

# THE NEBRASKA SCREEN AND ASSESSMENT TOOL

**The NSAT** is intended to standardize assessment of youth referred to diversion in Nebraska.

**Validated** using data from Nebraska in conjunction with a nationally representative sample to determine its questions.

**Risk level** of further involvement (1-year) in the justice system. Very Low, Low, Moderate, & High categories

**Needs domains** include *School, Family, Associations, Alcohol & Drugs, and Cognitions & Behaviors*. Low, Moderate, or High categories

**Responsivity factors** – one scored responsivity domain (Mental Health) and 15 unscored factors

**Hybrid design** – 36 question screener with choice to expand one or more domains (84 possible questions)

**Developed in-house** by the Nebraska Crime Commission (NCC) with assistance from academic risk assessment experts.

## NSAT

- ✓ Validated
- ✓ Evidence-Based
- ✓ Normed to Nebraska
- ✓ Founded on RNR Principles
- ✓ Includes short screener
- ✓ Strength-based
- ✓ Protective factors
- ✓ Static and Dynamic Factors
- ✓ Domain Scores
- ✓ Gender Specific (full)
- ✓ Derived from the PACT
- ✓ Vetted by Nebraska diversion officers
- ✓ Free for NE counties!!
- ✓ Digital interface built by Nebraska's OCIO
- ✓ Securely accessible in NCJIS
- ✓ Piloted in Nebraska
- ✓ Free ongoing in-person and virtual training
- ✓ Incorporates Motivational Interviewing ©
- ✓ Informs S.M.A.R.T. case planning
- ✓ Quality Assurance procedures developed
- ✓ Provides predicted probability of system involvement
- ✓ Double-barreled questions

NEBRASKA

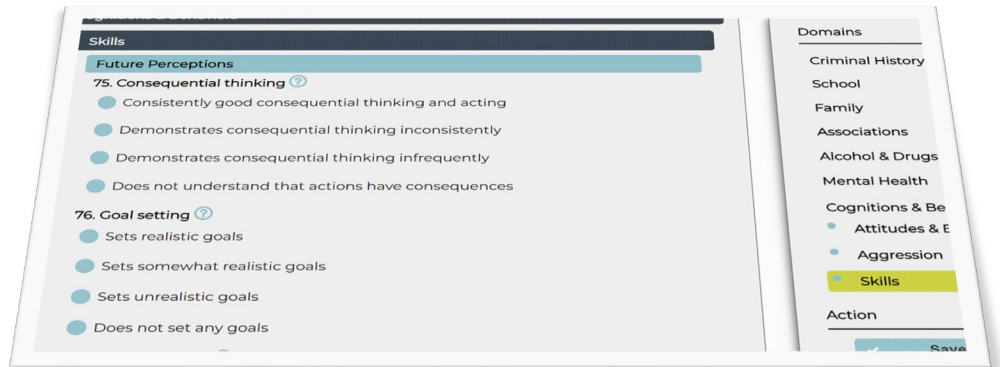
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COMMISSION ON LAW ENFORCEMENT  
AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE

## Some More Details

### Why use a risk assessment?

Research has shown for decades that actuarial tools (i.e., set of questions intended to predict an outcome) are better at predicting recidivism than practitioner “gut instincts” (Clear & Gallagher, 1985; Dawes, Faust, & Meehl, 1989). Further, risk assessments can be organized to provide practitioners with broad needs categories to structure referrals to services. Finally, Nebraska statute requires diversion programs to use a screening or risk assessment tool when creating a diversion plan (43-260.04; Nebraska Juvenile Diversion Guidelines, 2015, p.14).



### What does “validated” really mean?

“Validate” in justice applications means to empirically determine the extent to which the tool is predicting recidivism. However, many individuals claim a tool is validated, but miss the fact that it is not tested in the jurisdiction where it is used.

### Are we using risk assessment in juvenile justice?

Multiple tools are currently used by various diversionary programs/agencies in Nebraska, and the accuracies and reliabilities of these tools were examined by Nebraska’s Juvenile Justice Institute (JJI) (Rufino et al., 2019). Rufino and colleagues’ report recommended that a single, standardized tool be developed for diversionary programs across the state in order to increase efficiency.

### What is norming?

Norming is the practice of adjusting 1) which questions to include in the statistical algorithm and 2) how much each question counts towards the risk or needs score. To our knowledge, no other tool used in Nebraska diversion has been normed, thus the tools all rely on the characteristics of juveniles in the jurisdictions where they were created (e.g., Canada, Arizona).

### What is the AUC?

The AUC score in justice applications represents the probability that individuals ranked in a higher category (e.g., high risk) will recidivate at a higher rate than individuals ranked in a lower category (e.g., moderate risk). Higher AUC scores mean the tool is better at predicting recidivism. AUC’s range from 0 to 1, where a 0.5 is equivalent to “chance” or flipping a coin (i.e., 50/50). Many tools range 0.55 to 0.70. NSAT full AUC is 0.65 for boys, 0.64 for girls, and 0.59 for the screener.

### Do all questions contribute equally towards the score (and what does “gender specific” mean?)?

No. Each question has the potential to count differently towards an overall score, as determined by a “Nebraska-looking” sample. This means the tool is customized to predict on Nebraskans. The tool also has separate algorithms for males and females, meaning the same question on can count differently towards the overall scores (e.g., if yes, the algorithm adds 1 for males or adds 0.5 for females).

### Who are these developers?

These Nebraskan developers have created such tools for agencies at local, state, and federal levels (Hamilton et al.). They created, among other tools, the Prisoner Assessment Tool Targeting Estimated Risk and Needs (PATTERN) tool, which began use in the Federal Bureau of Prisons in 2019.

### Is this tool used anywhere else?

The original non-proprietary assessment was created by the Washington State Juvenile Court Administration in 1997. Commonly known as the PACT, the tool was the foundation for the development of ACES (Adverse Child Experiences). It has been modified (a key element of this tool) to be used on different populations (i.e., weighted, changed questions, changed wording), to account for cultural and legal differences across regions, jurisdictions, and populations. It is used at local and state levels, including Colorado, Iowa, Oregon, Florida, New York, North Dakota, Illinois, and Delaware.

“Some More Details” borrowed from UNO’s NCJR brief on the NSAT: July 2021. The University of Nebraska does not discriminate based on race, color, ethnicity, national origin, sex, pregnancy, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, disability, age, genetic information, veteran status, marital status, and/or political affiliation in its programs, activities, or employment.