

Proposed Methods

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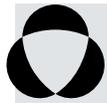
Vocational Performance Assessment System



Washington State Department of
Labor & Industries

Worker's Compensation Services

November 2007



Introduction

The draft **CRITERIA** and **VALUES** provide the foundation for the new assessment system. Criteria describe desired performance of vocational providers. Values describe important characteristics of the assessment system itself (fair, valid, etc.). Both the Criteria and Values were derived from extensive outreach (see Stakeholder Feedback Report) and have been affirmed by L&I management.

The MAQ teams have **draft proposals** for discussion. The proposals are intended to eventually meet the statutory requirement to establish criteria for quality and effectiveness, to monitor vocational providers and to use the system as a basis for referrals. Some proposals are specific, some are conceptual and some indicate areas for future exploration.

Approach

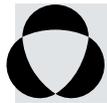
L&I is committed to **working closely with stakeholders** to develop a new vocational performance assessment system that will become the basis for monitoring vocational providers and for making vocational referrals (RCW 51.32.095, Section 5). To develop methods for assessing quality (MAQ) teams launched in August have had 14 meetings, for 4-6 hours each time. More than half of the 34 members are external stakeholders.

The agency and the teams are committed to **developing a solid assessment system**. The assessment system will provide information about the quality and effectiveness of vocational providers as defined in the CRITERIA and will be evaluated based on the VALUES (fair, accessible, valid, etc.).

The teams identified methods and ideas that could **support the success of the new legislation** and **recognize the resource constraints** resulting from its implementation. Examples include proposing methods that support shifting the emphasis to useful outcomes and implementation phasing that would focus first on increasing first-time approval rates of vocational work regarding “likely to benefit” and plans.

There is also an emphasis on **moving responsibility and quality assurance “upstream.”** To ensure vocational work is done right the first time, tools and feedback mechanisms are designed to increase the ability and the responsibility of VRCs. This approach is expected to reduce costs associated with repeat referrals, litigation and frustration, increase the effectiveness and efficiency of vocational services provided to the department, increase alignment, and achieve the system goal of improving outcomes at a reasonable cost. To this end, MAQ teams are proposing methods that will increase communication, responsibility and quality assurance checks early in the process.

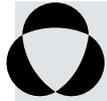
Continuous improvement of the assessment system is expected. The CRITERIA and VALUES will be used as a filter for evaluating assessment methods to ensure the methods are a valid measure of the CRITERIA for “quality and effectiveness.” are fair and accessible, and that they promote a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement. Strengths and opportunities identified guide future development of the methods and of the system as a whole.



The MAQ teams brainstormed and evaluated many ways that the Performance Criteria could be measured. We found that each idea had advantages and disadvantages and that there is no “silver bullet” measurement. There are however, methods that are better and which could be continuously improved to eventually create a solid assessment system. This should include measures that are valid, balanced and aligned. The concepts proposed below could be evaluated independently or as complimentary methods. Since some elements may be easier to implement than others, the MAQ team has recommended a phased implementation.

Proposals

1. **Amend the PERFORMANCE CRITERIA** to include a section on “Outcomes”
2. **“Useful Outcomes”** show on Claim Mangers’ VOCC screens
3. **“Status Report”** lists key measures and provides regular reports about VRC performance
4. **“Customer Survey”** obtains feedback from injured workers about VRC communication skills. Could also be used for employers and/or other stakeholders
5. **“Summary sheet”** complements or replaces current cover page of closing report
6. **“Qualifications test”** verifies knowledge of Washington state workers’ compensation system. Future versions could address knowledge about best practices and local environments
7. **Independent evaluation** of methods and system



If selected...

when could the method be implemented?

<u>Proposed Method</u>	<u>Could be implemented by...</u>
1. Amend the CRITERIA	Early 2008.
2. "Useful Outcomes"	Early 2008.
3. "Status Report"	Early 2008 in a limited version. Complete version may take more time.
4. "Customer Survey"	Needs more development work before estimating a timeline.
5. "Summary sheet"	Early 2008 in a limited version. Complete version may take more time.
6. "Qualifications test"	Needs more development work before estimating a timeline.
7. Independent evaluation	Needs more development work before estimating a timeline.



NOTE: For each proposal, the teams have identified pros, cons, and recommendations for how to implement.

Proposal #1: Amend the Performance CRITERIA

Description

Draft CRITERIA were derived from survey results and affirmed by L&I management in August.

The MAQ team recommends adding this section to the CRITERIA:

Outcomes:

- 1. Positive (useful) outcomes that are based on applicable statutes and rules.*
- 2. Vocational costs are appropriate.*

Pros

- Better reflect interests of the primary customers: business and labor
- Better reflect survey results
- Clarify goal of vocational process for VRCs

Cons

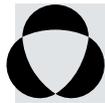
- A focus on Outcomes alone could recreate some of the difficulties that have been experienced with previous measurement systems. However If Outcomes are part of a balanced set of performance criteria, then these difficulties could be avoided.

Resources

Can be implemented with existing resources.

Recommendation

Affirm and communicate amended Criteria as soon as possible.



Proposal #2: “Useful Outcomes” on the VOCC screens

Description

For every VRC (or firm) on the VOCC screen - In addition to Name, Provider ID and # Open referrals, show data about outcomes: #closures, # useful outcomes and one of three results:

- Y - meets or exceeds agency goal (agency goal = 75% useful outcomes)
- N - does not meet agency goal
- insufficient data

Alternative display: show percentiles instead of Y/N. (e.g. 81% or 87%)

Recommend 10 closed referrals before results are calculated. After communicating intent to use the measure to VRCs, collect data on referrals sent out after the communication. This data should be supplemented with other methods of assessing quality.

Pros

- Aligned with other measures - GMAP presentations to the Governor, goals of the new legislation and claim manager accountability measures.
- Increases VRC focus on producing useful outcomes.
- Reduces incentives for inappropriate administrative closures.
- Encourages continuity of care - focus on useful outcomes could support appropriate VRC contact with injured worker, physician, and employer.
- Useful outcomes are attainable regardless of referral type or case complexity.
- Broad support among MAQ team members.

Cons

- Using a Y/N format appears similar to the “Eligible/Conditional” thresholds of CACO
- Medically unstable closures are included as “Not Useful” outcomes. This presents a potential contraction with the first VALUE that says VRCs are evaluated on things they can control. If a claimant experiences *legitimate* medical issues, the VRC should not be “punished.” Therefore the recommendation is to have a threshold measure (Y/N).
- If fee caps are set too low and this outcome is “Not Useful” then could discourage quality
- Difficulties experienced with previous measurement systems could arise if UO is the only criteria measured. If it is part of a balanced set of measures, then these difficulties could be avoided.

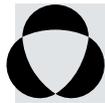
Resources

Can be implemented with existing resources. Data is easily obtainable and VOCC screens can be modified with minimal technical support. Could implement early 2008.

Recommendation Communicate and implement as soon as possible.

SAMPLE:

	<u>Name and Provid</u>	<u># Open</u>	<u>#Closed</u>	<u>#UO</u>	<u>%UO</u>
VRCs:	VRC A #####	67	22	20	81
	VRC B #####	38	20	12	67
Firms:	Firm A #####	128	100	85	77



Proposal #3: “Status Report”

Description

A periodic report about a VRC showing a variety of key indicators that address each of the Performance Criteria. *Actual measures have **not** yet been identified. Examples of measures might include:*

- Useful outcomes by referral type
- Plans completed in 90 days
- Plans approved
- Credentials

Pros

- Gives the referral source a variety of factors to consider when making a referral
- Provides a balanced picture of a VRC’s performance
- Identifies and communicates key quality indicators that are based on the Criteria
- Supports transparency and VRC accountability and improvement
- The report is not a formula
- Initial reports could be published soon using data currently available
- Can update measures to reflect changing requirements or priorities

Cons

- Challenges in selecting the best set of key quality indicators
- Too many measures may appear complex and be more difficult for referral source to use

Resources

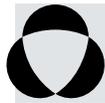
Can implement initial Status Report with existing resources in early 2008. Additional work is needed to produce a complete Status Report that reflects performance per the CRITERIA.

Recommendation

- Select key measures that are currently available. Provide reports to VRCs as soon as possible with periodic updates (quarterly?).
- Solicit feedback. Modify to improve usefulness.
- When report contains the necessary information, educate stakeholders (CMs, VRCs, etc.) about how to use the information. Publish the reports, probably on the web.

SAMPLE NOTE: Actual measures or display (#, %, graph, etc.) have not been identified.

<u>Possible measure</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Subset</u>	<u>%</u>
Outcomes:			
Useful outcomes	Total # referrals	# useful outcomes	%
Plans Completed in 90 days	Total # plans	# in 90 days	%
Quality Indicators:			
Plans approved	Total # plans	# approved	%
Knowledge:			
Credentials	CRC, CDMS, etc.		
<i>etc.</i>			



Proposal #4: Customer Surveys

Description

Conduct surveys regarding VRC communication skills. Could survey injured workers, employers and/or other stakeholders.

Pros

- Increase attention on communication and relationship building
- Highlight areas of success for recognition at the individual and systems levels
- Highlight areas of concern for focused training at the individual and systems levels
- Improved communication could reduce complaints and disputes thus reducing dollars and FTEs that are needed for these cases while improving the overall experience for all involved.
- Increase favorable opinions about workers' compensation.

Cons:

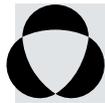
- Response rates may not be adequate to provide a valid assessment.
- Difficulty obtaining a representative sample of respondents with varying characteristics (such as computer skills, language proficiency, learning disabilities, etc.).
- Survey questions must be carefully written to minimize the influence of external factors, *such as* whether the injured worker was happy with an "able to work" decision.

Resources

Likely to require additional resources.

Recommendation

Meet with a survey experts to discuss possibilities. Request proposals to clarify options and resources needed. Share information and decide on next steps.



Proposal #5: “Summary sheet”

Description A short summary for each referral type to be submitted with the closing report. Could complement or replace current cover page of closing report.

Elements of the Summary:

- Key Quality Factors - VRC succinctly describes significant information regarding each of the Key Quality Factor listed for that referral type. Could include VRC “self-score.”
- Analysis - VRC writes a succinct, logical analysis of the factors, barriers and options.
- Recommendation - Recommendation should show sound judgment and logically follow from the factors, barriers and options.

Pros

- L&I clearly communicates expectations by listing Key Quality Factors for each referral type
- VRCs concisely communicate key factors, analysis and recommendation
- VRCs engage in “whole case” planning and logical analysis versus focus on process
- Phased implementation could support success of the new legislation and recognize limited resources

Cons

- Time to develop the list of Key Quality Factors for each referral type.

Resources Could be implemented with current resources if phased in.

Recommendation Begin with a small pilot for AWA-Likely to Benefit and/or Plan Development. Quality assurance checklists for these referral types are already being developed for VSSs and this “Summary Sheet” could communicate expectations to VRCs. Summary sheets for other referral types (EI and PI) could be developed later.

SAMPLE for Referral Type AWA: *NOTE: Actual elements have not been identified.*

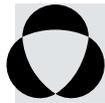
Key Quality Factor	Addressed	Summary statement
Education	yes	High school diploma
Work history	yes	Singular history - logger
Transferable skills	yes	etc.
<i>etc.</i>		

Analysis:

The singular work history and limited transferable skills present the primary challenges. Options include...

Recommendation:

Therefore the recommendation is...



Proposal #6: “Qualifications test”

Description

For assessing CRITERIA Knowledge #1 (re: sound vocational methodology) the MAQ teams recommend continuing L&I's current requirement for professional credentialing.

For assessing CRITERIA Knowledge #2, 3, and 4 (re: WA workers' comp, best practices and local environments), the MAQ teams propose creating a “qualifications test.” The test would be based on applicable performance expectations. This could be limited to statute, rule and policy or could be expanded to address the other Knowledge Criteria regarding best practices and the local labor market. To be eligible to provide services to the State Fund, vocational professionals would need to provide evidence they have passed the test. To promote learning, the test could be available to anyone, to take as often as they wish. Test results would not be available to the department until the individual chooses to submit their test score.

Pros

- Moving quality assurance upstream is expected to improve the quality of work submitted to the department,
- Increase satisfaction of all parties (injured workers, employers, claim managers, etc.),
- Reduce overall vocational costs by reducing disputes, repeat referrals and delays

Cons

- Resources may be needed to develop a valid test (money and time).

Resources

Unknown.

Recommendation

Meet with a survey experts to discuss possibilities. Request proposals to clarify options and resources needed. Share information and decide on next steps.



Proposal #7: Independent evaluation of methods and system

Description

Independent evaluation of the methods to confirm the reliability of the data, to ensure the methods are a valid measure of “quality and effectiveness” as defined in the CRITERIA, and that the methods and system honors the VALUES.

Pros

An independent evaluation could ensure that L&I meets the following VALUES:

- VALUE #9: “The method is valid, reliable and independently verified.”
- VALUE #10: “The method is used as the basis for referrals. The distribution of referrals to vocational counselors should reflect performance results and support performance quality.”
- VALUE #12: “The assessment system meets statutory requirements.”
- VALUE #13: “The assessment system is perceived as valuable and useful by department staff who make referrals.”

Cons

- Time and money

Resources

Unknown

Recommendation

Meet with an expert to discuss possibilities. Request proposals to clarify options and resources needed. Share information and decide on next steps.