

# Collaborative Defense Self-Assessment

Collaborative Defense is an innovative framework for client-led representation that confronts the underlying causes and prevents many of the most dire consequences of criminal legal system involvement. It consists of the following 6 tenets:

- **Have Vision:** An office has a clear vision for holistic, collaborative representation that is communicated internally and externally.
- **Ask The Right Questions:** An office has an intake process that screens for client needs and conveys that information to the appropriate staff.
- **Empower The Client:** Clients are treated professionally and with respect, and their representation works in service of their expressed goals and priorities.
- **Connect With Social Services:** Clients are systematically assisted in accessing community-based social services.
- **Access Legal Expertise:** Clients have access to civil, family, and immigration legal expertise to address concerns caused by involvement in the criminal legal system.
- **Change The Narrative:** The office systematically creates and documents persuasive mitigation, drawing on both the client's personal history and the office's Collaborative Defense work.

## Part I

Part I of this self-assessment provides a framework for Collaborative Defense's six tenets of practice, along with example indicators to suggest the level at which the practice is currently implemented. Each level builds on the last.

- **Preparing (Level 0):** The practice is not yet evident.
- **Emerging (Level 1):** Thought has been given to this practice or the necessary foundation for it has been laid. There may be a plan or procedure in place, but it has not yet been implemented or acted upon.
- **Developing (Level 2):** New strategies and techniques are being initiated, but they are not yet fully developed or implemented consistently. This practice may only engage some clients or only be available intermittently.

- **Providing (Level 3):** The practice is established and consistently implemented. Relevant staff have incorporated this practice into their work. The benefits of this practice are available to most clients.
- **Sustaining (Level 4):** The practice has become rooted in the culture. There are means by which to improve, adapt, and innovate. There are successful efforts to track, measure outcomes for, and get feedback on this practice. Resources may be shared with practitioners, clients, or community members.

In addition to the elements of Collaborative Defense, PFJ suggests offices assess the strength of two foundational enablers, organizational alignment and zealous representation that we have found necessary precursors to implementing a collaborative model. Organizational alignment has or can create pathways to ensure there is sufficient vision and support in implementing collaborative practice. Additionally excellent criminal legal representation is necessary both to fulfill a public defender's constitutional mandate and to realize the improvements in outcomes that can result from practicing collaboratively.