Introduction
Canada’s commitment to equality is evident in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Canadian Human Rights Act, provincial human rights legislation, and international conventions. To translate this broad commitment into reality requires the recognition of and respect for the diversity among Canadians and our different historical, cultural, economic and social circumstances. In practice, there is a need to be prepared to question assumptions, and to assess the possible effects of a proposed course of action on various groups in society.

This approach to the development of policy, legislation and programs was further advanced when federal, provincial and territorial Ministers responsible for Justice – at the request of the then Minister of Justice – agreed in 1996 that all justice proposals presented to them for approval should reflect appropriate diversity and equality considerations. In response, the Deputy Ministers established the Federal-Provincial-Territorial Working Group on Diversity, Equality and Justice, giving it the task of developing an instrument that would aid in the assessment of justice-related policies and initiatives in the light of the diversity of Canadian society.

A review of justice-related reports, research and recommendations provided a basis for identifying groups that have experienced particular disadvantages when involved in justice processes. This led to the development of a list of diverse groups for which the instrument would be used. By 1997, the design of the Integrated Diversity and Equality Analysis Screen (IDEAS) was complete, and it has been approved by the Deputy Ministers. To provide further assistance to users of IDEAS, the Working Group collaborated with the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics of Statistics Canada to offer some essential background data for as many of the groups as possible. This background information became the ten profiles which are a part of this IDEAS package. (The profiles are also available separately from Statistics Canada.)

IDEAS is intended to support the recognition of those rights by providing a way to assess the impact of proposed policies or initiatives. It provides a way to focus on questions which might otherwise not come to the attention of decision makers, and to treat equality and diversity as a living and evolving one.

The instrument begins with a question regarding the status and purpose of the initiative at hand. Ideally, this review should be done at the beginning of a project, so that diversity considerations can become an integral part of the initiative. As you apply the IDEAS instrument, the question of potential impact may remain front and center with some of the diverse groups. The profiles offer an introduction, providing a basic statistical snapshot of the individual groups. From there, it will be necessary to seek more specific and specialized information.

The instrument is designed to help the user answer questions such as:

1. What are the likely impacts (whether intended or unintended) of the initiative on individuals involved with the justice system, or on the public at large?
2. What are the foreseeable specific impacts of the initiative on members of any of the following groups?
   a) Women
   b) Children
   c) Youth
   d) Aboriginal peoples
   e) Racial and ethnocultural minorities
   f) Persons with disabilities
   g) Over 65
   h) Recent immigrants
   i) Gay, lesbian and bisexual persons
   j) Transgendered persons
   k) Persons with literacy problems
   l) Persons with language barriers
   m) Social assistance recipients and the poor
   n) Religious groups
3. What are the foreseeable specific impacts on individuals who belong to more than one of these groups?

How to Use IDEAS and Profiles
The instrument begins with a question regarding the status and purpose of the initiative under review. Ideally, this review should be done at the beginning of a project, so that diversity considerations can become an integral part of the initiative. As you apply the IDEAS instrument, the question of potential impact may remain front and center with some of the diverse groups. The profiles offer an introduction, providing a basic statistical snapshot of the individual groups. From there, it will be necessary to seek more specific and specialized information.

When using IDEAS and the profiles, you should keep in mind certain challenges and precautions. This will help to ensure that the instrument will fulfill the fundamental goals for which it was designed — to protect the rights of all Canadians and to promote the benefits of diversity in Canadian society.

To apply the IDEAS screening instrument, the following questions should be addressed:

1. STATUS
   a) What are the likely impacts (whether intended or unintended) of the initiative on individuals involved with the justice system, or on the public at large?
   b) What are the foreseeable specific impacts of the initiative on members of any of the following groups?
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      ii) Children
      iii) Youth
      iv) Aboriginal peoples
      v) Racial and ethnocultural minorities
      vi) Persons with disabilities
      vii) Persons with literacy problems
      viii) Recent immigrants
      ix) Gay, lesbian and bisexual persons
      x) Transgendered persons
   c) What are the foreseeable specific impacts on individuals who belong to more than one of these groups?

IDEAS extends diversity analysis to incorporate considerations of the concerns of Aboriginal peoples along with those of other diverse groups, in order to ensure that a proposed initiative will not compound problems they may already encounter with the justice system. It is important to recognize, however, the unique history, legal relationships and political status of Aboriginal peoples in Canada.

The issues faced by diverse groups are dynamic. Even the list of affected groups could change. For these reasons, IDEAS and the profiles could appear to provide information which is too static, or contribute to an impression of giving greater weight to some experiences over others. This tool should be treated as a living and evolving one, where the basic questions have to be posed whatever the emerging issue or group. Equality remains the persistent value.

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