



JUSTICE PROGRAMS OFFICE

SCHOOL *of* PUBLIC AFFAIRS



Veterans Treatment Court Enhancement Initiative

VET-S & VTC-Q User Guide

Updated July 2020

Overview and General Guidelines

The National Institute of Corrections and the Bureau of Justice Assistance have funded the Veterans Treatment Court Enhancement Initiative (VTCEI), a multi-stage project to develop and deliver a veteran-specific assessment tool and training and technical assistance (TTA) for implementation fidelity. The VTCEI is currently in Phase II.

In **Phase I**, the Center for Court Innovation developed veteran-specific assessment tools and a case planning protocol for veterans treatment courts (VTCs) based on risk-need responsivity principles (RNR). The assessment tools and case planning protocol were piloted across three VTC programs.

In this initial phase, two tools were developed:

- 1) the VET-S: a short screener to assess eligibility for veterans treatment courts and
- 2) the VTC-Q: a comprehensive assessment intended to assess justice-involved veterans' criminogenic risks and their needs

Both the VET-S and VTC-Q include an administrative review of the defendant's criminal history and an interview with the client.

In **Phase II**, American University constructed a computerized version of the tool, designed TTA for tool implementation with fidelity, and is currently implementing the TTA and computerized tools across four test sites. American University is also conducting a utility assessment across both Phase I and II sites and will provide a final report that includes, but is not limited to, both the utility assessment results and a validation plan.

Phases III and IV will focus on tool revision, additional testing, and validation.

The first section of the User Guide includes a general summary of the administrative guidelines for the tools. The second section provides specific guidance on how to score individual questions.

Administrative Guidelines

Training Requirements

In order to utilize the assessment, users should complete the required training that covers:

- 1) The RNR principles
- 2) Veteran-specific RNR principles
- 3) The administration and scoring of the VET-S and VTC-Q
- 4) Practice scoring of the mock interview(s).

Participants are required to achieve an 80% accuracy rate on their practice assessments prior to administering the assessment on referrals or actual clients. Once individuals have completed these requirements, they will receive a training certificate and may begin using the tools. Individuals who have not received the certification are not permitted to administer the assessment.

Individuals who are not administering the assessment(s) but who are utilizing assessment information should—at a minimum—receive training on RNR and an overview of the VET-S and VTC-Q.

General Directions for Completing Practice Assessments: Within 7 days of completing the “Assessment Training” video, participants should practice scoring the short screener (VET-S) and/or the comprehensive assessment (VTC-Q).

- For courts that are utilizing only the short screener, participants will be asked to score and submit their answers for the short screener mock interview into the system.
- For courts that are utilizing only the comprehensive assessment (VTC-Q), participants will be asked to score and submit their answers for the comprehensive assessment mock interview into the system.
- For courts that are utilizing both the short screener and the comprehensive assessment, participants will be asked to score and submit their answers for both the short screener mock interview and the comprehensive assessment mock interview.

VET-S (Short Screener) Only Directions

- Participants will need to locate the “Short Screener” video (10 min) in Dropbox. Access will be granted by Dr. Julie Baldwin.
- Participants will need to access the computerized version of the assessment at (vtceitool.org). Administrators can receive their login information by emailing jbaldwin@american.edu and use the Subject Line of “VTCEI Login.”
- Once logged in, click “Create a New Case.” In the “Client Name” box, type in your name for the mock interview. For “State ID,” please put the name of your court.
- Watch the “Short Screener” video and input your answers into the system.
- After completing the scoring, please send an email to Jamie Vaske (jvaske@email.wcu.edu) with the subject line “VET-S Mock Interview” and indicate that the assignment is completed.

Trainers will review your scoring of the assessment within 14 days of completion. A score of 80% is required to “pass” the assignment, meaning there can be no more than 6 scoring errors. Participants who do not meet the 80% accuracy benchmark will be asked to re-score the assessment. Once participants successfully complete the assignment, they will receive a certificate from the Justice Programs Office (JPO), noting their full completion of the Tool Training.

VTC-Q (Comprehensive) Only Directions

- Participants will need to locate the “Comprehensive Assessment” video (47 min) in Dropbox. Access will be granted by Dr. Julie Baldwin.
- Participants will need to access the computerized version of the assessment at (<https://vtceitool.org/>). Your login information will be: Administrators can receive their login information by emailing jbaldwin@american.edu and use the Subject Line of “VTCEI Login.”

- Click “Create a New Case.” In the “Client Name” box, type in your name for the mock interview. For “State ID,” please put the name of your court.
- Watch the “Comprehensive Assessment” video and input your answers into the system.
- After completing the scoring, please send an email to Jamie Vaske (jvaske@email.wcu.edu) with the subject line “VTC-Q Mock Interview” and indicate that the assignment is completed.

Trainers will review your scoring of the assessment within 14 days of completion. A score of 80% is required to “pass” the assignment, meaning there can be no more than 32 scoring errors. Participants who do not meet the 80% accuracy benchmark will be asked to re-score the assessment. Once participants successfully complete the assignment, they will receive a certificate from the Justice Programs Office (JPO), noting their full completion of the Tool Training.

Short Screener and Comprehensive Assessment Directions

- Participants will need to locate the “Short Screener” (10 min) and “Comprehensive Assessment” videos (47 min) in Dropbox. Access will be granted by Dr. Julie Baldwin.
- Participants will need to access the computerized version of the assessment at (<https://vtceitool.org/>). Administrators can receive their login information by emailing jbaldwin@american.edu and use the Subject Line of “VTCEI Login”.
- Click “Create a New Case.” In the “Client Name” box, type in your name for the mock interview. For “State ID,” please put the name of your court.
- Watch the “Short Screener” and “Comprehensive Assessment” videos and input your answers into the system using:
 - “New Case (Short)” button for the Short Screener and
 - “New Case (Comprehensive)” button for the Comprehensive Assessment.
- After completing the scoring, please send an email to Jamie Vaske (jvaske@email.wcu.edu) with the subject line “VET-S and VTC-Q Mock Interview” and indicate that the assignment is completed.

Trainers will review your scoring of the assessment within 14 days of completion. A score of 80% is needed to “pass” the assignment, meaning there can be no more than 6 scoring errors for the Short Screener and 32 scoring errors for the Comprehensive Assessment. Participants who do not meet the 80% accuracy benchmark will be asked to re-score the assessment. Once participants successfully complete the assignment, they will receive a certificate from the Justice Programs Office (JPO), noting their full completion of the Assessment Training.

Computerized Version

Interviewers should use the computerized version of the assessment to minimize scoring and completion errors. The computerized assessment can be found at: (<https://vtceitool.org/>). Credentials for entering the assessment system will be distributed by Dr. Julie Baldwin. It is recommended that users utilize Google Chrome, Firefox, Safari, or Microsoft Edge to complete the assessment. **Users should not utilize Internet Explorer because it is not a supported browser and has a host of security issues.**

Language

The VET-S and VTC-Q are currently only available in English. Local jurisdictions may utilize interpreters to help complete the assessment, or they may contract with the Justice Programs Office (JPO) to have the assessment translated into a non-English language (contact jbaldwin@american.edu).

Interview Guidelines

The assessment should be conducted as a semi-structured assessment where the interviewer carefully uses open-ended questions to guide the discussion, while asking the questions contained within the assessment in its entirety. Questions should not be missing in the assessment process as the computerized system will not allow interviewers to submit an incomplete assessment.

Each organization should develop a script to provide an overview to the interviewee on:

- How will the assessment be utilized;
- How long is the assessment;
- What types of questions are included in the assessment;
- Who can see the client's answers to individual questions;
- Who can see the client's scoring on the general domains;
- Whether the assessment is confidential, the meaning of confidentiality, and the limits to confidentiality.

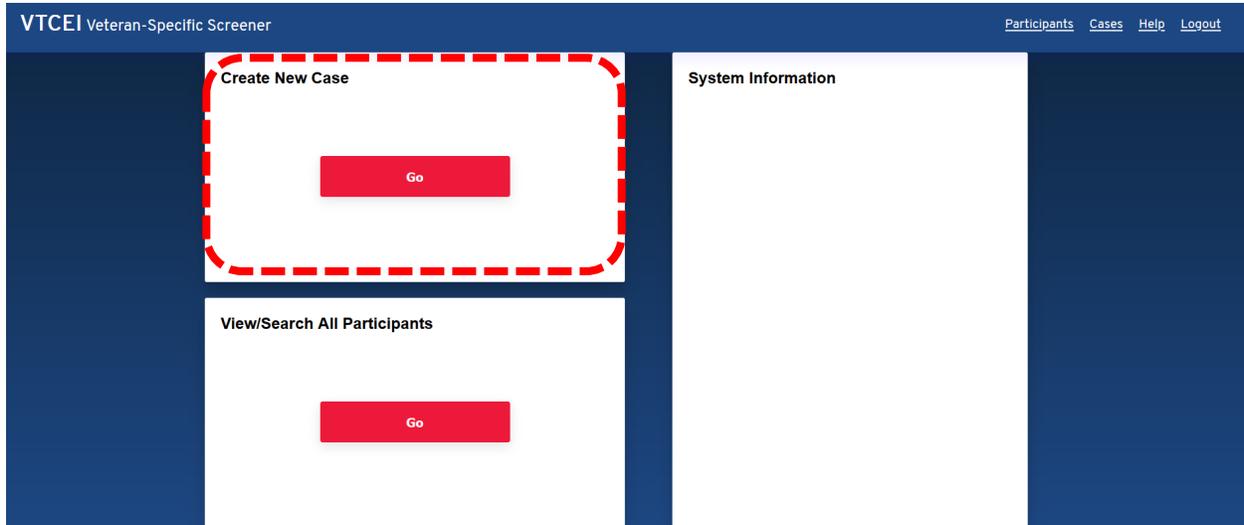
Below is an example of a script utilized by trainers in their implementation of the assessments:

Our discussion today will take about an hour, and at the end of it, I'll be using this information to see what kinds of treatments might be a good fit for you, and we can talk about the treatments you might be interested in. Some of the questions are a little personal in nature since we'll be talking about mental health concerns and exposure to intimate partner violence. If you prefer, we can skip those questions and come back to them later. Please note that your answers to me today are confidential. That is, I will not share your answers to specific questions with the team. However, this assessment does produce a score to tell us if a client has a specific need, such as substance use treatment. There are a couple of times when I am required to break confidentiality per law or organizational policy. This includes if you state you are at risk of harming yourself or others, if you disclose you are engaging in elder or child abuse, or if these documents are subpoenaed by an attorney.

Guidance for Computer System

As mentioned in the “Computerized Version” section, users should use Google Chrome, Firefox, Safari, or Microsoft Edge to complete the assessment. **Users should not utilize Internet Explorer because it is not a supported browser and has a host of security issues.**

After logging in, users will see the first page where they may either create a new case or update information on a participant who is already entered into the system. If this is the first time that a user is entering a participant into the system, they will click the “Go” button in the “Create New Case” box.



After clicking the “Go” button, users will be prompted to enter in baseline information on a participant to create an entry into the database (see image below). Note that for State ID number, we will be asking pilot sites about the identifiers that they utilize, and then update the system to reflect those possibilities.

VTCEI Veteran-Specific Screener

Participants Cases Help Logout

Add New Participant Save and Return Cancel

First name*

Last name*

Date of birth*

Address*

Address 2

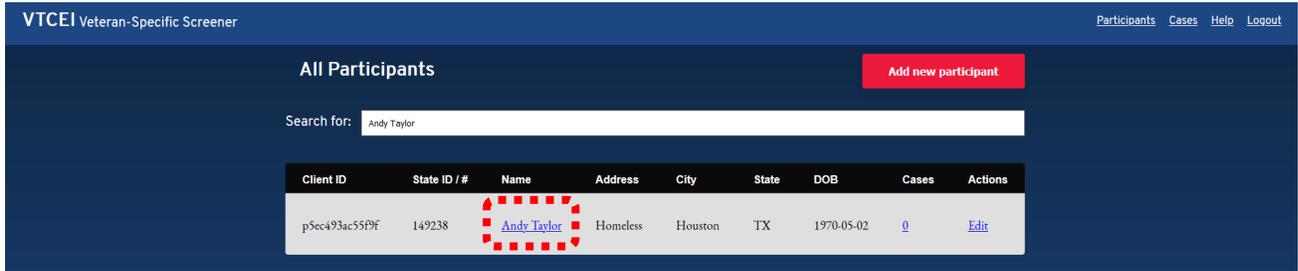
City*

State*

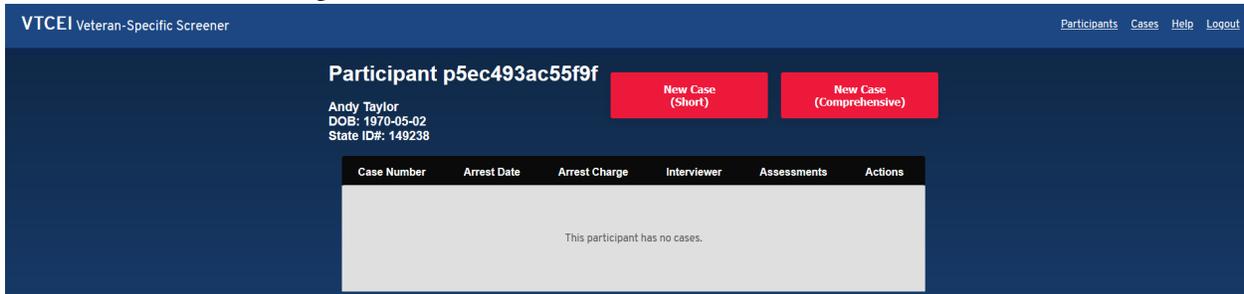
Zip*

State ID number*

The next page users will encounter shows the participant's name and the number of assessments we have saved for that participant. As shown in the image below, we have zero assessments completed for this participant. In order to start an assessment, we will click the participant's name.



Clicking the participant's name will take users to the next page where they can start a new short assessment or a new comprehensive assessment.



The computer program will not allow a user to continue if required elements are missing from the assessment. Users will receive the following screen which will show: (1) the missing items in red, and (2) the "Finish" button is inactivated (or grayed out).

Some required questions are still missing, please go back and verify these before continuing:

- N1
- N2
- N3
- N4
- N5

[Back](#)

[Save and Exit](#)

[Finish](#)

Once the assessment is complete, users will receive a summary screen which tells them: (1) the raw risk score, (2) the risk category, and (3) whether there are flags for any treatment needs. Domains that are flagged as “False” indicate that the treatment need was not indicated per the assessment. Domains flagged as “True” indicate that a treatment need was indicated per the assessment. A “True” flag may indicate that the client may need a more comprehensive assessment (such as substance use to determine per ASAM criteria what is the appropriate level of care for the client) or that we may need to plan for a referral if and/or when they enter the court.

Score	
Risk Score: 28	
Risk Classification: High Risk	
Needs Flags	
Potentially Eligible for VHA Benefits	True
Combat	False
Multiple DUI/DWI Convictions	False
IPV - Batterer	True
History of Violent Offenses	False
Education	False
Employment	True
Housing	True
Substance Use - Alcohol	True
Substance Use - Drugs	True
Criminal Thinking	False
Social Isolation	True
Prior Mental Health Hospitalization	False
Psychosis	False
PTSD	False
Current Withdrawal Symptoms	False
Suicidal Ideation	False

Guidelines for Specific Domains: VET-S

Criminal Record Review

The Criminal Record review is completed using official records such as court records and arrest records. These can be completed before or after the interview with the client. **These items should not be answered using self-report information from the defendant.**

Question 2 - Total number of criminal convictions includes both felony and misdemeanor convictions. If some traffic offenses are criminal misdemeanors within your jurisdiction, this question encompasses criminal traffic misdemeanors.

Defendant Interview

Question 11 – How would you describe your living situation at the time of your arrest? If the interviewee notes that they were “Living on the streets, in a car, or in a drop-in shelter” or “Refused to answer,” the interviewer would skip question 12 (“How long had you been at your current address at the time of your arrest?”) and proceed to question 12a. All other answers will proceed to question 12.

Question 12a – “Where will you be living upon your release from custody?” If the interviewee is not in custody, then the interviewer will skip this question or click “Refusal.”

Question 15 and 18 (“About how often do you drink alcohol?” and “About how often do you use drugs?”) – The timing of these questions are “at the point of arrest.” If the interviewee has a period of sobriety or is being interviewed months after arrest, please adjust the phrasing to be past tense (“About how often did you drink alcohol (right before you were arrested)?”).

Question 24 – “Do you have any children under the age of 18?” Users will select “Yes” for any biological, adoptive, foster, or step-children, as well as any children they have under the age of 18 of which they do not currently have custody.

Guidelines for Specific Domains: VTC-Q

Criminal Record Review

The Criminal Record review is completed using official records such as court records and arrest records. These can be completed before or after the interview with the client. **These items should not be answered using self-report information from the defendant.**

Question 2 - Total number of criminal convictions includes both felony and misdemeanor convictions. If some traffic offenses are criminal misdemeanors within your jurisdiction, this question encompasses criminal traffic misdemeanors.

Criminal History

Questions in the criminal history section include: (1) interactions during adolescence and adulthood, and (2) times when they were stopped/arrested and times they called the police for help. These questions do not include experiences where they represented law enforcement in a professional capacity, such as when they worked with the police department or as military police.

Question 18a – “Have you ever been locked up?” This question is asking about incarceration resulting from being sentenced on a charge. It does not include pretrial detention, being locked up on the current charge, or “quick dips.”

Peer Associations

Questions in the peer association section may include inquiries about: (1) association with family, friends, or acquaintances, (2) immediately prior to their current arrest, and (3) whom they spent time with at least once per week.

Question 38b – “Approximately how many people do you spend time with on a regular basis?” If the interviewee notes “0 people,” then click “Refuse to answer” for Questions 38c to 43.

Substance Abuse

The substance abuse section includes questions in three subsections:

1. General Substance Abuse (Question 69 to 78b)
2. DAST – 10 (Question 79 to 88a)
3. AUDIT (Question 89 to 98a)

Question 69 – “Have you ever drank alcohol?” If the interviewee responds “No” to this question, then the interviewer will answer “N/A” for all items in the AUDIT (Question 89 to 98a).

Question 71 – “Have you ever used illegal drugs or used prescription drugs without a prescription?” If the interviewee responds “No” to this question, then the interviewer will answer “N/A” for all items in the DAST-10.

Questions 76 to 78 ask about drug use at the point of arrest.

DAST – 10 (Question 79 to 88a) – if the client states that they have never used drugs in Question 71 or they have not used drugs in the past 12 months, then input “N/A” for all items in the DAST-10.

AUDIT (Question 89 to 98a) – if the client states that they have never used alcohol in Question 69, then input “N/A” for all items in the AUDIT. Note that the AUDIT questions inquire about alcohol use at the point of arrest. Questions 92 to 96 ask about problems resulting from alcohol use within the past 12 months prior to the point of arrest. Question 97 (“Have you or someone else been injured because of your drinking?”) and 98 (“Has a relative, friend, doctor, or other health care worker been concerned about your drinking or suggested you cut down?”) reflect problems that they have ever experienced (within the past year and beyond).

Lifetime Trauma Experiences

The three questions in this section include questions on stressful life events within the past 12 months (Question 114) and across their lifetime. It may be helpful to give the interviewee a sense of how in-depth the questions will be. For instance, the interviewer might state, “The next section asks you about traumatic experiences in your life. There are only three questions, and we do not need to discuss the specifics if you would not like to.”

Recent Trauma Symptoms

Questions in this section inquire about mental health symptoms within the past month. The interviewer can answer “N/A” for questions in this section if it has already been established that the individual has been diagnosed with PTSD by a treatment provider such as the VA or a community treatment provider.

Intimate Partner Violence Scales

If the interviewer notes that they are single in Question 137 (“Do you currently have a primary or “main” intimate partner?”) and they indicate they have not been separated or divorced in Question 139 (“Have you been through a separation or divorce in the past year?”), then click “NA – Single/Not Recently Divorced” for all of the Intimate Partner Violence questions (Questions 140 to 149). If the interviewee states that they are in a relationship in Question 137 or they were recently separated or divorced within the past year in Question 139, then the interviewer should administer the Intimate Partner Violence Scales.

Questions Regarding Training and/or Implementation

All questions regarding training and implementation should be directed to Dr. Julie Baldwin at jbaldwin@american.edu.