Washington State Department of
Labor & Industries

Open Forum: Quality Assurance (QA)

8/17/2020

AGENDA

- Reminders
- Updates to Timeline
- Reporting Template
- QA Plan Components
- Questions from the Survey
- Q&A on QA

Reminders - Requirements

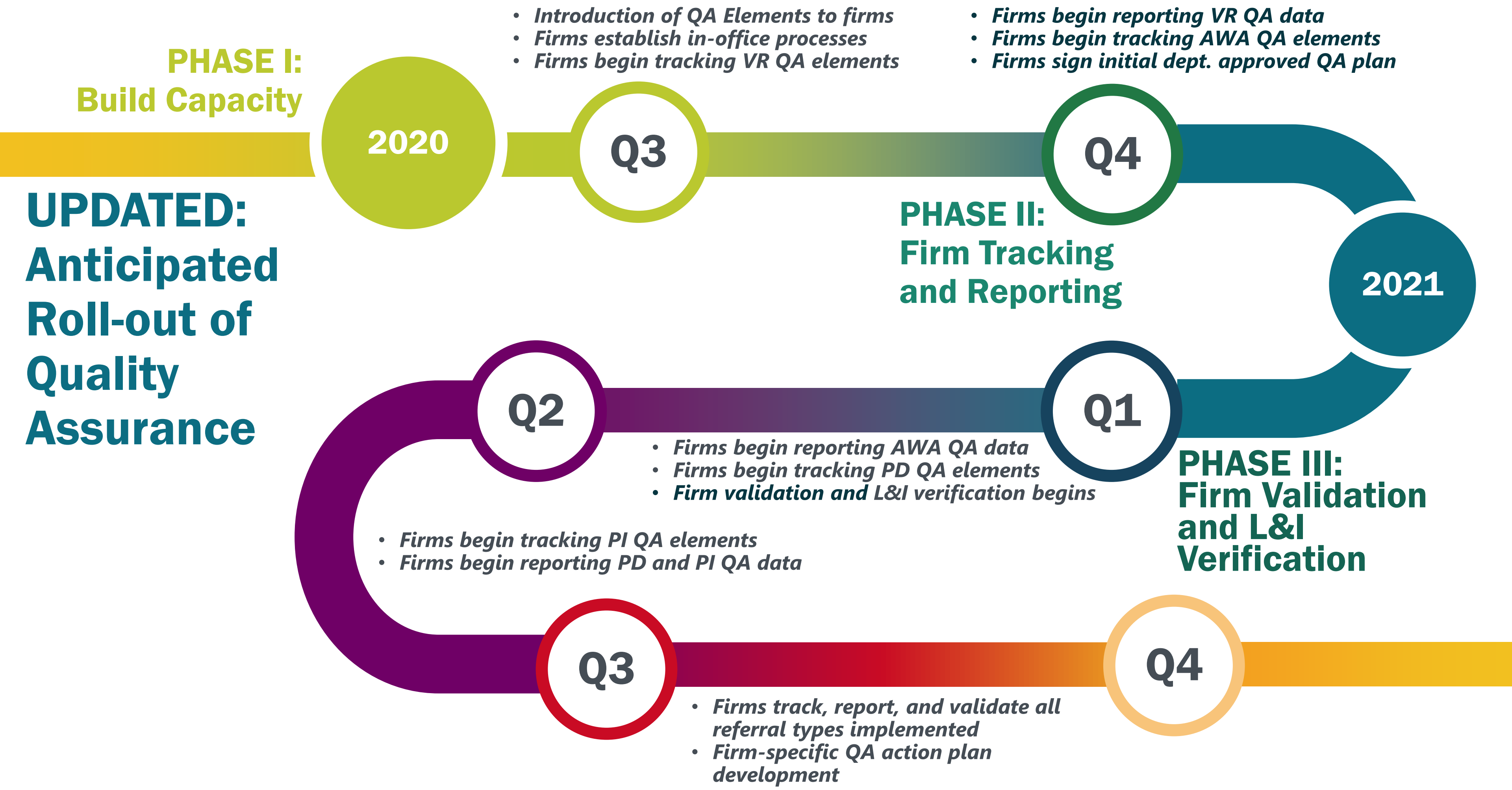
- Starting in August, you should be tracking QA data on vocational recovery referrals.
- You should continue tracking QA data on vocational recovery referrals each month.
- You will submit your QA data to L&I for the month of August <u>in October</u>.
- Moving forward, you will then submit QA data each month.

Reminders – The WHY

- Promotes high quality service.
- Staff understands their contribution and L&I’s focus.
- System data helps inform decisions and identify trends.
- Firms have an opportunity to show the quality of work being performed in the field.
- Engagement with workers, providers, and employers is demonstrated.
- Be in compliance with RCW laws and WAC rules.

Reminders – The WHY

- L&I is under scrutiny (by business labor, legislature, etc.) as it has dramatically transformed its partnership with the vocational community:
  - Introduced a new service-rich referral type (less process).
  - Addressed process barriers (fee caps, travel).
  - More referrals assigned earlier in the process (incorporated “second sweep”).
- The transformation gives firms control of referral assignment and responsibility for quality.
- L&I must monitor quality and effectiveness through:
  - Setting QA expectations.
  - Holding firms accountable for quality.
  - Making data-driven decisions and process improvements.


UPDATED: Anticipated Roll-out of Quality Assurance
PHASE I: Build Capacity
2020
Q3
• Introduction of QA Elements to firms
• Firms establish in-office processes
• Firms begin tracking VR QA elements
Q4
• Firms begin reporting VR QA data
• Firms begin tracking AWA QA elements
• Firms sign initial dept. approved QA plan
PHASE II: Firm Tracking and Reporting
2021
Q1
• Firms begin reporting AWA QA data
• Firms begin tracking PD QA elements
• Firm validation and L&I verification begins
PHASE III: Firm Validation and L&I Verification
Q2
• Firms begin tracking PI QA elements
• Firms begin reporting PD and PI QA data
Q3
• Firms track, report, and validate all referral types implemented
• Firm-specific QA action plan development
Q4

Reporting Template

Firm Provider Number	Firm name	Referral Type	Referral Cohort Month and Year (mm/yyyy)	Number of Referrals Received in Cohort Month	Activity Period (mm/dd - mm-dd)	Data Reporting Cycle	Number of Referrals Open for Activity Period	VR Elements					
								In-Person Meeting with Worker	Other Engagement with Worker	Site Visit with Employer	Other Engagement with Employer	Engagement with Provider	VR Plan Submitted or Updated

Some Quality Assurance (QA) Plan Components*

- Firm Best Practices Agreement
- Ongoing Capacity Authentication
- QA Tracking and Reporting Requirements
- Firm Validation Requirements
- Firm-Specific, Department Approved QA Tactics (sustaining positive findings and opportunities for improvement)
- Appendix (definitions, templates, guidelines)
- Firm Signature

*More details will be shared in coming months

Survey Results

- Almost 70 percent firm participation in the survey
- Firms report some technical difficulties, but are working with software vendors and incorporating more staff training to resolve.
- Average readiness for tracking and reporting is 8.36 out of 10. Also, 86 percent of firms who completed the survey perceive themselves as “ready or ready with some questions.”
- Only four respondents are not feeling confident in their ability to implement the requirements.

Questions from the Survey

How do I help my staff see the value in quality assurance activities?

Make them a part of the process. Get their input on how best to implement new processes and tools to support QA. Share the information provided by the department (Best Practices Agreement, Information Session materials, Q&A summaries, GovDelivery messages, QA Elements) along with the language in RCW 51.32.095 and WAC 296-19A-210(9)(d) to explain the reasons why QA is important. Reinforce the correlation between vocational recovery activities and return to work outcomes.

Questions from the Survey

"Engagement" means different things to different people. How will L&I help overcome the obstacles associated with this definition?

Quality Assurance Elements define "engagement" as ongoing, dynamic, meaningful interactions with the worker. In-person engagement is the gold standard, but engagement includes phone calls, text messaging, emails, video conferencing, or whatever works best for the worker, to continue to address medical treatment and claim barriers, psychosocial barriers, job search assistance, and vocational recovery plans and updates.

Questions from the Survey

The measures being tracked have not been fully tested to know if they are meaningful. When will the department expect to know if the measures are the right ones? How often will measures change?

QA measures have been developed over several months and tested with 10 firms since January. Through the test, measures have been refined and will continue to be evaluated as a part of our commitment to continuous improvement.

Measures are based on "evidence-informed" Best Practices from the AMA Guidelines and numerous academic studies. A bibliography of many of those studies is in the Vocational Recovery Reference Manual available on L&I's Vocational Services site.

Questions from the Survey

I'm concerned about "standardization" when each case requires professional judgment. No two are alike. The measures will be inconsistent at best, so what does that tell the department?

L&I has defined elements of quality vocational service for VR referrals. The department expects each firm to report data on identified QA measures in a consistent manner. However, there is no standard "one-size-fits-all" approach to case management. Professional judgment is essential to the work.

L&I is tracking at the system level, not the individual level, and, so far, no benchmarks have been set. This is not a competition. Follow WAC and department expectations and your numbers will reveal your quality work.

Questions from the Survey

How is VocLink a measure of quality?

VocLink is a tool and not a measure of quality. There is an expectation that once a firm receives a referral, a vocational rehabilitation counselor will be assigned as soon as possible. Referral distribution should follow guidance in the 2020 Firm Best Practices Agreement.

Questions from the Survey

What other QA elements are firms tracking?

We encourage firms to track additional QA elements that make sense for their circumstances. For example, some firms have reported tracking qualitative data, including specific methods for addressing psycho-social barriers across cases. Firms are also reviewing measures such as the timeliness of the engagement activities.

Depending on the software being used, dashboards are available for more visual representations of data at the firm (or VRC) level. Firms should discuss possibilities with their software vendor.

Questions from the Survey

Do I complete multiple case notes for each activity code?

No, you should not have to complete multiple case notes for each activity code. However, if you are running into issues, you should work with your software vendor to develop a solution.

Questions from the Survey

Is L&I going to continue to track when progress reports (PR) are due?

It is the responsibility of each vocational firm and vocational rehabilitation counselor (VRC) to track PR due dates. Timely submission of PRs is required by the Washington Administrative Code (WAC) 296-19A. Currently, VRCs may rely on the PR links in the Claim and Account Center (CAC) as reminders. However, the department plans to remove the due dates, keeping them as simply submission links.

For now, continue to use the PR links, but do <u>not</u> rely upon the due dates. Submit PRs every 30 days and follow department guidance for billing multiple (tie-in) claims or submitting reports on more than one open referral for a worker.

Questions from the Survey

Is the Voc Profile being phased out?

Yes. This section in CAC is being turned off and will no longer be visible internally or externally. This is scheduled to happen on Sept. 1 as long as there aren't any unforeseen delays.

Questions from the Survey

Has any consideration been given to how these extra steps in measuring quality are affecting my workload?

It is expected that firm owners and managers have performance management systems in place to promote quality and effective vocational services for workers. Most vocational firms have reported (in a recent survey) that they already actively manage the performance of their counselors. Complying with new department expectations for QA may require some changes in how you manage QA, but should not be new work.

The department is currently exploring ways to broaden support for firm QA activities, including a review of payment policies.

Questions from the Survey

Why is contact with representatives of employers or representatives of the worker (like an attorney) NOT considered engagement?

Interactions with third party administrators and attorneys are an important part of case management, but should not be considered employer or worker engagement for the purposes of QA tracking.

L&I is collecting data at the system level to measure the true level of employer engagement, worker engagement, and provider engagement in the system. The department does not expect 100 percent in any category. There is no competition between firms and referrals will not be impacted by the firm's reported data.

Questions from the Survey

How will the validation process work?

The process of firm validation and L&I verification is still being tested and refined. L&I expects to begin rolling out validation in January 2021. More information about processes will be shared later this year.

Questions from the Survey

Are you having any trouble with the new activity codes? How about your staff? Are software vendors aware of duplicate code issues?

If you are experiencing any difficulties with activity codes, please reach out to your software vendor to discuss.

Questions from the Survey

How can I find out about upcoming changes that may affect how I run my business?

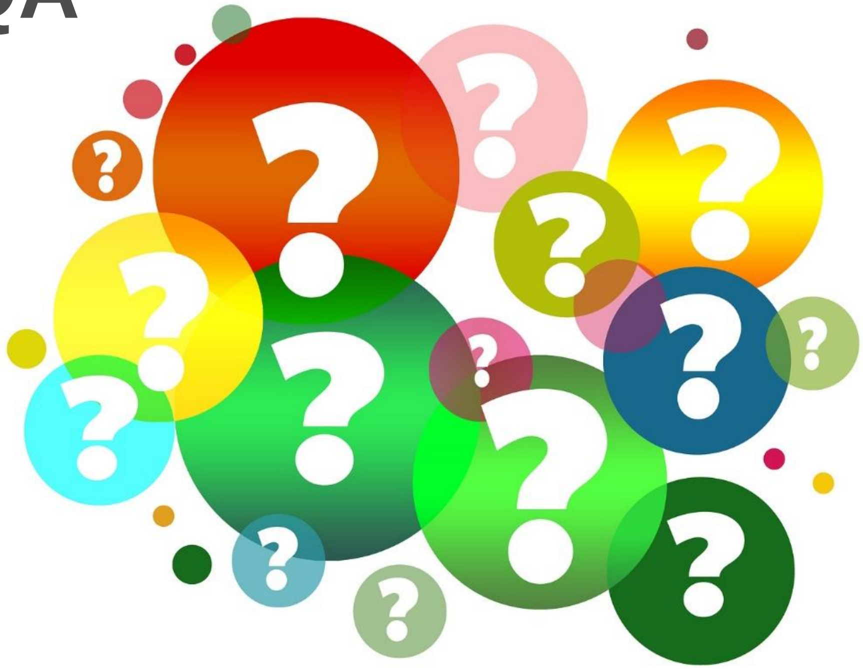
Information specific to vocational recovery is available on L&I's Vocational Services website.

We attempt to manage the volume of messages you receive via GovDelivery, reserving that channel for the most important updates and announcements.

Open Forums and Information Sessions are becoming more regular opportunities to interact with the project team and learn about upcoming implementation plans.

As always, the Vocational Recovery Project mailbox (VocRecoveryProject@Lni.wa.gov) is continuously monitored to address any questions or concerns you have.

Q&A on QA



Next Steps

FIRMS

- Work with your software vendor (if applicable).
- If you do not have a software vendor, contact Kirsta Glenn (Kirsta.Glenn@Lni.wa.gov) for assistance.
- Reach out to the test firms for guidance and advice.

L&I

- Assist firms one-on-one, as needed.
- Provide ongoing education and training.
- Continue to test and refine the concepts in the QA plan.