



Office of Information
Technology Services

New York State Veterans Mobile Application

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Category: Digital Government: Government to
Citizen

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The New York State Chief Information Officer and Office of Information Technology Services (ITS) is charged with reimagining New York State's decentralized approach to administering IT services across the state enterprise. Over the past several years, ITS has implemented solutions to manage IT systems more efficiently and effectively, and share resources to meet increasing demands and lower statewide operating costs.

One of the top priorities for ITS is to transform the way government uses technology to interact with New York State citizens. Our goal is to deliver government services to citizens seamlessly and have these services mirror the best of the private sector in functionality, availability, reliability, usability and security. Working with our state agency partners to ensure we are developing technology solutions that best meet the needs of New Yorkers is fundamental to our success.

The **NYS Veterans Mobile App** is a shining example of how ITS worked with one of its partner agencies, the New York State Division of Veterans' Affairs (DVA), to develop a technological solution to better reach their constituents, nearly 840,000 Veterans in New York State. This app was designed to connect Veterans and their families with services, information, and resources Veterans granted by law for service in the United States Armed Forces.

Prior to the development of the app, it was challenging to reach New York State Veterans, especially with the increasing number of post-9/11 Veterans who often opt for more digitally mediated communication channels. The DVA was primarily relying on direct mailings and their website to provide information on benefits and services, and Veterans had expressed interest in a mobile app that would more readily connect them with these services.

ITS and DVA began working closely together on the development of the app in October 2015, and utilized feedback garnered from a survey of Veterans and their families to inform the direction of the app. The first version of the **NYS Veterans Mobile App** was released to the public on January 28, 2016. In March 2017, the team released an updated, fine-tuned version of the app that, amongst other things, features geo-fencing capabilities to further target messages to the most appropriate users.

To date, the **NYS Veterans Mobile App** has been downloaded more than 5,000 times. The **NYS Veterans Mobile App** also received recognition from the Center for Digital Government in 2016, winning the "Best Mobile/Wireless Project", where the DVA and ITS were jointly recognized for their collaboration throughout the project.

The DVA continues to utilize the **NYS Veterans Mobile App** and looks forward to interacting with more Veterans and their family members throughout New York State with the help of this important communications vehicle.

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CONCEPT

ITS partnered with the DVA to launch the **NYS Veterans Mobile App**. This app was designed to connect the nearly 840,000 New York State Veterans and their families with services, information, and resources to help Veterans utilize the benefits granted by law for service in the United States Armed Forces.

The need for the app was first identified by the DVA from their need to reach Veterans, especially the increasing number of post-9/11 Veterans, who often opt for more digitally mediated communication channels. Veterans had expressed to the DVA their interest in having a mobile app that would more readily connect them with services and information in real time.

As a result, ITS partnered with the DVA to develop the **NYS Veterans Mobile App** in October 2015. The team had regular meetings with the DVA, who advised on app development and content using both their professional opinions and the results of a survey they conducted with Veterans and their family members to solicit feedback. The survey shed light on the kind of information and functionalities potential users would value, including information on events, contact information for necessary support services, and push notifications.

Working in collaboration with the DVA and taking into consideration Veterans' feedback, ITS began the app development. The first version of the **NYS Veterans Mobile App** was released to the public on January 28, 2016. Upon initial release, the app included the following features:

- Contains information describing benefits and services for Veterans;
- Encompasses helpline information to get Veterans help with alcoholism, drug abuse, and gambling;
- Utilizes a share feature, so users can share available help and resources; and
- Connects, using a web service, to the DVA Drupal website and automatically updates information on the app when the website is updated.

In March 2017, the team released an updated, fine-tuned version of the app that included all of the original features first launched, but added the following significant updates:

- Ability to utilize push notifications for changes, updates, and more;
- Ability to embed interactive links within push notifications so that users can seamlessly navigate to additional details and information; and
- Geo-fencing capability for specialized push notifications to further target Veterans in specific regions.

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SIGNIFICANCE

The **NYS Veterans Mobile App** provides an important medium for delivering information and access to services for Veterans throughout New York State. It is a vital tool for reaching out to all New York State Veterans and their families, as New York is now reaching them through the devices they hold in their hands.

In the past, communications and notifications to Veterans were limited to the DVA website and direct mailings. Direct paper mailings are expensive and time consuming. Though website updates are relatively low cost, their effectiveness depends entirely on a user's decision to visit and view the update – something by no means guaranteed.

The **NYS Veterans Mobile App** predominantly facilitates communication between DVA and Veterans, or their families, to notify them of services and benefits, as well as any changes or news impacting them. The app provides users with a wealth of easily accessible material about federal and state benefits and services, including: essential materials regarding healthcare, housing, employment, education and filing claims for financial Veterans' benefits with the United States Department of Veterans Affairs.

In order to ensure that content remains up to date, the team developed web services that would integrate with the Drupal-supported DVA website. Whenever an update is made to the DVA website, the NYS Veterans Mobile App is also updated, and a push notification goes out to users informing them of the change.

Considering this synced structure, the mobile app should have excellent longevity and be relatively easy to keep current with the latest information. By duplicating dissemination through both the website and the app, content is streamlined and easy to manage from the perspective of the DVA staff.

Now, with the **NYS Veterans Mobile App**, the DVA can make updates, notify users using push notifications, and spread information quickly at little expense. Using the app, the DVA can also share information to targeted audiences, based on region, to make sure the information gets to those who are most likely to benefit.

The **NYS Veterans Mobile App** was featured in an article by StateTech Magazine, entitled "[Mobile App Empowers New York Veterans' Agency to Expand Outreach and Tap State IT Resources.](#)"

The piece provides an in-depth look at what the DVA was hoping to achieve, including better serving post-9/11 Veterans, while also encouraging younger family members to utilize the app to get information to aging Veterans within their family.

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IMPACT

Adoption of the technology has been noteworthy. ***The app has been downloaded over 5,000 times, to date.*** The DVA has observed a spike in downloads when they include the app download instructions in relevant communications.

In addition, the DVA is reaching a wider audience using the app in conjunction with the website, when compared to a time when they were just using the website alone. At one event, an attendee even said that they found out about the event due to a push notification from the app.

The most recent updates to the app which integrate geo-fencing allow Veterans and their families to access personalized resources based on their current location, giving them access to up-to-the-minute information about temporary and permanent programs. Veterans literally have access to critical services such as healthcare, housing, education, employment claims and benefits in the palm of their hands. This timely dissemination of important information is proving to be a vital tool in reaching this important population.

The **NYS Veterans Mobile App** has also received noteworthy recognition from the Center for Digital Government in 2016, winning the “Best Mobile/Wireless Project”, where the DVA and ITS shared recognition in celebration of their collaboration throughout the project.

The DVA continues to utilize the **NYS Veterans Mobile App** and looks forward to interacting with more of the nearly 840,000 Veterans and their families throughout New York State with the help of this vital tool.

Ultimately, the **NYS Veterans Mobile App** is a prime example of how New York State is transforming the way we interact with our citizens through the use of technology. Through direct feedback obtained from the populations of Veterans in New York, ITS and the DVA were able to collaborate to develop a solution that makes it easier to provide information to this important group of citizens.

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APPENDIX

Apple Store / iOS downloads to date: 3,404

<https://itunes.apple.com/us/app/nys-veterans-official-veteran/id1064967198?mt=8>

Google Play Store / Android downloads to date: 1,988

<https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=gov.ny.its.Veterans>

Ribeiro, R. "Mobile App Empowers New York Veterans' Agency to Expand Outreach and Tap State IT Resources" *State Tech Magazine*. November, 2016.

<http://www.statetechmagazine.com/article/2016/11/mobile-app-empowers-new-york-veterans-agency-expand-outreach-and-tap-state-it> (4/14/2017)

