# 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: I actually didn’t find out about that until after I joined. I was in the national guard and also at the **[?]** state benefits. Because you’re in the national guard you don’t get the full benefits.

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 am looking to apply to a graduate school within the next two years. I completed my bachelor’s two years ago.

A: do you know what you want to study?

P: yes, business analysis.

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

P: curriculum, price and I would say reputation of the school.

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 would visit their yellow ribbon website. Typically if they have that and their veteran department, then that’s pretty settling to me. Otherwise if they don’t have a a veterans department, that shuts me off.

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

P: assistance, the ability to move forward even though I’m out of the military.

A: when you say the ability to move forward, in what realm?

P: in the military, you get all the gi bill benefits when you’re in there. once you leave, the gi bill helps to set you up for success. **[?]** So this helps you set your road once you leave.

**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 San Diego 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 San Diego State University would be?

{ prompt: Remember to think aloud as you go }

P: I would change my military status so I’m considered a veteran now. I’d put that. Which gi bill benefit I’d use? Post-9/11. Cumulative post 9/11 service? I’m at 60%. I’m assuming it’s obviously a school so I’d keep that there. how do you want to take classes? I’d do both. I’m typing in san Diego state university. I’m going to click on the main university without a bridge off campus [searched and went to srp]

P: I’m going to assume that this is the main university [first result] I’m going to view details and I’m not an in-state student. Just verifying all the information is correct [clicked through calculator fields] I’m going to back up and look at the benefit information after I verified all the information is correct. So gi bill will pay this much, 4,476. Out of pocket tuition, housing… it’s actually a lot. It actually breaks down the tuition by semester. [scrolled down to veteran programs] so this says all the programs that it offers. Oh, this is important, the complaints.

A: what are you seeing there?

P: students have complaints about financial issues… this only has 2 and 3 complaints in the last 24 months out of the thousands of people, so that’s a really good rate for me. [reviewed additional information accordion] they may not have a yellow ribbon program. That’s why it says 0. I think that’s it.

**Questions**

1. What are your thoughts on that process?

P: Well, for me, I’ve used this so many times that I really enjoy messing with the different estimated benefits. When I change the part time to full time, it’s pretty direct. You don’t have to visit each school’s website to get that information. the only other thing is, I don’t know if I noticed this before, the veteran programs. That’s pretty cool to have there instead of going offsite to see what programs they offer.

1. 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: Atlantic Institute.

A: yeah, so assuming these are some of the functional pieces that don’t work.

P: ok so that’s prepopulated. Is it an employer or a school?

A: they are cybersecurity.

P: Sorry. [searched and went to srp] this school has a cautionary warning. Where did you say he was at?

A: in Pensacola

P: that’s where he’s from, not the school?

A: the school is in Pensacola

P: thank you. [found Pensacola school, went to profile, then scrolled down to cautionary accordion] so this is pretty helpful. It’s good that va would post that. [?]

[scrolled to inst. Summary] so it seems like a pretty small school. I’m just looking for the cost for the pricing for the school. I’m just looking by term.

A: are you looking for something specific as you’re going through the page?

P: [?] it was probably the process of being accredited. It may be if I applied with an employer, the degree may be a concern there. [?]

P: can I click on learn more or no?

A: yeah you should be able to.

P: oh, yeah. That is really helpful [accreditation page] is this a page? I want to learn what the signs of accreditation for each category [?] I guess this isn’t the same. But yeah, it’d be nice to search.

A: any other factors? [?]

P: besides accreditation, no. other than the accreditation issue, I would go for it. [?]

**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: definitely an email to the students. If this had 1000 students, it’d be difficult to pick up, but definitely an email

### 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: oh, so I’d keep all this as is. I’m going to keep it as schools only. In person since this is going to be restricted to phoenix, Arizona. I would type in phoenix az or ar. I don’t know the acronyms. I would search and [on srp] if I really wanted to I would narrow it down more using the left panel, country and state, but it looks like it’s all for phoenix Arizona. It looks like all the parameters are solid so I don’t have to do any of that. So closing soon, that’s out of the question, this school is very expensive, and there’s 0 gi bill students there, that would be a no for me. That’s pretty expensive too [2nd school card tuition]. I’m just reading through… and this is a no go for me as well, brunley college.

A: why would you say that?

P: not approved for post 9/11 gi bill benefits and deceptive advertising lawsuit. It’s a combination of both. That seems deceptive. Just not a fan of those words. The not approved for post-9/11 gi bills, that could mean that they’re just getting started, if it was just that message, I would consider it, but the deceptive advertising lawsuit, [?].

A: so a. couple of the things that are attractors for you are the # of gi bill students and the tuition for school.

P: yeah, and this one the beautician school, it is comforting to see a number of gi bill students. The potential lapse in program approval doesn’t concern me, and it’s a school of art. There’s not many art schools, in my opinion. These seem like gib schools. Should I click next or does it matter?

**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?
3. 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 would visit the website, and if there’s a military representative, like department of military affairs. I would visit the admissions office, I would ask them why this message occurred, I guess not completely dismissed the not approved for gi bill benefits cos they could be in the process of getting approved.

A: so you’d do a little more research

P: yeah because there’s 180 gi bill students. They couldn’t all be wrong. [Tried going to brunley page but invision was acting up]

A: [?]

P:

A: when you click the link, did you know that was going to happen?

P: no, I thought it was going to open something else, but it is nice that it brings you down to the bottom.

A: [had to reauthenticate her connection] if you’re thinking of using your gi bill benefits at a particular school, what are your thoughts on whether va should warn you about the flags?

P: to be honest, if I didn’t even see the accreditation issue, I wouldn’t have thought of anything. It’s probably the number of complaints coming from gi bill users [student complaints would be primary concern] [?] I had this issue before because I was enrolled in a class but they kicked me out of the class because it wasn’t paid in time even though it was being paid by the state. so those types of complaints. If other veterans are having issues, I think that’s important.

A: so you’d want to make sure you’re doing your due diligence to make sure everything is working for your gi bill benefits?

P: yeah, so let’s say if 5 out of 7 students are having issues, let’s say that.

A: what are your thoughts on whether va should warn you about flagged schools?

P: when you look it up in the system

A: or outside of the system

P: let’s say when you apply to the school. Does that count?

A: so when you reach out to the school, they should tell you that they have a caution flag?

P: yeah.

**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?

P: oh, on the left side. I would scroll down to make sure all my parameters are correct. So I would go to a school. i would exclude institutions with warnings [clicked warnings filter] programs…[went through the rest of filter questions]

A: great, that worked really well. Nice job. I have one other thing…

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

**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?

Accreditation issue: moderately concerned. I don’t want to try to advance in my career, and the university is not recognized by my employer. However, it’s not an extreme concern because the school may be working towards becoming accredited.

A campus at this school is closing soon: that’s good information cos it means you probably shouldn’t apply there. extremely concerned

Emergency campus closure: I would say moderately concerned

Heightened cash monitoring: [?]

Deceptive advertising lawsuit: I’d say extreme concern. Falsifying methods to draw the students to the school

### 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!

You said you like to play around with the filters and calculators in the comparison tool. What are your thoughts on the position of the cautionary warning filter in the search results page?

You mentioned that you’ve used the comparison tool many times before. What are some other ways that you typically search for school information as it relates to your gi bill benefits?

[?]

[typically uses the comparison tool to search for a specific school, not so much a location or city search]

[has not come across any flags during previous searches in the comparison tool]