

Advancing Fairness and Transparency: National Guidelines for Post-Conviction Risk and Needs Assessment

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for Administrators

Q: There are valid and growing concerns about risk and needs assessments in the criminal justice system. Are they accurate? Are they fair? How do they work? How should they be used?

A: When implemented correctly, post-conviction risk and needs assessments can give criminal justice agencies the information they need to appropriately target supervision and services and thereby increase people's likelihood of success when re-entering their communities. However, without ground rules, using these assessments can inadvertently perpetuate bias and lead to decisions that unnecessarily burden people in the system and agencies, as well as taxpayers.

To date, there have been no national guidelines for post-conviction risk and needs assessment that agencies can follow to ensure that their day-to-day usage of these assessments is accurate, precise, and equitable. And criminal justice leaders have not been given the tools they need to communicate the results, strengths, and limitations of risk and needs assessments. **Advancing Fairness and Transparency: National Guidelines for Post-Conviction Risk and Needs Assessment**, a new resource from the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs' Bureau of Justice Assistance and The Council of State Governments Justice Center, addresses these gaps with clear, concrete direction.

The guidelines provide practical measures your agency can take whether you are continuing to use the same instrument that has been in place for years or are considering adopting a new one. Ultimately, these guidelines establish what your agency should be doing to ensure that it adheres to the four essential principles in the use of post-conviction risk and needs assessment:

Accuracy: ensuring that assessment results predict the recidivism outcomes they were designed to predict.

Fairness: ensuring that assessment results have similar meanings and applications across races, ethnicities, and genders and using results equitably to inform case decisions, resource allocation, and service provision.

Transparency: providing information that raises awareness and understanding of the assessment process and results.

Effective communication and use: sharing assessment results with stakeholders in a way that increases positive outcomes for people in the criminal justice system.

Q: What are the potential benefits of following the guidelines?

| A: For people in the system | A: For your agency | A: For your community |
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| <p>Mitigation of bias.</p> <p>Greater consideration of the context surrounding their case.</p> <p>Increased understanding of what assessment results mean and how they are used.</p> <p>Clearer, more transparent decisionmaking about their case.</p> | <p>Clarity regarding the appropriate use of risk and needs assessment.</p> <p>Improved implementation of post-conviction risk and needs assessment instruments.</p> <p>More informed case planning, which can lead to increased success and cost savings.</p> <p>Better prepared staff who can respond to critiques and concerns.</p> | <p>Opportunities to provide input on agency policy.</p> <p>More knowledge about how decisions are made.</p> <p>Increased sense of accountability.</p> <p>Greater buy-in and trust.</p> |

Q: How can I support the implementation of these guidelines in my agency?

A:

- Assess the degree to which your agency is currently following the guidelines.
- Proactively address potential obstacles to following the guidelines.
- Allocate resources, such as staff time, training, and a contract for an independent and rigorous evaluation of the assessment tool and its use, to align agency practices with the guidelines.
- Identify champions to promote the implementation of the guidelines.
- Communicate why implementing the guidelines is important within and outside your agency.

Q: Where can I learn more?

A: Visit csgjusticecenter.org/publications/risk-assessment/ for the full set of guidelines and accompanying resources.



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