RAQI | Risk Assessment Quality Improvement CHECKLIST v1.3

More states than ever are using risk assessment to guide corrections decision making and supervision practices. Risk assessment is a valuable tool, but it requires routine maintenance to ensure continued effectiveness. The Risk Assessment Quality Improvement (RAQI) protocol was developed by The Council of State Governments Justice Center to help agencies take stock of their risk and needs assessment practices and determine opportunities to further their quality improvement efforts. While there are a variety of risk assessment tools used by criminal justice agencies (e.g., custody classification tools or pre-release parole tools), the RAQI protocol was specifically developed to help agencies evaluate their use of **general criminogenic risk assessment tools**.

Terms in **gold** are defined in the glossary at the end of the checklist.

SECTION 1: Design and Structure of the Assessment Tool

1.1 | Which **risk assessment tool** are you currently using? Please include name and version number, if applicable.

> [ ]

1.2 | Does the tool measure **static and/or dynamic risk factors**?

Static? ☐ Yes ☐ No
Dynamic? ☐ Yes ☐ No

> [ ]

1.3 | If you are using an externally developed tool (either proprietary or public domain), has it been modified in any way for your jurisdiction?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, how?

> [ ]

1.4 | Do you use a **scoring guide** that has been tailored for your jurisdiction?

☐ Yes ☐ No

If yes, when was it last updated?

> [ ]

If yes, and you are using a proprietary tool, were the scoring guide changes approved by the owner/developer of the tool?

☐ Yes ☐ No

1.5 | Is there a specific person or entity within your agency or department responsible for monitoring developer-recommended modifications to the tool or scoring guide?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

If yes, how frequently does this person or entity check for changes in scoring guidance?

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1.6 | Who conducts your risk assessments (e.g., counselors, classification staff, institutional parole officers)? If the tool is fully automated and does not require staff to conduct interviews, please indicate "N/A."

☐ N/A

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In total, how many staff members conduct the assessments?

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1.7 | When are risk assessments conducted (e.g., at intake to prison, prior to parole hearing, within 30 days of starting probation) ?

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1.8 | Does your department or agency conduct regular re-assessments?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

If yes, what triggers re-assessments (e.g., updated annually, redone at significant life events such as loss of a job, etc.)?

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1.9 | Are different criminogenic risk assessment tools being used within your system? For example, do correctional institutions use one tool, and probation or parole agencies use another?

☐ Yes   ☐ No   ☐ Don't Know

1.10 | How is risk assessment information stored? For example, do you keep paper files or use electronic records to store the item-by-item scoring and assessment results?

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SECTION 2: Process and Uses of the Assessment Tool

2.1 | Has everyone who conducts assessments completed training on using the risk assessment tool? If the tool is fully automated and does not require staff to conduct interviews, please indicate "N/A."

☐ Yes   ☐ No   ☐ N/A

2.2 | Are staff required to participate in refresher trainings? If the tool is fully automated and does not require staff to conduct interviews, please indicate "N/A."

☐ Yes   ☐ No   ☐ N/A

If yes, when was the last time refresher training was conducted?

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How frequently does the refresher training occur?

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2.3 | Is individual risk assessment information shared among agencies working with the person being assessed (e.g., DOC, probation, parole, service providers, etc.)?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

If yes, what information is typically shared (e.g., total score, risk category, primary need areas, responses to each item)?

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2.4 | How is the risk assessment information being used in your department or agency? Case assignment / supervision determination? Workload determination? Case planning? Classification? Determining responses to a person's behavior (i.e., sanctions and incentives)?

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2.5 | For what purposes does your agency share the risk assessment results with other agencies working with the individual (check all that apply)? If risk assessment results are not shared with other agencies, please select not applicable.

☐ Not applicable

	Pretrial Decisions	Sentencing	Parole Decisions	Reentry Planning	Treatment Coordination
Prosecutors/public defenders	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Judges	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Police	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Community behavioral health providers	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Parole Board	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Department of Corrections	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Community nonprofit	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Other: _____	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

2.6 | How would you rate your department's or agency's buy-in for using the risk assessment, with 1 indicating "very little buy-in (staff generally do not see risk assessment as adding value)," 3 indicating "neutral (staff conduct risk assessments but do not use results to inform activities such as case planning)," and 5 indicating "full staff buy-in (staff view risk assessment as necessary to best practices)"?

☐ 1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5

2.7 | Is there a person or entity responsible for conducting quality improvement activities for risk assessment (e.g., reviewing assessments for scoring accuracy, conducting inter-rater reliability exercises, providing coaching to improve assessor's skills)?

☐ Yes ☐ No

Has this person or entity been trained to conduct quality improvement activities?

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2.8 | Does the quality improvement person or entity review risk assessments to ensure scoring accuracy? If the tool is fully automated and does not require staff to conduct interviews, please indicate "N/A" and skip to Section III.

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ N/A

If yes, how are reviews conducted (e.g., by auditing recorded assessment interviews, reviewing assessor's notes and scoring)?

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How frequently do the reviews occur?

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2.9 | Are the reviewed samples representative of the people being assessed (e.g., people who are incarcerated or on community supervision)?

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2.10 | What steps does your department or agency take to improve the assessors' skills?

> [blank text box]

2.11 | Does your department or agency regularly conduct **inter-rater reliability** exercises, where staff work to improve consistency among those conducting and scoring assessments?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

If yes, how frequently does this occur?

> [blank text box]

2.12 | Does your department or agency regularly analyze data to monitor the quality of risk assessment administration? Please note, this question is trying to assess the process by which assessments are completed and how completely they are conducted as opposed to testing the accuracy of the tool.

☐ Yes   ☐ No

If yes, please indicate which items you routinely analyze:

☐ The total number of assessments conducted
☐ The average assessment score and distribution of scores
☐ The most commonly omitted items and frequency of omissions
☐ The number of and reasons for overrides; and the overall risk/needs profile of your population)
Other, please specify

> [blank text box]

2.13 | Does your department or agency have a written policy guiding the use of **overrides** of the assessment tool (i.e., when an assessment indicates one risk level for an individual but the assessor chooses to manage that case according to a different risk level based on aggravating or mitigating circumstances)?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

Does the override process require supervisor approval?

☐ Yes   ☐ No

2.13 | Are high-quality assessments used to model appropriate techniques for other staff?

☐ Yes   ☐ No   ☐ Don't Know

SECTION 3: Validation and Statistical Properties of the Assessment Tool

3.1 | Has a **validation study** been conducted for your risk assessment tool?

☐ Yes　　　☐ No

If yes, when was the most recent validation study completed?

> (blank box)

3.2 | Did the results of your validation study indicate that the assessment instrument was predictive of recidivism in your jurisdiction?

☐ Yes　　　☐ No　　☐ Don't Know

3.3 | Did the validation study demonstrate predictive accuracy by race and by gender?

☐ Yes　　　☐ No　　☐ Don't Know　　☐ Study didn't examine validation by race or gender

3.4 | If a validation study has been conducted, did the evaluator use a measure for recidivism that is comparable to what is commonly reported nationally (e.g., re-arrest, reconviction, or re-incarceration)?

☐ Yes　　　☐ No　　☐ Don't Know

3.5 | Did your validation study consider multiple measures of recidivism?

☐ Yes　　　☐ No　　☐ Don't Know

If yes, were the multiple measures of recidivism considered together or separately?

☐ Yes　　　☐ No　　☐ Don't Know

3.6 | Does the jurisdiction use **normative risk categories** (i.e., the categories that were established in the development of the tool) or **site-specific risk categories** (i.e., categories that were established based on a study of your local population)?

☐ Normative risk categories　　　☐ Site-specific risk categories

If the categories are site-specific, are the resultant risk categories (e.g., very high, high, moderate, low, very low) based on site-specific recidivism rates?

☐ Yes　　　☐ No

3.7 | What is the current risk distribution of your population (i.e., percentage in each risk category)? If your agency only uses 3 risk categories, please complete boxes 1, 3, and 5.

Risk level 1 (lowest risk)　　　> (blank box)

Risk level 2

Risk level 3 (average risk)

Risk level 4

 Risk level 5 (highest risk)

If your agency uses more than 5 risk categories, please describe below.

3.8 | Are any of the risk factors on the tool "weighted" based on reasons not derived from empirical analysis (e.g., policy decisions or resource limitations)?

☐ Yes   ☐ No   ☐ Don't Know

Glossary of Terms

Actuarial	The actuarial approach represents a statistical model of estimating the risk of an event's occurrence (e.g., the risk of an individual committing a new offense).
Assessor	Line or direct services staff who administer the risk assessment tool by conducting the interview and using the scoring guide to place the person in a risk category. Assessors may be probation officers, parole officers, intake services staff, etc.
Cut-off scores	The points in the distribution of your population's risk scores at which one risk category ends and another begins. Cut-off scores are sometimes tailored to a particular jurisdiction. Cut-off scores are meant to produce meaningful differences in risk categories.
Criminogenic	Causing or likely to cause criminal behavior. Common criminogenic needs include antisocial attitudes, antisocial associates, and antisocial behavior.
Dynamic risk factors	Factors that contribute to risk of recidivism but can change over time (e.g., social networks, thinking patterns, housing, substance use, finances, etc.). Dynamic risk factors not only add to the predictive ability of an assessment tool, they represent those areas that can be changed through programming and interventions.
Inter-rater reliability	The degree to which an assessor scores an assessment consistently and the degree of scoring consistency between different assessors when assessing the same person. Assessments should be consistently scored the same way regardless of who conducts the assessment.
Normative risk categories	The original risk categories created during the development of a tool. Externally developed tools generally come with guidance about the risk categories from the normative group. These are often adopted by an agency until a local validation effort is conducted.
Overrides	An override is an assessor's decision to increase or decrease a person's risk category and supervision and programming recommendations based on some extenuating information (e.g., departmental policy requires people who have committed certain offenses to be supervised at a high level of intensity for an initial post-incarceration period).
Proprietary tools	Some screening and assessment tools are owned by business entities (e.g., the Level of Service tools are owned by Multi-Health Systems), requiring users of the tool to purchase the instrument.
Public domain tools	Some tools are considered to be "in the public domain" (e.g., the ORAS), which means they are not copyrighted, although most still require paid training prior to use.
Quality improvement activities	Also referred to as "quality assurance," these are evaluations of the risk assessment processes, procedures, and scoring to see whether the tool is being used correctly and meeting specified requirements and best practices. Audits are commonly conducted through reviewing files, tapes of assessments, and direct observation.
Risk assessment tool	Sometimes referred to as simply "risk tool," this is an instrument used to predict the likelihood of criminal behavior (often defined in terms of reoffending). Assessment refers to the full set of questions that are contained in an instrument and generally surveys more topics than a *screening* tool. Risk tools do not predict the behavior of specific individuals, but rather the probability of reoffending for people who share certain characteristics.

Scoring guide	Instructions for how each question in a risk assessment should be scored based on the information collected. The scoring guides of proprietary and public domain risk assessments are regularly reviewed and updated by their creators to reflect the latest research and practices in the field.
Site-specific risk categories	Risk categories (e.g., low, moderate, high) that are created as a result of a local validation study and reflect the characteristics of the local population.
Static risk factors	Risk factors that are unchanging (e.g., gender, criminal history) or not subject to change as a result of treatment interventions. For example, age of first arrest is typically one of the factors predictive of future criminal behavior, and undergoing an intervention cannot change it.
Validation study	A validation study (and later revalidation) entails examining the scores of a risk assessment in relation to the verified criminal risk of those who have taken the assessment (criminal risk is related to recidivism and may be defined as reoffending, rearrest, reincarceration, etc.) to ensure that risk scores are accurately predicting risk.

The RAQI protocol will help you structure the review of your department's or agency's current risk assessment practices, and The Council of State Governments Justice Center can provide expert guidance around how best to interpret the results and translate them into system improvements. *For additional information, please contact The Council of State Governments Justice Center at raqi@csgjusticecenter.org.*

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The Council of State Governments Justice Center is a nonprofit organization delivering nonpartisan advice and data-driven strategies for safer communities. The CSG Justice Center's Justice Reinvestment Initiative aims to improve public safety while reducing corrections spending.

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