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Carrying out a self-assessment: preparation note for parliaments

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Evaluating parliament: A self-assessment toolkit for parliaments is intended to help parliaments analyze their performance, leading to the identification of any weaknesses and the formulation of recommendations for reform and development. Unlike other such exercises, the self-assessment is done by parliamentarians and staff themselves, who bring a unique perspective, own the process and have a clear stake in the effective functioning of the parliamentary institution.

The purpose of this note is to help parliament prepare for a self-assessment by outlining the major steps, based on IPU's experience. However, the self-assessment process is flexible and can be adjusted according to the needs of the parliament. This note assumes that an IPU facilitator will assist the parliament in carrying out the self-assessment, although this is not an obligation.

Carrying out a self-assessment

- 1 Identify the purpose of the self-assessment
- 2 Identify a focal point
- 3 Decide who will participate in the self-assessment
- 4 Review the questions in the toolkit
- 5 Distribute the toolkit to participants
- 6 Answer the questions to the toolkit
- 7 Analyze the responses
- 8 Prepare the report
- 9 Follow-up

STEP 1: Identify the purpose of the self-assessment. It is essential that the purpose and expected outcomes are clearly identified at the outset. Some typical contexts for undertaking a self-assessment are: when preparing or reviewing a strategic plan for parliament; to initiate a programme of parliamentary reform; to assess the state of parliament at the beginning or end of the legislative term. Outcomes could be, for example: an analysis of strengths and weaknesses of parliament; agreed priorities for strategic planning; recommendations for internal reforms of parliamentary processes; input to a project document for modernizing and streamlining parliament's work; a tool for donor support to the parliament that leaves parliament in the driving seat, etc.

STEP 2: Identify a focal point. This will be the person who is responsible for the self-assessment within the parliament. The IPU facilitator will contact the focal point to discuss the process and obtain information about the parliament's needs. The focal point will also be key in organising practical details related to the exercise.

STEP 3: Decide who will participate in the self-assessment. Many models of participation could be considered and the decision has to be taken by parliament itself. Some typical options are: mandate an existing parliamentary structure (House/Business/Modernization committee); set up an ad hoc committee to carry out the self-assessment; invite all members of parliament to participate in a self-assessment seminar. Whatever the formula, it is important that participants in the self-assessment should reflect the broadest possible array of perspectives (including members from governing and opposition parties, men and women, senior parliamentary staff). In bicameral parliaments, it is preferable that both chambers participate in the self-assessment together.

STEP 4: Review the questions in the toolkit. If necessary, the questions can be adapted to the parliament's context and additional questions can be included, with the help of the IPU facilitator.

STEP 5: Distribute the toolkit to participants. Advance distribution is encouraged so that participants have the time to read through and prepare answers to the questions before the IPU facilitator travels to the parliament. In this case, parliaments can compile these responses to identify major trends and areas for discussion. Please note that this advance preparation does not replace discussion and analysis of each section of the toolkit.

STEP 6: Answer the questions to the toolkit. If this has not been done in Step 5, participants in the self-assessment should individually consider each question, before a collective analysis takes place at the next step.

STEP 7: Analyze the responses. The participants in the self-assessment will use the answers as a starting point for an in-depth analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of their parliament. The IPU facilitator will seek to draw out recommendations to address the problems that are identified during the discussion. A template for recording the recommendations is provided in the Annex to the toolkit. The time devoted to the analysis will vary depending on the formula chosen. If the analysis is done by a small group or a committee, four half-days of work with the IPU facilitator would be a typical configuration.

STEP 8: Prepare the report. The IPU facilitator will draft a report containing a summary of the process, conclusions and recommendations. The report will be sent to parliament for review. Once completed, the report is owned by the parliament.

STEP 9: Follow-up. Parliament has to decide itself what follow-up to give to the recommendations, depending on the context and purpose of the self-assessment. If required, the IPU facilitator can travel to the country to present the recommendations and discuss possible next steps.