**Discussion Guide for Stakeholders**

**Nate**

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’m with military civilian transition office – the office supposed to run the TAPS program. Any agency that touches Veteran lives and works with transition. We are basically the transition office for DoD. I’m the research for this office. I see what research is out there so we can summarize to leadership so they can base policies and curriculum on the latest research. What Veteran service members need. We reach out to post secondary institutions to help them see the benefit of pulling Veterans into their campus.
* Amy: first hand knowledge of GI Bill Comparison Tool
* I was just looking it up now – right now I’m trying to figure out how much GI Bill the schools receive and the number of GI Bill students. Comes up intermittently. I’m more familiar with the aggregate – the total numbers. I’m not your normal user.
* Right now I just got data from Department of Vet of GI students on campus and number of money schools receive. And also the percentage of campuses that have services for Veterans. One argument we like to make is what low percentage of employers/universities are offering things to Veterans. That if they want access to something billion dollars then they can do something to get a competitive advantage since about half institutions aren’t doing anything. From our curriculum side, its nice to show transitioning service members what schools they can go to. We give them the link and we tell them to look up schools they are interested in.
* I just use it for the total numbers – I haven’t explored it for individual schools. It’s a link – it’s a web link that pulls up a spreadsheet. One is the CT and the other is benefits….it’s just an Excel sheet. You click on the link and it opens up the sheet – it has overall GI Bill, approved schools, POE complaints, Veteran initiatives, POE coverage, etc.
* Amy: What do you do with that data?
* For me, I summarize it and present it to leadership and curriculum designers. And then they use it in the work that they do. The big thing right now is talking to universities and saying only 40% of schools are doing this with billions of dollars, is this good motivation for you. We put it in press releases, Congress members and in the curriculum. One thing we want to know is what percent of GI Bill students are family members/spouses/etc. versus service members transitioning out. That is one holy grail we’re pursuing – separating service members from spouses/kids/beneficiaries.
* For curriculum designers, they are interested in the actual school checking link so they can give it to transitioning service members.
* Amy: Using the data you’ve accessed to help make the case or identify schools to reach out to?
* It can be both – for presentations, we can use aggregate numbers or slice it by states. The idea being able to congregate by similar institutions. So they can look up a specific college and compare it to other schools in the state or say that I notice you do x, but not y. I forward the link to them. I’ve summarized the data for leadership.
* Challenges with accuracy?
* Today I’m having a meeting with Department of Edu and your team because I’ve noticed some numbers are off. I’m more interested in the bottom line – that $4.x billion dollars. I’m sure there’s an explanation for it. The VA tabulates the amount of checks that go out. It may be a time discrepancy. Or it could be a fiscal year versus calendar year. It’s not off by a huge amount, but make sure we’re on it. That’s part of my job (to look at accuracy). I’m honored that they trust me. If I can say I confirmed this number. Leadership will get pushback and they’ll say why does this say this number, and that one say that. Particularly the student veteran number because there are Veteran service organizations that of all the transitioning service members, half of them go to school. They say that more should be given. I ask how they come up with those numbers, they’ll say its proprietary. They’ll brief Congress and throw out a number and Congress will treat it as gospel. Knowing how many transitioning members go into academia within x number of months after leaving the service is the holy grail. For the more typical user who want to learn about the school…one ideal we’re trying to push is that each service member should shoot as high as they can go. Story on first generation college student – as infantry, he didn’t think he could reach Georgetown’s calibre. Georgetown was good at looking at military experience and high school scores and he led a platoon. That a liberal Jesuite school would be open to military ? My undergrad which is known for being hippy left has a solid program to bring military Veterans in. It’s Wesleyan Connecticut. I was like really? It’s the last place I would expect to be Veteran friendly. I think they’ve had it 4-5 years and they’re starting to push the alumni out. Props to the school for having that program.
* Any improvements?
* For my perspective of the summary, having the full line by line data looks like you got a part of the spreadsheet that does that. Making that clearer would help. I’d say for the spreadsheet have a description – a note about what things mean, make it easier to download and understand. From the actual Veteran tool…it looks like everything someone would want to know. I like that it has a link to the school itself. I can’t really offer a lot of suggestions, it looks like it does the trick. I like the boxes that you can expand. You can click through and expand what you want to see.
* Aggregate data points? I’m thinking. The biggest thing would be to differentiate Veteran versus family. Maybe if it could be broken by county or type of school. The schools would be more interested in knowing how they match up against schools like them – and many times they aren’t geographically close.
* Whatever you can do to really encourage people to upgrade their thinking – think high. It might be hard to put that in a system. If you look at this school, here are other comparable schools. Or more prestigious ones. Have you spoken to Office of Economic and Manpower Analysis at West Point. They came up with an app that would help you figure out what schools would be of interest to you. What Army students had done well there…and the point was to get you as high as you could. It’s all about degrees. But they work to make it seamless and invisible that the app would make recommendations to you. Saying you’re looking at this degree in this geography and it pulls up options. I thought that was a useful tool and once you expressed interest, it would send you reminders about deadlines. It became a push model against laziness. Colonel Karl Washanak? Mark Crow is deputy director.
* That’s a goal we work in our realm – so it’s not just getting you a job, but getting a job that maximizes what you’ve done and accomplished in the military. I tell people as a taxpayer. If this person isn’t in a job maximizing their skills, it’s a waste of money. If we can get them in the best program, it’s really all for the better.
* Feel free to reach out
* 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!