

Self-assessment tool for the Australian community work practice guidelines

This self-assessment tool is easy to use: it provides 40 statements selected from the *Australian Community Work Practice Guidelines* which can be answered with a 'yes' or 'no'. Alongside each statement is a set of helpful questions to assist you to clarify your answers. We are not expecting a perfect score but an experienced practitioner should be able to answer 'yes' to most of the statements. If you give yourself one point for each 'yes' answer, a score of somewhere between 30 and 40 is acceptable. A less experienced, or new practitioner, should be able to achieve a score of somewhere between 20 and 30. Use the marking system to help identify areas that you could improve upon either through training, private study or through working with a mentor.

Each statement relates to one of the practice guidelines. For example, questions 1-7 relate to Guideline 1: Ethical practice; 8-12 relate to Guideline 2: Provision of services and supports; 13-22 relate to Guideline 3: Confidentiality in the workplace; 23 relates to Guideline 4: The regulatory framework; 24, 25, relate to Guideline 5: Diversity; 26-34 relate to Guideline 6: The workplace; 35-38 relate to Guideline 7: Professional development; and 40 relates to Guideline 8: Professional standing.

The full version of Australian Community Work Practice Guidelines is relevant to all community workers in Australia and is available on the Community Work Australia website, communitywork.org.au

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Statement from the practice guidelines	Yes	No	Things to consider when responding to the statement
1.	I work within an established code of ethics.		If you work within a code of ethics have you thought of some of the challenges that might arise in relation to observing a code of ethics. Have you read the Community Work Australia Code of ethics, are you expected to comply with more than one code?
2.	I have sought advice over a challenging ethical dilemma.		If you answered 'no', is that because: you have not had any ethical challenges; you chose not to address the issue; the course of action was clear; or because you did not have an appropriate person with whom to discuss the problem? If you answered 'yes', was the advice helpful? With hindsight, would/could you have addressed the issue in any other way?
3.	I have questioned workplace policies and practices that I believe are unjust or fail to meet accepted community standards.		If you answered 'no', is that because the policies in your workplace are sound or because you have not read and/or considered them? If you answered 'yes', was the process easy and did your action bring about change in the workplace? If not, will this present an ongoing ethical challenge and how might you address this dilemma?
4.	I have reflected on my personal beliefs and values.		We often take our beliefs and values for granted. In community work practice, however, it is important to challenge any of our beliefs and values that may impact on the rights of others, most of which are protected through legislation or universal declaration. Whilst we may see this as a given, our profession, in the past, has sanctioned public policies that have profoundly negative impact upon the rights of others. If you answered 'yes', can you describe a circumstance where this has occurred, for example, a situation where you have had to hold back on, or reconsider your views because they conflicted with the rights of a client? If you answered 'no', is this because: you have not thought about your values and beliefs; or the situation has not arisen?



5.	I base my relationships with service users or groups on the principles of respect regardless of a service user's own attitudes or behaviour.		<p>If you answered 'yes', have you been confronted with difficult behaviours from a client or is your answer based on how you think you might react in such a circumstance?</p> <p>If you answered 'no', can you justify your position or identify what prevents you from understanding and contextualizing the behaviours of a client. Is there some training you can attend to help you deal with 'difficult clients'?</p>
6.	I can identify and avoid breaches of confidentiality, privacy, and professional boundaries that may occur when using online tools for service provision.		<p>If you answered 'yes', what processes do you have in place to ensure that such breaches do not occur?</p> <p>If you answered 'no' have you breached confidentiality and privacy: do you need assistance from a colleague or mentor to identify possible hazards?</p>
7.	I used my knowledge and skills for the benefit of the service user, the employing organisation and the common good.		<p>If you answered 'yes', could you explain to a third party how you achieved this? What do you routinely do to ensure your knowledge is useful to the organisation?</p> <p>If you answered 'no,' can you identify what is preventing you: is it your role; the way in which your organisation is structured; organisational policies; or a lack of self-confidence? Can you think of a way around this dilemma?</p>
8.	I actively encouraged service users to provide feedback on services.		<p>If you answered 'yes', how do you collect and use the feedback?</p> <p>If you answered 'no', is that because: your workplace does not have a mechanism for taking feedback; you believe that feedback is not taken seriously; feedback daunts you; or the service delivery model is set in stone?</p>
9.	I advise service users of their right to complain and how to make a complaint if they wish to do so.		<p>If you answered 'yes', do you do this routinely or only when you feel a client has become aggrieved?</p> <p>If you answered 'no', is that because your organisation does not have a complaints policy and/or mechanism; or because you do not want to alert clients and deal with a possible complaint?</p>
10.	I ensure that I do not inadvertently discriminate against or disadvantage service users who make a formal complaint.		<p>If you answered 'yes', this demonstrates a mature approach to a crucial component of continuous improvement in service delivery and practice.</p> <p>If you answered 'no', is this because you do not think complaint is justified; you believe that most complaints are unfounded or unfair; or you have not considered how to respond appropriately to a complainant; you have not considered that a justified complaint, may lead to improved practice?</p>



11.	I work towards effective outcomes by monitoring, evaluating, and improving my practice.		<p>If you answered 'yes', is this: part of your organisation's expectations; or your own desire to provide an effective service?</p> <p>If you answered 'no', how will your practice improve? What strategies can you put in place to ensure that the outcome of your practice is effective?</p>
12.	I am current in theory and practice.		<p>If you said 'yes', how do you determine what is current? Can you itemize the ways in which you have maintained currency?</p> <p>If you said 'no', do you recognise how this will eventually limit your practice and disadvantage service-users? Do you know how to stay current?</p>
13.	I am familiar with the relevant legislation and my organisation's confidentiality and privacy policies.		<p>If you answered 'yes' what are your plans for keeping up-to-date with amendments or repeals in legislation and their impact on policy?</p> <p>If you answered 'no', is this because: you have not read the policies; or your organisation does not have policies? Find out through similar organisations which pieces of legislation affect you and your work.</p>
14.	I inform service users of who has access to his or her file and under what circumstances the information contained therein is, or may be, shared.		<p>If you answered 'yes', do you do this routinely? Do you inform service users at the beginning of your professional relationship?</p> <p>If you answered 'no', is this because: you do not know under what circumstances information is to be shared; or because your organisation has not made provisions for this to occur? How can you find out and how will you address the issue with your employer?</p>
15.	I provide service users with access to their own files and alert them of the process to record or amend any representation, notation, or omission with which they disagree.		<p>If you answered 'yes', to this statement how does this occur? Are you proactive in this provision or do you simply respond to a request either from a service user, their advocate, or another staff member?</p> <p>If you answered 'no', is this because: you are unaware of the rights of service users; the organisation is silent on the matter; or you do not agree with the principle?</p>
16.	I protect a service user's privacy through secure record keeping.		<p>If you answered 'yes' can you demonstrate secure record keeping? Do you have a clean desk policy and ensure files are not left lying around for others to peruse; do you keep passwords secure; do you lock up files at the end of the day; do you ensure that files are shared on a 'need to' basis only?</p> <p>If you answered 'no', what steps can you and should you take to ensure the privacy of a client or service user?</p>



17.	I seek informed consent from service users before sharing any confidential information, unless required by law.		<p>If you answered 'yes', do you still inform service users of the need to share information under law regardless of their wishes? How do you ensure your own safety or the safety of others, especially if this causes anxiety or anger in a service-user? Do you know the organisation's policy and risk management strategy in this situation?</p> <p>If you answered 'no', is this because you have no policy guidelines; you feel uncomfortable or unsafe broaching the legal requirement with a service user; or you do not feel the need to share information other than that required under law?</p>
18.	I am aware of the exact circumstances where I have the legal obligation to disclose confidential information.		Can you itemize the exact circumstances and if not, from whom or from where can you get that information?
19.	I recognise when a client needs a private space to discuss sensitive matters.		<p>If you answered 'yes', do you provide a private space? Does your organisation have the facility to provide a space? If not, how do you deal with the issue of privacy?</p> <p>If you answered 'no', is that because: you do not agree with the proposition; you do not have the space; it has not occurred to you?</p>
20.	I destroy obsolete confidential information/records in a secure manner.		You most definitely should: request a shredder or a secure disposal service at work if you do not have one.
21.	I have respected the privacy and confidentiality of colleagues and employer information.		<p>If you answered 'yes', well done - it's sometimes hard to avoid workplace or after-work conversations.</p> <p>If you answered 'no', you need to understand the principles underlying privacy and confidentiality. Colleagues should be confident in your discretion and sharing confidential employer information can be a dismissible event, particularly if the information is commercially sensitive or negative.</p>
22.	When necessary, I remind colleagues who disclose confidential information of their obligation regarding the privacy of others.		<p>If you answered 'yes', this indicates a respect for the fundamental principle of privacy and confidentiality. It takes courage to do this but as you know, it can be done sensitively.</p> <p>If you answered 'no', is it because: you believe that debriefing in the workplace is OK; tackling colleagues is tricky; or because you think it will never leave the office? Dealing with difficult situations is the mark of a mature approach to practice and you should seek assistance or mentoring if you need it.</p>

23.	I comply with legislation and statutory provisions which regulate my professional practice.		You should not answer 'no', to this statement. If you are unsure about which legislation applies check with your supervisor and/or co-workers. Compliance protects clients, the organisation, and you, and above all it is a legal requirement!
24.	I acknowledge and uphold the rights of culturally and other diverse groups.		Rights are rights - you should be able to truthfully say 'yes' to this question, but can you identify those rights? If you answered 'no', is it because: you do not know, if this is the case you need to find out and revisit Q4; or you do not believe or support those rights. Either way this is an important component of community and social work and a legal requirement.
25.	I engage in individual and collaborative knowledge building to ensure my interaction with culturally or otherwise diverse or minority groups is appropriate and effective.		If you answered 'yes', this can be used as part of your professional development providing you can verify your involvement. If you answered 'no,' you could consider as part of your CPD program for the year. It's an all-round win.
26.	I develop and use my knowledge and skills within the workplace for the benefit of service users, colleagues, and employer.		If you answered 'yes', can you itemise what knowledge and skills you developed and how they were applied in the workplace? If you answered 'no', you should consider how, as an individual practitioner, you can improve upon your practice through continuous learning and development.
27.	I maintain professional boundaries with service users and colleagues.		If you answered 'yes', are you complying with workplace practice and policy or your own innate sense of what is appropriate? If you answered 'no', is that because: you are unclear about professional boundaries and why maintaining appropriate boundaries is so important; your workplace is silent on the matter; or you think you can manage a relationship without it compromising your professional practice? Contravening professional boundaries may lead to all types of professional and personal complications.
28.	I understand my obligation to protect confidential, sensitive, or commercially valuable workplace information and intellectual property.		This is similar to a previous question, but can you identify: what is commercially sensitivity information; and what is intellectual property and when does it belong to your organisation and when does it belong to you?

29.	I treat colleagues with respect, honesty, and consideration.		<p>If you answered 'no', to any of these three points can you explain why you do not? Once you have done that, what is the remedy, and do the Community Work Australia practice guidelines help you clarify what you should be doing? Plan what you should do to remedy the circumstance that is preventing you from enjoying a professional relationship with a colleague.</p>
30.	I deal with conflict in a timely manner.		<p>Many of us do not deal with conflict in a timely manner but wait until the matter is more stressful than it needs to be. If you answered 'yes', then you are a good role model for others in your organisation providing you deal with conflict appropriately. Aggression, gossiping, or undermining, for example, are not acceptable.</p> <p>If you either answered 'yes', but your response to conflict is not ideal, or you answered 'no', talk to a supervisor about developing some strategies for dealing with conflict before it becomes a workplace and personal problem.</p>
31.	I report discriminatory, bullying or otherwise adverse behaviour of a colleague toward clients or another staff person.		<p>This is another area that is difficult to address in the workplace. If you answered 'no', is that because: the bullying could be directed at you also; it comes from a manager or supervisor; or because it is the culture of the whole organisation? Both legally and ethically this is unacceptable: you need to develop a workable strategy to deal with this matter and get external assistance or advice if it cannot be obtained in the workplace.</p>
32.	I take individual responsibility for workplace health and safety.		<p>Workplace health and safety is paramount in every organisation. WH&S is an individual responsibility as well the responsibility of the employer. Report all unsafe or unhealthy situations and do not put yourself in unsafe situations or leave health and safety issues unaddressed on the assumption that someone else has reported it. This could include a myriad of things, for example, the expectation that practitioners: can meet angry or agitated clients alone when they feel unsafe; take on unreasonably large case-loads, work in crowded or over or under heated office spaces, use equipment that is not maintained, work late and walk through a dark car park to get to their car, can be bullied or harassed; be provided with dirty kitchens and lavatories etc. These types of things, and many others, should be addressed with the employer before they become an insurmountable problem.</p>



33.	I understand and follow organisational policy and procedures.		<p>If you answered 'yes', do you agree with the all the policies?</p> <p>If you answered 'no' is that because you do not agree with the policies; they are not readily available; you haven't read them and are just winging it; or the organisation has no written policies? Yes or no, policies are made to be followed or challenged if they are unsuitable, unfair, unethical, or illegal. If this is the case, then you should consider how you should or could question any inappropriate policies.</p>
34.	I take up any areas of concern, either regarding policies, service provision or workplace behaviors with my supervisor, manager, or employer.		<p>The intent of this statement has come up in previous statements. The profession always benefits from people standing up for what is right. Many injustices have occurred from community and social work practitioners not standing up for what is right and just. These occurrences damage the reputation of the profession and your own careers. Think through directives or instructions that you feel uncomfortable about and seek advice if needed.</p>
35.	I recognise my skill and knowledge gaps and endeavor to address such gaps through training, supervision, or other means.		<p>This is an excellent opportunity to develop your CPD plan for the upcoming year. Use your performance appraisal to identify skills that you would either like to develop or expand upon.</p>
36.	I seek appropriate professional support, mentoring or advice to address personal and professional limitations		<p>Every one of us has personal and professional limitations; recognising that and not feeling self-conscious about it is a mark of maturity. A mentor or good supervisor can help you identify your limitations, achieve your potential, and become an exemplary practitioner.</p>
37.	I sought opportunities to increase new knowledge about the profession, the sector, and my own areas of practice through engagement with research and enquiry.		<p>If you answered 'yes', can you itemise where you have collaborated or engaged with research? Do you regularly respond to opportunities when they arise?</p> <p>If you answered 'no', is this because: no opportunities have presented themselves; you are uncertain of your ability; or because of some other factor, such as time? What can you do to ensure that you are involved in the evolving recognition of the community work profession?</p>



38.	I supervise students, staff, and volunteers in an ethical manner and from an appropriately qualified knowledge base		<p>If you answered 'yes', to this statement can you nominate the training or qualification that justifies your claim?</p> <p>If you answered 'no', is that because you have been assigned supervisory duties but have no experience or qualifications in the area; you believe your existing qualification is adequate; or because you did not know of such training? This sort of training or education is highly recommended CPD.</p>
39.	I share information and knowledge with colleagues		<p>If you share with colleagues, they will share with you. This is a great way to increase individual and collective knowledge.</p>
40.	I promote and take pride in the profession of community work		<p>Community work is a profession of which to be proud. Practitioners often work for little pay in under resourced organisations and services, and under difficult circumstances. They do, however, make a profound difference to the lives of many.</p>

