



Guide to completing the International Ombudsman Self-Assessment Tool

Introduction

This guide sets out the steps for an Ombudsman to self-assess their office against international best practice using the International Ombudsman Self-Assessment tool (the tool). The tool consists of a checklist that is completed through a workshop process.

This guide provides users with the information needed to complete the tool independently. However, if your office would like external support to facilitate your self-assessment, the New Zealand Ombudsman may be able to assist offices in the Asia-Pacific region. Please contact international@ombudsman.parliament.nz for further information.

Related documents

[International Ombudsman Self-Assessment Tool](#)

Background to the International Ombudsman Self-Assessment tool

What is the International Ombudsman Self-Assessment tool?

The tool is designed to help Ombudsman offices to benchmark their functions and capabilities against regional and international best practice.

The tool was developed to assist all Ombudsmen, with a focus on those in the Asia-Pacific region.

The tool is designed to assist Ombudsmen to identify areas of strength, and areas for further development. This will help inform strategic planning, prioritise areas of focus, monitor change over time, and ultimately improve practice. It may also help Ombudsmen with their efforts to advocate to their governments for structural change.

The tool can also help identify areas where Ombudsmen can learn from – and assist to develop – international best practice. Ombudsmen can seek guidance and support from the international Ombudsman community to improve areas for development, including the New Zealand Ombudsman where relevant. Conversely, Ombudsman can draw on their areas of strength to support and advise other Ombudsmen.

The tool measures seven areas that contribute to the overall maturity and effectiveness of an Ombudsman:

Structural Factors

1. Independence
2. Mandate and powers

Operational Factors

3. Reporting and accountability
4. Investigations
5. Staff competency
6. Corporate
7. Access and outreach

The tool was developed by the New Zealand Ombudsman with pilot feedback from:

- Ombudsman Western Australia
- Te Mato Akamoeau, Cook Islands Office of the Ombudsman
- Ofisa o le Komesina Sulufaiga, Samoa Office of the Ombudsman
- Office of the Ombudsman, Hong Kong, China

What international best practice is the tool based on?

The tool is informed by:

- United Nations General Assembly Resolution 75/186, *The role of Ombudsman and mediator institutions in the promotion and protection of human rights, good governance and the rule of law*, A/RES/75/186 (16 December 2020), available from: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/3896442?ln=en>
- European Commission for Democracy Through Law (Venice Commission), *Principles on the Protection and Promotion of the Ombudsman Institution ("Venice Principles")*, CDL-AD(2019)005 (3 May 2019), available from: [https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD\(2019\)005-e](https://www.venice.coe.int/webforms/documents/default.aspx?pdffile=CDL-AD(2019)005-e)
- International Ombudsman Institute, *By-Laws*, (25 May 2021), available from: https://www.theioi.org/downloads/m2o9/ioi-by-laws-en_20210901.pdf
- International Ombudsman Institute Best Practice Papers (various), available from: <https://www.theioi.org/publications>

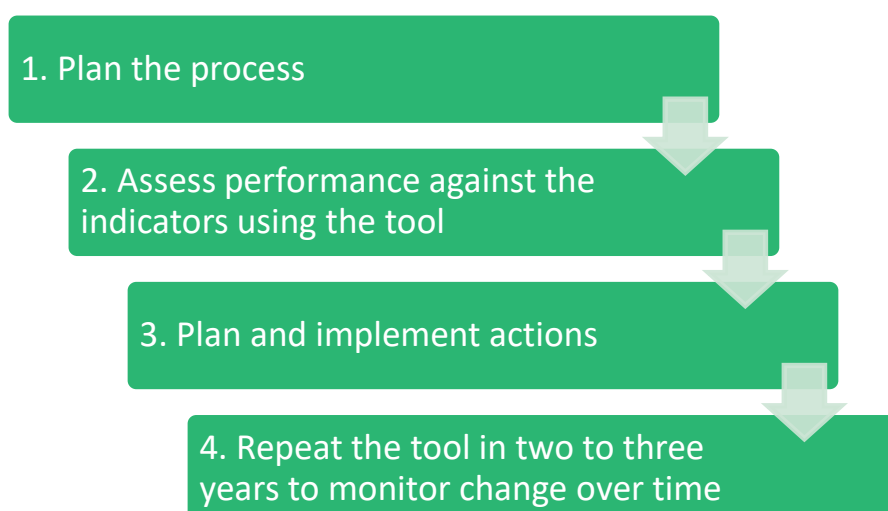
- International Ombudsman Institute, *Application for Membership Form*, available by contacting the International Ombudsman Institute
- New Zealand legislation, standards and operational practice

The ‘*Source – additional context and background*’ column in the tool provides reference to the source document for each measure. You can refer directly to these source documents for additional context and background, which may assist in interpreting the measures.

While the tool is based on international best practice, every Ombudsman is different and works in a different context. Not all measures may be important, relevant or applicable to every office. When completing the tool, you can score measures that are not important or relevant to your office as ‘not applicable’. Those measures will not count towards the scoring system in the spreadsheet.

How to use the tool

There are four main steps to conducting your self-assessment:



Step 1: plan the process

There are a number of approaches an office can use to complete the self-assessment:

- **‘Workshop’ approach:** this approach includes collection of information with relevant staff to answer the questions through a workshop, or series of workshops.
- **Informal self-assessment approach:** this approach could include conversations with key staff and management, and collection of evidence as identified during the process. This approach could suit a small institution.

- **Structured project approach:** a project management approach ensures the lines of communication, responsibility and accountability are clear from the outset.

Workshop considerations

The New Zealand Ombudsman and other offices who have piloted this tool have used a workshop approach. Below are some considerations for your office if you choose the workshop approach:

- **Facilitation:** select an individual to facilitate the workshop to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to contribute, and to guide participants toward reaching a consensus answer for each factor.

If there is a large number of participants, the facilitator may choose to divide participants into smaller groups. Each group can complete a different part of the tool, and report their results back to the facilitator and all participants.

- **Recording:** select an individual to complete the spreadsheet during the workshop. It can be helpful to record evidence (such as legislation or office policy) in the notes column. If there are multiple groups in the workshop, more than one note taker will be required.
- **Participants:** It is important to consider how to best structure your group of staff to complete the tool. The following are relevant considerations for selecting participants:
 - Participants should feel free to express their opinions as open discussion will lead to more robust results. The New Zealand Ombudsman therefore recommends that participants are selected from a similar seniority level within the organisation (e.g. manager level).
 - Consider how views of senior managers can be included.
 - Voluntary participation is recommended.
 - Participants as a group should have adequate practical knowledge to make informed assessments against each of the measures. This includes knowledge on:
 - › Ombudsman independence and legislation
 - › Reporting and processes
 - › Staff legal and investigation competencies
 - › Staff training and development
 - › Corporate services
 - › Community and international engagement

Where possible, it will be helpful to invite a cross-section of staff to utilise staff expertise and institutional knowledge.

- **Scope:** the tool covers a wide range of factors. The New Zealand Ombudsman recommends completing the full tool to get a comprehensive view of how your office currently sits against international best practice. Completing the tool as a whole will also make it easier to monitor change over time if you intend on repeating the process again on a regular basis (for example, every two to three years).

However, if completing the whole tool at once is not feasible, your office can choose to complete only the sections that are highest priority. For example, you may choose to focus just on 'structural' or 'independence' factors one year and focus on other factors in the next year.

- **Time:** it is important to set aside enough time to work through the tool and to allow for discussion. The New Zealand Ombudsman recommends three to four hours to complete the self-assessment. Additional time will be required to complete the Action Plan.

Step 2: assess performance against the indicators using the tool

Complete the self-assessment sheets in the spreadsheet (sheets 3 – 9) using your chosen approach (e.g., workshop, informal, or structured project approach). Record your answers along with any notes. It can be helpful to include the below in the note column:

- Evidence for your answer (such as legislation or office policy)
- Any identified opportunities for improvement

Step 3: plan and implement actions

Note the summary of results in the Outcomes tab (sheet 10). This can be useful to provide and discuss results 'at a glance'.

Complete the 'Action Plan' included in the spreadsheet.

Note: the tables in sheets 3 – 9 and the Action Plan (sheet 10) can be filtered using the arrow in each column header. For example, you may wish to use these to hide 'N/A' factors in the Action Plan which do not apply to your Office, or to highlight a specific group of factors you wish to prioritise.

Think about *who* will be responsible, *what* needs to be done, and *when* and *how* it will be done.

Not all areas for development need to be tackled at once. Consider prioritising what factors are most important to your office and starting with those.

Seek endorsement of the Action Plan from the Ombudsman and/or senior leadership.

Think about what's next – consider a sponsor, with regular reporting against the Action Plan.

If you want external support to improve against one or more measures, consider reaching out to the New Zealand Ombudsman or to other Ombudsmen with relevant expertise.

The New Zealand Ombudsman also welcomes hearing about areas of strength in your office to learn from you and to help share strengths with other ombudsmen internationally.

Step 4: Repeat the tool in two to three years to monitor change over time