RISK ASSESSMENT IMPLEMENTATION CHECKLIST

This checklist provides guidance about the critical steps to full and effective implementation of risk assessment. The checklist lays out action items in four broad implementation areas: Tool Selection, Validation, Assessment Process, and Structured Decision Making. Agencies are strongly encouraged to complete all items on the checklist before fully implementing an instrument into the decision-making process. Items in bold are defined on the glossary section on the back of the page. If you have feedback on how the checklist can be improved, please send it to riskassessment@urban.org

Tool Selection: In order to select the right risk assessment instrument, it's necessary to ensure the fit between the tool and the job you need it to do. This includes verifying that it's appropriate for the population you're assessing, the outcome that matters, and that it provides the information you need for the decision or decisions the information will be informing.	
	Have you identified the appropriate class of tool based on: • Population to be assessed (e.g. juveniles, people who have committed a sex offense); • Outcome(s) to be predicted (e.g. **general recidivism**, **pretrial failure**, **specific recidivism** type such as violence); • Justice decision to be made (e.g. pretrial release/detention, setting level of probation supervision) • Whether **dynamic need factors** should be captured (e.g. to match to appropriate treatment or develop case plans); and • Resources/time available or optimal for assessment (e.g. screener or more comprehensive assessment)?
	Has the purpose and process for assessing risk been communicated to all stakeholders who will contribute or be affected?
	Have you verified that the tool under consideration is the most up to date version?
Validation: Validation is the process of testing a risk assessment tool to determine whether it predicts outcomes effectively. When you develop your own tool, validation is part of that development process. When selecting a tool developed elsewhere, it is important to validate the tool locally to ensure it predicts well for the population you work with in your community.	
	Have you defined the outcome(s) the tool should predict (e.g. failure to appear in court, reconviction within 3 years)?
	Have you identified data sources for those outcomes?
	Have you identified a **validation cohort**, the population on which you'll be testing how well the tool predicts?
	Have you conducted validation analyses sub-populations of interest (e.g. by race, gender)?
	Have you tested **inter-rater reliability,** if the tool requires an interview**?**
	Have you set a schedule for when the tool should be re-validated?
If developing a tool locally	
	Have you identified research-based and/or theory-based risk factors for which data is available?
	Have you divided your validation cohort into separate construction and validation samples?
	Has the **prediction model** developed on the **construction sample** been tested on the **validation sample?**
	Have you identified relevant categories (e.g. low, moderate, high) for risk score ranges?
Assessment Process: Implementing a good process of risk assessment means ensuring that the process of getting the necessary information to create risk scores is done consistently and with fidelity. This includes both incorporating administrative data into the tool (e.g. drawing on electronically available criminal history information), and information gathered from the person being assessed through an interview.	
	Have you developed a written policy indicating when, where and by whom assessments should be conducted?
	If **administrative data** will be used to auto-populate the assessment tool (in whole or part), have you: • Identified who holds the necessary data?

	• Secured permission to obtain that data? • Finalized the process for importing that data to populate the tool?
	If assessment requires an in-person interview, have you: • Identified staff to conduct the interview? • Defined the location and timing of the interview?
	Have the staff who will administer/score the tool been trained in how to do so? • Has a reference guide been prepared for staff to consult when scoring or administering the tool?
	Have you identified resources for refresher trainings and for training new staff?
	Have you defined where (in what data system) and how you will record and store assessment data electronically?
	Have you established how frequently people will be re-assessed?
	Have performance measures been established for assessment (e.g. % individuals with assessment completed within time range, % decisions accord with risk level, % overrides)?
	Is there a quality assurance process in place to check the accuracy of risk scores?
Structured Decision Making: The benefits of implementing a risk assessment tool are only realized once the results of that tool are systematically incorporated into decisions such as whether to release or detain a defendant pretrial, or how intensively to supervise a probationer. While the specific decisions that risk assessment tools can inform vary across the justice system, it is important when implementing any risk assessment in any justice context to set a structure that clearly articulates how decisions should vary by risk and need level, and that supports monitoring of whether this is happening.	
	Is there a process in place to provide assessment results to decision-makers?
	Have end users of the assessment information been trained on what it means and how to use it? • Did the training include general understanding of the science and purposes of determining risk level, need factors, etc.?
	Has a reference guide been prepared for staff to consult using risk assessment information in decision-making?
	Is there a written policy (or tool such as a matrix) indicating how risk/needs level should inform decisions?
	Are “overrides” or departures from recommended decisions defined?
	Is there a process in place to monitor overrides and remediate if exceeding benchmark?
	Is the integration of assessment information into required documents such as case plans and treatment plans routinely monitored?
	Do overall agency/system performance measures incorporate risk/needs information (e.g. recidivism rates tracked by risk level, program assignment by need level)?

GLOSSARY

General recidivism: Engagement in any type of criminal offense that results in the rearrest, reconviction, or return of an individual to prison.

Specific recidivism: A subset of general recidivism. Engagement in a particular type of criminal offense (i.e. violent, or sexual) that results in the rearrest, reconviction, or return of an individual to prison.

Pretrial failure: Failure of an individual to appear in court for trial, or commitment of an additional offense before trial.

Dynamic need factors: Potentially changeable factors such as substance abuse or negative peer associations which are associated with criminal behavior. Dynamic factors can either change on their own over time or be changed through interventions. Addressing these factors can lead to reduced likelihood of recidivism. Commonly known as criminogenic needs.

Validation cohort: Set of individuals which are used to develop and validate a prediction model for a risk assessment instrument.

Construction sample: Portion of the validation cohort which is used to develop a risk prediction model.

Validation sample: Portion of the validation cohort not used in the development of the tool. This sample is used to test the performance of the prediction model.

Prediction model: Model that predicts the risk of an individual experiencing a certain criminal justice outcome occurring based on a set of risk factors. The selection of which risk factors to include in the prediction model, as well as how they are weighted is based on analysis of existing data about the population of interest.

Inter-rater reliability: A measure of how consistently different practitioners score the same individuals using the same assessment instrument. Inter-rater reliability can potentially influence a tool's performance in predicting recidivism.

Administrative data: Data about individuals (such as demographic information, criminal history, and current charge) which are collected and maintained by criminal justice agencies in internal data systems, and are separate from interview or clinical data.