**Discussion Guide for Stakeholders**

**Walter**

Thanks so much for joining us today. Our team is investigating how different users engage with the GI Bill Comparison Tool and are interested in hearing how you use the Comparison Tool in your work to support schools, employers, and their military-connected students.

**Warm-up Questions**

* [Name & Role]
* I use it quite a bit – it’s one of the key data sources. One of the links in the document I sent is a paper I wrote in February. A little bit is teasing out Veteran success in post-secondary education. It walks through the research. I used to work in datasets and one of the most important things in the dataset was to make sure that the data was accurate. What I sent you is examples of where it’s not accurate.
* So I know that you talked to other colleagues on Monday. I just want to echo one of the comments made – and this is supposed to help Veterans make an informed education. One of the important parts of that is outcome data. Much of it is about money – 100% tuition, housing education, benefit. I think there’s a bit of a disconnect with that information. I don’t have a statistic but I would guess that the vast majority of beneficiaries, money is not an issue because many schools are covered. They use in-state tuition. What is the bottom line of what a school charges and what VA will pay. I guess there is a link online versus others. To be honest I’ve never really used those. I’m a researcher. Mostly I use the dataset (link at bottom of page). A lot of research. A lot of Veterans end up taking out student loans. And not all schools who participate in GI Bill benefit also participates in Title IV. I can’t tell if individuals are doing graduate or undergraduate. I would guess that most are going back to school after being in the service for 3-4 years. We aren’t as concerned about officers because to do that you have to have a college degree. It also doesn’t break out by beneficiary type. In CT, you can look at how many schools are enrolled in University of Phoenix, etc. If you look at the CT, you can see Veterans going to Princeton, Yale…and when you dig down, you find out most are graduate students – probably officers. Finally, college scorecard data used to be shown here. I’m not sure why it disappeared. I understand why they took off VA data – schools were complaining and saying VA was undercounting. There’s no reason why they shouldn’t show the scorecard data. This is a really important piece of data that is important to picking a college. There’s more in the paper – the rest of this won’t take long.
* What data specifically from college scorecard?
* Most crosswalk was done manually. The nomenclature that VA uses is different from Department of Education. Schools are constantly closing, merging branches, etc. It puts a burden on VA to make sure they have a link to the right code. When they did the manual crosswalk, they stopped if a school had less than 10 GI Bill students. There’s missing data, there’s inaccuracies. I pasted in a couple things I did in 2015, trying to get to schools not participating in Title IV. There were schools not listed as Title IV eligible, but they were. I think it’s important that Veterans know that. Title IV is a federal student aid program. It probably distributes millions of dollars in aid to students. We work on a lot of for-profit colleges. For for-profit colleges, there’s a rule that you can’t get more than 90% of revenue from Title IV, but GI Bill is excluded from this. Community colleges are pretty cheap. Some don’t participate in direct loans, they just do Pell grants and costs are pretty low. Quite a few beneficiaries have student loan debt. I also pasted in info on how to automate OPEID and VA facility codes. Another issue I’ve noticed is school ownership data is not accurate. We use this a lot. DeVry has 50-60 campuses. So how many Veterans or beneficiaries are going to each campus. I don’t know how frequent this is, but sometimes when I download it, data is missing. I’m not sure I reported that to VA, but I have reported a lot of these things. Throughout the course of the year, I may download the data 2-3 times a year. If I’m starting a project, I’ll download a version to use. So I have quite a few copies of that on my computer. How many beneficiaries are enrolled and what did they pay to the school. The enrollment data is always calendar year, so it’s anyone who enrolls over a 12 month year. Payment is on fiscal year. I did reach out to Daniel Ortega. It’s usually updated in April-may-June. For a long time, it had FY2018 payment data and calendar year 2019 enrollment data. Then in August it had 2020…and 2020 isn’t over, so that’s not possible. It was a labeling issue. But they couldn’t publish 2019 payment data. That’s definitely an issue. I have to archive these (datasets). When they post the new data, the data from prior years just disappeared and I go back to those datasets pretty often. I think it would be pretty easy for them to archive them. School closes…so if ITT closes…within a few days, that data disappears. If someone asks me what the enrollment was the day it closes, I can’t tell them. I can understand someone not accessing ITT for search for funds, but there’s no reason you can’t put that info in a tab and allow access to it. I guess the new facility code issue is the same. American Intercontinental purchased Trident. So they got a new facility code and all the data disappeared. Same with Ashford. So how many GI Bill students went to Ashford and it says 0, which isn’t correct. Largest campuses – I’m concerned the methodology isn’t quite right. At first they identify the individual campuses of a school. Like Ashford has one campus, but some schools have many campuses. The second part of the tab shows all the campuses owned by that school. It’s not clear that using the largest campus and rolling it up to all those groups, is not catching the biggest ones. I’m just curious what the methodology is. It’s done by money and not be enrollment. You put this data on the tool and scratch your head on how it was done. It would help to have some explanation of methodology. Yellow Ribbon – school can cover any portion of gap between tuition and what VA pays. So is YR just what VA pays or if it includes what the school matches.
* YR – it’s complicated because they can set a cap on the number of students they offer it to. For medical school, they can cap it at 5. But no cap on the business school. I think there are a lot of unknowns and I don’t think the CT can answer all their questions.
* Scorecard – I think I reference it in the paper. We did report on outcomes of Veterans at trade schools. They only offer credentials. No higher level degree. We identified say 2000 schools that only offer credentials. When they started putting completion data, where they got in trouble is when they started reporting Bachelor’s degrees. In the report, there were basic questions VA couldn’t answer about what they were showing on the CT. We decided the VA data was junk. We ended up using Scorecard data. The data isn’t Veteran specific, but we reported outcomes for students. For the most part, it’s what’s on the website at the time. Do you have historical records? Student outcomes - Retention, graduation and earnings. Did you earn more than a high school graduate. I can send you a link. It would be terrific if there is an archive that you can share with the public. The for-profit association sent members of Congress a letter (25 schools). Scorecard is not broken out by beneficiaries and others. Median debt. Payment rates, Default rates. I’m pretty sure we put the announcement of MOU…I think there’s a link in a report. It might be in a SAS report.
* Congress passed the bill and basically told Veterans that “I hope you succeed” and we still don’t have good data on outcomes. What’s the result of all that money? I think the public and members of Congress should have this information.
* OPTIONAL: Could you tell us a bit about how your work supports Veterans?
* How long have you been doing this work?

**Use of the Comparison Tool**

* How does the GI Bill Comparison Tool factor into your work?   
  + About how often do you use the Comparison Tool?
* What tasks do you use the Comparison Tool to accomplish?
  + What kind of information are you typically looking for?
  + What do you do with that information?
  + Are there other sites or tools you use to perform similar tasks?
  + Any other tasks? (repeat series, as needed)
* OPTIONAL: What are your thoughts on the accuracy of the information in the tool?
  + If you find information on schools that isn't accurate, what do you do?
  + How long does it take for information to be fixed?
* OPTIONAL: How do you find out about changes/updates to the Comparison Tool?
  + How effectively does that meet your needs?

**Making Improvements**

* If you could change the Comparison Tool to better meet your needs, what would you be able to do with it that you can’t now?  
  + How would that be beneficial to you?
* What else would you like it to do that it doesn’t already?
* Would you have any interest or need to update data in the Comparison Tool? If yes, what would you want to update?
* Is there anything within the Comparison Tool that you find incredibly useful as-is and think shouldn’t be changed?

**Thank-You and Closing**

Thank you! Those are all the questions we had for you today. Do you have any questions for me?

[ If time allows, ask for Qs from the team ]

We really appreciate you taking the time to share your thoughts with us today. Your feedback will help us make ensure the Comparison Tool works well for those who rely on it.

Thank you so much and enjoy the rest of your day!