# 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: can I give you a percentage? I’d say maybe 30%. It was definitely a career move and then retire, but I certainly thought about education.

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 just got my bachelor’s in December.

A: what did you get your degree in?

P: International Affairs.

A: are you planning on continuing your education?

P: Yes, when I was planning my degrees, I used my gi bill strategically so I could use it for both my bachelor’s and master’s. I have about 22 months left.

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

P: location, the program, and the yellow ribbon program.

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: the first thing I would do is speak to the veterans office at the school if they have one. Another factor is that I’d first find out if the school is veteran friendly, and I’d call their veteran office and speak to the school the veteran’s club president and the certifiying official to keep in line with any questions I have.

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

P: fortunate, lucky, mine, as in I’ve earned it. I don’t know, that’s a good question.

A: what does fortunate and lucky mean to you?

P: fortunate because without the gi bill, I don’t think I would ever go to college. I can’t afford it, my parents can’t afford it. I dropped out of high school and never took the sats. Working my way up after that was a struggle. So yeah, I feel I’ve earned it.

**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: [could not get remote control passed to him so Amy opted to have him direct movements] using the gi bill comparison tool? You’re right. This is very hard without any real substance. [Amy had him share his screen] ok, I’m scrolling and then I would search the schools. Then click on the school information [went to profile page] the first thing is the housing and the tuiton information. I’d look for those two things. Make sure it’s in person.

A: what would be particular about being in person for you?

P: I just can’t function or learn on my own. I like to be in a classroom setting [kept tweaking the calculator fields]

P: I would certainly contact Christian ( a SCO in the contact details. Tuition is also very low, which is good.

**Questions**

1. What are your thoughts on that process?

P: when I was searching for my undergrad, I think I got accustomed to looking at these things. Not using this tool, though.

1. Do you have particular thoughts on the Comparison Tool at this point?

P: It’s pretty resourceful. It has everything you would need. When I was searching for my undergrad, I didn’t use this. I’d use this for my master’s.

**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: ok, let’s see, search the school first. [on srp] is there anything in particular that I should be looking for or just my own thoughts?

A: yeah just your own thoughts…

P: my first thought is that this school has accreditation issues. first I would call at least to be sure. I believe, when I was looking at schools, most schools don’t have this warning. The fact that this school does just raises another flag to me, so I’d point that out to my friend. Certainly. Looking at this, I don’t think I would look at anything else. I would tell him to look for another school. [clicked on learn more about accreditation link] I’ve never heard of this before. I suppose, instead of calling the school, I’d call them first to verify if the school is accredited since they would know more than the university. That’s the first thing I would do after viewing this warning.

**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: [if friend is already attending] if he is already there and is using the gi bill before, if he did do his research before, for example, I would tell him when I was applying for undergrad, I called the va education department. The person on the other line was very informative and very helpful. If he did call the education department, then nobody told him about it. I would tell him to call. When he asked questions about the gi bill, the housing stipend, they would tell him, look, this school isn’t accredited. You can’t get your benefits. [idea: call center rep training for flagged schools]

### 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: schools only, for sure. Yellow ribbon [on srp]. I would click on yellow ribbon here. Student vet group is big for me. [was looking at the left rail filters]

A: so right away you’d try and use the elements on the left-hand side. What do you think would happen?

P: I think it would narrow down the schools. I would immediately discard these online and independent institutions. They don’t really appeal to me.

A: anything jump out to you?

P: maybe university of Arizona just because it’s probably the most well-known university in Arizona. A lot of these schools I’ve never heard of so they don’t appeal to me. Probably the university of Arizona. No, wait. [went to alpha university card] when I was actually looking at schools I’ve never seen these warning signs. These are new to me, that they warn you.

A: what do you think about that?

P: I think it’s a very useful tool. I like it. I think it’s great. You’re saving a lot of time here.

A: how would that factor into your decision making?

P: it’s kind of like a bad review for a product. When I see this, it throws up flags immediately for me. Even if I talked to someone at the university, if I were to see this, I would avoid them. Why do they have flags at this school and not other schools? I also look at how many underneath the city, how many gi bill students are using these benefits. I know that this school has a small gi community [gensley] as opposed to this school [alpha].

**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 not [attend] because it’s not approved for gi bill, chapter 33. It’s another one that is being sued for advertising. Yeah, I would not look beyond this school after seeing this. Even beyond that, it’s not approved, so there’s no need for me to enroll. Yeah, really those two things.

**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: so I’m looking for schools with these warnings or without?

A: that did not have the warnings

P: [clicked exclude warnings filter] yeah I suppose I would say check this box here. Has this always been here, this option? I don’t ever remember seeing that. I figured not many universities would have these warnings. I don’t think a lot of schools would have these. Maybe I’m just blind. Maybe I just haven’t seen them before. I could pretty much see what I wanted to see.

**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?

P: I think it’s important for the veteran students, but I don’t know if they have to advertise it. I don’t think they would because it ruins the reputation for the school. so, just look the other way. It’s all business at the end.

A: you think va would probably not let you. Know because of a consideration for the school’s reputation?

P: I would think they should, but my brain is telling me initially anyway.

A: that the va would hide it or the school?

P: I don’t know. Maybe the school more than the va. Becaue the va doesn’t have any sort of attachment to all these schools. [like they wouldn’t let va know about it] [ thinks va would eventually let veterans know about these warnings]

How might VA communicate that information to you?

P: I was thinking maybe they could email you personally, but that means they would have to email every student. I don’t know if that’s feasible. Nothing is coming to mind.

A: if you got an email from the va, would you open it?

P: yes, right away.

### 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?

### 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!