Criminal justice evaluation and performance monitoring

Guideline 5: Measuring service effectiveness through client feedback

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Introduction

In this guideline, we provide services with advice about how to collect feedback from clients about their experiences engaging with the service.

What is client feedback?

Client feedback is what people tell you about their experience of your service — what they liked, what didn't work for them, and how things could be better. It helps services understand how well they are meeting clients' needs, and whether the activities and outputs they provide are delivered in a way that is respectful, accessible, and appropriate.

This kind of feedback focuses on the quality of what was delivered — for example, the responsiveness of staff or the clarity of communication — rather than on the impact of the service. Evaluating impact (e.g., changes in behaviour, wellbeing or recidivism) is covered in Guideline 6.

Client feedback can include information about:

- **Accessibility** – whether the client was able to access the service easily (e.g., location, opening hours, eligibility, communication needs).
- **Timeliness** – how quickly the client received support after seeking help.
- **Appropriateness** – whether the service was relevant and tailored to the client's circumstances.
- **Responsiveness** – whether the service adapted to the client's needs over time.
- **Cultural safety and inclusiveness** – whether the client felt respected, understood, and free from discrimination (e.g., First Nations clients, LGB+ clients, people with disability).
- **Respect and dignity** – how the client felt they were treated by staff.
- **Communication** – whether the client understood the information provided and felt listened to.
- **Environment** – physical or virtual service space, including safety, privacy, and comfort.
- **Suggestions for improvement** – ideas from clients about how the service could be made better for them or others

Why collect client feedback?

Client feedback helps you understand how people experience your service — what worked well for them, what didn't, and whether the support you provided met their needs. Collecting this feedback shows that your service is open to learning, supports continuous improvement, and helps demonstrate to funders and partners that you are delivering meaningful support to the targeted population.

When should services collect client feedback?

Services should collect feedback from clients once they have completed core activities (e.g., after participating in your programs) or just before exiting your service.

What tools can services use to collect feedback?

There are different ways to collect client feedback, but the two most common are:

- Exit Interviews (Appendix A).
- Surveys (Appendix B).

This guideline provides advice on how to administer both. If using a survey, we recommend the Client Satisfaction Questionnaire (CSQ-8) (Larsen et al, 1979) as a starting point. Because many criminal justice clients have lower literacy levels, we have tried to simplify the language for accessibility. We have also provided emojis, which some organisations may find helpful to show clients. More broadly, services may find it helpful to use emojis (e.g., happy or sad faces) to discuss client experiences.

The Exit Interview (Appendix A) questions are based on the CSQ-8,[1] but are open-ended so that clients can provide more information and detail in their responses.

The suggested tools are intended to be a starting point and should be adapted to meet the needs of your service. This ensures you collect information that meets funding requirements <u>and</u> helps evaluate service effectiveness.

How should services collect client feedback?

When thinking about the best option for your service – interviews (Appendix A), surveys (Appendix B) or something else – it is important to carefully consider who is going to administer these tools to the client. In particular, client feedback will be viewed as more convincing and 'accurate' if it is:

- collected by someone who is not associated with your service in a formal capacity – in other words, someone who does not have a vested interest in what the client says about their experiences, and/or
- provided anonymously – in other words, if your service does not know which client has provided the feedback.

Maintaining anonymity in the ACT is often difficult, considering how small the jurisdiction is. With that in mind, if you are trying to collect feedback anonymously, it is a good idea to collect this information from a pool of clients at the same time. For example, every three months, you may ask clients who have exited the service during this period to complete a survey. It is much more difficult to protect clients' anonymity when you collect their feedback using an interview.

If your service decides to use a survey to collect feedback from clients, you may want to use online survey software. [SurveyMonkey] is an accessible option and is free to use if the survey is

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[1] D Larsen et al (1979). 'Assessment of Client/Patient Satisfaction: Development of a General Scale'. *Evaluation and Program Planning,* 2(3): p.197.

10 questions or less. Other software packages include [Survey Manager] and [Qualtrics], although these can be expensive to buy.

One of the benefits of using online survey software is that once, you have set up the survey, you can easily share the weblink (URL) with clients, for easy completion. The survey responses are also stored by the software package and can be downloaded by your service when needed. This includes in formats that are suitable for analysis – like MS Excel.

Which clients should be asked to provide feedback?

All clients who receive services should have the chance to give feedback. If any are excluded (e.g., clients who are in prison), this should be done **consistently** and communicated clearly among staff.

It is important to be transparent about which clients do (and do not) have the opportunity to give feedback on your service. This can help protect your service from accusations that you are 'cherry-picking' clients, who will only say positive things about you. Constructive negative feedback can be very useful for improving service provision.

It is also important to ensure a range of clients are involved in this feedback process, to increase the scope of the information received. This will help to improve service delivery. This is particularly important for groups in the community who have historically not benefitted from mainstream services, such as LGBTQ+ and Indigenous peoples and people with disability.

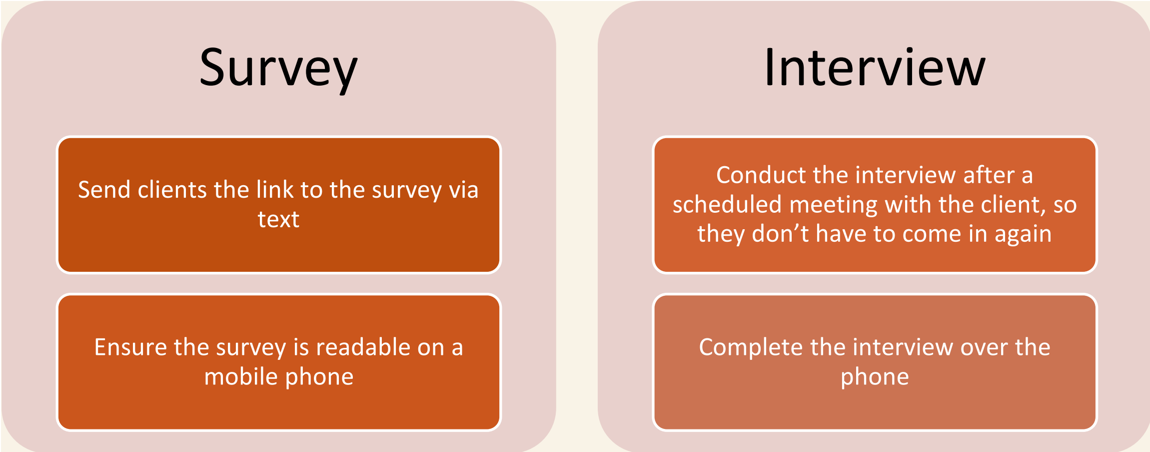
How can services increase client response rates?

A common challenge when collecting feedback, is that clients may not want to complete surveys or participate in an interview after leaving the service. To improve response rates:

- keep them short (maximum 5-10 questions),
- use plain English,
- make them accessible, especially for people with literacy and/or disability issues (eg, use pictures/symbols/emojis, audio files,[2] and
- Make them easy to complete (minimal effort required).

To make it easier for clients to provide feedback, you could use one or more of the following techniques:

[2] Australian Government (2025). *'Create Accessible Materials – Forms and Surveys'* <https://www.disabilitygateway.gov.au/forms-surveys>.



You can also consider offering clients a small incentive to complete the feedback tool, e.g,, gift card, movie tickets etc. This could include an incentive for each participant or going into a prize draw. However, the second approach should be used carefully, as some clients have addiction issues that could be exacerbated by a lottery-style incentive regime (e.g., with gambling, drug use and/or be in custody at the time of giving feedback).

How should services store client feedback?

How feedback is stored depends on whether it is anonymous.

- If NOT anonymous: Attach feedback to case files in the information management system. This allows services to link demographics and participation data to feedback.
- If anonymous: Store responses separately in a database or spreadsheet.

What are some next steps services can take?

Appendix A: Exit interview questions

1. Did you feel respected by the staff?
2. Did you feel like you were listened to?
3. Do you feel like the service helped you address some of the things you want/ed to change about your life?
4. What did you like most about the service?
5. What do you think could be improved?
6. If you needed help again, would you come back to the service?
7. Would you recommend this service to a friend or family member, if they needed support?
8. Is there anything else you would like to tell us?

Appendix B: Client Satisfaction Questionnaire (CSQ-8)

We would like you to complete this survey. It asks you to give some information about you and how you feel about yourself and other people. You don't have to complete the survey if you don't want to, but it will help us to find ways of improving the service.

Table 1: CSQ-8 questions and response categories

Question	Response categories	Notes
How old are you currently?	(1) 13-14 (2) 15-16 (3) 17-18 (4) 18-24 (5) 25-34 (6) 35-44 (7) 45-54 (8) 55-64 (9) 65+	You may not need to collect this information if clients are not anonymous, because you could link their answers to their demographics (Guideline 3)
What is your gender? This refers to current gender. This may be different from the sex recorded at birth and/or what is indicated on legal documents.	(1) Male/Man/[Boy] (2) Female/Woman/[Girl] (3) Non-binary (4) I use another term (please specify) (5) I would prefer not to say	If clients are anonymous, you may want to collect other information, to see how satisfaction may vary between groups. This is only a starting point.
Are you of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin?	(1) No (2) Yes – Aboriginal (3) Yes – Torres Strait Islander (4) I'm not sure (5) I would prefer not to say	You may not need to collect this information if clients are not anonymous, because you could link their answers to their demographics (Guideline 3)
1. How would you rate the service you received?	Excellent (4) Good (3) Okay (2) Poor (1)	

2. Did you get the help you were looking for?	No, not at all (1) A little bit (2) Mostly (3) Yes, definitely (4)
3. Did the service meet your needs?	Yes, completely (4) Mostly (3) Only a little (2) No not at all (1)
4. Would you tell a friend to use this service if they needed help?	No, definitely not (1) Not sure (2) Probably (3) Yes, definitely (4)
5. Were you happy with the amount of help you got?	Not happy (1) Not sure / Okay (2) Mostly happy (3) Very happy (4)

6. Did this service help you with your problems?	Yes, a lot (4) Yes, a little (3) No, not really (2) No, it made things worse (1)	
7. Overall, how happy are you with the service?	Very happy (4) Mostly happy (3) Not sure / Okay (2) Not happy (1)	
8. If you needed help again, would you come back to this service?	No, definitely not (1) Not sure (2) Probably (3) Yes, definitely (4)	
9. Do you have any suggestions for how the service can be improved?	Free text	This question is not part of the CSQ-8 but gives clients an opportunity to provide feedback, which can lead to service improvement.

How to 'score' CSQ-8 responses

To calculate a client's level of satisfaction using the CSQ-8, you can add (sum) the total of questions 1-8. The minimum total score possible is 8, and the maximum total score possible is 32 (i.e. total score range: 8-32). Higher scores indicate higher levels of client satisfaction.