SELF-ASSESSMENT TOOL FOR ACCESS TO JUSTICE COMMISSIONS

Introduction

This self-assessment tool is presented in three different formats, each of which is designed to serve a separate purpose:

1) The first is a Checklist of characteristics of an effective Access to Justice Commission that can be used by the Commission’s leadership, members, staff and others informally to assess its operations and provide guidance for its future activities.

2) The second uses the Checklist as a template for a Survey that can be administered to individual Access to Justice Commission Members, staff, partners or others as part of an assessment of a Commission’s operations.

3) The third presents a Planning Template for recording proposed strategies to respond to identified areas of strength and weakness.

The checklist is simply presented as a list with checkboxes, the review of which might provoke the thinking of the Commission, its leadership, its staff and others regarding its current operations and possible future activities. Not every characteristic set forth in the checklist will be appropriate for every Access to Justice Commission, based on its own specific circumstances. Some represent essential features of an effective ATJ Commission and would presumably apply to all – for instance, clarity regarding the Commission’s mission. Other items on the checklist may be more representative of “best practices” that not every ATJ Commission will have the staff or resources to pursue. They are all, nevertheless, presented in the checklist, since its purpose is in part to provoke thinking about ways that an ATJ Commission might expand or improve its operations in ways that that it might not have previously considered.

The survey template includes all the items set forth on the checklist and asks respondents to assess how effectively the ATJ Commission demonstrates the characteristic. Because the list is comprehensive, there may be parts of it that are not germane or appropriate for every potential evaluation. Accordingly, the survey is designed so that sections of it can be lifted out to be administered to the appropriate audience. For example, an ATJ Commission may be interested in surveying its partners and stakeholders about their perceptions of the Commission’s effectiveness at communicating about its work, but may not feel it appropriate to survey them about its staffing and internal operations. The
The survey template is also designed to be administered online and, therefore, also has skip logic, so that the respondent can be taken only to portions of the survey that pertain to them or about which they have knowledge. The survey template is designed in SurveyMonkey and can be transferred to an active, paid account upon request so that it can be administered directly by a Commission wishing to take advantage of it.

The Planning Template invites an assessment of the presence or effectiveness of the characteristics listed in the Checklist, but adds a place to record possible or agreed upon strategies to respond to weaknesses and take advantage of strengths. The Planning Template could be used either as an instrument to gather input from Commission Members, staff and others or as a template for recording the discussion and agreements in a planning meeting.