

# High Quality Services Questionnaire

## The Client Community

This exercise asks some basic questions about your client community. Completing it gives you a bird's eye perspective and should surface some available resources.

a) What is the percentage of your client community in relation to the community as a whole? \_\_\_\_\_ %

What is the size of your client community in total numbers?  
\_\_\_\_\_

How many clients did your organization serve in the past year?  
\_\_\_\_\_

b) What is the ethnic and racial mix of the client community? The general community? Indicate in terms of percentages.

Client Community	General Community
_____ %	_____ %
_____ %	_____ %
_____ %	_____ %
_____ %	_____ %
_____ %	_____ %
_____ %	_____ %

c) What % of your client community is female? male?  
\_\_\_\_\_ % Women                      \_\_\_\_\_ % Men

d) What are the dominant age groups that make up the client community (in %)?

Children/Youth (Birth-17) \_\_\_ % Young Adults (18-25) \_\_\_\_\_ %

Middle Adults (26-65) \_\_\_\_\_ % Older Adults (65+) \_\_\_\_\_ %

e) Approximately what % of the total client community know about your organization?  
\_\_\_\_\_ %

f) Has your organization systematically determined the needs of the total client community? If not, why not?

What methods did it use? Surveys? Interviews? Word of mouth? Other?

How valid would you consider these methods?  
1. Not at All                      2. Not very  
3. Adequate                      4. Very

What did your organization learn?

List the major resources (sources of supply or support) that your client community provides you or your organization.

h) List the five most important things that your organization could be doing to meet the client community needs that it's not doing presently.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

## Mission

*A mission statement describes the organization's fundamental aims, why it exists, and what it will do in the long run. It spells out the benefits that will accrue to the people it serves. A mission statement communicates your organization's reason for being and serves as a basis for all organization strategies and activities. It is a focal point for allocating resources and making decisions. Examples of mission statements are:*

"To change poor people in such a fashion as poor people choose, to obtain social and economic justice."

"To change institutions, provide access to justice, and represent individuals."

"To work in partnership with people with disabilities - to protect, advocate for, and advance their human, legal and service rights. To strive toward a society that values all people and supports their rights to dignity, freedom, choice and quality of life."

"To promote equal justice and to effect change and long term solutions which lead to: client participation in planning and monitoring agencies that deliver services to the community; requiring agencies to fulfill their obligations and to do it with dignity; the development of a humane lifestyle; the attainment of basic needs; the achieving of client self-sufficiency."

**This exercise helps you to explore the clarity of your mission and to weigh its impact on your organization's operations.**

a) State your organization's mission as it is described in public documents. If your organization has no written mission statement, describe what you believe it to be.

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How clear is the mission statement to you?

1. Not            2. Enough            3. Very

How clear do you think the mission statement is to other staff? 1. Not      2. Enough      3. Very

How much agreement among all staff do you think exists on your organization's mission?

1.None    2.Little    3.Enough    4. A lot

b) How has your organization made these groups aware of its mission:

- ...client community generally
- ...client community organizations
- ...the legal community
- ...government institutions and/or social agencies with whom your interact
- ...the media
- ...political decision-makers
- ...funding sources

c) How committed are you to your organization's mission?

1.A little    2.Some    3.Enough    4.A lot

How do you carry out your organization's mission/purpose in day-to-day activities? List at least four ways.

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How committed is the staff to your organization's mission?

1.A little    2.Some    3.Enough    4.A lot

How does the staff demonstrate its commitment?

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d) What do you believe could be done to clarify your organization's mission and to secure greater staff and client commitment to it?

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## Effectiveness of Strategies

*Most organizations operate under a system of strategies, or goals, to carry out their mission. Strategies represent the major pieces of work to be done in the long term; they are the means by which missions are actualized, the chosen ways by which results are achieved. They can include legislative advocacy, litigation, administrative advocacy, information and referral, publicity, and client self-help such as clinics, community education and self-help materials.*

**This exercise helps you to explore the effectiveness of your organization's strategies to realize its mission.**

a) What are your organization's basic strategies to carry out its mission or to justify its reason for being?

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b) How are these strategies communicated to the client and general community?

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c) How do these strategies relate to the key needs of your client community?

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d) How committed is your organization's staff to the strategies it employs?

1. Not very 2. A little 3. Somewhat 4. A great deal

What actions do you believe should be taken to increase staff commitment to your organization's strategies?

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e) List three ways in which your organization's strategies have affected your client community.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Are you satisfied with this impact ?

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

f) List at least three actions that you think could be taken to improve the impact of your organization's strategies on the client community.

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## Effectiveness of Services

*Services can include legal advice and representation, hot lines, clinics, peer counseling, community education, legislative advocacy, community economic development, and the like. This exercise explores the quality and quantity of the services your organization provides.*

a) What is the total number of individual cases being handled by your organization at this time?



# Competence Questionnaire

	Yes	No	?		Yes	No	?
1. Do you keep abreast of current legal developments that affect your clients and client communities?				10. Does your organization effectively refer clients to other agencies for help — emotional, physical and legal?			
2. Is case preparation thorough for litigation, hearings, arbitration, and mediation?				11. Do people in your office routinely work together on cases and projects? Do you work with other organizations that serve poor people?			
3. Do cases which settle receive the same thorough preparation as cases that are tried? How about transactional or policy matters?				12. May advocates limit their intake when necessary? May secretaries limit their work load?			
4. In all forums where your program represents clients, are advocates prepared, thorough and competent?				13. Does the client community believe that your organization provides competent services of a quality equal to or better than the private bar?			
5. Do all files (paper and electronic) contain legible and complete case diaries and opening memos so that anyone could take it over quickly and easily?				14. Do people in your organization think that it provides competent services?			
6. Is staff adequately supervised by experienced, competent people?				15. Have methods been implemented in your organization to systematically and critically scrutinize the competence of your work?			
7. Do all staff have easy access to up-to-date legal research materials?				16. Do you and all staff have access to computers, fax machines, CDs, internet and other technology to support your work?			
8. Do all staff have easy access to an up-to-date "pleadings, briefs, hearing, position statement" bank?				17. Is teamwork among all staff encouraged and rewarded?			
9. Do all staff have easy access to up-to-date forms prepared by your office or courts or administrative agencies?				18. Are you and the other people in your organization provided with the training and development necessary to serve clients competently?			

## About Competence

1. Analyze how your organization is structured. Is staff grouped into smaller units to handle particular subject areas? Or does everyone handle everything? Are particular individuals in your office identified as the "expert" in a particular field? Are attorneys, legal secretaries/assistants and paralegals properly utilized?

If you and the other staff members are generalists, then it is almost impossible to keep abreast of current developments. Too much goes on in housing, family, government benefits, consumer, education, civil rights and other areas of poverty, disability, and public interest law to be an expert in all of them at once. Many maintain that it is impossible to be a competent generalist.

Generalization may mean that no area is mastered, leading to incompetent client services. In the last 25 years, most legal services organizations adopted substantive law specialization as a means of coping with this problem. Specialization permits advocates to keep abreast of current developments in a field and remain competent. In offices as small as four advocates, staff members develop expertise in certain areas to maintain competence.

On the other hand, overspecialization may also lead to incompetence. The inability to spot issues may lead to missed problems and prevent meaningful teamwork.

Today, the challenge is to combine the specialist's expertise in a substantive law area and the generalist's ability to identify issues in a basic way with the ability to work in lawyer, paralegal and legal assistant teams. And increasingly, the teamwork must be done at a distance.

If your staff is specialized, then what procedures are in place to inform staff about new developments? Is information circulated regularly? Is it timely? Are advance sheets, the *Clearinghouse Review* and any Task Force Bulletins regularly reviewed and discussed by those in your unit? Does any system exist to circulate new

information, or is it done haphazardly? Is anyone in your organization specifically assigned responsibilities of filing updated material? If your organization has 40 or more advocates, do you have a professional librarian?

Is the problem with you or the size of your caseload? Do you allocate time to read about current developments? Do you arrange time for study where you do not answer e-mail and accept phone calls? Are you on intake all the time so you have no quiet time?

Do people in your organization work in teams? Does your organization encourage teamwork? Does it provide training and reward performance for working in teams?

2. Get an experienced advocate to review 3-5 recently closed cases you have litigated or taken to an administrative hearing. File review should include: (a) general background information on the client; (b) fact investigation; (c) witness examinations; (d) client interviews; (e) pleadings; (f) motions; (g) preparation for various hearings; (h) negotiation notes; (i) legal research and memos of law; (j) trial documents; (k) formal discovery documents; (l) correspondence; (m) court orders, findings of fact and law; and all other "papers" that give some clues as to your preparation. Likewise, other advocates, legal secretaries and assistants should arrange for their work to be reviewed by an experienced person

Did a supervisor or unit member review cases at each stage of their development? Did you do moot trial/hearings before the actual hearings or trials?

Did you utilize standard preparation techniques? Do you have preparation protocols? Did you use any sophisticated techniques, such as visual aids or demonstrative evidence that might have been helpful in the case? Did you do all necessary discovery? If not, why not?

No legal services/public interest organization should be without a fund to pay for discovery, expert witnesses and other types of expenses

needed to represent clients competently. These expenditures are essential to competence.

3. Select five of your recently closed cases that were settled without going to trial or hearing. Have your supervisor or some other experienced person review the files for information on whether: (a) all factual and legal issues were fully explored; (b) the client was provided with full information at each stage of the negotiation; (c) further discovery which could have produced additional concessions from your opponent could not be justified; (d) the worth of your various claims was properly assessed at the time a settlement was reached; (e) other, more favorable settlements were considered and artfully offered; (f) the goal in the negotiation process was not mere client satisfaction, but what was possible.

The same type of review should be done for other advocate and legal secretary or assistant work.

4. On a periodic basis, all attorneys should be observed at all court stages including motions, summary judgment hearings and trials. The observer, a skilled litigator, should focus on courtroom "presence," appearance and attitude, knowledge of the facts and law, ingenuity and creativity, persuasiveness, grasp of evidence rules, thoroughness and clarity of presentation, witness preparation, and relationship with the client.

Skilled administrative advocates should observe paralegals and lawyers at administrative hearings in a similar fashion. Video taping mock trials and hearings is very useful for self-evaluation.

5. During staff meetings, exchange two or three cases with other advocates. Give feedback on legibility, understandability and whether case logs are up-to-date. Continue with the review on a regular basis to ensure all files are maintained. Closed cases could be signed off by the supervisor or another unit member to make sure no loose ends remain.

6. Inexperienced advocates should not be working on files without having an experienced, competent staff person carefully supervising intakes,

reviewing opening file memos, assisting with case planning, and consulting at each crucial stage of a case. At a minimum, you and your supervisor should review all open files at least once a month. Work should be assigned to inexperienced personnel to enable them to experience a variety of tasks.

7. You should have easy access to federal and state statutes, regulations and case decisions to permit thorough research into any federal or state question. Is on-line access effectively coordinated with any print materials? CDs?

Is there a system for keeping the library in order on a daily basis? Do people routinely use your office library rather than one someplace else? Is anyone in your office specifically assigned to update library materials?

8. To determine whether your "pleadings, briefs, hearing statements" bank is useful, check to see whether it is regularly maintained, contains a full-range of useful pleadings and briefs for each stage of each type of case, is indexed in a fashion that makes it quick and easy to use, contains pleadings and briefs that are of top quality rather than junk, and is regularly reviewed to purge out-of-date materials.

9. Your office should have an indexed file (computerized or paper) containing all forms prepared by your office or printed by the court/agency to use in frequently-encountered situations. Does your office have such a file? Is there a system for replenishing forms when you run out and adding new forms as soon as they are released?

10. Has your office provided you with a directory of agencies that is sufficiently complete and informative to allow you to quickly refer your clients to places where they will receive help? Does someone periodically contact these agencies to update services provided, costs, waiting time for service, etc. Increasingly this information should be on line.

A legal referral directory should also be at your fingertips. It should contain up-to-date, accurate information on all the possible sources of legal help available to your clients, *e.g.*, homeless advocates, food banks, consumer fraud agencies, E.E.O.C., Federal Trade Commission, domestic violence survivors, independent living centers. Is it updated by contacting sources for information on problems handled, complaint forms, backlogs, procedures?

Assuming these referral directories are available, are they used? Are all the "other" kinds of problems noticed and referred? Periodically, have an experienced person sit in on a couple of your interviews to check whether you are identifying these other kinds of problems and effectively referring the client. Are clients assisted with making the connection to other agencies to insure that the services are in fact provided to them? Are periodic follow-ups made to monitor the service provided and the client's progress? Referral assistance and follow-up are essential to competence.

11. Common mistakes are less likely to occur when two or more heads work on a problem. Enthusiasm for a case or a project is directly related to the number of staff working on it; enthusiasm on a major project or case is directly related to the likelihood of its success. For a whole variety of reasons, a competent approach to "major" cases or projects requires the collaboration of two or more staff members including paralegals and legal assistants.

In some organizations, deciding to apply the term "major" to a case or a project means that it has been designated important enough for two or more staff members to work on it. Does your office encourage joint efforts on important cases and projects? Does collaboration happen often? Are specialties so rigid that joint efforts are discouraged? Is this technique used to pair up less experienced staff with more experienced staff? Does each new staff person work on a "major" case in his/her first year?

12. Do you feel that you can say "no" to additional cases, that you have the power to "close down" your intake when you feel you are handling more cases than you can work on competently? Once you have established an appropriate level of cases, can you limit your intake in a given month to the number of files you closed in the prior month, thereby maintaining caseload stability? Do you feel guilty about burdening others with this work or not providing the services at all? What does the office do to alleviate that guilt?

13. Survey 10 random clients whose files have been closed for at least a month. Send each a short questionnaire with a self-addressed stamped envelope asking for an evaluation of your work. Ask whether the client felt that the service he/she received was of a quality equal to or better than she or he might receive in the private sector? If not, ask why not? Talk to members of your community advisory board about the community's impression of the quality of services provided.

Another useful technique is to record intake interviews and evaluate them for the quality of the interview conducted. Did you listen? Who directed the interview? How do you think you impressed the client? Did the client know what was going to happen to him or her?

14. Ask your colleagues to give you feedback on how you serve clients. Does anyone chastise you or your colleagues for the "way" you serve clients? Analyze that criticism for any constructive content. Are you criticized merely because of whom you serve or for some additional honest and deserving reasons, *e.g.*, your lack of decorum when dealing with courts, agencies or other outside persons or entities; your disrespectful appearance, your ignorance of unwritten rules.

15. A powerful way to improve staff performance is to set up systems to critically scrutinize each other's work. There are a whole range of such systems: systematic evaluation of randomly selected case files; postmortems on closed cases; circulating selected case files for review within the office; pairing advocates in handling cases;

surveying clients to assess reactions to services rendered.

The techniques vary depending upon the structure of the office, the personalities in it, the relationship among staff, the level of ability of the staff, the substantive areas handled by the office, and caseload pressures. Whatever systems are utilized, however, they must be done in ways that minimize resentment and defensiveness. They must be separated from procedures used in making promotion and salary decisions. Open, frank communication is the key to this approach. Are there any such systems in your office?

16. Technology has the potential for allowing us to offer quality services to more clients. Beside word processing, computers can be used in a variety of ways to support your work; *e.g.*, managing cases, organizing discovery, presenting information at hearings, trials and other public forums. Access to the Internet can improve communication and teamwork. Access to Westlaw and Lexis can speed legal research and cite checking.

17. Teamwork among staff is fast becoming an absolute necessity in all types of organizations. One of the most exciting and challenging is the emergence of the legal assistant role. Beyond the role of "typist" or receptionist, the legal assistant can work with advocates on individual cases and other projects, including interviewing, interacting and referring clients, organizing and obtaining documents, and doing legal research.

18. Training and development are critical to all workers. Was any initial orientation to your present job meaningful, thorough and coordinated with a personalized plan for on-the-job training during your first year? Does your organization promote planned, systematic development of staff performance? Is staff provided with the opportunity to participate in training events outside the organization? Are there adequate funds set aside in your organization's budget for training? Does any training you receive meet your training needs?

Learning how to learn is a key skill. The ability to keep current in a variety of substantive and skill areas is critical to high quality work. You as an individual advocate, lawyer, legal assistant, or paralegal must invest in the training necessary to keep your performance at its best. So must your organization. Check out organizations such as Benchmark's Core Skills and Leadership Programs, National Institute of Trial Advocacy.

