The OECD Council adopted on 15 July 2014 the Recommendation on Digital Government Strategies. The Recommendation provides a set of 12 principles structured around 3 pillars. The OECD Secretariat is developing a Digital Government Policy Toolkit to support OECD member countries and non-member adhering countries with the implementation of the Recommendation. This practice was submitted by the government of Canada to be considered as a good practice in the implementation of one or more of the principles contained in the Recommendation.

### Description of the practice:

**Organisation:** Service Delivery and Program Management, Veteran Affairs of Canada  

**Name of the practice:** My VAC Account  

**Principles implemented:** Principle 10 – Reinforce institutional capacities and monitor project’s implementation  

**Description:** The My VAC Account project most closely relates to principle #10 as follows:

i) The project adheres to structured approaches;  

ii) The results of the Project and its impact in moving VAC towards online business are available anytime via reporting statistics;  

iii) The evaluation and measurement standards of the Departmental Project Management Committee (DPMC) for VAC, as well as other procedural processes, are adhered;  

iv) Digital and project management skills are utilized appropriately to ensure best fit for the requirements needed; partnerships with private and non-governmental actors (i.e. outside contractors for IT expertise, consultation with Adobe or MS, etc.) are mobilised as needed;  

v) Sharing, testing and evaluation of prototypes with expected end-users is ongoing and is now an expected part of the development process.
My VAC Account is a secure authenticated web portal which enables Veterans to conduct business with Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) online. Through My VAC Account Veterans can:

-use a Benefits Browser to help them learn more about VAC benefits and services and eligibility;

-apply online for VAC benefits and services;

- upload documents, to support applications;

- track the status of applications (in real time);

- view a summary of the benefits they receive from the Department;

-sign up for direct deposit or change banking information;

-update contact information;

-communicate with the Department through secure messaging; and more.

Although My VAC Account has been available to Veterans since 2005, significant increases in functionality began in 2011 as part of VAC’s transformation initiatives which were undertaken to modernize the Department. A business case was developed at that time and approved through Treasury Board Secretariat as part of VAC’s transformation agenda. Additional projects have followed to continue to increase functionality, most notably the ‘My VAC Account 2014/15’ project. The business case, and funding for the 2014-15 project, were also approved through Treasury Board. The VAC Departmental Project Management Committee (DPMC) provides oversight for VAC projects.

As an aspect of the My VAC Account 2014-15 Project, a governance model was established. This model continues to provide governance to the overall initiative. It consists of a senior management steering committee (MVA ADM steering committee), a management level committee, and a project management team. These are internal VAC committees, but outside Departments or groups may also be included when required. i.e., the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman is an ad-hoc member of the ADM Steering Committee; and DND, as a partner, has membership in the Management Committee.

**Results**

With a focus on service to the Veteran, and an increase in functionality which meets the business needs of clients, My VAC Account has grown significantly in usage over the past 2-3 years. Registration for My VAC Account has increased from 2,795 in September 2012 to 10,283 in April 2014 to over 23,000 as of August 2015. With these increases in registrants, there has also been a significant increase in the amount of business being completed online.
Digital government toolkit

Development

**Design:** My VAC Account was first introduced in 2005 as part of the Government OnLine (GOL) initiative. Although various projects have improved MVA since that time, the answers to the following section will be based on the timelines of the My VAC Account 2014-15 project. The Design for this project began conceptually November, 2013. Project Charter was completed February, 2014; Project Plan completed May 2014; and the project implementation began in late May 2014.

Since the My VAC Account 2014-15 Project, the project team has worked to ensure input from stakeholders is incorporated into ongoing design improvements and functionality updates. Stakeholders include Veterans, Veterans organizations, the Office of the Veterans Ombudsman, etc. As well, ensuring that relevant VAC internal stakeholders are involved in the ongoing improvements and design of My VAC Account is also critical to its success and sustainability. Other Government Departments with online applications (i.e. Service Canada, and the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA)) are also part of ongoing design considerations through both working group level meetings, and more formalized Government initiatives.

**Testing:** User testing began September 2014 and continued throughout the project to ensure all deliverables would meet the needs of end-users.

As part of the My VAC Account 2014-15 Project, all new functionality and design changes are tested by Veterans. User testing by Veterans and input from stakeholder groups are critical to the success of this initiative. This testing is based on industry standards, is systematic, and ongoing.

**Implementation:** The project was implemented (i.e. the various function deliverables released) in stages to enable use of the functionality by Veterans as it became available (scalability). The final release, which signalled the completion of the project was, April 1, 2015.

My VAC Account adheres to a structured Project Management approach to implementation. This approach follows the Treasury Board Directive on managing projects, which follows the PMI Global Standard.

My VAC Account 2014-15 project budget was 2.7M. The current My VAC Account project (Interoperability between VAC and DND) has a similar budget of 2.3M. The majority of the project budgets are for professional services: IT and business system contractors. In addition, My VAC Account has a small group of dedicated public servants who manage the day to day operations, strategic planning, etc.

**Diffusion and scaling:** Knowledge sharing and lessons learned from the My VAC Account 2014-15 project are ongoing. With each release of functionality lessons learned were shared amongst the project team, with management, and internal stakeholders, to allow for ongoing improvements as the project progressed.
Transferring knowledge externally to Veterans on enhancements has been accomplished through broadcast messages within the MVA system, and use of various social media messages (i.e. Facebook posts and tweets) to inform Veterans of the features available. Informing internal VAC stakeholders of changes can be a challenge. As we move towards electronic processing, change management is key to success. During the MVA 2014-15 Project, the team developed various new methods to inform staff of changes such as one-pagers which list currently available functionality, a user-manual which is kept up to date, and a ‘training account’, which uses hypothetical data, accessible by any staff person to help them understand the application. Training modules on various features have also been developed.

The practice of developing training modules has been expanded to other parts of the organization with great success. With shrinking budgets, having access to easy to understand and self-paced training is important and contributes to successful overall change management.

**Partnerships: Public Sector organizations**

The My VAC Account 2014-15 Project had involvement with various other government departments to share knowledge and best practices. These partnerships were important to the success of the project. A current My VAC Account project entitled ‘Interoperability between VAC and DND’ involves a partnership between Veterans Affairs Canada, and the Department of National Defence.

The partnerships or networking undertaken within the My VAC Account 2014-15 Project had positive impacts on the outcome of the deliverables. The project team was able to learn from other Government departments in a very practical way. The partnership is critical to the completion of the project deliverables, but also has additional benefits moving forward in terms of streamlining access to digital information across Departments.

**Lessons learned**

What worked well:

- A well-defined and dedicated project team with clear and consistent expectations
- Commitment to positive communication (both formal and informal) amongst the Project team; collaboration with other government departments on a working level; use of shared technologies (i.e. WET4);

What worked less well:

- To move forward with significant digital initiatives the issue of “change management” needs to be given significant attention. Our project is making progress in this area, but ensuring change management has sufficient attention is certainly a lesson learned.
Conditions required: To move ahead quickly in adding significant functionality to a digital business line, as was completed via the project “My VAC Account 2014-15”, there needs to be clear support throughout the business for this initiative; from frontline staff to senior management. As well, a clear direction and passion for the project by the team is clear. We were fortunate with the My VAC Account 2014-15 project team to have a group that worked very well together, and which was dedicated to the success of the project.

Additional information: As digital solutions are changing rapidly, and the end user is expecting a great deal from online services, the My VAC Account team ensures that VAC is receptive to feedback, reviewing all requests for functionality and feedback about design and implementing those where possible. Ensuring the end user is part of the design has been tremendously important to the success of this project.