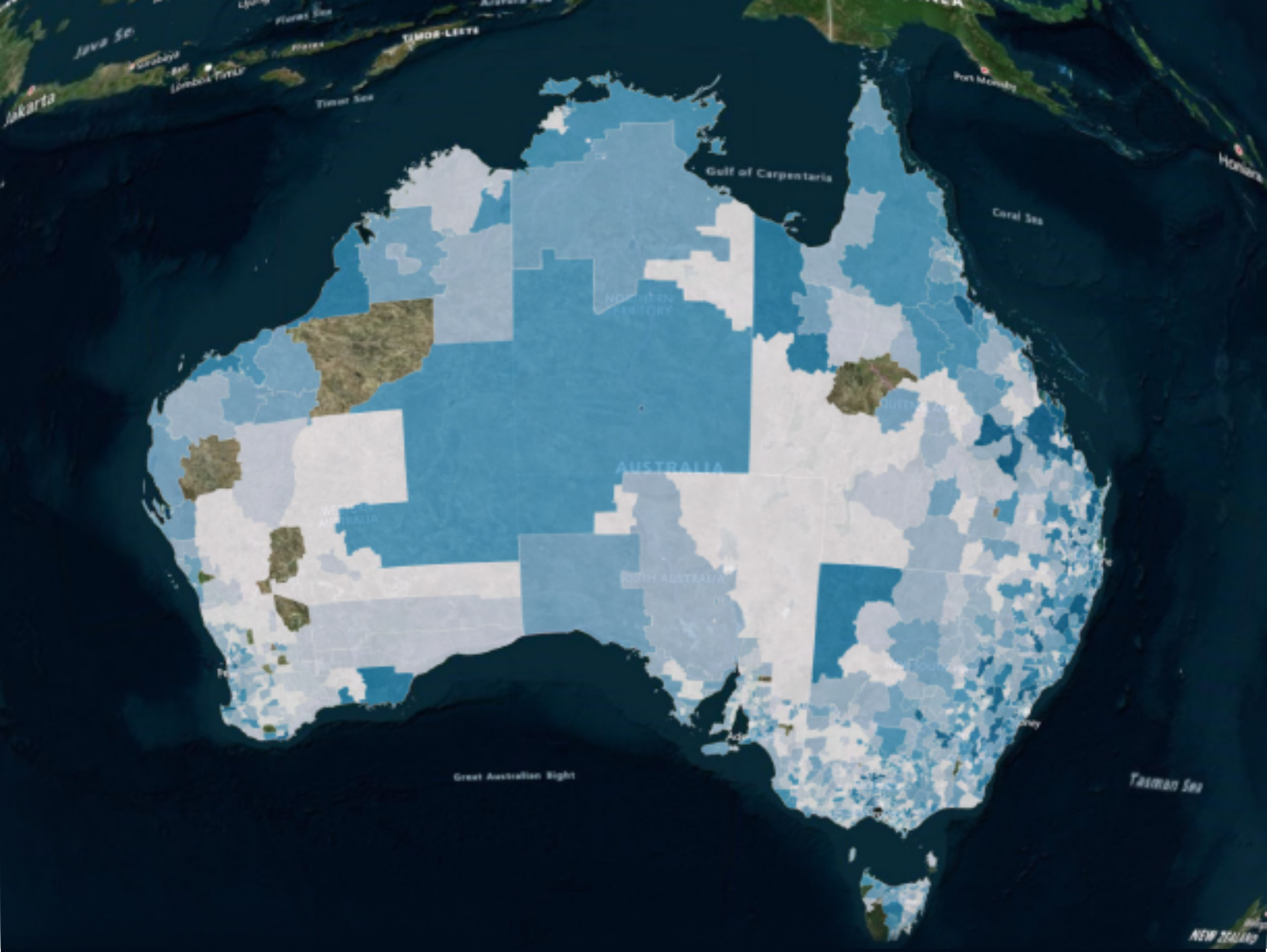

June 2019

COMMUNITY LEGAL CENTRE DATA TOOLKIT FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING & ANNUAL REPORTING

This was updated in June 2019 to adapt to CLASS.

The Guide is based on a National Strategic Planning Toolkit Guide originally developed by Judith Stubbs and Associates in 2012 with extensive additional material by Justin Finighan, Finrea Pty Ltd & Catherine Hastings, NACLC in 2016

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About this Toolkit

Overview

The Community Legal Centre Data Toolkit (“the Toolkit”) has been developed by the National Association of Community Legal Centre (NACLC) for any community legal centre in Australia. It may be used by centres of all sizes, metropolitan and regional/rural/remote centres, generalist and specialist centres. The Toolkit can be used by centres using CLASS or a different client management database.

The Toolkit is designed to support:

- The development of an evidence-based strategic plan that considers both ‘met’ and ‘unmet’ legal need in their geographic and/or specialist service catchment area
- Reporting and other data analysis for Annual Reports, funding submissions, policy and law reform, public relations, media and so on.

Due to funding trends and reporting requirements, community legal centres need to understand their current service delivery - the people and communities they are currently helping. This Toolkit helps centres analyse their service delivery by bringing CLASS data into Excel and generating charts analysing trends over time in relation to types of legal services provided, legal problems, and client demographics.

This Toolkit is also designed to provide community legal centres with an evidence-based approach to better understand and consider ‘unmet’ need - the people or communities living in the centre’s relevant catchment area who are likely to have a legal problem.

By reviewing current service data against data relating to priority groups, the centre can pinpoint gaps - whether there are any client groups or regions that might be experiencing legal problems but whom the centre is not currently reaching in the proportions they expect or wish to aim for.

The Toolkit can also assist centres to utilise their data to review how well they have done against previous strategic plans and provide useful information for funding submissions. This approach aims to ensure that community legal centres are providing services to meet the greatest need and more effectively target the most disadvantaged in the community.

The Community Legal Centres Data Toolkit is located on the NACLC website and consists of 3 parts:

- Part A: Community Legal Centre Data Toolkit Guide (this document)
- Part B: Instructions for bringing data from CLASS into Excel
- Part C: CLASS Data Tables, an electronic template Excel file with a series of data tables and templates needed to complete data extraction and analysis tasks

In the future The Toolkit will also include:

- Part D: Instructions for using nationalmap
- Part E: Demographic Data Tables, an electronic Excel file prepared by the Law and Justice Foundation of NSW containing national data-sets

After using this Toolkit, you'll be able to:

- Develop a better understanding of your current service delivery and your clients
- Conduct a 'gap' analysis of met and unmet legal need in your service catchment.
- Develop an 'evidence-based' strategic plan for your organisation.
- Develop data and information to report against your Strategic Plan and populate your annual reports, funding submissions, impact reports and so on
- Know where to go for help if you need it.

Strategic planning and Impact reporting

Governments and other funders are asking service providers to show they have an evidence base for their services.

Effective strategic planning starts with understanding the issues that currently exist (current state), then determining the outcomes that the organisation wants to achieve (the change we want to see), and making sure the organisation can measure and monitor their work to determine if this change has been achieved. Community Legal Centres Queensland and the Federation of Community Legal Centres Victoria have both developed resources to assist and guide community legal centres in impact and evaluation measurement – available here and here.

Consequently, a vital part of the strategic planning process for CLCs is to identify and analyse the geographic and demographic nature of legal need in their community. This allows for an informed and nuanced development of outcomes, outputs, and activities. This guides decisions about how scarce resources will be allocated to undertake the casework, advices, community legal education, law reform and other activities that CLCs undertake to meet their objectives.

In this toolkit, you will be guided through the extraction and analysis of data from a number of sources:

- An analysis of your centre's current service delivery as captured in CLASS or your own database;
- Interviews with key stakeholders.

Strategic planning work driven by evidence can both confirm and challenge existing practice and assumptions, thereby improving the efficiency, effectiveness and appropriateness of the service delivery of your CLC. Being able to clearly link the activities of your CLC to focused objectives, derived from evidence-based analysis,

is the key to compelling funding submissions and effective evaluation of service delivery.

Strategic planning – getting ready

As discussed at the start of this toolkit guide, evidence-based strategic planning is a powerful tool for program development, change and evaluation. Before getting started however there are a few things you need to know in order to assess if your centre is ready to undertake this strategic planning process.

Strategic planning takes time. Allow four to six months to the task of using this guide to prepare your evidence-based strategic plan. Obviously, you will not be working on it every day! You will need time to work through the tasks, think about and discuss the results with your management team and test your conclusions. Allowing four to six months will give you and your centre's management time to 'ruminate', follow new paths of inquiry and consider the implications of what the evidence reveals.

Strategic planning works best with active participation from staff and management committee members. You will need to think about how to structure your project to encourage their commitment through engagement in the process. At the same time, the project will need 'champions' – key people in management who will drive it and make it a priority within a busy CLC. One approach would be to convene a small project team to drive the project, undertake the data tasks and prepare the findings for use in the workshops. The workshop tasks could involve staff and the management committee more broadly and in greater numbers.

A strategic planning project needs a project plan. You will need to allocate time and resources to the project. A timeline detailing when you expect each of the toolkit tasks to be completed, allocating specific jobs to members of the project team will help to keep the project focussed and on track for completion in the agreed time frame.

Strategic planning needs good data. Data for this evidence-based process comes from a range of sources including the Toolkit and your centre's database, which may be CLASS or another system. It's important that your centre's database is up to date, and data entry is consistent. Identify any problems that may exist with your centre's data early. Data entry methods may have changed at your service over time and it may not be useful or possible to investigate trends over time if data from one year is not comparable to the next. This sort of issue is not a roadblock to developing your evidence-based strategic plan, but it is better to be aware of any issues early in the process.

Evidence-based planning needs some basic technical skills. Experience with your centre's database or CLASS and Microsoft Excel will be essential to further explore your data. You may or may not be familiar with all of the CLASS reports described in this Toolkit.

Strategic planning using data may be a new way of looking at need and service delivery. Hopefully it will encourage debate and discussion about how your service operates now and what sort of changes may be practical, desirable and possible for the future. You may consider engaging an external facilitator to guide workshop discussions.

At the end of the day, decisions about the strategic direction of your service will be made by your service. This guide is designed to help you make informed decisions.

Good luck!

Evidence-based strategic planning activities

This guide presents a step-by-step program of activities to develop an evidence-based strategic plan for your service. Some activities are desktop tasks that can be completed by one person, while workshops will require the participation of staff and management committee members to complete.

The guide is separated into three sections with desktop and workshop activities. While there is a logical order to the activities, how the activities are undertaken can be individualised to suit your service.

Depending on the size of your service, geography of your catchment area, complexity of service delivery and level of engagement and availability of management committee members some workshops could be combined or tasks streamlined to suit your centre's objectives.

SECTION 1: Your Service & 'Met' Need

- DESKTOP TASK 1 – Describe your service
- DEKTOP TASK 2 – Use your centre's data to understand 'met' need
- WORKSHOP 1 – Explore the alignment between your current service activities and your stated objectives

SECTION 2: Your Service & 'Met' and 'Unmet' Need (Gap Analysis)

- DESKTOP TASK 3 – Interview key stakeholders to better understand 'met' and 'unmet' need in your catchment
- WORKSHOP 2 – Explore the alignment between your service with 'met' and 'unmet' need

SECTION 3: Your Service's Evidence-based Strategic Plan

- WORKSHOP 3 – Lessons learned through the gap analysis; re-visit and clarify your vision, mission and objectives; and develop your evidence-based strategic plan for the next 1 to 3 years.

SECTION 1: Your Service & 'Met' Need

It is important to clearly describe where your service's energy and resources are currently being used, and the level and type of need that is currently being met.

DESKTOP TASK 1 – Describe your service

It may seem like a quick and easy task, but clearly describing your service as it operates now is an important first step in evidence-based strategic planning and may take some time.

1. Describe your service catchment

- You may offer some services targeted to particular Local Government Areas (LGA). For each LGA listed in your catchment, describe which services you currently provide and how often those services are provided.

- Describe services offered by centre. Here you will include details about telephone advice, outreaches, casework, community legal education and law reform activities. You may discuss how you offer these services, for example, drop-in versus appointment services, telephone advice model (call back, specific session times, or ad-hoc), night service using volunteers, community legal education targeted to other service providers or specific client demographics, participation in law reform agencies or direct action, and so on.

- Make sure you are aware of the other community legal services (or similar services) operating in or adjacent to your catchment, so that you can describe how the work you do fits geographically.

2. Describe your current staffing arrangements

- Compile a list of current staff including positions, funding arrangements and any regular service activities (such as outreaches) attributed to each position.

- Staff positions are likely to include principal solicitor, outreach solicitors, generalist solicitors, financial counsellors, community engagement workers, social workers CLE workers, policy and law reform, and administration staff.

3. Describe your service's current vision, mission, and objectives

- Compile your service's current stated vision, mission and objectives from your existing strategic plans etc.

- How was your strategic documentation developed and by whom?

- Include any key target groups, geographic areas and areas of law.

4. Share findings and gather initial feedback

- Circulate your findings from steps 1, 2 and 3 with your Project Team for their initial feedback and reflections prior to Workshop 1.

DESKTOP TASK 2 – your centre’s data & ‘met’ need

An analysis of your service’s data (from CLASS or your own database) is necessary to understand the level of need currently being ‘met’ by the service.

To understand how your service’s activity and client profile may have changed over time, it is useful to look at results for a selection of recent years - for example the three year period preceding the current financial year.

See parts B & C of this Toolkit for more information.

Reading and talking about graphs

It is important to orientate yourself to the graph before you start interpreting its shapes. For example, ask yourself:

- What is the relationship or distribution the graph is describing?
- What are the units of measurement on both the horizontal (x) and vertical (y) axes? What is the range on each axis (small changes between 80% and 81% look huge if the range is 79-82% compared to 0-100%!)
- Look at the legend (key). What do each of the lines or the bars in the graph actually describe? What does each colour stand for? Ask yourself, “Am I looking at proportions of a total (percentages) or numbers?”
- Is this chart providing a snapshot in time, or displaying trends (or changes) over time?
- Are the changes I see actually very big, very fast – look at the measurement scale again and the number of cases (matters, clients etc) that the data in the graph refers to.

When you are presenting data (in charts or tables or within text), don’t forget that your audience also needs time to orientate themselves to what the graph represents. Tell them what it shows, what each axis measures and what each line, or section of the bar chart or pie graph represents BEFORE you start interpreting and explaining the results to them.

WORKSHOP 1 – Explore alignment between your centre's current service activities and stated objectives

It is important that everyone involved in the strategic planning process, including staff and management, has a clear understanding and agreement of how your service operates now.

The information obtained from the Desktop Tasks 1 and 2 will provide an excellent starting point for discussion about the way your service is operating now, the level and type of need that is currently 'met', and initial perceptions from staff and management committee members about 'gaps' in service and 'unmet' need that may exist in the catchment area.

What you will need for Workshop 1:

- A mix of staff and management committee members
- Description of your service from Desktop Task 1 including:
- Geographic service catchment (list of LGAs)
- Type, location and frequency of services provided across catchment
- Staffing arrangements
- Stated mission, vision and objectives
- Any initial feedback gathered from Project Team
- Summaries from Desktop Task 2 using CLASS or your centre's own database to describe recent trends for your service in terms of:
    - Service activities (e.g. Legal advice, representation services, non-legal support etc)
    - Geographic distribution of services (list of services by LGA)
    - Client profile (e.g. by age, gender, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status, disability status, income level etc)
    - Profile of problem types for first services

Aim of Workshop 1:

- To use the information gathered from Desktop Tasks 1 and 2 to review how your service activities currently align with your organisation's stated vision, mission and strategic objectives.

- To discuss staff and management committee member perceptions of 'met' need within your service catchment in terms of target groups, geography, and legal matter types.

Plan for the workshop. Ensure that participants get lots of notice and receive anything you want them to read in advance. Have an agenda and be clear about the outcomes you want from the workshop.

Key questions for discussion:

1. **How do your service's activities currently align with your stated objectives?**

Consider the list of your service's matters by LGA.

- Are you surprised by the spread of matters?
- Can you see the effect of your targeting or outreach activities? And/or the effects of not targeting or conducting outreach in certain areas?
- Where do you think there are gaps?
- Are there things you can't explain?

2. **In an 'ideal world', without funding or other constraints, what would your service priorities be in terms of target groups, geography, legal matter types?**

- Back in the 'real world', what are your service priorities in terms of target groups, geography, and legal matter types?
- If there is a mismatch between the 'ideal' and 'real' worlds, why?
- Identify issues that you can do something about and those that are outside of your control.
- Is it possible to allocate time and resources in the strategic plan to work on addressing some of the constraints you have identified?

3. **What are your perceptions of current 'gaps' in service and 'unmet' need in the catchment area in terms of target groups, geography and legal matter type?**

Keep a record of your answers and discussion.

Section 2: Your Service & ‘Met’ and ‘Unmet’ Need

Understanding the levels of ‘met’ and ‘unmet’ need that exist in your catchment area is essential for developing an evidence-based strategic plan. Section 1 presented a step-by-step guide to better understand the level of need ‘met’ by your service within your geographic catchment. Section 2 aims to explore the level of ‘unmet’ need in your catchment, which may not be readily ‘expressed’ by people and does not show up in your service’s statistics.

Key questions to consider:

- Are your services provided to, and matters being generated from, the most disadvantaged areas of your catchment?
- Are there areas of disadvantage in your catchment that appear to be generating few matters?

This may indicate a ‘gap’ in service to this area.

Specialist Centres, or centres with specialist programs

Some frequently referenced data sources on legal need are based on research related to ‘general’ legal need. Some of the indicators (which the model for predicting legal need is based upon) will be more relevant to predicting the legal need which defines your clients of interest than others. In order to investigate the distribution of factors driving the legal need for which your service was established to meet, you will need to work through the following questions:

- What attributes of groups or individuals make them more likely to develop legal need (of the type your service targets) than the general population?

- Is there data available that describes how these groups or individuals are distributed ‘geographically’ in your catchment? Think in terms of government departments collecting data on housing or crime (for example) or NGOs collecting data in your area of interest.

Consider the following questions:

- How do you define your clients? What is the nature of their legal problem?

- What are the drivers/triggers of legal need for your clients? You may know this from your experience and knowledge, or you may wish to do some additional research.

- How does disadvantage interact with the drivers of legal need for your clients

Is there other data available which will help you to better understand the distribution of other drivers of legal need relevant to our clients? This may be Australian Bureau

of Statistics figures, data from other Government departments, or other research data.

Are there other CLCs or legal/social services whose clients are like yours, who you can talk to about these questions?

DESKTOP TASK 3 – Interviews with key stakeholders in your service catchment

No matter where your service is located, there are likely to be a number of other services and organisations that may have insight into 'met' and 'unmet' legal need in your catchment. To find out what they think, all you have to do is ask.

You will need to personalise this task to suit your centre depending on the catchment size and scope of service delivery.

The desktop tasks and workshop so far, may have thrown up questions that you would like to discuss with other experts in your catchment.

Make a list of the relevant services and organisations that you believe are key stakeholders for your service and will have an insight on 'met' and 'unmet' need in terms of geography, client groups and legal matters in your catchment. You may already work closely or partner with them on service delivery and/or CLE activities. Identify your main referral sources, plus places you'd expect to refer to or receive referrals from but often don't. Key stakeholders may include:

- Local offices of Legal Aid, Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (ATSILS), Family Violence Prevention Legal Services (FVPLS)
- Specialist legal services related to key target groups or matter types
- Pro Bono partners and other private legal practitioners
- Local Courts registrar or deputy registrar
- Local community services directly related to key target groups (e.g. financial counsellors, workers with local Indigenous groups, youth workers, Family Relationship Centres, Migrant Resource Centres, etc)
- Peak bodies for services directly related to key target groups

Refine your list of interviewees based on relevance and the amount of time and resources you have to devote to this task. Generally, 6 to 8 interviews with a diverse range of stakeholders will provide a sufficient overview of service gaps in your catchment. For small centres, you may have fewer key stakeholders that you'd like to interview.

Prepare interview questions for key stakeholders. Some questions are suggested below.

- What services does your organisation provide?
- What is your service's geographic catchment area?
- Where are your services provided? (e.g. offices, outreaches, how often, what is the focus)
- How are your services provided? (e.g. face to face, phone, appointment, drop in)
- Does the type of service provided vary by geographic area within your catchment? (e.g. phone coverage only from some areas)
- Does the type of service provided vary by client demographics?
- Do you have any particular partnerships with other organisations for service provision?
- Who are your clients? Do you have any key target groups? Are there predominant demographic characteristics and/or special need groups in your catchment area?
- How dispersed through your catchment area are your clients?
- What are the main types of legal issues experienced by clients in your catchment area that you are aware of?
- In your opinion, are there currently gaps in service provision to help your clients solve their legal problems? (By geography, client group or legal problem type).
- In your opinion, which geographic areas of your catchment appear to be well serviced?
- In your opinion, are there certain client groups who appear to be well serviced by your organisation or others in your catchment area?
- In your opinion, are there certain legal problems that appear to be well serviced by your organisation or others in your catchment area?

Conduct interviews over the telephone or face-to-face, each should take around 30 to 45 minutes. Tips for your Interviews:

- Let the interview subject know ahead of time the questions you will ask so that they can prepare.
- Avoid questions where the answer is yes/no – ask 'open' questions
- Probe for detail – ask Who? Where? What? When? How?
- Seek clarification if you need more information "You said the service is 'not up to scratch'. Can you tell me what you mean by 'not up to scratch'?"
- Give feedback during the interview which lets the interviewee know that you value the information they are providing & thank them at the end
- Consider having a scribe to take notes so that you can concentrate on listening to what is being said and framing your next question.
- Let the interviewee do most of the talking!

Compile a summary of findings, particularly perceptions of current service 'gaps' by geography, client type, and legal matter type for discussion at Workshop 2.

WORKSHOP 2 – Exploring the alignment between your service, 'met' and 'unmet' need in your catchment

The information obtained in the previous tasks will provide an excellent starting point for discussion about service 'gaps' and 'unmet' need in your catchment area.

What you will need for Workshop 2:

- A mix of staff and management committee/board members
- Summary of findings from stakeholder interviews (Desktop Task 3) with regard to current service gaps by geography, client type, and legal problem types.
- List of your service's services by LGA (Desktop Task 2)
- The list of service 'gaps' and 'unmet' needs identified by staff and management committee members at Workshop 1.

Aims of Workshop 2:

- To discuss the level of 'unmet' need that may exist in your service catchment
- To discuss how your service aligns with the services being provided by others in your catchment.
- To highlight the 'gaps' in service in your catchment in terms of geography, client type and legal matter types.
- To discuss to what extent this 'gap' analysis has prompted ideas for changes to current service provision.

Key questions for discussion:

What do the data and maps show about your catchment? How well does this match what you previously understood about your catchment?
How are your services, including outreaches, located and how appropriately do they reach areas of disadvantage and likely legal need within your catchment?
Where are the areas of alignment?
How effective are any current targeted and/or outreach activities?
Where are the gaps / areas that could be strengthened?

Section 3: Your Service's Evidence-based Strategic Plan

WORKSHOP 3 – Developing your evidence-based strategic plan

The process from here will be different for each CLC. You are working towards Workshop 3 – a workshop to develop your centre's new strategic plan, but each centre may have additional steps to complete before they are ready.

These may include:

- Additional focussed investigations to answer key questions that have been raised by not effectively answered through this process;
- Examination of other service models;
- Validation of 'evidence' by checking results of investigations against other data sources

What you will need for Workshop 3:

- A mix of staff and management committee / board members
- Your service's current strategic plan
- Summaries from Desktop Tasks 1 - 3
- Summaries from Workshops 1 and 2

Aims of Workshop 3:

In light of the evidence-based assessment that you have undertaken, the aims of this workshop are to:

- Reassess your current stated vision, mission and objectives.

- Reassess your current model of service delivery and deployment of staff and resources across the geographic catchment in light of the 'gap' analysis that you have undertaken.

Key themes for discussion:

1. How relevant is your service's current vision, mission and objectives?
2. How should your service best direct its efforts through its geographic catchment?
3. What changes might your service make over the next 1 to 3 years to better align services with legal need?
4. How could services be strengthened in geographic areas of high calculated need?
5. Does your catchment include dispersed and/or isolated areas with lower calculated legal need but significant issues related to disadvantage and access? What are the best ways to reach these communities?

6. Consider how your current service model is set up to generate matters ('met' need) in certain areas versus others. Is the current service model appropriate for reaching 'unmet' need in your catchment?

7. Does your service currently have the right mix of target groups and legal matter types compared with legal needs and gaps?

8. What opportunities are there to realign service delivery methods?
   a. Advice / casework balance
   b. Outreaches
   c. Appointment vs. drop-in vs. telephone services

9. Are there opportunities to meet your aims through expanded or strengthened partnerships with other services?

10. What infrastructure may be required to maximise your strategic goals? (location, technology, travel, staffing)