Tool: Trial Court Research and Improvement Consortium (TCRIC): Self-Help Program Assessment Tool (John Greacen 2005)

Program Assessment

This program assessment tool ("tool") is designed to produce a "snap–shot" assessment of a court's services to self-represented litigants, including but not limited to a specific program designed to provide information to them ("program"). It is intended to provide management of a court with information on four different levels:

1. Where best to allocate scarce resources (Program Assessment).

2. Where to fill gaps between a program's mission and its actual process (Gap Analysis).
3. Where to develop the next stage of data analysis (Data Analysis).
4. Where to consider the next stage in program development (Emerging Practices).

This tool is useful for obtaining valid information and advice about a court's current efforts, for comparing a court's performance against the performance of other courts that have used the tool in the past, for setting priorities for additional court efforts to improve the handling of cases involving self-represented litigants, and for collecting data to demonstrate the benefits of current efforts.

This tool is not intended to marshal data to test particular hypotheses about self-represented litigants, to answer fundamental questions about the motivations, needs, and interests of self-represented litigants, or to determine in any absolute sense the fairness or appropriateness of court decisions in cases involving them. Those sorts of questions require more structured, long term research.

Design and Use of the Tool

The tool is designed to be used in an inexpensive and expeditious manner; experience has shown that it is more likely to produce helpful results if it is used by an outside consultant working with a volunteer from another court. This document assumes that an outside consultant/outside volunteer will perform the assessment. The tool could be used by a court to perform its own internal assessment of its performance or as a source of questions and ideas for a general program review.

This tool is designed to be used as a part of a national effort to obtain consistent information about how courts deal with self-represented litigants and how programs to assist self-represented litigants perform. It comes with standard data gathering instruments. If it is necessary to obtain different data for purposes of a local program's needs, please add questions to the instruments rather than changing the standard questions.

The Trial Court Research and Improvement Consortium (TRIC) provides this guide, and the accompanying instruments, with the expectation that all users of it will provide their results to the Consortium so that they can be integrated into the Consortium's compendium of available data for purposes of better understanding

these programs, improving their performance on a national basis, and providing individual programs with useful benchmarks for assessing their performance relative to other such programs.

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Topics

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