



Marketing and scams aimed at military communities

Learn how to spot military community affinity marketing and scams that may cost you hard-earned money.

AFFINITY MARKETING

Affinity marketing is a way businesses and organizations design products and services and communicate about them to specific target audiences.

MILITARY AFFINITY MARKETING

Military affinity marketing uses military-sounding names, symbols, patriotic imagery, and military jargon to attract military consumers to their products and services. Businesses and organizations using military affinity marketing often use "ex-military" people in sales or other customer-facing positions to convince servicemembers, veterans and their families that they can trust in what they are being sold.

There are more than 20 million veterans and 2.3 million troops serving on active duty, in the reserve forces, or with the National Guard. Add to this family members and friends or people who have served. This is a large group of people who are likely to respond positively to military affinity marketing.

WHAT TO ASK WHEN CONSIDERING FINANCIAL PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

Many businesses and organizations offer financial products and services to military consumers.

To ensure the business or organization is offering financial products and services that are beneficial, it can be helpful to ask questions including:

- **Does the business or organization have a legitimate link to the military?** Some businesses or organizations often use names that imply a connection when there is none.
- **Does the product or service offer a benefit not already provided to military communities?** For example, the VA offers life insurance policies directly to servicemembers, veterans, and their families. Ask them how their product or service is superior to the one offered by the government.
- **If providing loans, are the rates and terms similar to loans you can get at regular banks or credit unions?** Be sure to understand the costs and terms of loans and comparison shop.
- **If providing an educational service, does the school avoid pressuring you to use additional student loans?** Some educational institutions pressure military students to enroll in programs. In some cases, the entire GI Bill benefit is used up and additional student loan debt is incurred.
- **Does the business or organization seem to be knowledgeable about military consumer protections such as the Servicemembers Civil Relief Act and the Military Lending Act?** See "The SCRA and MLA: How are they different?" for more information on these laws.

If you answered "no" to any of these questions, you may want to do more research.

SCAMS

Servicemembers, veterans, and their families must also be aware of scams. Here are some common scams:

- **Pension buyout scam.** This is a lump sum payment of cash for a retired servicemember or veteran's current or future pension payment. The lump sum payment is often a fraction of the total value of the benefit.
- **Charging for records scam.** A veteran is offered access to their military records for a fee. All military records are available free of charge through the National Archives ([archives.gov](https://www.archives.gov)).
- **VA phishing and smishing scams.** A veteran receives calls, emails, or texts from someone posing as a VA employee asking for personal information to update their records. The VA does not solicit people to do this and all unsolicited calls, emails, or texts like this should be ignored.
- **Employment scams.** Jobs are posted in publications and on websites that target veterans and military spouses. In some instances, the information provided on a job application may be used to commit financial fraud. This is common in work-at-home jobs in that they require upfront investments but promise easy money with unlimited earning potential.
- **GI Bill scams.** The GI Bill provides servicemembers and veterans with free or reduced cost post-secondary education. Some businesses and organizations use marketing messages to convince military students to enroll, but then provide them with unaccredited training and education.

Often, the entire benefit is used up before the servicemember or veteran can earn their desired certificate or degree.

Use the VA's GI Bill comparison tool to learn about education programs and compare benefits by school at [va.gov/gi-bill-comparison-tool](https://www.va.gov/gi-bill-comparison-tool).

HOW TO SUBMIT A COMPLAINT

 **Online**
consumerfinance.gov/complaint

 **By phone (180+ languages)**
M-F, 8 a.m. - 8 p.m. ET
(855) 411-2372
(855) 729-2372 TTY/TDD

 **By mail**
Consumer Financial Protection Bureau
P.O. Box 2900
Clinton, IA 52733-2900

For more information, you can refer to the full *Your Money, Your Goals* toolkit online at consumerfinance.gov/your-money-your-goals.

If you're having a problem with a bank account, credit card, student loan, consumer loan or other financial products or services you can submit a complaint with the CFPB at consumerfinance.gov/complaint.

For answers to commonly asked questions you might have about other money matters, visit "Ask CFPB" at consumerfinance.gov/ask-cfpb.

Mail

Consumer Financial Protection Bureau
PO Box 2900
Clinton, IA 52733-2900

Email

YourMoneyYourGoals@cfpb.gov

Toll-free phone

855.411.2372
Monday-Friday
8:00 a.m.-8:00 p.m. (EST)

TTY/TDD phone

855.729.2372

Fax

855.237.2392

About the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau

The Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) regulates the offering and provision of consumer financial products and services under the Federal consumer financial laws, and educates and empowers consumers to make better informed financial decisions. Learn more at consumerfinance.gov.

This guide and related materials are free and accessible

The Your Money, Your Goals toolkit and this companion guide are available as a PDF download or can be ordered in hard copy for free. Both documents are 508 compliant to be accessible to people with disabilities. The individual tools and handouts in the toolkit and the guide are available as separate, downloadable PDF documents. You can add information directly into the fields of the tools and all calculations are now done automatically.

You can find the toolkit, this guide, and additional resources such as the Implementation Guide, training slides and videos, and pre- and post-training surveys on the Your Money, Your Goals webpage at consumerfinance.gov/your-money-your-goals.