

## Updated Frequently Asked Questions On the Yellow Ribbon Program 2021-2022 Academic Year

These frequently asked questions (FAQs) augment existing information on the Yellow Ribbon program for School Administrators and in the School Certifying Official Handbook on the GI Bill website at

[https://www.knowva.ebenefits.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va\\_ssnew/help/customer/locale/en-US/portal/55440000001018/content/554400000149088/School-Certifying-Official-Handbook-On-line](https://www.knowva.ebenefits.va.gov/system/templates/selfservice/va_ssnew/help/customer/locale/en-US/portal/55440000001018/content/554400000149088/School-Certifying-Official-Handbook-On-line)

This list of FAQs will serve as an on-going resource and will be updated as needed.

The information on the Yellow Ribbon program for school officials is available at [http://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/yellow\\_ribbon/yellow\\_ribbon\\_info\\_schools.asp](http://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/yellow_ribbon/yellow_ribbon_info_schools.asp).

**Question 1.** Who is eligible to participate in the Yellow Ribbon program?

**Answer:** To receive benefits under the Yellow Ribbon program a student:

- must be eligible for the maximum benefit rate under the Post-9/11 GI Bill.
- have served an aggregate period of 36 months of active duty service after Sept. 10, 2001;
- have been honorably discharged from active duty due to a service-connected disability after serving at least 30 continuous days after Sept. 10, 2001; and,
- must be a dependent eligible for Transfer of Entitlement under the Post-9/11 GI Bill based on the service eligibility criteria listed above.

Effective August 1, 2018, Purple Heart recipients with an honorable discharge, as well as recipients of the Marine Gunnery Sergeant John David Fry Scholarship may also participate in the Yellow Ribbon program.

Effective August 1, 2022, active duty service members, and their spouses using transferred entitlement, may participate in the Yellow Ribbon program.

**Question 2.** What are the maximum tuition and fee amounts payable under the Post-9/11 GI Bill?

**Answer:** There is a tuition and fee cap for each academic year (August 1 – July 31). This cap can be paid towards net costs for tuition and fees at private and foreign branches of United States (U.S.) schools. Current tuition and fee caps are located here: [https://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/resources/benefits\\_resources/rate\\_tables.asp](https://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/resources/benefits_resources/rate_tables.asp)

**Question 3.** How does the Yellow Ribbon program work?

**Answer:** The Yellow Ribbon program can be paid towards net tuition and fee costs not covered by the Post-9/11 GI Bill at a U.S. public or private institution of higher learning (IHL).

Schools must report the actual net cost for in-state tuition and fees after the application of any waiver of, or reduction in, tuition and fees, and *any* scholarship, or other federal, state, institutional, or employer-based aid or assistance (excluding Title IV aid) that is designated for the GI Bill student for tuition and fees.

For public IHLs, the Post-9/11 GI Bill can cover up to 100% of the net in-state charges, and the Yellow Ribbon program can be used to cover the remaining out-of-state charges for qualifying individuals.

For private IHLs, the Post-9/11 GI Bill can cover up to academic year cap, and the Yellow Ribbon program can be used to cover the remaining charges for qualifying individuals.

The difference, or a portion thereof, between the actual costs for tuition and fees and the amount of Post-9/11 GI Bill funds can be met through matching contributions under the Yellow Ribbon program for eligible students.

**Question 4.** How does section 3679(c) of title 38, United States Code (U.S.C.), affect Yellow Ribbon program benefits?

**Answer:** Since public IHLs no longer charge out-of-state tuition and fee rates to “covered individuals” meeting the requirements in 38 U.S.C. 3679(c), the Yellow Ribbon program will not be applicable to those beneficiaries.

**Question 5.** How are the Post-9/11 GI Bill maximum tuition and fee amounts (cap) applied for private and foreign branches of U.S. schools?

**Answer:** The cap is applied until it is exhausted. If the entire amount is not fully used in the first term, then the remainder will be applied to cover all or a portion of costs for any subsequent term during the academic year. Once the amount of the cap has been exhausted, then the difference between what the Post-9/11 GI Bill covers, and the tuition and fees charges could be met with Yellow Ribbon program funds (presuming the school participates in Yellow Ribbon) or with other financial aid. Please note that if the tuition and fees do not exceed the cap, then the Yellow Ribbon program funds are not awarded. Likewise, a student attending part-time may not need Yellow Ribbon program funds.

**Question 6.** Will the cap for private and foreign branches of U.S. schools increase each year?

**Answer:** The tuition and fee caps are recalculated annually, and changes are effective on August 1, the beginning of each new academic year. VA will update the GI Bill website with any adjustments to the cap.

**Question 7** Are foreign schools ever eligible for the Yellow Ribbon program?

**Answer:** The recent passage of Public Law 116-315, Section 1008, “Technical Correction to Clarify Eligibility for Participation in Yellow Ribbon Program of Department of Veterans Affairs,” will allow foreign schools to participate in the Yellow Ribbon Program. VA is working to implement this section of the law and will post information specifically for foreign schools in the near future on the application process for academic year 2021-2022.

**Question 8.** Are schools that do not offer a degree program eligible for the Yellow Ribbon program?

**Answer:** No, the Yellow Ribbon program is only available for U.S. institutions of higher learning (IHLs), including branches located overseas.

**Question 9** For public schools, can Yellow Ribbon funds cover all the out-of-state tuition and fees charges?

**Answer:** Yes, the Yellow Ribbon program could be used to cover the difference between the in-state and out-of-state tuition and fee charges. Also, see Q&A 4, above.

**Question 10.** Does a Veteran, survivor, or designated transferee have to be at the 100% benefit tier to be eligible for the Yellow Ribbon Program?

**Answer:** Yes, only Veterans entitled to the maximum benefit rate (based on service requirements) or their designated transferees may receive this funding. Active duty service members and their spouses are not eligible until August 1, 2022. Child transferees of active duty service members may be eligible if the service member is qualified at the 100% rate. As of August 1, 2018, spouses and children receiving Fry Scholarship benefits are also eligible for the Yellow Ribbon program.,

**Question 11.** How do you calculate Yellow Ribbon program benefits for part-time students?

**Answer:** The calculations for part-time students are the same as for full-time students. Any tuition and fees charged beyond the cap can be met or partially met through the Yellow Ribbon program.

**Question 12.** How should a school report tuition and fees (and the Yellow Ribbon Program contributions) to VA with respect to the cap?

**Answer:** The school should report actual net charges for tuition and fees after all scholarships already designated to the student have been applied, as well as Yellow Ribbon Program contributions. VA determines the payments for students.

**Question 13.** A student attended a private school for the fall semester and used the entire annual cap, and then transferred to a public school for the spring semester. Would that student have all tuition and fees covered at the public school, even though the cap was already exhausted at the private school? (This assumes the student at the 100% eligibility tier, not out-of-state, and properly certified.)

**Answer:** Yes, the student would have all in-state tuition and fees covered at the public school for the spring semester.

**Question 14.** A student attended a public school for the fall semester, and then the student transferred to a private school for the spring semester. Would that student be entitled to the full annual cap at the private school for the spring semester as well as Yellow Ribbon program funds?

**Answer:** Yes, the student would be eligible to receive up to the annual cap and Yellow Ribbon program funds (if charges for tuition and fees exceeded the academic year cap for that semester).

**Question 15.** Does VA recommend any specific methodology regarding how schools should comply with the requirements for the Yellow Ribbon program (i.e. awarding, billing, etc.)?

**Answer:** No, other than the school must comply with the terms of the Yellow Ribbon program agreement (beyond what is stipulated per regulation) which is a binding legal contract. VA doesn't prescribe specifically how a school meets the conditions. The school's Education Liaison Representative (ELR) is a good source of information and can describe how other schools comply with the requirements.

**Question 16.** Can a school eliminate students attending part-time from the first-come-first-served selection process for the Yellow Ribbon program? Can a school apply any minimum enrollment requirements on part-time students?

**Answer:** No, schools cannot eliminate part-time students from the first-come-first-served selection process. Also, a school cannot apply any minimum enrollment requirements as that also would violate the first-come-first-served selection process.

**Question 17.** Can a school limit its Yellow Ribbon program participation to apply only to students seeking their first undergraduate degree, for example, but not students seeking a second undergraduate degree?

**Answer:** No, as that is not permissible per 38 CFR 21.9700(d). That provision only allows for distinctions based on the student's status (i.e. undergraduate, graduate, doctoral) or sub-element of the school (i.e. college or professional school), etc. Making a distinction of first versus second undergraduate degree would violate the "first-come-first-served" requirement, also within that section.

Example: a student may have already earned a Bachelor of Arts (BA) while in the service, is injured in service, and upon release finds that he or she may have to alter his/her education in attempts to gain different employment given the injury, etc.

**Question 18.** Can a school treat a traditional vs. a non-traditional program of study differently in its Yellow Ribbon program?

**Answer:** No, the school cannot differentiate between traditional vs. a non-traditional program of study, such as the day and evening programs with the same course material and GI Bill approval. Therefore, the school cannot exclude the Undergraduate Adult Learning program, for example, while only including the traditional first-degree undergraduate program where the difference is day versus night school.

**Question 19.** Can a school's policy state that the school will contribute Yellow Ribbon program funding towards a student's first attempt of classes, but for no successive attempts?

**Answer:** VA makes Yellow Ribbon program contributions for punitive grades, so if the student is receiving Yellow Ribbon program contributions initially, then the school must continue to contribute Yellow Ribbon funding when he/she re-takes the class, provided that the following conditions apply:

- the school continues to participate in the program;
- the student continues to maintain satisfactory progress towards completion of the program (per the school's policy);
- the student remains continually enrolled (per the school's policy); and
- the student has remaining entitlement under the Post-9/11 GI Bill.
- The student has not reached the school's maximum academic year Yellow Ribbon contribution noted on the agreement

**Question 20.** Can a school modify or reduce its Yellow Ribbon program contribution after a student reduces the number of credits during a term since the school previously certified the student at a higher number of credits (with higher associated tuition and fee amounts)? Also, can a school modify or reduce its Yellow Ribbon program contribution after a student withdraws during a term, after the school certification and Yellow Ribbon contributions were made?

**Answer:** When a student reduces his/her credit hours, the school must report the change of status of the student and, in addition, the new amount of tuition, fees, and respective Yellow Ribbon program contributions that would be payable for the number of credit hours to which the student has reduced. The school is responsible for certifying to VA the amount of tuition and fees charged, as well as the amount of Yellow Ribbon contributions payable.

**Question 21.** For purposes of the Yellow Ribbon program, can the school define the academic year as fall and spring only? Or is the participating school obligated to match the tuition gap for any Yellow Ribbon eligible student who elects to attend for a summer term?

**Answer:** VA defines an academic year as August 1 through July 31. However, a school participating in the Yellow Ribbon program may designate how it will distribute its Yellow Ribbon program funding over the entire academic year.

**Question 22.** If a student is receiving Post-9/11 GI Bill and Yellow Ribbon benefits for a summer class which starts in July, and ends in August, from which academic year would the annual cap be deducted?

**Answer:** The first day of the enrollment for a semester, quarter, or term establishes the academic year for that class. A semester, quarter, or term which begins prior to August 1, will be paid under the tuition and fees rules for that academic year. Consequently, the amount will not be deducted from the following benefit cap.

**Question 23.** Can a school use funds from a grant or scholarship to satisfy its matching contribution?

**Answer:** Yes. Funds for Yellow Ribbon contributions may derive from any source of institutional funding that is not already allocated or awarded for a non-Yellow Ribbon purpose. Student ledgers must denote contributions as "Yellow Ribbon." Yellow Ribbon funds cannot be denoted as any type of grant, scholarship or other fund sources that would be applied to the student's account regardless of Yellow Ribbon program participation. To ensure consistent observation of this limitation and to avoid confusion during audits, schools must denote its contributions as "Yellow Ribbon" on student ledgers. Schools may not denote its contributions as "grant," "scholarship" or any other analogous terms.

**Question 24.** Is fundraising permitted to raise money for the school's contribution under the Yellow Ribbon Program?

**Answer:** Yes. Fundraising for the Yellow Ribbon program and applying those funds towards the school's matching contribution is allowable. Such funds must be denoted as "Yellow Ribbon" on the student ledger. Such funds may not be denoted as "grant," "scholarship," or any other analogous term.

**Question 25.** Under what circumstances should an institution of higher learning (IHL) apply to participate in the Yellow Ribbon program?

**Answer:** A public school should apply for the Yellow Ribbon program if the school wants to have some or all of its out-of-state charges covered; the school should include the amount of out-of-state charges in the remarks section on VA Form 22-1999.

A private school should apply for the Yellow Ribbon program if its tuition and fees exceed the cap for the academic year and the school wishes to have the Yellow Ribbon program make up all or part of the difference between the cap and the net amount of tuition and fees.

**Question 26.** When is the deadline to submit the Yellow Ribbon program agreement?

**Answer:** The Yellow Ribbon program open season is offered yearly from March 15<sup>th</sup> through May 15<sup>th</sup>. During the open season, institutions may (1) request participation in the program, (2) modify participation in the program, or (3) request withdrawal from the program. Since the Yellow Ribbon program agreement is open-ended, agreements will remain in effect until modified or withdrawn.

Schools should periodically check for announcements for the enrollment season at [http://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/yellow\\_ribbon/yellow\\_ribbon\\_info\\_schools.asp](http://www.benefits.va.gov/gibill/yellow_ribbon/yellow_ribbon_info_schools.asp) .

**Question 27.** Can an institution of higher learning (IHL) use the Yellow Ribbon program agreement to indicate its commitment to adhere to the Principles of Excellence?

**Answer:** Yes, participating institutions that did not previously agree to adhere to the Principles of Excellence may update their agreement to indicate a commitment to adhere to the Principles of Excellence by completing the top section of the agreement, checking "modification to existing agreement", completing block 12, and signing appropriately or by submitting an email to [principles.excellence@va.gov](mailto:principles.excellence@va.gov). Any addendum to the agreement or a separate email notification must also include the name, address, and facility code of each campus.

However, an institution may agree to adhere to the Principles of Excellence or may rescind its decision to adhere to the Principles of Excellence at any time by submitting an email to [principles.excellence@va.gov](mailto:principles.excellence@va.gov).

**Question 28.** If there is a change to the names or contact information for either the institution's Authorizing Official, School Financial Representative/Yellow Ribbon Program Point of Contact, or School Certifying Official, does the institution need to submit a modified agreement?

**Answer:** No, however, a modified agreement is required if there are any changes made to page 1 and/or to item number 7 of the agreement.

**Question 29.** Does a new school or a school that becomes separately approved (own facility code) need to wait for the open enrollment period to apply for the Yellow Ribbon program?

**Answer:** No, an institution under either situation can apply for the Yellow Ribbon program as soon as it is approved for VA education programs and has its assigned facility code.

**Question 30.** Can an institution reduce its matching contribution amount for the Yellow Ribbon program during the academic year?

**Answer:** No, an institution may not reduce its matching contribution amount during the academic year. The school may modify its agreement and reduce their matching contribution during the next open season (March 15<sup>th</sup> to May 15<sup>th</sup> each year). However, be advised that students that had received the higher Yellow Ribbon funding amount must continue to receive that funding as long as they stay continuously enrolled.

**Question 31.** What are the responsibilities of a school participating in the Yellow Ribbon program?

**Answer:**

1. Certifying in accordance with the school's Yellow Ribbon program agreement;
2. Maintaining records on the following:
  - tracking the number of students enrolled under the Yellow Ribbon program;
  - tracking the annual amount of the school's tuition and fees;
  - developing and documenting the process for the first-come-first-served enrollment of students into the Yellow Ribbon program;

Questions concerning participation in the Yellow Ribbon program should be directed to [Yellow.Ribbon@va.gov](mailto:Yellow.Ribbon@va.gov).