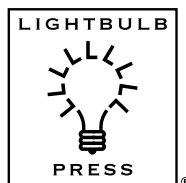




# VETERANS HANDBOOK

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# Making the Right Moves

There's no basic training for new veterans.

You've heard it before: The transition from service member to civilian is one of the most difficult you're ever likely to make. You can plan diligently, make well-reasoned decisions, and think you're ready for what's ahead. But being a member of the military one day and a veteran the next means leaving behind a clearly defined and closely knit unit and becoming just one of the crowd.

How easily you manage this move depends on how carefully you plan and a number of other factors, some of which you're already aware of:

- Whether you made the decision to leave the military or it was made for you
- If you have a good job lined up
- If you're coping with a serious injury
- How stable your personal life is

But you may also have to cope with emotions or reactions that surprise or disturb you, including symptoms of persistent stress.

The best way to prepare for this dramatic change in your life is to anticipate its challenges and be ready to seize its opportunities.

## OFF TO A HEAD START

Before you leave the service, it's a good idea to identify the professional, financial, and personal choices that lie ahead and to explore the ways your status as a veteran may give you certain advantages.

Certainly employment is a major concern, and, as you'll discover, various departments of the federal government, including Defense (DoD), Labor (DOL), and Veterans Affairs (VA) have mounted a coordinated effort to help you launch a successful job search. Individual states also have veteran-specific employment programs, as do some private organizations.

The Post 9/11 GI Bill provides tuition and housing assistance for qualifying veterans. And while financial aid from the Department of Education, individual states, and many

educational institutions isn't necessarily veteran-specific, it can help make it possible for you to be a full-time student.

When you're ready to buy a home, you'll want to investigate the VA home loan program and look into real estate tax breaks that may be available. Similarly, your insurance needs—life and healthcare in particular—may be met at least in part by programs you're eligible for as a veteran.

Finally, it's smart to seek out veteran-friendly financial institutions for your savings, checking, and investment needs.

## THREE KEY DECISIONS

To prepare for the immediate choices you'll have to make as a new civilian, it helps to group them into three categories:

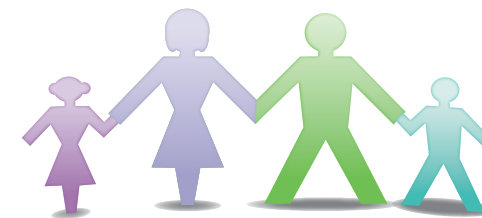
- **Career decisions**, including whether to postpone your job search to polish your skills, acquire new ones, or finish an undergraduate or graduate degree

## FAMILY MATTERS

If you have a family—spouse, partner, children—the changes in your life are intertwined with the changes in theirs. Talking things through and making collaborative decisions are essential to a successful transition.

For example, choosing one job over another may be a decision you have to make for yourself. But where that job is located, whether you buy a home right away or decide to rent, and if you choose to use the GI Bill's tuition assistance for yourself, your spouse, or your children isn't just about you—they affect your family directly.

If you've been deployed for extended periods, you and your spouse may not have been doing much joint decision making, if only for practical reasons. Establishing—or reestablishing—a partnership approach to setting goals, making choices, and managing money can add positive energy, rather than more stress, to your new life.



## READY, AIM, FILE

If you plan to take advantage of the VA benefits to which you're entitled, it's essential to enroll for your VA eBenefits account at [www.eBenefits.va.gov](http://www.eBenefits.va.gov).

Check out the "Introduction to eBenefits" link on the Help Page for a description of how to apply. You'll need to be registered in the Defense Enrollment Eligibility Reporting System (DEERS) and have a DoD Self Service (DS) Logon.

When you leave the military, the one thing you don't leave behind is the paperwork. There's a form for almost everything, from your Release or Discharge papers (DD Form 214) and Verification of Military Experience and Training (DD Form 2586) to the specific documents you need to qualify for a VA loan guaranty, receive tuition assistance through the GI Bill, or convert your SGLI insurance.

It's smart to obtain the original documents and a number of certified photocopies while you're still on active duty. You will need a system for keeping them secure and accessible so you'll have them when you need them—which may be more often than you think.

You'll also want to keep careful track of your personal records, including birth certificates, adoption papers, marriage licenses, and divorce decrees. There are times when you need originals, not copies.

- **Financial decisions**, including establishing a relationship with a reputable financial institution, such as a credit union, setting a strategy for saving and investing, and refining your money management skills
- **Personal decisions**, including where to live, the type and amount of life insurance you need, and the best source for health insurance

There's overlap, of course. The flexibility you have in managing your money depends on what you earn and what your living expenses are. Similarly, the decisions you make about health insurance may depend on whether or not your new employer offers this coverage.



# The Post 9/11 GI Bill

This may be the right time to pursue your education and advance your career.

Enrolling in school may be the perfect next step after leaving the military, whether you're accumulating credentials for a specific occupation or trying to decide on a career path. More education is always smart, and the benefits of the Post 9/11 GI Bill make this choice especially appealing.

Specifically, the Post 9/11 GI Bill will pay your tuition and fees for up to 36 months for two- or four-year under-

a nine-month academic year if you attend a public college or university in another state. It also covers accredited private or state-approved vocational or training programs. There's also a stipend of up to \$1,000 to cover books and supplies each year. Check out [www.NewGIBill.org](http://www.NewGIBill.org) to calculate your benefits or seek advice.



graduate degree-granting programs, graduate study, technical or vocational training, certification or licensing programs, flight training, and apprenticeships.

The bill covers your tuition and fees at any public institution to which you're admitted in your home state and a fixed amount that increases annually to pay tuition and fees for

### ELIGIBLE FOR THE GI BILL?

To qualify for the full benefit, you must have served at least 36 months on active duty, including active duty since 9/11/2001, or have a service-related disability.

You'll also be eligible for a location-based housing subsidy when you enroll more than half-time. The complication is that the subsidy isn't paid when your school isn't in session, which includes the break between terms and summer vacation, often three full months or more. Since most rentals require a year lease, you'll have to find a way to supplement your housing costs for the periods the subsidy isn't paid.

If you're required to take a national entrance exam as part of the application process, such as the SAT, ACT, GMAT, LSAT, or others, those fees are normally reimbursed. So are expenses for meeting certification requirements.

VA Form 22-1990  
"Application for VA Education Benefits"

### WHEN YOU'RE READY

To apply for Post 9/11 GI Bill benefits, you'll need to complete **VA Form 22-1990, "Application for VA Education Benefits,"** at [www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/apply.asp](http://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/apply.asp) or by calling 888-442-4551. You have 15 years from the date you leave the military to take advantage of this opportunity.

### YELLOW RIBBON PROGRAM

If you think a private college or university will suit your interests better than a public institution, you'll want to look for the list of approved degree-granting institutions that participate in the veteran-friendly Yellow Ribbon program. Being part of the program may make it possible for you to enroll without taking on more debt than you are comfortable with—a major benefit in itself.



Participating schools cover at least part of the tuition and fees that exceed what the GI Bill covers. In addition, the VA matches the amount the institution commits, dollar for dollar.

This means, for example, if a school covers \$8,000, and you add the VA match of \$8,000 on top of the amount covered by the GI Bill, then you'll have nearly twice as much for tuition, fees, and related costs for the academic year. Schools publish the amount they will contribute and the number of students who can participate each year. You apply directly to the school. Schools don't promise to include everyone who's eligible, but if you participate one year, you should be in line for funding for the following years.

You can check the websites of the schools in which you're interested to see if they're part of the Yellow Ribbon program or find a list of participating schools by searching for [www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/yellow\\_ribbon.asp](http://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/yellow_ribbon.asp).

You may be able to reduce the cost of your education and speed up your progress toward a degree by transferring credits you've already earned or passing qualifying tests through the College Level Examination Program (CLEP).

### OTHER WAYS TO PAY

If you have to borrow to pay for the difference between what the GI Bill covers and the cost of your certificate or degree, you may wonder if you're making the right decision in pursuing your education now. Though that's ultimately your call, borrowing wisely for a goal as valuable as education can pay big dividends in the future. Smart borrowing boils down to two things:

- Taking loans for only as much as you need
- Finding loans with the lowest possible rates and most flexible repayment terms

With few exceptions, it means borrowing through the US Department of Education (ED) Direct Loan program or possibly through your state's education loan program.

Federal Direct loans offer low interest rates, especially on subsidized loans for students who demonstrate financial need. There are several repayment alternatives, including some that give you 25 years to repay. As an adult, you are also eligible for a direct PLUS loan, although the rates are somewhat higher.

You apply for federal loans by completing the FAFSA, or Free Application for Federal Student Aid ([www.fafsa.ed.gov](http://www.fafsa.ed.gov)). It's long, detailed, and annoying, but essential to qualify for grants, loans, and federal work/study programs that provide on-campus jobs while you're enrolled. Remember that grants, like scholarships, don't have to be repaid, so they're always worth investigating.

### BEWARE PRIVATE LOANS

Be very careful of private student loans from commercial lenders, and the institutional loans offered by certain schools. They're typically more costly and less flexible than federal or state loans.

