# Caution Flag Prototype & Reduce Veteran Risk Discovery - Research Plan - Prototype Research Discussion Guide

## Introduction

Thanks for joining us today! My name is [NAME]. I work with a team at the VA that is enhancing the VA.gov website. Some of the folks I work with are also on the line. They’ll be observing and taking notes to ensure we capture your feedback accurately.

We're interested in speaking with you today about the process of selecting a college. Specifically, we're looking at the GI Bill Comparison Tool on VA.gov. We're reviewing a new feature of the Comparison Tool with people who plan to use their benefits soon to ensure that it's easy to use.

The entire session should take less than 45 minutes.

Are you familiar with the GI BIll Comparision Tool? { if yes: Great. I'm looking forward to hearing your perspectives. If no or unsure: Not a problem. We love to get fresh eyes on it! }

Have you done any usability testing before? { if yes: How'd it go? If no: Ok, it's always fun to try something new. Thanks for signing up! }

Throughout the process, we are interested in hearing your honest opinions. We are in no way testing your knowledge or ability. We just want to hear your ideas and be sure the tool meets Veterans’ needs. You are welcome to express any opinions you wish. We welcome your feedback.

If for any reason you want to pause or stop the session, please let me know. I'd be happy to do so. Do you have any questions before we get started?

**Recording**

We like to record sessions in case we need to double check that we captured your opinions accurately. Are you comfortable if I record the audio and screen movements as we talk?

Great! I'm going to turn the recording on now. Once it starts, I’ll ask again if you are okay if we record, so we have your verbal consent.

[The meeting host will begin audio and screen recording.]

Are you comfortable if I record the audio and screen movements today? Thank you.

**Warm-up Questions**

I have a couple questions for you as we get started.

1. When you were thinking about joining the { Air Force, Army, Coast Guard, Marine Corps, Navy }, how much of a factor were GI Bill education benefits in your decision making?

P: Not many, I don’t think.

1. Where are you now on your educational journey? For example, are you just starting to explore schools, decided where to go, decided what to study...

P: I have my master’s degree, but I either need to get another master’s or a ph.d to be [?] on both.

A: Where are you in the decision-making process?

P: I kind of know what I need and I know what I like. Two different things. I guess I’m 75% set there.

1. As you think about comparing colleges, what 3 factors are most important to you?

P: Location, cost, I guess program would be first, what they can offer me, and then location cost.

1. If you're thinking about applying to a school, how might you go about learning if the VA has any concerns about Veterans attending the school?

P: I guess that never even occurred to me.

1. When you think about your GI Bill Education benefits, what are a couple words that come to mind?

P: Help, money, I guess it makes it a lot less stressful.

A: less stressful for what?

P: Pretty much, in my area, you have to quit your job and go back to school full time to do it properly. To give up your income to go back to school, it’s stressful, but if you have the gi bill, it’s doable.

A: What area are you studying or interested in?

P: technology.

**Think Aloud**

For our session today, I'm going to give you a couple tasks to do online. While you're going through them, it would be really helpful if you'd think aloud - kind of like you'd do if you were talking to yourself. We are interested in your first reactions, what you're thinking & wondering as you go through the process. The more you say about what you are thinking and wondering, the more we’ll learn.

When you think aloud, it helps us understand what works well and where we might want to make improvements to make things even easier. If you have questions, it’s likely that many other Veterans will, as well, so feel free to ask them along the way.

Ok, let's get started and try it out.

{ pass control to participant }

### Scenario 1: GIBCT with full functionality [Production site].

Let's say you've heard great things about Arizona State University's Veteran programs and think you you'd like to check out that school. Starting on this page, how would you go about finding how much the tuition to Arizona State University would be?

{ prompt: Remember to think aloud as you go }

P: I guess I’d go over to get help choosing a school. [link in right rail]

A: what would you be looking for there?

P: I’m looking for a search bar. Can I just go ahead and search san Diego state? I’m not sure.

A: [explained a little of the page]

P: oh right here, at the bottom! You can put that right at the top! [the search bar] [started typing in San Diego state but pulled up imperial valley campus from suggestions] So I now found that they’ll take my benefits. I’m now curious to what all these are as well, maybe it’s all money [filters in left rail of srp] [started clicking through filters]

A: as you’re clicking through, what are you expecting to happen?

P: to get a button that I can hit for more information, but I don’t see it. Oh, I’m confused, so I thought when san Diego came up on my screen, they accept these things, and now these programs belong to the school. [realized filters are for all schools]

A: how would you try that process again? [?]

P: I’d hit the back button

A: you want to try a different school?

P: Sure. [searched for Austin Peay State University] oh, so right here, it tells me what I’m eligible for. Oh, view details. That’s what I want [clicked view details link, went to profile]

A: what do you see now?

P: a lot more details. [went back to landing] so I would say here [search field] you should be able to type in multiple schools […] so I can view multiple schools at the same time. [went back to Austin’s profile page]

A: is this a school that you’re actually thinking of attending?

P: yes.

A: if you have any thoughts, let us know,

P: a question I have, and we’re old, but back then you would pay into the gi bill and then switch to post 9/11. [?] the payment, instead of going to the school, goes to you.

A: are you interested in master’s or ph.ds?

P: master’s and Ph.D’s. Austin state has an accredited program, but then I’d have to drive. They’re working on getting accredited, but in the two years that would take, I just don’t think I could wait [?]

A: that’s good to hear, interesting how you’re weighing your options.

**Questions**

1. What are your thoughts on that process?
2. Do you have particular thoughts on the Comparison Tool at this point?

**Prototype**

So that was the real VA.gov website. Now we're going to shift gears and review a prototype that has some new functionality.

The prototype is a mock-up, rather than a real website. Only certain links are activated and there may be pretend data in some areas. If you click something and nothing happens, we can talk about what you expect might happen. In some cases, when you click in an area where you'd normally type, content will fill in automatically. We do this to save us some time.

Any questions?

### Scenario 2: School with one warning [Prototype]

Let's say your friend is studying cybersecurity at Atlantic Institute in Pensacola. You're thinking about enrolling in the same program. Walk me through how you'd use the comparison tool to learn more about the Atlantic Institute where your friend is studying.

P: I would probably go to Education and Training because I don’t need to know the gi bill at this point and time.

A: what would you be looking for there?

P: Just a tab where I can search by school.

P: Once I find a school, either a link with the school and the programs offered, or if you guys want to type it in, just the programs offered.

A: amy redirected her to search field]

P: [she clicked through to srp] the first thing that pops into my head is I want to know why this school has a cautionary warning. [tried clicking first card’s caution flag] I want to click on it because I want to learn more about them because I saw a hand. And see down here, why school closing when. I don’t like warnings, especially the one I see about cash, heightened cash morning, that doesn’t sound good. And this one I want to know what they settled about. So I like that it has that. That’s important information to know.

P: I have a daughter who is in high school and is going to college [?], and I talked to a soldier who told me, oh, don’t send her there. she’ll get raped. So as a parent it’s important to know where that money will go.

A: [?] it’s helpful to get information from someone that you know, as well.

P: yeah.

A: were you able to find the program that your friend was in, the Atlantic institute in Pensacola?

P: yes, I have it [found school, went to profile] [clicked jump link to go down to accordion] personally, I would have a huge issue with this. As soon as I read that, I would look elsewhere. I would think my friend’s an idiot, and this program’s not getting my money.

A: would you let your friend know about this information you found?

P: I kind of learned in life to keep my mouth closed. People usually don’t want to hear that kind of stuff. If they hadn’t started the program, then yeah, but he should have done his research before he started.

**Observe**\*

* How did the participant react to the caution flag?
* Is the participant naturally interested in clicking the card or learning more about the warning.

**Questions**

1. What were your thoughts when you first noticed the warning message?
2. As you read the warning message, what thoughts or questions come to mind?
3. What additional information would help you determine whether or not to attend Atlantic Institute?
4. What are your thoughts on whether VA might let your friend know about this flag? { if "They should" or something similar: How would you think they'd go about doing that? }

P: I would. It’s going to affect their ability for one, to get any position with the government. Anyone that’s served time wants to go work for the government so they can cash in their years for retirement [?] I don’t consider it necessarily your job, but it would be a courtesy. I don’t know if you have the power to do that, but hey, just a heads up, they’re wasting your money.

A: how could va let students know?

P: just an email or a text, or maybe when they go to get their check for that year, there’s a note on it.

A: great ideas. Would you need any other additional information to help you determine whether you’d go to this atlantic institute?

P: no, just the warning, and now that I look at it, the cost is way more expensive than others that have warnings.

A: one more question on this one that says it has an accreditation issue. What did this message mean to you?

P: don’t go to school there. it got put on probation because it didn’t meet the levels of quality.

A: if there was a school that you thought, oh I really want to go to this school, but then you saw this warning, would that have an impact on you?

P: oh, absolutely. If the two schools I was interested in both had these on them, I would start looking for other accredited programs online. To me, that’s just not acceptable in higher education.

### Scenario 3: School with multiple warnings [Prototype]

{ Get participant to search results page and have them review the schools }

Let's say you just moved to Phoenix, Arizona, and would like to check out schools in your new city. Using the comparison tool, how would you determine what schools you might be interested in attending there?

P: I would just type in Phoenix or Arizona. [clicked through from landing to srp, started scrolling down results] there are going to be way too many listed, so I would go to “institution type” and see where I can narrow my search [dropdown]

A: ok, so you’re looking for a way to reduce the number. Looks like you’re trying to click the institution type

P: or maybe search by program. I just don’t want to go through every single school in phoenix. Oh, this one’s a good school [grand canyon university]

A: what makes you think there?

P: my cousin’s kid goes there. there’s so many bad schools. It’s hard to know which one’s a legitimate school.

**Questions**

1. Which of these schools might you consider and why?
2. What questions do you have about the warning messages you see on this page?

P: oh, wow [stopped on brunley] it goes from bad to worse. So this one’s not approved. That’s very important to know! Yeah, that’s really not good either [alpha] not that I have any interest from going to alpha university, but I would click details just to be able to read the drama. And this stuff is really important to know. Once you click [?] this is really important to know,.

A: do you think if you clicked through on the va website, brunley college would know that and you’d start getting stuff from them?

P: yeah because everyone’s tracking you. Maybe not because I don’t think the va would sell your information. [?]

A: are you ok with that?

P: no, but at this point in time, I don’t even know what a person can even do about it. It’s kind of like if you agree to use the internet, you’re agreeing to have this happen.

A: [?]

1. Under what circumstances might you attend a school with a warning message?

**Observe**

* How did the participant react to the caution flags on the SRP?
* Did the participants { want to } click the schools with caution flags? If yes, to learn more about the school OR more about the caution?

#### Scenario 3b: School with multiple warnings / Profile Page [Prototype]

{ Get participant to profile page and have them review caution flags there }

Let's say you'd seen a lot of advertising for Brunley College. How would you go about getting more inof on that school?

P: I’d click “view details”. As soon as I viewed the warnings, I would be like, oh, I’m not going there [was in accordion]

A: talk to me about the warnings you do see here

P: the first thing that triggered me was the school has not been approved, but then down here, I see 221 have used it [historical gi bill students chart]. How did this happen if it’s not approved? I would like more information here. Why is it not approved? Is it because the school doesn’t accept them? Is it because the school is a crappy school? Is it because of the lawsuit? Especially since down here it says 221 have. Or maybe I get more information here [clicked about this tool link]

[on about this tool page] P: [scrolled down]

A: what are you looking for on this page?

P: just more information. I wanted to learn more about cauition flags. I thought if I clicked on that, it would tell me specifically why, but yeah.

A: is this a page you’ve seen before?

P: no, this might kind of explain it, but I’m a little bit confused trying to get back to the last page.

A: trying to get back to where you were before? It looks like when you clicked the link, it opened a new browser tab, so it looks like the back button isn’t going to work there. alright, so there’s a little bit more investigation that you’d like to do before you get going. It looks like we’re out of time, but I want to ask you one more thing before you go.

**Questions** 4. What are your thoughts on { Brunley College } ? Might you attend that school? If not, why?  
{ If they haven't already, have them click into the School Profile page }  
5. What are your thought on the warnings you see at the top of this page?  
{ If they haven't already, have them view the flags in the accordion }  
6. What are your thoughts on the warnings you see further down the page?

**Observe**

* On the School Profile page, did the participant engage with the jump link? How? { Clicked it immediately, clicked it eventually, didn't click it, didn't seem to see it, other }

### Scenario 4: Refine search [Prototype]

Looks like there are 14 schools in Phoenix. Can you tell me how you'd go about focusing your search on specific types of schools?

If you didn't want to see schools VA has tagged with flags, how might you narrow down the list of schools?

{ Let the participant know that on the real site, the number of results will change as they make selections. }

P: oh, right here [exclude warning filter]. I never saw that before, but I wasn’t looking for it, so. If I clicked that, does it automatically take all of them out or do I have to hit apply? It looks like it automatically took them all out, so that’s good.

A: alright, excellent.

**Observe**\*

* Does the participant understand that the left column controls the right column?
* Does the participant notice the "Exclude schools with warnings" filter?
* Does the participant use the exclude schools with warnings filter?

**Questions**

1. Did you notice the filter that lets you exclude schools with warnings?
2. What are your thoughts on this { exclude schools with warnings } filter?

**Reducing Veteran Risk: Questions**

If you're thinking of using your GI Bill Benefits at a particular school, what are your thoughts on whether VA should let you know a school has cautionary flags?

How might VA communicate that information to you?

### Task 5: Review Caution Flag Language [Graphic with pairs of Caution flags]

Now for something a little different. There are a handful of the cuation flags. We'd like to hear your thoughts on the language of some of these flags. We want to make them easy to understand. We also want to understand which messages people consider alarming and which they think are more informational.

Let's look at a few. For each, tell me in you own words what it means to you - or if you have no idea, let me know that too. Then, we'll have you rate it - based on how concerned you'd be about attending a school with that particular flag.

For each...

1. How would you describe this?
2. How concerned would you be about attending this school?

This campus closing soon: this is extremely important to know. It’s telling me that I probably won’t be able to complete my program at this location and I’d be extremely concerned.

Loss of title iv participation: I don’t really know what title iv participation is, so I would say monetary concerns. I’d be extremely concerned. It sound simportant.

This school has settled its case with the us government: oh, I’d be extremely concerned!

This school has settled its case with the FTC: I don’t know what the ftc is, but then again, there’s a lawsuit, so that’s not good. [extremely concerned]

[?]extremely concerned

Potential loss of accreditation: for me, I’m extremely concerned because I have to have accreditation,

Emergency campus closure: I don’t know what emergency campus is. I guess slightly concerned? I live at home, so I don’t really care. Emergency campus? I envision it being kind of like emergency shelter, like if the campus had to be closed for some reason, I don’t think it really applies to me.

Suspended for 85/15 violation: it probably has something to do with, like 85% of the population has to be something, or probably distribute money or something like that. It would be between moderately and extremely. If it’s suspended, then it’s extremely concerning.

Potential lapse in program approval: I guess I’m extremely concerned. I don’t have time for a lapse.

### Thank-You and Closing

[The moderator concludes each session by thanking the participant for their time and for offering his/her opinions and suggestions.]

Thank you very much for taking the time to give us your feedback today. We really appreciate your help!

Where do you expect to see information about warnings?