**CSIT**

A toolkit to help the culture, sport, green space & tourism sectors to

***re-group, survive & re-grow the services for the community***

Document 3.13

**Effective Self-Assessment Workshops**

**Assessing & understanding your organisation’s, or partnership’s, current strengths & areas for improvement**

***“He who asks the questions cannot avoid the answers”***

A Cameroon proverb!

Version 2 – July 2011

**Introduction**

Formal, cyclical Self-Assessment lies at the heart of CSIT[[1]](#footnote-1). This is simply a very good way of identifying improvement in the way the organisation or partnership works, which leads to improved outcomes and therefore to everyone’s future success. All organisations have strengths & areas for improvement – the successful ones know what these are and are committed to actions!

Carried out effectively, Self-Assessment provides….

* **Identification of the organisation’s strengths….recognition of progress for everyone**
* **Identification of the organisation’s areas for improvement….a sound basis for improvement**
* **Measurement of the organisation’s progress**

The process of carrying out Self-Assessment can also improve…

* **Staff awareness of the way in which the organisation or partnership works**
* **Staff *ownership* of improvements**
* **Values & habits of continuous improvement, synergy, trust & teamwork**
* **Insight to what is required to improve the services provided to the community**
* **Improvements in partnership working & relationships**

Self-Assessment is a popular tool, used in many organisations around the world. It is not new, nor particularly complicated. Many organisations and partnerships use a structured Self-Assessment and many are using aspects of Self-Assessment by a different name. However, there are many *stumbling* *blocks* to carrying out comprehensive and effective Self-Assessment. These tips will assist you to avoid these *stumbling* *blocks*.

**Self-Assessment Workshops**

Document One provides detailed guidance on the improvement process, scoping & planning your Self-Assessment and establishing your Self-Assessment Team.

Self-Assessment is conducted by the Self-Assessment Team through consensus workshops (often informed by supported by 360 feedback from stakeholders, via focus groups, one-to-one discussions or feedback forms). During these workshops the Self-Assessment Team discusses the organisation or partnership’s progress against the criteria. The objective is to arrive at a consensus agreement in relation to each criterion – in consensus everybody feels happy with and is willing to stand behind the decisions. This enables the Team to create an accurate picture of the organisation or partnership’s strengths and areas for improvement and ensures there is enough energy to move forward.

The workshops need to be positive & energetic; therefore they should last between 3 to 4 hours (a full CSIT Self-Assessment could require 4 of these).

Critical friends can be used to challenge assumptions and provide an external viewpoint. This could be an external person (e.g. a trained excellence assessor) or preferably a peer, ideally someone who has been trained in Peer-Led Challenge. A skilled Facilitator is required to make the workshops operate effectively. This could be someone within the organisation or partnership, a peer or an external specialist. The Facilitator could also act as the critical friend.

**Tips for the Self-Assessment Team**

1. Remember that Self-Assessment is a valuable tool for identifying improvements, rather than a tool necessary because of external pressure, a one-off exercise or a ‘bolt-on’ to normal work
2. Recognise that Self-Assessment is not a review of the people working in the organisation - it is about the way the organisation or partnership works
3. Remember that that Self-Assessment is not a threat or criticism
4. Minimise the pressures to achieve higher judgements – Self-Assessment is not a competition, a points-scoring exercise or a way to improve your image - these perceptions are all barriers to identifying accurate and in-depth areas for improvement.
5. Remember that identifying ratings is not an exact science and should not be the focus or the goal – establishing accurate and valuable areas for improvement is the primary goal.
6. Honesty & confidentiality are essential before during and after Self-Assessment workshops.
7. In this exercise at least, there is no ‘failure’ – just feedback, no ‘problems’ – just areas for improvement (they can’t be ‘problems’ if they have been clearly defined) and no ‘blame’ – just cause.
8. Remember that the key to obtaining comprehensive insight about the organisation is consensus agreement (individuals only know part of the overall picture). A consensus view is ‘win/win’, not ‘lose/win’, ‘lose/lose’ or ‘democracy’. It requires the following beliefs & habits:
* Everyone’s perception of the organisation is right and valuable – your goal is not to persuade everyone that your view is right!
* Everyone’s perceptions added together will create an insight which is ‘greater than the sum of the parts’
* ‘Seek first to understand then to be understood’ [[2]](#footnote-2)
1. Have a small number of critical documents on the table during the Self-Assessment (e.g. strategy, business plans, performance trends, summary of partner and staff perceptions). Ensure that Self-Assessment doesn’t become a ‘paper-chase’ or ‘box ticking’ exercise. Remember that you do not have to do anything ‘for an external Validator’ – documentary evidence is for your benefit.
2. Avoid discussions about trivia or a checklist approach – Self-Assessment is about developing collective insight to how the organisation works and what needs to be improved in order to make a significant difference to results.
3. Always “begin with the end in mind” – if faced with a difficult decision during Self-Assessment go back to this statement
4. Keep your sense of humour!**Tips for Self-Assessment Workshop Facilitators / Critical Friends**
5. Before you go in to a session, remind yourself what you are there for…to remove any interference and make it easy for the team to reach a consensus agreement on strengths & areas for improvement relating to the criteria. Your role is to achieve this by structuring the discussions, triggering energetic & incisive discussions, explaining the criteria where required and asking challenging questions.
6. Capture the outputs of the session either on flipchart or on an electronic version of the work sheet with the Toolkit, using a data projector. Both of these approaches ensure that there is a single focus of attention for the Team. It is important that everyone in the team is happy to stand behind the outputs before they leave. The advantage of an electronic version of the working sheet with data projector is that it removes the need for any (or much) report writing after the workshop (and avoids the temptation to change key words back in the office!).
7. Always stick to the planned start and finish times. So structure the discussions to ensure that the session covers what is required within the allocated time. Don’t be afraid of letting conversations run, even if they run into different criteria – this will often save time later in the workshop. It is better to have an in-depth discussion about a small number of criteria than bland conversation about many criteria.
8. You don’t have to start at Criterion 1.1 and work through to 8.4 – group the Criteria or follow *Red Threads*
9. Use the chosen Self-Assessment tool to guide your prompts & questions. For example when conducting a full CSIT Self-Assessment, the sequence is as follows:
* What methods & practices they have in place? Create a list
* To what extent do these meet the Criterion?
* To what extent are these linked together?
* To what extent are these implemented throughout the organisation or partnership?
* To what extent are these systematic?
* How have you reviewed & improved the effectiveness & efficiency of these methods & practices?
* What does the evidence tell you about the impact of the methods & practices on stakeholders?
1. Encourage everyone in the Team to give their views & perceptions, by repeating the question to the whole group in another way, looking at the person, or directing a question to that person.
2. One of your main tasks is to ask questions which challenge people to think hard about their perceptions & assumptions and gives them the opportunity to think again when they hear their answer. Keep asking the questions until there is consensus about the response and until you can clearly understand the logic of this response – at this moment the Self-Assessment Team will reach a new collective insight (some “awareness is curative” [[3]](#footnote-3)). Phrase your questions using ‘how’, ‘what’ and ‘when’ – avoid ‘why’, as this can provokes a defensive response and avoid closed questions (i.e. those which can be answered with ‘yes’ or ‘no’).
3. Be legitimately curious about the organisation & partnership and the way in which it works and ask the questions from this state of mind, as opposed to thinking (consciously or unconsciously) that…
* they need to be given a hard time, like an inspector!
* you know better and so need to give them advice
* what they are doing is wrong!

Remind yourself and remind the Team that you are not asking the questions because you need to know the answer, you are asking them because this will help them…and it is not a quiz! Reflect on your vocal tones and body language to check whether you are giving the right impression to are support the above state of mind

1. Accept silences! It is essential to give people time to think. Silence is a good sign!
2. Use different tools during the workshop to maintain energy, focus and involvement (e.g. using scorecards, silent feedback through post-it notes, sub-groups, asking people to move to different parts of the room to reflect their perception)
3. Keep the energy & positivity going throughout the workshop by…
* using a mixture of tools & techniques
* Maintaining & demonstrating your own energy & positivity
* Humour!

1. This version of CSIT has been designed and developed in association with Steve Wood steve-wood@talktalk.net [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Source: Dr Stephen Covey – 7 Habits of Highly Effective People [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Timothy Gallwey – The Inner Game of Work) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)