



WORKFORCE INNOVATION AND OPPORTUNITY ACT

VIRGINIA WORKFORCE LETTER (VWL) No. 25-02

TO: Local Workforce Development Boards

FROM: Nicole Overley
Commissioner, Virginia Works

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Nicole Overley'.

SUBJECT: Assessments for WIOA Title I Programs

EFFECTIVE DATE: September 15, 2025

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this letter is to provide guidance to Virginia's Local Workforce Development Boards (LWDBs) on implementing individual client assessment services as required under Title I of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). Individual client assessments are foundational to informed service planning, serving as a catalyst for meaningful client engagement, targeted training, and successful employment outcomes.

REFERENCES:

- 20 CFR Part 680; 681
- Training and Employment Guidance Letter 19-16: Guidance on Services provided through the Adult and Dislocated Worker Programs under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and the Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service (ES), as amended by title III of WIOA, and for Implementation of the WIOA Final Rules
- Training and Employment Notice 21-07: Effective Use of Assessment in the Public Workforce Investment System and Transmittal of *Testing and Assessment: A Guide to Good Practices for Workforce Investment Professionals*
- Virginia Department of Education (DOE) [Assessment Policy and Distance Education Policy for Virginia Adult Education and Literacy Programs](#).
- VWL 20-07 Change 2: VAWC and Electronic Case Files

DEFINITIONS:

Basic Skills Deficient - An individual who computes or solves problems, reads, writes, or speaks English at or below the eighth- grade level or is unable to compute or solve problems, read, write, or speak English at a level necessary to function on the job, in the individual's family, or in society.

BACKGROUND:

Assessments are essential to effective service planning. They help identify employment goals, anticipate challenges, and shape personalized strategies for success. Approaches vary from formal tools to informal interviews, and may be led by staff, partners, or contractors. Regardless of method, strong assessments center on client engagement and generate actionable insights that drive training and employment outcomes.

GUIDANCE:

This guidance provides an overview of the stages of assessment for an individual engaged in the workforce services client journey, including allowable assessment options in each stage, and youth program specific requirements.

It is important to note that all assessments must be documented in Virginia's system of record, the Virginia Workforce Connection (VaWC).

Overview of Assessment Stages (Implementing Assessments)

The assessment process begins upon initial contact between clients and Virginia Works or its partner programs. All assessments must be recorded in the Virginia Workforce Connection (VaWC) per VWL 20-07 Change 2: *VAWC and Electronic Case Files*. The general progression includes:

- Initial Assessment
- Objective Assessment
 - In-depth interview
 - Academic and occupational diagnostic tools
 - Supportive service evaluation
- Individual Employment or Service Plan (IEP/ISS) Creation
- Ongoing Assessment throughout engagement in training, job search, or employment

1. Initial Assessment

Initial Assessments are conducted by Virginia Works program staff, WIOA Title I program staff, or partner agencies to engage the client and establish a general baseline of current circumstances, employment readiness, and service needs. These assessments are generally informal, primarily qualitative, and rely on structured interviews, observations, and, when appropriate, diagnostic tools tailored to the participant's entry point. The purpose is to help the individual and program staff to make decisions about appropriate employment goals and to develop effective service strategies for reaching those goals.

Key elements evaluated during the Initial Assessment may include, but are not limited to:

- Overall work history and educational background
- Career interests and employment goals
- Literacy and English language proficiency
- Digital literacy and computer navigation skills
- Need for language translation or interpreter services
- General household status, general income level, and other factors related to supportive service needs
- General aptitudes, abilities, and a broad identification of skill gaps

The Initial Assessment identifies opportunities for partner program referrals, informs the development of the Individual Employment Plan (IEP) or Individual Service Strategy (ISS), and ensures services are tailored to the participant's goals. When necessary, it also determines whether further comprehensive or specialized evaluations are required to support effective service delivery.

2. Objective Assessment

Objective Assessments are conducted by Title I staff to comprehensively evaluate a participant's strengths, challenges, and readiness for employment or re-employment to inform service planning decisions. The Objective Assessment may be conducted through a combination of in-depth interview(s), diagnostic testing, and career-focused tools depending on the intended purpose and approach. Conversational techniques (interviews), whether formal or informal, are used to elicit information relevant to a participant's needs, goals, and service planning. Structured assessment tools yield measurable insights into academic and occupational competencies, including state-approved basic skills assessment instruments such as the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE), Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems

(CASAS), and career-focused assessments such as CareerScope. If a recent Objective Assessment (within six months) was completed in another workforce, training, or education program and deemed sufficient by the current workforce program provider, a new one is not required (see *Use of Previous Assessments* section on page (6) below. The Objective Assessment informs service planning decisions and is critical to developing a personalized Individual Employment Plan (IEP) or Individual Service Strategy (ISS).

Key elements of the Objective Assessment may include, but are not limited to:

- Educational attainment
- Literacy and Basic skills levels
- Prior work experience/work history – both paid and volunteer
- Occupational skill levels
- Interests and aptitudes (including for non-traditional roles)
- Work motivations and current employability
- Family, financial, and disability-related considerations (as disclosed)
- Supportive and developmental service needs

Virginia Works encourages use of the VAWC Objective Assessment tool as a best practice but does not mandate specific formats beyond Department of Education (DOE)-approved academic instruments for formal basic skills assessments. No matter what the assessment source is, all results must be securely uploaded to the client's VAWC case file.

For a best practice reference, please consider the following elements which make up a complete Objective Assessment in the VAWC, Virginia's System of Record:

- General Expectations (General Demographics, General Notes)
- Program Expectations (Immediacy of Employment Needs, Training Focus)
- Employment Expectations (Occupational Details)
- Education History (Grades Completed, Summary)
- Basic Skills/Education Factors (Education and Literacy Level Specifics and Summary)
- Education (Degrees, Certificates/Licenses)
- Occupational Transferrable Skills (Summary)
- Employment History (By Position with Details)
- Work Readiness (Various Factors)
- Workplace Behavior (Various Factors)
- Health & Behavioral Observations (Various Factors)
- Living Environment
- Economic Factors/Financial Situation
- Vocational/Occupational Factors
- Other Assistance Received

- Barriers to Employment (Multiple Factors, including Limited Work History, Single Parent, Legal Issues, etc.)
- Testing Results for Basic Skills (Test Date, Test Name, Results)
- Other Testing (Test Date, Test Name, Results)
- Agency Referrals (Reviewed with Customer, Agree/Disagree, Comments).

Please note that for justice-involved individuals, assessments may evaluate how background affects job eligibility or training opportunities, including transferable skills gained during incarceration.

Special Considerations Regarding Objective Assessments:

Assessing Basic Skills Deficiency using Structured Academic Assessments - Academic assessments determine math and literacy proficiency necessary for employment and education. When conducting academic assessments to determine basic skills levels, Virginia's WIOA Title I-funded programs must adhere to the Virginia DOE's [*Assessment Policy and Distance Education Policy for Virginia Adult Education and Literacy Programs*](#). Examples of acceptable instruments include WorkKeys, TABE, CASAS, and Benchmarks for Excellent Student Thinking (BEST), and the results must be documented in the VAWC. Programs must regularly consult DOE's *Policy 4: Assessments Permitted* for current tools and coverage areas (e.g., Adult Basic Education, ESL). See also, *Training and Employment Notice 21-07*, page 7, for recommended assessment models by client profile. Whenever feasible, these assessments should be conducted in partnership with WIOA Title II Adult Education providers. However, other staff may administer them if certified. Testing certification is often free and can typically be completed within one hour. LWDBs should maintain a current registry of their certified administrators, including recertification dates. Staff must follow the specific test publisher's accommodation guidelines when serving individuals with disabilities to maintain assessment validity.

Assessing Occupational Skill Levels – Assessing occupational skill levels helps participants identify career interests and aptitudes aligned with labor market needs and training pathways. Staff may use a variety of occupational assessment tools to support informed career planning.

Assessing Supportive Service Needs – Supportive service assessments explore barriers beyond academic and occupational challenges—such as transportation, housing, childcare, and family care needs. The process requires a holistic review of individual circumstances and should result in strategic plans to address barriers. Considerations include:

- Life conditions that impede employment or training

- Support strategies to mitigate those conditions
- Immediate service needs impacting goal achievement

Staff must refer to their LWDB's current supportive service policy and be able to connect clients with appropriate resources.

Assessment Interpretation - Staff must be trained to interpret Objective Assessment results, communicate findings to participants, and recommend services accordingly. If results are received from a partner program and are unclear, staff must request clarification and add context to the VaWC case file.

Use of Previous Assessments - Programs are not required to repeat interviews, evaluations, or assessments if a recent and appropriate record exists from a partner workforce, training, or education program. For example, clients referred by Adult Education may already have a valid academic assessment completed within the past six months. These should be retrieved, documented in VaWC, and reused as applicable. Reassessment may be appropriate for assessments older than six months or when no recent engagement with partner services is evident.

Assessing Individuals with Disabilities

When assessment accommodations are required, they must be arranged prior to the assessment. LWDBs are encouraged to coordinate services through Integrated Resource Teams (IRTs), including Vocational Rehabilitation, Adult Education and Literacy, and other service providers, to ensure individuals with disabilities receive appropriate support throughout the assessment process.

YOUTH OBJECTIVE ASSESSMENT

This section applies to WIOA Title I Youth ONLY!

The WIOA Youth program design requires an Objective Assessment of academic levels, skill levels, and service needs of each participant, which includes a review of basic skills, occupational skills, prior work experience, employability, interests, aptitudes, supportive service needs, and developmental needs. The addition of a youth Objective Assessment and its coding into VaWC is necessary to fully trigger participation for the client in the WIOA Title I Youth Program.

All Youth Program participants must receive an Objective Assessment of their:

- academic levels;

- basic skills levels;
- occupational skills;
- prior work experience;
- employability;
- interests and aptitudes;
- areas of strength;
- developmental needs; and
- service needs, including supportive services.

The service provider does not need to complete the entire Objective Assessment if it is appropriate to use a recent Objective Assessment developed under another workforce partner program. In this context, "recent" is defined as having been completed within the previous six months.

Note: There may be instances where, during the previous six months, a youth completed one or more components of the Objective Assessment that was administered by another partner program or a licensed medical provider but does not have a comprehensive Objective Assessment that satisfies WIOA's requirements. In this case, it is highly encouraged that the WIOA Youth Program staff use those components that have been previously completed and focus WIOA resources on the components that still need to be completed.

Local WIOA Youth programs have the flexibility to determine how to conduct the review of basic skills required as part of the Objective Assessment. For the basic skills assessment portion of the Objective Assessment, local programs are not required to use the assessments approved by the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) in the [*Assessment Policy and Distance Education Policy for Virginia Adult Education and Literacy Programs*](#). Additionally, they are not required to determine an individual's grade-level equivalent or educational functioning level (EFL), although use of these tools is permitted.

Basic skills may be assessed using other formalized instruments designed to measure skill-related gains, as long as the tools used are valid and reliable. Any such assessment must be appropriate, fair, cost-effective, well-matched to the qualifications of the test administrator, and easy to administer and interpret.

It is important to note that the requirement to review basic skills as part of the Objective Assessment process is not the same as conducting a basic skills assessment for eligibility determination for the basic skills deficient barrier or as conducting a basic skills assessment for determination of an educational functioning level gain within the measurable skill gains indicator.

However, if using the basic skills deficient component of WIOA Youth eligibility in WIOA (3)(5)(A), programs must use a generally accepted standardized test which DOL defines as an approved test from the list of tests the Secretary of Education which is outlined in the DOE Assessment Policy: Virginia Department of Education (DOE) [*Assessment Policy and Distance Education Policy for Virginia Adult Education and Literacy Programs*](#). Additionally, measuring EFL gains after program enrollment under the measurable skill gains indicator, local programs must use a DOE approved assessment for both the EFL pre- and post-test to determine an individual's educational functioning level.

For youth service providers, some components of the WIOA-defined Objective Assessment, such as identifying support needs, are subjective, while others, like assessing academic levels, are objective. As discussed above, WIOA requires a review of basic skills as part of this Objective Assessment.

Basic Skills Assessments for Youth

The LWDB must use formalized assessment instruments that are valid, reliable, and appropriate for the target population when assessing basic English reading, writing, and math skills and the test administrator must be qualified to administer the assessment. The formalized test should also be cost effective and easy to administer with results that are easy to interpret. The LWDB may, but is not required to, use assessments approved for use in the DOE.

Likewise, the LWDB is not required to determine an individual's grade level equivalent or educational functioning level (EFL), though these assessments may be used. The LWDB must also provide reasonable accommodation for individuals with disabilities in the assessment process if needed.

WIOA Youth Program funds may be used towards costs associated with assessing an individual's basic skill level for an eligibility determination, even though the individual is not yet a program participant. The LWDB may also use results from a previous basic skills assessment if the assessment was performed within the past six months.

Career-Related Assessments for Youth

Career-related assessments help youth understand how their interests, values, preferences, motivations, aptitudes, and skills affect their potential success and satisfaction with different career options and work environments. Multiple assessment tools may be necessary to meet the needs of an individual and address the required components of the Objective Assessment. Youth with disabilities may benefit from less formalized assessments and may need information on benefits planning, workplace supports, and accommodations. Career-related assessments may be provided by WIOA Youth Program staff or through referrals to

national and community-based partners and resources.

The LWDB will complete youth assessments with these categories below to effectively plan services and develop the youth Individual Service Strategy (ISS) by collecting:

- Quantitative data (can be measured, counted, or expressed numerically) versus,
- Qualitative data (non-numerical data such as characteristics and qualities that is observed, descriptive, and subjective),
- Formal assessments (structured such as written or online),
- Informal assessments (observations or unstructured interviews),
- No cost or purchased tools, and/or
- Standardized or customized tools.

Assessment Data Collection

LWDBs are expected to gather and apply data from a range of tools and formats to inform service planning and ISS development, including:

- Quantitative (numerical) and qualitative (descriptive) data
- Formal (structured, written/online) and informal (interviews, observations) assessments
- Free or paid tools, standardized or customized instruments

Partner Coordination and Assessment Sharing

Local Boards should consider developing Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with required and optional partners to facilitate the mutual acceptance of valid assessments across programs. Assessments used by any partner must provide relevant and sufficient data for planning purposes. Where needed, WIOA staff may supplement external assessments to meet program requirements. Avoiding duplication is critical to managing limited funding efficiently.

3. Individual Employment Plan (IEP) and Individual Service Strategy (ISS) Development

While not assessments themselves, the IEP and ISS represent the outcome of the comprehensive assessment process. These plans must integrate findings from the client's assessments to outline strategies that support employment and training objectives. The IEP/ISS should clearly reference assessment results to justify planned services, identify support needs, and ensure alignment with the individual's goals. Documentation must reflect the rationale behind the service strategy and the resources mobilized to assist the client.

4. Ongoing Assessment

Ongoing Assessment Conducted throughout a participant's engagement with the workforce system, ongoing assessments help track progress as well as identifying emerging barriers to be addressed during training, job search, or employment. This informal, relationship-based process and its outcomes must be documented in VaWC to maintain an accurate and up-to-date service record.

ACTION REQUIRED: LWDBs must adhere to the guidance provided in this document and ensure that their LWDB staff and contracted service provider staff are aware of and follow this guidance for potential and enrolled Title I participants.

INQUIRIES:

Please submit inquiries regarding this VWL to:

Virginia Works

Director of WIOA Title I Programs

2221 Edward Holland Drive,

Suite 500

Richmond, VA 23230

LWDBinquiries@viriniaworks.gov