

## **Creation of Statewide Diversion Screen and Assessment Tools: Frequently Asked Questions**

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**Question 1: Why is Nebraska creating a statewide screener and assessment tool for diversion programs? We have an established practice of using other tools, how will this statewide tool benefit my program and community to switch to something new?**

*Answer:* Currently, diversion programs across the state are using different assessment tools, most of which have not been normed for a Nebraska youth population. By having a statewide tool, we can ensure diversion programs are using the most appropriate tool for youth and risk scores will be comparable across programs. In addition, the statewide tool development, training, and usage implementation will be provided to programs at no cost; therefore, the cost of using a validated assessment tool will no longer be a barrier to diversion programs.

**Question 2: Our program currently uses the NYS or YLS; how will the statewide tool and the process for administering the tool be different?**

*Answer:* The statewide tool will have a screener and a full assessment. Evidence-based practices in assessment indicate that it is best to first screen youth and then only do a full assessment for youth scoring in the moderate to high range. The domains for the statewide tool will be similar to the YLS and NYS domains (with two additional domains); therefore, the process for using the tool for case management should be identical to how you are currently using the YLS or NYS, and there should not be a need to reprogram case management systems. The length of time to administer the screener will be similar to the NYS or YLS screener, and the length of time to administer the full assessment will be similar to the full YLS assessment. The statewide tool uses interviews and collateral information; therefore, the process for completing the assessment should be similar to current practices with the YLS and NYS. The tool will have the option to be on paper or on the computer.

**Question 3: Does the tool assess risk and needs? What domains are included?**

*Answer:* Yes, the statewide tool will assess risk and needs. The PACT/YASI, which is the basis of the Nebraska statewide tool, contains 10 domains (school, employment, use of free time, relationships, family, alcohol and drugs, mental health, attitudes/behaviors, aggression, and skills), plus criminal history. These 10 domains possess a set of static items and a set of dynamic

items. The Nebraska statewide tool can be modified to include or remove domains as we see fit. There will be a process for diversion programs to give feedback on these domains.

**Question 4: How is this tool better than an “off the shelf” validated tool?**

*Answer:* The statewide tool will be normed for Nebraska youth, thereby reducing “prediction shrinkage.” When tools are validated in one population and then applied to a different population, the predictive capability of the assessment is substantially reduced (Copas, 1988). This predictive shrinkage results in greater errors and missed predictions/classifications. All tools, even well-known, validated tools, should be validated when being used with a new population. This means that if you are currently using a tool that has been validated before in other places (e.g. YLS), it should still undergo the validation process when being used in a new population as recommended by the developers. Similarly, tools that have been validated with Nebraska youth should continue to be validated over time.

**Question 5: Is the statewide tool validated?**

*Answer:* The statewide tool is based on PACT/YASI, a juvenile assessment tool that has been well-validated.

**Question 6: What data is being used to norm the tool for Nebraska kids?**

*Answer:* In 2019, the Juvenile Justice Institute collected item-level assessment data (YLS, NYS, and ARNA) from most diversion programs in Nebraska. This data will be used to modify the PACT/YASI to develop the statewide tool for Nebraska youth.

**Question 7: Kids in rural Nebraska might be different than kids in urban Nebraska. How can this tool work for all of Nebraska kids?**

*Answer:* Yes, there may be differences in youth risk and needs depending on where they live. This means that it is even more important that we have a standardized tool that can accurately capture these differences. Assessment data from across the state was included in the development of the statewide tool, which ensures that both rural and urban youth will be accounted for when developing the tool.

**Question 8: How does the tool account for gender, race, and ethnicity differences?**

*Answer:* There will be separate tools for males and females that will also be scored differently.

Our findings, across 10 states, is that the tool predicts relatively equally for all races/ethnicities. However, all tools utilize some form of criminal history assessment. Criminal histories are static indicators that have systematic bias related to race/ethnicity. Therefore, even though a tool predicts equally well for all races/ethnicities, this does not mean that all groups have the same proportion of individuals identified as high, moderate, or low-risk.

With that said, no tool can both remove racial/ethnic bias entirely and provide an accurate prediction of recidivism. However, the use of a screener and a full assessment can help to diminish racial/ethnic bias. In particular, the full assessment tool contains additional needs assessment items, identified to possess less bias than criminal history indicators. The inclusion of a greater proportion of needs assessment items reduces the weight of criminal history indicators and, in prior studies, has been shown to reduced bias.

Furthermore, by creating a tool using our versioning method, whereby the first version creates a matched sample of youth that look like Nebraska youth, we attempt to remove bias as compared to traditional off-the-shelf models. We further examine and reduce bias over time, revalidating the tool with data collected on Nebraska youth, refining and recalibrating measures to further reduce bias in subsequent versions.

**Question 9: Why do we need multiple iterations of the tool (i.e., revalidation of the tool after some time has passed)? How often will the tool change?**

*Answer:* Assessment tools should undergo validation at regular intervals to ensure the tool remains valid. Once the statewide tool has been utilized in Nebraska for a period of time, best practices indicate that a revalidation process should be instituted, which could modify the tool and/or scoring of the tool. It is recommended that tools undergo validation at least every two years.

**Question 10: Will there be a manual and training on how to use the tool?**

*Answer:* Yes, there will be a manual and ongoing training for the tool.

**Question 11: What is the timeline for the statewide tool?**

*Answer:* The first draft of the tool will be available for review and feedback in March. There will be a presentation of the tool with opportunities to provide feedback and input.

Effective July 1, the assessment tool will be ready to begin full implementation. A training schedule will be developed prior to July 1.

**Question 12: Are diversion programs required to utilize the tool?**

*Answer:* Diversion programs are strongly encouraged to utilize evidence-based practices, including the use of risk and need assessments in the development of diversion programs. Pursuant to Nebraska Revised Statute 43-260.04(5), diversion programs are required to provide screening services for use in creating a diversion plan utilizing appropriate services for the juvenile. With the creation of this statewide tool, we are providing all diversion programs with a validated screen and assessment tools created specifically for diversion programs at no cost. If diversion programs receive Crime Commission grant funding, the use of the tool may be a requirement.

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**References**

John P. Copas, "Prediction Equations, Statistical Analysis, and Shrinkage," Chapter 12 in Predication in Criminology, David Farrington and Roger Tarling (eds.), State University of New York Press, 1985.