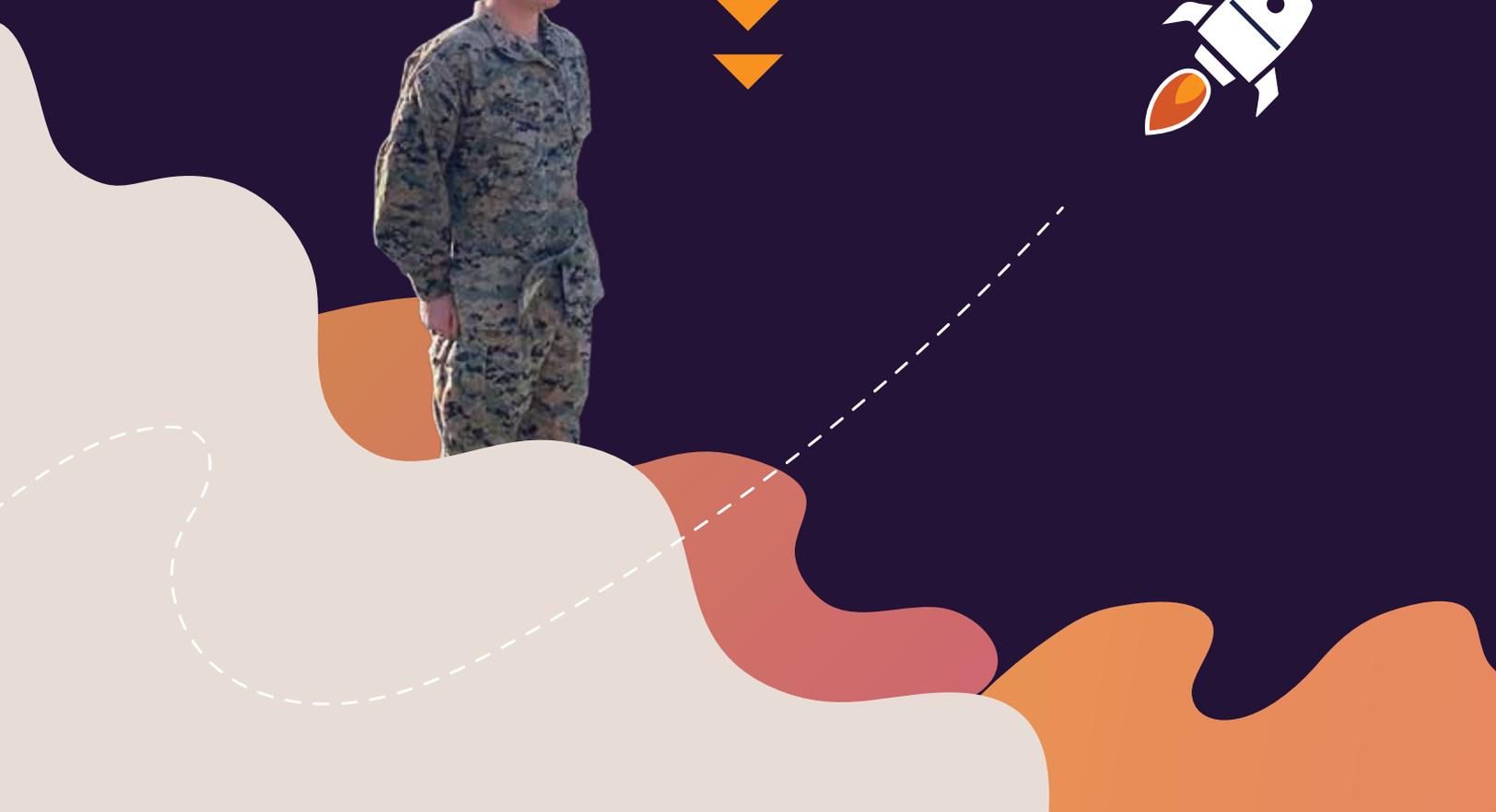


KYO

Getting Started with SkillBridge A Personal Account

Greetings,

My name is Patrick McCaffrey, and I'm a SkillBridge intern with the KYO Group. I'd like to tell you a little about how I got into working with SkillBridge, and hopefully give you some insight into how service members can use and benefit from this program.





My journey began at the end of 2020, while I was on a UDP (Unit Deployment Program) in Okinawa, Japan. I was bored out of my mind, roving the barracks, and noticed a flyer for SkillBridge that advertised a bunch of internship programs. They offered courses for different professional skills—welding, carpentry, real estate, and so on. It was only a one-page document on a bulletin board in the barracks, but I thought, “If I can get paid to learn how to weld and do that while on active duty, that would be a sweet deal.”

At the time, it was common belief that the SkillBridge programs on the flyer were the only programs offered, and that they all used your G.I. Bill funds. As a result, a lot of people didn’t look into the program because they either wanted to save their G.I. Bill for school or a different trade.

This brings me to my first tip.

Tip #1





Tip #1

Do Your Research

One of my best resources in learning more about the SkillBridge programs was none other than almighty Google.

The main website is at <https://skillbridge.osd.mil/>, and there are a bunch of other places where you can look up all the program details and prerequisites. There are a lot more programs than you might realize, and many of the industry partners that work with SkillBridge provide funding so you don't have to use G.I. Bill funds.

For me, as a Marine, I discovered that I had to complete the Transition Readiness Seminar (TRS) and be within 180 days from my End of Active Service (EAS) date to participate. So, I went to my unit S-6 UTC (Unit Transition Coordinator), scheduled my TRS, and began to hammer it out. (For fellow Marines: You only need to complete up to the 5-day course to do the SkillBridge. You do not need to complete your Capstone Review at that time.)

If you're in other branches of the military, your process will look a bit different. Your SkillBridge point of contact might be different from mine, or work in a different part of your unit. Just be sure to do as much research as you can.

At this point, I'd started my TRS, but I still had a bit of a way to go.





Tip #2

Find a SkillBridge That's Right for You

Applying to a SkillBridge program is just like applying for any other job—you have to look through the programs, think about what you want to do, and signal your interest. I usually wrote an email to the point of contact listed on the website, stating who I was, why I was interested, and what dates I was looking to do the SkillBridge with them. I would also attach my resume, as well as a list of personal and professional references.

I had a couple back-and-forths that ultimately weren't a good fit, until I reached Veterans Florida, a non-profit specifically focused on helping veterans transition to civilian life. They put me in contact with the Florida Department of Economic Opportunity (DEO), in a division working strictly with veterans. At this point we did a couple phone calls back and forth, I sent an email stating a letter of interest in the program, and finally did a Zoom interview. After that, I was accepted by DEO into their SkillBridge and given a letter of acceptance/MOU, so that I could begin working with my chain of command to let me go to the SkillBridge.

That's right—getting accepted to a SkillBridge was only one part of the process.

Which brings me to my final tip.





Tip #3

Be Your Own Advocate

It's important to remember that participation in a SkillBridge program is a privilege, not a right. Anyone in your chain of command can accept or deny it for any reason, and they're not obligated to make it convenient for you or a priority for them. You have to take responsibility for explaining why this program is pivotal to your post-service transition, why it benefits you, and how it will reflect well on both you and the people you're working for. But you also need to show the appropriate respect and tact when you're trying to get all the details finalized, and you have to be ready to be a bit flexible.





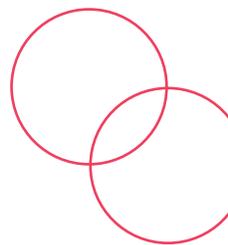
When I returned to Camp Pendleton in California, I accepted Fleet Assistance Program (FAP) orders to be Corporal of the Guard (COG) for the 21 Area Guard. This was a potential problem for my participation in the SkillBridge, because you cannot do a SkillBridge program while on FAP or any other type of orders—you must go through your parent or home unit.

Therefore, I talked to my Company First Sergeant about doing it anyway, and he said that he was willing to work with me. At this point, I risked it for the biscuit, as the saying goes. I cut my orders to my cushy job at Camp Guard and went back to the Fleet to complete my SkillBridge package.

To accomplish that, I went to the Marine Corps Community Services Office on Camp Pendleton and spoke directly to a SkillBridge representative to create and build my package.

They provided me with

-  The appropriate document to fill out and have my Company First Sergeant and Commanding Officer sign off on
-  A MarineNet (online education site for Marines) course certificate
-  A lot of signatures of understanding from me
-  Orders with my Battalion Commander's signature on it.





I had to write my own orders for the SkillBridge and had it red-penned and returned many times. You'll want to make sure you work with your local admins to figure out what is necessary and how to get it done as smoothly as possible. Remember, again, you've got to be your own champion and stick with it to get everything done.

Once my package was complete, I turned it back in to my SkillBridge representative at Marine Corps Community Services and they accepted it. At this point, I returned to my Company S-1 (admin) and received my check-out sheet so I could turn in gear and clear medical.

Finally, at long last, I was ready to start my SkillBridge program.





Summing it All Up

Here are the key steps to make SkillBridge happen as a service member

- 1** Complete the TRS 5-day course or whatever process your branch requires
 - 2** Reach out and apply to SkillBridge programs
 - 3** Once accepted, speak to your on-base SkillBridge representative and begin building your package
 - 4** Collect signatures and everything necessary to complete your package
 - 5** Return the package to your SkillBridge representative, get it accepted by them, and wait for your SkillBridge to start
 - 6** Try to finish your check-out sheet so you do not have to return to base after SkillBridge (Keep in mind, some commands may not let you do this.)
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I hope that my own experience helps prepare you for what to expect if you want to take this path. I know it can seem like a long, drawn-out process, but if you do your research, find a program that's a good fit for you, and remember to be your own advocate, I'm confident you'll be able to get into a SkillBridge program and start laying down a foundation for your post-service career.



KYQ

