
NaBITA Standards

for Violence Risk Assessment (VRA)

Part 1: VRA Assessor

- 1. Professional/Academic Experience:** Those conducting a VRA must have a BA/BS degree in psychology, criminology, law enforcement, or similar field; demonstrate a reasonable understanding and familiarity across disciplines (legal, psychological, law enforcement, ADA/504, and disability) and possess the ability to conduct an interview, mitigate implicit and explicit bias, and reduce defensiveness.
- 2. Training:** There are no licensures or credentials that govern the practice of the VRA. Those conducting a VRA must have obtained sufficient training (40 hours and continuous), knowledge, and practice before conducting these assessments.
- 3. Dual Relationships:** When conducting a VRA, the assessor should not have a significant personal relationship, clinical treatment relationship, power/authority relationship, or other conflicting role related to privilege of communication or potential criminal charges/conflicts. In these instances, the VRA professional will recuse themselves from the assessment unless measures can be put into place to mitigate the conflict.
- 4. Bias Mitigation:** Those conducting a VRA should be aware of their explicit and implicit bias and look for ways to mitigate confirmation bias, in/out group bias, the halo effect, experience bias, and availability bias while nurturing cultural competency to ensure accuracy.
- 5. Structured Professional Judgment (SPJ):** This evidenced-based risk analysis process is critical for those conducting a VRA. The SPJ process assesses risk and protective factors and offers a non-actuarial estimation of risk with a strong focus on the management of threat and violence over time, rather than a “one-and-done” assessment.

Part 2: Process

- 6. Define Scope of Assessment:** The VRA must be an evidence-based assessment of risk factors for targeted violence and balance these against the stabilizing anchors in the subject’s life to better inform a threat mitigation strategy. The VRA should not be the sole criteria for adverse action such as dismissal.
 - 7. Evidenced-Based:** The VRA should be free of outside pressures and challenges and should assess the potential for escalations down a pathway of violence based on current research and literature to build a full contextual analysis.
 - 8. Understand the Limits of Psychological Assessment:** A psychological assessment is often different from VRA and focuses more on diagnoses, imminent risk of danger to self/others (which often is part of an in-patient admission), medication referral, and outpatient treatment. Anyone conducting a VRA should be vetted to ensure they have the qualities outlined in these standards.
 - 9. Assessing Contextual Data:** Any VRA must prioritize a rich exploration of the subject and gathering close, rich, and expansive contextual information regarding the scenario in question. At a minimum, this must include assessing past behavior, social media, and other sources of data that may deepen the accuracy of the assessment.
 - 10. Threat Management not Just Assessment:** The VRA must encompass questions of “what happens next,” taking into account future actions and variables. Likewise, any treatment or management measures should be proportional in response to the behaviors and current risk analysis.
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Part 3: Terminology

- 11. Understanding Affective vs. Targeted Violence:** Those conducting a VRA must have proficiency in determining the differences between affective, adrenaline-based violence and targeted, mission-oriented, instrumental violence built upon injustices, past grievances, and mission-oriented planning.
- 12. Research-Based Risk Factors:** The VRA identifies research-based, culturally appropriate risk factors for targeted and instrumental violence that have been studied by researchers in criminology, psychology, and forensics from the National Threat Assessment Center, Department of Education, U.S. Secret Service, U.S. Postal Service, and Department of Justice.
- 13. Research-Based Protective/Anchor Factors:** In addition to understanding the risk factors for targeted violence, those conducting a VRA must have proficiency in assessing the stabilizing influences in the subject's life. This scaffolding is critical to assess during the VRA; balancing risk and projective/anchoring factors to develop a threat management mitigation plan.
- 14. Understanding Variableness of Threats:** Those conducting VRAs must have proficiency in assessing the various types of threats that occur within a VRA. At a minimum, these include transient and substantive threats, hunting and howling, affective and mission-oriented, indirect/vague and direct with and without an action/time imperative, and conditional and non-conditional ultimatum.
- 15. Assessing Truthfulness:** The assessor must be grounded in research and literature surrounding deception, credibility assessment, truthfulness, validity, rapport building, and mitigating impression management.

Part 4: Procedures

- 16. Collaborative Team Process:** A VRA must involve a collaborative, multi-disciplinary team approach to reduce silos of information, expand the contextual analysis, and bring together expertise in law enforcement, psychological, legal, student conduct, human resources, and disability/IEP services.
- 17. Informed Consent:** Those conducting a VRA must clearly explain the purpose of the interview and where the results will be shared, with acknowledgment of applicable laws and guidance such as FERPA, HIPAA, privilege, confidentiality, duty to warn (Tarasoff), Title IX, ADA/504, and the Clery Act.
- 18. Documentation:** The VRA process requires timely, consistent documentation provided to the referral source and the subject. This documentation must avoid jargon, create clarity in the process, and assist in the threat mitigation process.
- 19. Meeting Logistics:** Ideally, it is preferable for one person to conduct the VRA in-person, rather than over a telephone or online. The frequency and length of meetings depends on the severity of the risk analysis.
- 20. Recording & Cost:** The VRA interview is not routinely recorded. If there are reasons to record (e.g., required by agency, seriousness of threat), these should be clearly stated in the informed consent (#17) prior to the VRA. Any money paid to the assessor or agency should be agreed upon prior to the start of the VRA.