VETERAN - FOCUSED INTEGRATION PROCESS GUIDE 4.0

March 2021

VA | **U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs**
Office of Information and Technology

Executive Summary and Approval

This Veteran-Focused Integration Process (VIP) Guide describes how the Office of Information and Technology (OIT) will move from legacy VIP to an industry standard Lean-Agile Systems Development Lifecycle (SDLC). If there is a conflict with previously issued OIT guidance or publications, the current version of the VIP Guide takes precedence.

As the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) continually strives to improve project and product management effectiveness and efficiency, VA welcomes any insight that users can provide. Users should send their comments and suggestions for improvements to the Agile Center of Excellence (ACOE), ACOEMethodology@va.gov for review and consideration.

This guide applies to all IT products offered (whether procured or developed by VA) and any VA Information Technology project effort in the DevSecOps organization that touches the VA network regardless of IT organizational alignment (whether it spends government funding from VA's Congressional IT Appropriation or any other appropriation). Others outside of DevSecOps may use the guide for situational awareness as needed.

The Veteran-Focused Integration Process (VIP) Guide 4.0 is approved by:

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Date: 2021.03.24 08:17:09 -04'00'

Deputy Assistant Secretary, DevSecOps

Record of Changes

Version	Date	Comments
1.0	12/31/2015	Initial Release
2.0	05/22/2017	Update to revise policy and responsibilities associated with VIP
3.0	12/27/2017	Update to revise policy and responsibilities associated with VIP
3.1	04/04/2018	Update to revise policy and responsibilities associated with VIP
3.2	12/13/2018	Update to revise policy associated with VIP
4.0	03/24/2021	Update to revise policy associated with VIP

1. **REASON FOR ISSUE:** To revise Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) policy issued December 13, 2018.

    1.1 **SUMMARY OF CONTENTS/MAJOR CHANGES:** This guide sets forth revised policies and responsibilities for managing VA Information and Technology (IT) products under VIP. The changes include:

    - Removed legacy VIP lifecycle and processes
    - Implemented the new VIP lifecycle

2. **RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** DevSecOps Agile Center of Excellence (ACOE)

RECISSION

Veteran-Focused Integration Process Guide v.3.2, dated December 18, 2018, is rescinded, and

Veteran-focused Integration Process (VIP) Pausing Memo, dated August 16, 2018, is rescinded.

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1 Overview

In 2015, the Office of Information and Technology (OIT) implemented a new Information Technology (IT) delivery and governance framework that encompassed portfolio, program, and project levels. The Veteran-Focused Integration Process (VIP), a Lean-Agile framework, was adopted to provide increased value to the Veteran, information security, portfolio management, project workflows, and continuous organizational learning and improvement using a single integrated release process.

VIP originated as a 'Project-Centric' process that consisted of a series of phase-gates which VA projects were required to meet as they moved through the System Development Lifecycle (SDLC). Follow-on projects were evaluated based on their adherence to the defined scope, schedule, cost, and quality. The VIP Guide 4.0 provides guidance for the VA as Business Units and OIT staff transition from Project-Centric to Product-Centric practices and adopt Enterprise Lean-Agile Frameworks including the Information Technology Service Management (ITSM) framework IT Infrastructure Library (ITIL) 4.

Product-Centric delivery focuses on organizing people to continuously deliver value to our customers. In conjunction with Lean-Agile Product Line Management (PLM) and Infrastructure Operations (IO) approaches, the use of the VIP Lifecycle will provide a continuous flow of work to Portfolios, Product Lines (PL)*, and Service Lines** by aligning funding to the products and services that deliver value to the customer.

The new simplified and streamlined VIP process results in the following benefits:

- Faster product and service delivery

- Improved customer engagement

- Reduction of waste

- Measurable value delivered to our customer and Veterans

- Efficient utilization of resources

* *Product Lines* represent ongoing streams of work that are funded top-down based on their strategic importance. They are supported by dedicated delivery and management resources and are measured based on product outcomes (e.g., cost, volume, value delivery, etc.). Product Lines apply to DevSecOps.

** *Service Lines* represent a specific grouping of 'like' services (shared services) and are based upon customer encounters and consumption. Service Lines introduce consumable IT Services to Product Lines and Business units on demand. Service Lines apply to ITOPS.

1.1 Purpose

The goal of VIP is to increase the speed of delivering high-quality, secure, cost-effective, and sustainable IT capabilities to benefit the Veteran. The **VIP Guide** is a principle-based approach to our transformational SDLC and is a companion guide to the **PLM Playbook** and the **Infrastructure Operations (IO) Instructions** (applicable to ITOPS IO only).

This transformational guide and related principles apply to ANY Product or Service Line, group, or team in the DevSecOps organization that initiates a technology project or product that interfaces with the VA

network. To the maximum extent possible, all spending of government funds on informatics & technology must employ Lean-Agile processes.

1.2 VIP Lifecycle Principles

OIT staff use the following VIP Lifecycle Principles in their daily practice:

- "You build it, you own it"
- Focus on aligning IT to how services are consumed
- Optimize flow by removing unnecessary steps
- IT Product Managers, Product Line Managers, and IT Service Managers (Shared Services) are accountable and responsible for their products'/services' lifecycle from initiation through retirement
- System Team and Shared Service staff members are accountable and responsible for providing operations, architecture, compliance, and other related services to their assigned teams' Product Managers
- Business related roles and responsibilities are integrated with IT roles through Product Line Management (PLM) and Scaled Agile Framework (SAFe) implementation
- Products that deliver the highest value receive funding
- Continuously focus on customers' needs and participation in creating and building solutions
- Use a Lean-Agile approach to deliver working products to and for our Veterans

These principles are pervasive throughout this document and will be further expanded upon below.

2 Enterprise Oversight, Governance, and Reporting

2.1 Oversight and Governance

The new VIP Guide is less prescriptive and focuses on outcomes, giving Product Line Managers, Service Managers, and Implementation Managers discretion as to how product/service delivery oversight occurs. VA Product and Service leadership have latitude in the governance models that they implement, given the product attributes (i.e. cost, schedule, visibility, risks, congressional involvement, etc.). There are many forms of governance implemented within a Product/Service or Product Line:

- Internal reviews (Product and Portfolio level)
- Escalations
- Status Reporting and Dashboards
- Metric Reporting
- Product Management Oversight
- Product Management Review (PMR)/Product Line Review (PLR)
- Product Scorecards (PSC)
- Governance Boards/TechStats
- Contracting Officer Representative (COR)

- Federal Information Technology Acquisition Reform Act (FITARA) process
- Authority to Operate (ATO) process

Participation in and compliance with the above forms of governance is still required. Interface with your leadership to determine the appropriate form(s) of governance attributes required for your Product/Service Line. See Appendix A for descriptions of the various governance types used at the VA.

Product Lines and Service Lines are still required to collect and report costs, schedules, risks, and other valuable product information in the **VA Product (Line) Accountability and Reporting System (VA PARS)**, formerly known as the **VIP Dashboard**.

2.2 Reporting

VA PARS reporting is required for all Products and Services. This reporting meets all regulatory requirements and compliance standards to both outside Federal agencies (Office of Management and Budget (OMB)) and metrics of interest to OIT senior management. Portfolios, Product Lines, Product Managers, Service Lines, and Service Managers are accountable for making weekly updates to **VA PARS** to meet both internal and external data and compliance requirements.
Click here to access the VA PARS website or VA PARS User Guide for Product Line reporting guidance.

3 VIP Lifecycle

The new VIP Lifecycle flow is simplified. Funded work requirements are submitted into VIP and Product Teams create and deliver value to the customer. Value delivery is repeated until the product/service is no longer needed and/or funding has ceased, which triggers products/services to be retired or decommissioned.

Figure 1: VIP Simplified Lifecycle

Oversight and implementation beyond specifications within this guide are at the discretion of the Product Line Managers, Product Managers, Service Line Managers, and Service Managers.

Although OIT is shifting to Product Line Management, funding is still appropriated by investments in terms of projects at the VA. VA PARS will maintain this terminology for a minimum of two years until the budgeting process is changed.

3.1 VIP Lifecycle – Work Received from Epic Owners

The lifecycle begins with the Epic Owner presenting new initiatives to the Account Management Office (AMO), Portfolio Directors, and the Demand Management Division (DMD) to elaborate and fund the scope of the needed solution.

Work comes into VIP:

- The AMO, DMD, Service Line Management, and Portfolio Directors work with the Epic Owner to elaborate requirements; fund the work; determine the solution scope; and determine which Product Lines, Products/Services, or Support Teams will be needed to support delivery of the business Epic.

    o In coordination with AMO and the appropriate IT Governance Board, funding is allocated to the Portfolios, Product Lines, and Product Teams needed to deliver the Epic solution. The same applies to Service and Support Teams for non-software projects.

The ideal condition is to have interactions between the Product Manager and Product Owner/Customer or the Service Manager and the customer as soon as practical.

Needed and Funded Workflows to Product/Service Support Teams:

- Once work has been funded and authorized, it is delegated to Product Lines/Products/Service Lines.
- Only work traced to funding can be given to Product/Service Support Teams.
- Funding approval is reported in **VA PARS** by Product/Service Managers or a delegate.[1]

3.2 VIP Lifecycle – Create and Continuously Deliver Value

Portfolios take funded work and assign it to Product/Service Lines, who then assign work to Product/Service Support Teams. Portfolios and Product/Service Lines continuously explore, define, and refine customer Epics even after Funded Work delivery begins. These refinements flow to the funded backlog to be prioritized by the Product Owner.

- Portfolios only add work that has been funded to their Product/Service Line's backlog.

- The Product Owner prioritizes existing work along with new, funded work.

- The IT Product Manager/Service Manager injects system and non-functional requirements to ensure a compliant and functional product.

- Product/Services Lines and Product Teams continuously engage with OIT compliance groups such as Section 508, Open Source, Security, and Architecture to ensure standards are met.
    o OIT uses industry standard DevSecOps and Lean-Agile development processes to meet

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[1] Product Manager records the Product Line Managers project approval in the VA PARS gateway review.

> regular and frequent delivery commitments. Product/Service Line Teams should reference the OIT DevSecOps Product Quality Standards to select, implement, and integrate appropriate compliance standards.
>
> o The IT Product/Service Manager is responsible for building and maintaining products/services that are compliant with both industry and VA standards and deliver maximum value to our customers.
>
> o Product Lines, Service Lines, and Product Teams continuously improve design and compliance throughout the product lifecycle.

- Funded long-lived Product/Service Support Teams continuously deliver value using industry standard DevSecOps and Lean-Agile practices.

- Product/Service Line Teams build value as long as there is a need and funding.

- Product/Service Line Teams record project/product performance data in **VA PARS** weekly.[2]

The diagram below illustrates how an Epic and its funding flows to Product/Service Line Teams through the VIP Lifecycle and how value is continuously delivered and reported in **VA PARS** by the Product/Service Line Teams.
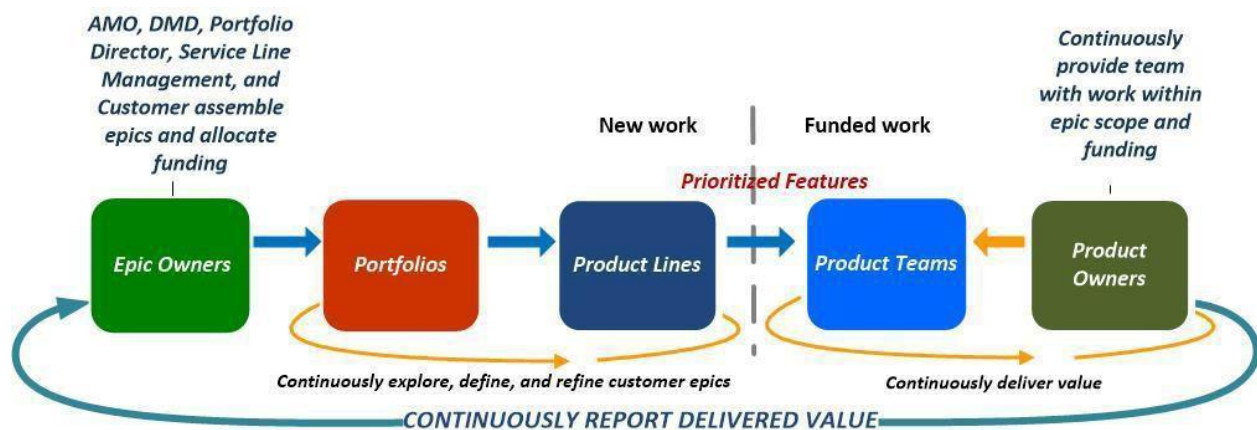

Figure 2: VIP End-to-End Lifecycle

3.3 VIP Lifecycle – Retire/Decommission

Changes in business requirements, technology, or business needs will necessitate the retirement of some OIT products/services. Business Owners retire a product/service when operational analysis indicates that it no longer provides business value and/or is no longer cost-effective to operate. Once a product/service has reached the Product/Service Retirement phase in the VIP Lifecycle, it is removed/closed from the AMO, DevSecOps, ITOPS Service Catalogs, VASI, eMASS, TRM, and VA PARS.

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[2] Product Manager records Product Owner release concurrence in VA PARS

Appendix A – Governance

Governance provides consistent and repeatable processes and oversight, which help ensure that Portfolios and Product Lines have standard measures, are managing to expectations, and are delivering on commitments. VIP Governance focuses on three areas: accountability, authority, and the decision-making process. There are many forms of governance associated with Product Line Management. The following is a list of the types of governance employed in the VA:

- **Internal reviews (Portfolio and Product level):** Internal Portfolio and Product reviews are designed to provide transparency and inspection of Agile practices and implementation. Product Teams use internal reviews as a method of performing frequent progress checks of their products. Internal review governance types include:

    - Daily scrums
    - Sprint Planning (elaboration and characterization of requirements)
    - Sprint Reviews (demos)
    - Retrospectives (continuous improvement)

- **Escalations:** Escalations are required when higher levels of leadership are needed to resolve an issue. Escalations should be managed using the Product Management governance hierarchy structure shown in the diagram below (Figure 3).

GOVERNANCE ESCALATION STRUCTURE

Product Team → Product Manager → Product Line Manager → Portfolio Director → Executive Leadership

Figure 3: Governance Escalation Structure

- **Status Reporting and Dashboards:** Status reporting and dashboards are tools that gather data on Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) of various aspects of a Portfolio or Product. In the past, these KPIs typically included performance and progress around cost and schedule and have been recently advanced to include modern SAFe and DSO metrics in the Product and Product Line Scorecards.

- **Metric Reporting:** Metric reporting is used to capture operational indicators and produce reports to communicate Portfolio, Product Line, and Product performance and measure against VA goals; identify areas for improvement; and measuring progress toward a desired state. The VA uses the following types of metric reporting governances:
    - **Business Metrics:** A quantifiable measure that is used to track and assess a specific business outcome that is important to the Business Owner as it relates to a particular product in the Product Line.
    - **Performance Metrics/Product Scorecards (PSC)**: The PSC contains key DevSecOps and SAFe measures related to product information, testing, release, monitoring, quality, and

compliance. The goal of the PSC is to drive transparency, identify problem areas associated with performance, and support PL decision making grounded in data.

- **Placemat Report:** A weekly report to the CIO that shows product performance relating to cost, schedule, and release cadence.
- **Customized reporting** based on VA PARS data. ACOE's reporting team can create Product and PL specific reports based on parameters that are important/needed. Reach out to the Reporting Team to request creation of custom reports.

- **Product Management Oversight:** Product Management oversight is used as a means to guide and improve the management of products. It ensures products meet the needs of the customer and the organization through the use of standards, procedures, accountability, efficient allocation of resources, and continuous improvement. Product Management Oversight is used for:
  - Portfolio and product management
  - Continuous improvement
  - Assessing and elevating the maturity level of the organization's Product Lines
  - Assess and review PL and Product performance, progress, and resource allocation
  - Monitoring of cost, schedule, scope
  - Identification of staff training needs

- **Product Management Review (PMR)/Product Line Review (PLR):** Product Line Reviews are a mechanism to track and monitor the performance of Products and PLs. It is required by Senior/Executive Leadership for several reasons, including but not limited to:
  - Monitoring high visibility products (i.e. Mission Act/Community Care, Colmery, Telehealth, etc.)
  - Reviewing products exhibiting negative trend(s):
    - Recent failures to meet planned budget and/or schedule
    - Contract teams not meeting VA Requirements
    - Stakeholder concerns
    - The overall risk exposure of a Product Line and the threat that cumulative or compounding effects of multiple risks pose to successfully meeting Product Line objectives

- **Governance Boards/TechStats:** Governance Boards are used to monitor and lead various aspects of OIT operations. One governance board in particular, the Program & Acquisition Review Council (PARC), is used to govern and monitor TechStats, an OMB requirement used to make visible and remediate products in distress.

- **Contracting Officer Representative (COR):** Contracting Officer Representatives maintain oversight of contractors to:
  - Ensure contract deliverables are met/achieved
  - Evaluate relevant contractor performance and integrity information in CPARS
  - Assess contractor performance (cost, schedule, quality)
  - Evaluate contractor key personnel
  - Manage contractor onboarding/offboarding
  - Secure elevated network access

- **FITARA process:** OMB requires a process for the VA to review their IT investments to reduce duplication and waste, consolidate acquisition and management functions, and increase cost savings. FITARA governance requires the following:
  - Involvement from appropriate stakeholders, including VA senior leadership and the

mission and business leadership
- Having comprehensive linkage from the VA strategy to Portfolios to Product Lines
- Having the ability to make authoritative decisions that are binding for the organization at each level of governance
- Making evidence-based decisions based on accurate and actionable data
- **ATO process:** The Authority to Operate (ATO) is the risk-based decision granted by the appointed Authorizing Official (AO) to explicitly accept or deny system security and business risk for the VA. This decision is based upon organizational operations (including mission, functions, image, or reputation), organizational assets, system (functional, security, technical, business, operational, and privacy) requirements, individuals, other organizations, cyber security and the Nation based on the implementation of an agreed-upon set of system security controls and the status of the system security authorization packet.
- The eMASS Authorization Requirements Standard Operating Procedures provides practical procedures on systems requirements to obtain an ATO. Note: This SOP is a living document based on current National and VA security policies, standards, and guidance, and is subject tochange.

Appendix B – List of Acronyms and Glossary of Terms

List of Acronyms

Acronym	Description
AMO	Account Management Office
DevOps	Development + Operations
DevSecOps	Development+ Security+ Operations
DMD	Demand Management Division
eMASS	Enterprise Mission Assurance Support Service
EPMO	Enterprise Program Management Office
ITIL	Information Technology Infrastructure Library
OIT	Office of Information Technology
PL	Product Line
PLM	Product Line Management
SAFe	Scaled Agile Framework
TRM	Technical Reference Model
VA	Veterans Affairs
VA PARS	VA Product (Line) Accountability and Reporting System
VASI	VA Systems Inventory
VIP	Veteran-Focused Integrated Process

Glossary of Terms

Term	Definition
Backlog	A prioritized list of everything that is known to be needed in the product. It is the single source of requirements for any changes to be made to the product. The Product Owner is responsible for the Product Backlog, including its content, availability, and ordering.
Cadence	The approach to achieving commitment and reliability with a system. It is a measure of balance and the rhythmic flow of the process. Sprints of regular time interval or duration establish a cadence for a development effort.
DevOps	DevOps is a mindset, a culture, and a set of technical practices. It provides communication, integration, automation, and close cooperation among all the people needed to plan, develop, test, deploy, release, and maintain a Solution.

DevSecOps	DevSecOps is short for development, security, and operations. Its focus is to make everyone accountable for security with the objective of implementing security decisions and actions at the same scale and speed as development and operations decisions and actions.
IT Service Manager	IT Service Managers are responsible for ensuring their respective organization's IT Services meet the business needs and are delivered in accordance with agreed upon business requirements. Works closely with Data Analytics and Operations teams and, using collected data, collaborate with the Service Management Office (SMO) to identify and achieve significant ITSM improvements and participate in various Continuous Service Improvement projects and activities.
Portfolio	A collection of IT Systems and related IT Products which are used to attain specific business capabilities.
Portfolio Management	Defines the set of capabilities to support the administration of a group of investments held by an organization.
Product	An item, system, or service offered to or provided for use by a customer. It can be physical or in virtual or in cyber form. A valuable product is: • Relevant – Customers must view it as a way to fulfill a need. • Functional – It must perform as expected. • Adaptable – It must be able to change with trends, time, technology, and user segments. • Communicated – Customers and potential customers must understand how they can benefit from it.
Product Line	A VA Product Line is a group of related products that address related customer needs.
Product Line Change Request	The Product Line Change Request (PLCR) Product Line Change Request manages VASI change requests related to re-aligning VASI Product records to Product Lines.
Product Owner	A member of the Agile Team responsible for defining Stories and prioritizing the Product Backlog to streamline the execution of program priorities while maintaining the conceptual and technical integrity of the Features or components for the team.

Release	Installation into Production Environment—includes IOC, full deployment, subsequent releases, maintenance releases, defect repairs, security and other patches, and any changes that are released into production; also used to refer to the package (hardware, software, middleware, documentation, other components) being deployed.
Service Line	Service Lines represent a specific grouping of 'like' services (shared services) and are based upon customer encounters and consumption. Service Lines introduce consumable IT Services to Product Lines and Business units on demand. Service Lines apply to ITOPS.
Shared Services	Shared Services represents the specialty roles, people, and services required for the success of an Agile Release Train (ART) or Solution Train, but that cannot be dedicated full-time.
System Team	A specialized Agile Team that assists in building and supporting the Agile development environment, typically including development and maintenance of the toolchain that supports the Continuous Delivery Pipeline. The System Team may also support the integration of assets from Agile teams, perform end-to-end Solution testing where necessary, and assists with deployment and Release on Demand.
VIP	Veteran-focused Integration Process; former single path, from beginning to end, for IT releases in the VA.