. Collect and evaluate data from QR codes or custom URLs

$300

2. LinkedIn analytics and postings
3. Social media engagement and amount of content
4. Decrease the number of issues Veterans have with accessing online systems
5. Focus content on highlighting business lines
6. Number of bulletins and engagement metrics from GovDelivery emails not sent by SE

$500

7. Double the number of blogs published
8. Number of SMTs and resulting engagement metrics
9. Publish 12/24 news releases a year
10. Number of executive/PAO media trainings completed, new speakers added to the Speakers Bureau, and participants in media trainings[1]
11. Number of targeted article/op-ed placements (six per year)[2]
12. Complete more national and local interviews/placements
13. Percent of editorial calendar used each month[3]

Step 4: "Buy" the Goals

How the final list was determined

Each participant in the offsite was given **$1,500** to spend on the goals they deemed the most important for SE to pursue in FY 2022. Team members were encouraged to explain why they were buying each goal and avoid letting their personal opinions sway their purchase choices.

Using a round robin style, SE team members took turns spending their money. While they did not have to spend all $1,500, they could not break it up in increments other than **$100**, **$300**, or **$500**. Goals had to be purchased for their previously assigned values.

See next slide for more information

Step 4: "Buy" the Goals

Final list and number of times each goal was purchased

After spending their money, clear favorites emerged. Most fell into the **$500** category, with only two from the **$300** category making the final list. No **$100** goals were purchased.

8

1. Number of SMTs and resulting engagement metrics ($500)

5

2. Double the number of blogs ($500)
3. Social media engagement and amount of content ($300)

4

4. Number of executive/PAO media trainings completed, new speakers added to the Speakers Bureau, and participants in media trainings ($500)
5. Percent of editorial calendar used each month ($500)

3

6. Complete more national and local interviews/ placements ($500)
7. Focus content on highlighting business lines ($300)

2

8. Publish 12/24 news releases a year ($500)
9. Number of targeted article/op-ed placements (six per year) ($500)

Day 2: Reviewing Goals

Day 2: Reviewing Goals

Finalizing the goals from the "Buy a Feature" session

At the end of the first offsite day, SE team members were asked to review the goals they had identified as "homework" and come prepared to discuss them further the next day.

On the second day, the SE team reviewed each of the goals identified in the "Buy a Feature" session in more detail. The ideas from the previous day were broken down into a series of objectives. Each of those objectives were then categorized into **seven overarching goals**.

See next slides for the full list of goals and objectives

Day 2: Reviewing Goals

Finalizing the goals from the "Buy a Feature" session

No.	Goal	Objectives
1	Increase VBA audience reach for key benefits and services.	• Target four to six SMTs annually on high-profile programs and topics, reaching an audience of more than 15 million. • Conduct proactive media marketing, increasing media placements and interviews by 10%. • Increase the number of public service announcements (PSA) to four or five for FY 2022, if funds are available.
2	Improve digital outreach to Veterans.	• Increase content production by 15%. • Improve Veterans Benefits Newsletter open rates by 3% and click rates by 15%. • Gather insights on non-SE GovDelivery bulletin volume and audience engagement.
3	Increase message delivery skills of leaders and subject matter experts (SME).	• Improve skill delivery quality through training sessions with a goal of training 30% of senior executives, SMEs, and communications representatives. • Improve skill delivery quality through job shadowing SMTs, targeting two spokespersons per session.

Day 2: Reviewing Goals

Finalizing the goals from the "Buy a Feature" session

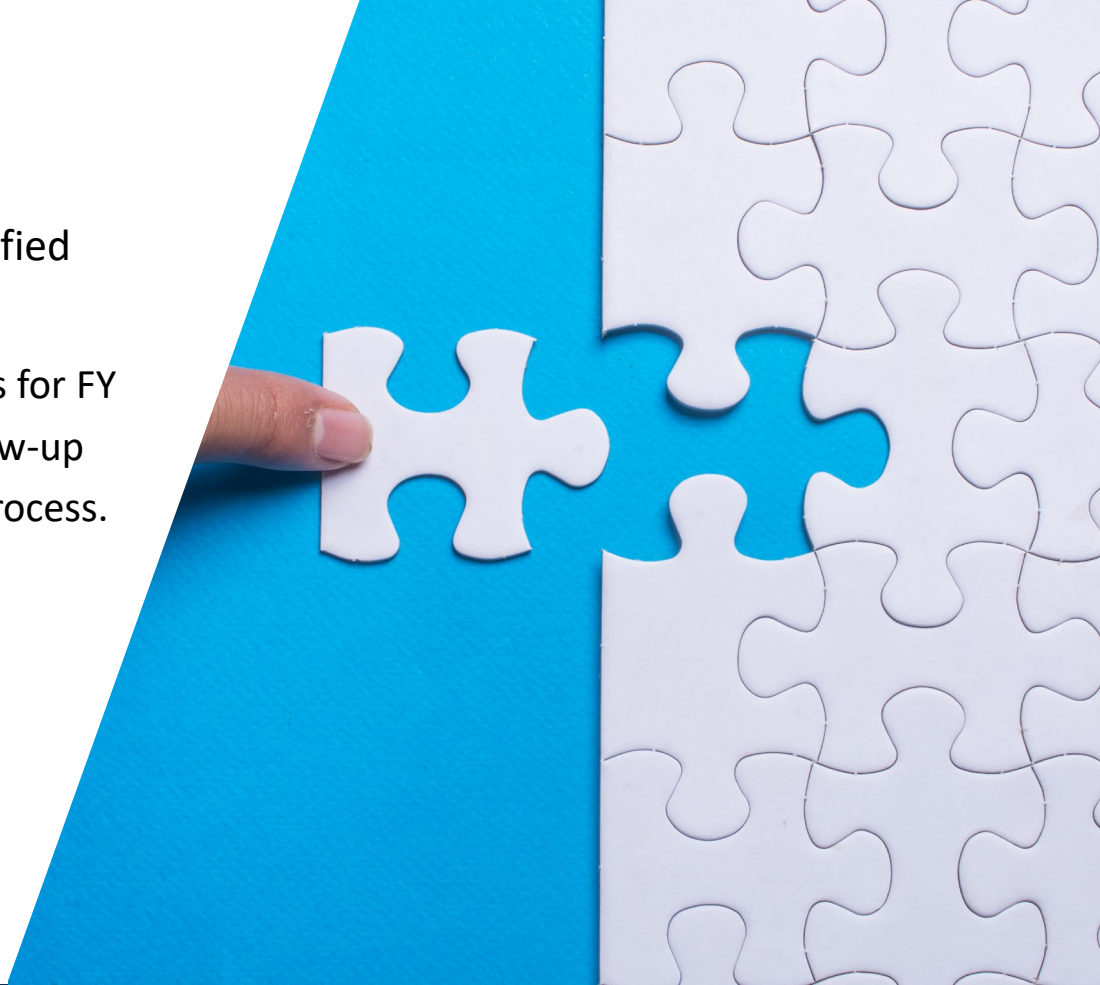| No.	Goal	Objectives
4	Improve focus on key VBA programs and benefits.	• Execute more than 60% of editorial calendar topics monthly. • Link operational goals and communications strategies to demonstrate positive impacts to Veterans.
5	Improve national profile and brand.	• Publish 24 news releases or VAntage Point blogs.
6	Improve diverse audience reach.	• Target industry, special emphasis, Veterans Service Organizations (VSO), military, and national publications averaging 2 placements per quarter.
7	Improve the quality of customer interactions with access issues to online systems.	• Provide communications addressing functionality issues of online tools and platforms through job aids and blog posts.
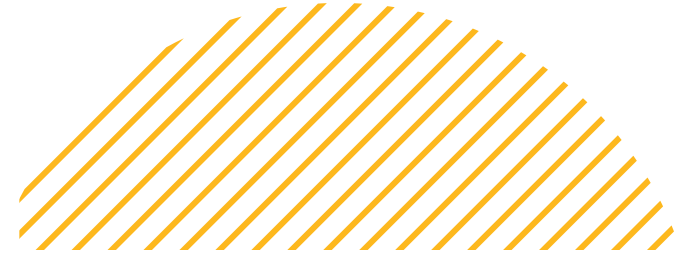
Next Steps

Next Steps

Where SE goes from here

At the conclusion of the offsite, SE identified two primary action items:

- Share the final seven performance goals for FY 2022 with VBA leadership during a follow-up discussion regarding the concurrence process.

- Review the FY 2022 editorial calendar concurrently alongside the new performance goals. Then send the final editorial calendar through concurrence with the Office of Policy and Oversight and Front Office.

Thank You!