

# **AIRS STANDARDS AND QUALITY INDICATORS FOR PROFESSIONAL INFORMATION AND REFERRAL**



**Version 9.0  
Published: July 2020**



**Published by:  
Alliance of Information and Referral Systems**

The Alliance of Information and Referral Systems (AIRS at [www.airs.org](http://www.airs.org)) is a membership organization whose mission is **"To provide leadership and support to our membership and affiliates to advance the capacity of a Standards-driven Information and Referral industry that brings people and services together."**

For further information about AIRS products and services, contact:

AIRS  
11240 Waples Mill Road  
Suite 200  
Fairfax, Virginia 22030  
(703) 218-AIRS (2477)

[info@airs.org](mailto:info@airs.org)  
[www.airs.org](http://www.airs.org)

**NOTE THAT THROUGHOUT THIS EDITION OF THE STANDARDS, CERTAIN BOLDED WORDS AND PHRASES LINK DIRECTLY TO A GLOSSARY DEFINITION**

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Printed in the United States of America.

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## AIRS STANDARDS AND QUALITY INDICATORS OVERVIEW

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The AIRS Standards Committee is pleased to release the 9th edition of the *AIRS Standards and Quality Indicators for Professional Information and Referral*.

The AIRS **Standards** establish reference points that define expected **practices** within the field of I&R and can be used to measure the compliance of organizations to these requirements. **Quality Indicators** (QIs) provide concrete examples of processes or outcomes that can determine quality.

I&R programs help individuals, families and communities identify, understand, and effectively use the programs that are part of the human service delivery system. At the community level, they facilitate long-range planning by tracking requests for services and identifying gaps and duplications in services.

Community resource specialists help people better understand their problems/needs and make informed decisions about possible solutions. Specialists may advocate on behalf of those who need additional support and reinforce an individual's capacity for self-reliance and **self-determination**. Resource database curators create, maintain, and disseminate information on the **programs** and **services** delivered within the **human services** sector. I&R services bring people and services together.

The Standards are the foundation for **credentialing** programs, whether it is **AIRS Accreditation** for individual programs, or **AIRS Certification** for community resource specialists as either **Certified Community Resource Specialist (CRS)**, **Certified Community Resource Specialist Aging/Disabilities (CRS-A/D)**, and **Certified Resource Specialist – Database Curators (CRS-DC)**.

Note that the Older Americans Act uses the phrase '**Information and Assistance**' (or I&A) which is sometimes used within the sector.

The Standards address all aspects of an I&R program. They define the information and referral process in concrete terms; establish criteria for database development; mandate support for community planning activities; incorporate a broad view of collaboration at the local, state or provincial, regional and national levels; include provisions for the socially responsible use of technology; describe the role of information and referral services in times of disaster; and oversee an ongoing **quality assurance** and evaluation process.

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## AIRS STANDARDS AND QUALITY INDICATORS

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### SECTION 1: SERVICE DELIVERY

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I&R service delivery optimizes access for all. The **I&R service** recognizes the inquirer’s right to accurate, comprehensive and unbiased information provided in a confidential and/or anonymous, nonjudgmental manner; and is a non-partisan, non-ideological and impartial information source for available nonprofit, government and for-profit services that meet the I&R service’s **inclusion/exclusion criteria**. Service is provided by trained community resource specialists and is delivered in a variety of ways that support the mission of the I&R program, the accessibility requirements of the community and the communication preferences of **inquirers** (for example, a combination of telephone, in-person, email, **instant messaging (IM)**, **text/SMS messaging**, **online chat**, **video relay service**, **social media** and other methods of communication). Although the channel of service delivery may affect the nature of the interaction with inquirers, the essential elements of the **I&R process** remain the same.

#### Standard 1: Information, Assessment and Referral Provision

The I&R service establishes and maintains **rapport**, conducts an assessment in which the inquirer has one-to-one interaction with a community resource specialist and provides appropriate information and **referrals**. The I&R process consists of active listening and effective questioning to determine the needs of the inquirer, clarifying those needs, providing requested information and/or identifying appropriate resources, making referrals to organizations capable of meeting those needs, and providing enough information about each organization (e.g., describing how intake works and required documentation) to help inquirers make an informed choice. In situations where services are unavailable, the I&R service engages in **problem solving** to help the inquirer identify alternative strategies and manage expectations.

#### *Quality Indicators*

1. The I&R service ensures through training, monitoring, and **coaching** that community resource specialists:
  - ✓ Identify themselves and their program according to agency guidelines.
  - ✓ Establish rapport with the inquirer and use **active listening skills** and empathy to discern the presenting problem.

- ✓ Respond to each inquirer in a professional, nonjudgmental, **culturally appropriate** and timely manner.
- ✓ Apply **person-centered** techniques and approaches that identify the inquirer's strengths, needs, preferences, goals and values, and support the inquirer's own choices.
- ✓ Use clear language and an appropriate tone of voice and inflection to convey empathy and engagement with the inquirer's situation.
- ✓ Make an accurate assessment of the inquirer's problems and needs asking relevant questions to obtain the information necessary for an accurate referral.
- ✓ Identify underlying or unstated problems, when appropriate.
- ✓ Determine any specific needs or preferences to access services (e.g. language needs, evening or weekend hours, proximity to public transportation, or disability access).
- ✓ **Clarify** and confirm the inquirer's need(s) using techniques such as paraphrasing before offering referrals.
- ✓ Provide the inquirer with various approaches to their situation that give them a range of options, as appropriate.
- ✓ Explore the inquirer's own resources (e.g., friends, family, **faith-based organizations**).
- ✓ Effectively use the I&R's resource information system to identify resources to meet the inquirer's needs.
- ✓ Where possible and practical, provide at least three referrals to give the inquirer a choice (and to protect the I&R service from being perceived as making a 'recommendation') while being careful not to overwhelm the inquirer with too many options;
- ✓ Suggest ways the inquirer can advocate for him or herself, when appropriate (**empowerment**).
- ✓ If demographic information is being collected that is not directly relevant to the assessment, e.g., if required by contract or to enhance community reports, provide an explanation to the inquirer about why the information is needed and collect such data at the end of the call. (Note that it will sometimes be required to differentiate between the inquirer and the person-in-need). The primary goal of data collection is to gather enough information about inquirers to help them address and/or resolve their problems.

- ✓ Encourage inquirers to contact the I&R service again if needs were unmet or for future needs; and
  - ✓ Accurately record what occurred during the course of the **inquiry** (for example, **assessment and referral, assistance without referral**, information only, crisis intervention, advocacy) as well as the problems and needs that were addressed for use in reports.
2. The I&R service provides barrier-free access to its services for individuals and groups who have special needs, e.g., access via applicable technology and/or communication methods for people with hearing or speech impairments; language access for inquirers who speak languages other than English; and access for people with disabilities.
  3. The I&R service ensures, through appropriate **queue** management techniques such as **schedule adherence**, that an appropriate number of community resource specialists are scheduled to meet the needs of callers, i.e., that the optimum number of staff are available at the times most inquiries occur.
  4. All I&Rs should offer some extended hours in consideration of inquirers who need service outside of Monday-to-Friday 9am to 5pm. The preferred option is for the I&R service to provide access to information and referral 24 hours a day, year-round.
    - ✓ Access to information and referral can be provided through a variety of channels - the preference being for a staff person to answer calls (i.e. live answer).
    - ✓ However, if this is not possible, the I&R service identifies alternative delivery options in collaboration with other I&Rs and/or human services providers.
  5. I&R services that use after-hours or overflow coverage provided by another organization have a formal, written agreement with that organization to ensure that the organization meets all AIRS Service Delivery and Resource Database standards and quality indicators.
  6. The organization develops overall quality and productivity goals for I&R service delivery to ensure a high-quality experience for inquirers through effective information, assessment, referral and follow up.
  7. When providing **multi-channel services**, specialists divide their attention, as appropriate to the situation, without compromising customer service. Community resource specialists balance the inquirer's needs with the overall productivity goals of the organization regardless of the channel through which the inquirer contacted the I&R service.
  8. The I&R service makes every effort to ensure that its service is **accessible** from all communications devices and channels (e.g. telephone, email, instant messaging (IM), text/SMS

messaging, online chat, video relay service, social media or other alternative access methods) within its coverage area.

9. The I&R service has defined timeliness and service metrics for all service delivery access channels (e.g. in-person, telephone, email, instant messaging (IM), text/SMS messaging, online chat, video relay service, social media or other alternative access methods).
10. The I&R service provides its service at no cost to the inquirer (e.g. toll-free access is provided to people living within the area served by the I&R). Inquirers are responsible for cell phone minutes, landline fees, pay phone charges and text charges.
11. The I&R service has implemented policies to ensure the privacy, **confidentiality** and security of personal inquirer information; and has agreement forms that staff, visitors and others with access to confidential information sign to document their compliance. **Identifying information** about inquirers, their requests and the information given to them is not communicated to others unless either:
  - ✓ Release of information is required by law or court order.
  - ✓ Careful consideration indicates the presence or risk of serious harm to the inquirer or another person, and then communication may be only to those who must be informed in order to reduce harm or risk.
  - ✓ The inquirer has given explicit permission for the information to be disclosed to another person or agency. The inquirer specifies what information may be given and to whom. This applies to individual advocacy situations as well as those involving shared case coordination.
12. The I&R service has **procedures** for managing **challenging inquirers** that recognize the right of inquirers to access, respect, privacy, confidentiality and treatment that is professional, nonjudgmental and culturally appropriate while protecting the I&R service from an unreasonable level of offensive behavior. The procedures define inquirer behaviors that are potentially offensive; describe acceptable options for managing contacts that are disruptive; and mandate a review on a regular basis of actions taken regarding specific individuals to determine if a change is required. The procedures also address staff security issues, particularly in face-to-face settings.
13. The I&R service may engage in more detailed eligibility assessments and/or determination as an enhancement to the initial I&R transaction such as prompting inquirers regarding their interest in additional resources, conducting initial case coordination, application assistance, and appointment setting. These enhancements are clear in terms of their scope and expectations.



14. The I&R service has a process to resolve complaints from inquirers and community service agencies, including those related to customer satisfaction, accuracy of referrals, and potential breaches of privacy and confidentiality.

## Standard 2: Client Advocacy

The I&R service offers **advocacy** to ensure that people receive the benefits and services for which they are eligible, when necessary. **Client advocacy** seeks to meet individual needs without attempting to change social institutions and, for purposes of these standards, does not include system advocacy or **legislative advocacy** (lobbying). All advocacy efforts are consistent with written policies approved by the governing body of the I&R service and proceed only with the permission of the inquirer (i.e. **informed consent**).

### *Quality Indicators*

1. The I&R service has an advocacy policy that describes the circumstances under which client advocacy should be undertaken, the advocacy mechanisms that are authorized and the conditions under which supervisory staff need to become involved.
2. The I&R service intervenes, on behalf of individuals to help them obtain needed services, when necessary. The I&R service makes one or more additional calls or takes other actions on the inquirer's behalf to make sure inquirers get the information and/or help they need.
3. The I&R service refers to an organization that specializes in providing advocacy in situations where the level of advocacy required by the inquirer are beyond the scope of the I&R's services or an effective use of its own resources.
4. The I&R service ensures through training that community resource specialists document acts of advocacy and their outcomes.

## Standard 3: Crisis Intervention

The I&R service is prepared to assess and meet the immediate short-term needs of inquirers who are experiencing a **crisis** and contact the I&R service for assistance. Included may be individuals at risk of suicide, homicide or assault; families and friends who have experienced a suicide; victims of domestic abuse or other forms of violence; children or elder/dependent adults who are victims of abuse or neglect; sexual assault survivors; runaway youth; people experiencing a psychiatric emergency; people with a substance use disorder who are in crisis; survivors of a traumatic experience; victims of human trafficking; and others in distress.

## ***Quality Indicators***

1. The I&R service has **crisis intervention** procedures that include **protocols** for specific types of emergencies. Included are **safety risk assessment** procedures, protective measures for individuals in **endangerment** situations and protocols that address inquirers who wish to remain anonymous yet require direct intervention.
2. The I&R service trains its community resource specialists to anticipate the possibility of a crisis contact occurring through any of the channels of communication it supports (e.g. calls with suicidal ideation or calls that begin with one issue and escalate to reveal a crisis).
3. The I&R service has protocols that determine when to access 911 or other emergency **rescue services**.
4. The I&R service either provides crisis intervention services or has a prearranged agreement and documented protocols with a crisis service that does.
5. The I&R service ensures through training, monitoring, and coaching that community resource specialists have the skills to:
  - ✓ Recognize when the inquirer is experiencing a crisis.
  - ✓ Determine whether the individual is in immediate danger and take appropriate steps to ensure that the inquirer is safe before continuing with an assessment.
  - ✓ Recognize the warning signs of people at imminent risk of suicide, violence or victimization (including signs of abuse/neglect, domestic violence and risk of homicide or self-harm) whether the risk issues are explicitly stated or implicit.
  - ✓ Recognize when an inquirer is in immediate need of intervention (e.g., when a person is in medical crisis due to a substance use disorder, has taken steps to end her or his life, is a victim of recent violence or is experiencing a psychiatric emergency).
  - ✓ De-escalate and stabilize the inquirer and help him/her remain calm.
  - ✓ Help inquirers talk about and work through their feelings as part of the assessment and problem-solving stages of the interaction.
  - ✓ When necessary, follow the organization's rescue protocol for when to access 911 or other emergency personnel to request that they intervene. In these circumstances, the individual's safety overrides confidentiality concerns.
  - ✓ Keep the inquirer engaged during the contact pending referral or rescue.

6. In cases of suspected child abuse or elder abuse, the I&R service has protocols that comply with prevailing legislation regarding **mandatory reporting** and completes a report when required.
7. In situations involving suicide or homicide, the I&R service understands the circumstances under which a safety risk assessment is required and conducts an appropriate assessment when necessary. Risk assessments are documented and include a description of specific actions taken in response to the situation.
8. In cases of domestic violence or other endangerment situations, the community resource specialist takes special precautions to safeguard the inquirer's identity and all aspects of their interaction.
9. The I&R service uses a variety of means to support its ability to connect with 911 or other emergency rescue services including Caller ID, a call tracing arrangement with the telephone company, or the identification of an IP address. At a minimum, there is a separate external line that is available for initiating rescue procedures without interrupting the crisis call. The community resource specialist follows the protocol for addressing inquirers who wish to remain anonymous yet require rescue.
10. The I&R service ensures that community resource specialists have annual crisis intervention professional development training to upgrade existing skills and learn new skills.
11. For inquirers in crisis situations who are not at imminent risk, the community resource specialist assesses their immediate, short-term needs and connects them with a crisis intervention service for ongoing assistance. The connection is made by **warm transfer**, when possible, and the community resource specialist follows the protocol established by agreement with the crisis service.
12. The I&R service has a protocol for debriefing community resource specialist following a crisis interaction, as needed.
13. The I&R service ensures through training that community resource specialists document crisis intervention contacts and their outcomes.

#### **Standard 4: Follow-Up**

The primary purpose of **follow-up** is to contact inquirers to find out if their needs were met and if not, why. The I&R service has a policy that addresses the conditions under which follow-up is conducted. The policy requires follow-up with inquirers who are at risk and/or vulnerable and in situations where the specialist believes that inquirers do not have the necessary capacity to take the needed actions to resolve their own situation. Additional assistance in locating or accessing services may be necessary.

### ***Quality Indicators***

1. Follow-up generally occurs within 3-7 days of the original contact, although in situations of endangerment it may take place within hours.
2. Follow-up is only conducted with the permission of the inquirer and never compromises inquirer safety.
3. The follow-up policy describes examples of situations in which an individual's safety or well-being might be at risk and follow-up by a community resource specialist or other designated individual is required.
4. During follow-up, if it is determined that the inquirer has not received services or the need has not been met, the I&R service makes additional appropriate referrals or engages in enhanced problem-solving. The I&R service also determines whether the inquirer has additional, new needs and makes appropriate referrals prior to completing the contact.
5. The I&R service documents the follow-up results (whether service was received or there remains an unmet need and the nature of that unmet need) for use in reports and/or systems advocacy.
6. Information gathered during follow-up relating to the accuracy or availability of information in the **resource database** is submitted to resource database curators for verification and correction.
7. Information gathered during the follow-up process is also used as a further means of evaluating the effectiveness of the service delivery system and for identifying gaps in community services.
8. The I&R service uses multiple channels of access for follow-up (e.g., texting, email, chat) according to the preference of the inquirer and the efficiency of the process.

### **Standard 5: Independent Access to Resource Information**

The I&R service provides community resource information in a variety of ways to facilitate **independent access** for the general public and other human services professionals. These options provide additional choices for inquirers and complement the alternative of one-to-one interaction with a community resource specialist.

### ***Quality Indicators***

1. The I&R service offers multiple options for the public by making all or the majority of its resource database available on the Internet at no cost.

The elements that increase the effectiveness of a publicly accessible resource database include:

- ✓ An easy-to-remember URL.
  - ✓ A prominently displayed search button.
  - ✓ A search page that is clean, well-organized and easy to navigate (i.e. which minimizes the instances of '**false hits**').
  - ✓ A prominently displayed guided search with pictures or graphic icons representing service concepts or similar strategies that promote 'hot topics' lists and other embedded 'user friendly' search strategies expressed in natural language.
  - ✓ A keyword search window that employs search logic which produces an inclusive search results list.
  - ✓ **Keyword Taxonomy searches** include partial and full-word matching. Entered text must appear at the beginning of words in order for the term to be retrieved. For example, a search on 'aging' would ignore words like 'managing').
  - ✓ The ability to search agency, site, program and AKA names.
  - ✓ The ability to filter by geographic location/area served.
  - ✓ Display location and proximity maps of available resources.
  - ✓ Cleanly-designed search results that include the data elements that are most helpful in providing the details inquirers need to make informed choices about their options.
  - ✓ Recognized best practices for accessibility for persons with disabilities (such as JAWS readers, font sizes, Section 508 Standards, etc.).
2. The I&R service explores additional features to enhance the experience and options available to users, including:
- ✓ Making its information about community resources available through focus pages on its website, online information portals, and other similar gateways.
  - ✓ Compiling and distributing directories of services in print or electronic format.
  - ✓ Using social media and other communication tools to inform the public about significant changes to key services and important access issues.

- ✓ Providing menu-driven **IVR** recorded voice information about key information.
  - ✓ Offering subscriptions to community resource information via SMS/text.
3. The I&R service ensures that the display of its online search module and the retrieval of resource database records is **mobile-friendly**.
  4. The I&R service uses **APIs** and other mechanisms that provide opportunities to move up-to-date resource database information into other systems in order to increase access and collaborative ventures.
  5. **Meta-tagging** and other techniques are incorporated to ensure search-engine optimization (SEO) that allows the I&R's resource database to appear as a prominent option for Google and other online search systems.
  6. When the I&R service provides mechanisms for independent access, it includes information about how to connect with a community resource specialist if consultation and guidance are required (for example, the ability to press "0" at any time when listening to a recorded message or to engage in text or online chat when searching for resources on the website).
  7. The principles of confidentiality remain applicable in cases involving independent access. In situations where online information can be gathered, information about individual activities is only made available in aggregate form. Privacy policies are clearly displayed and cover a variety of topics including privacy and security, copyright and intellectual property rights and access.

## **Standard 6: Service Delivery Data Collection, Analysis and Reporting**

The delivery of I&R service generates valuable information about the problems/needs of a community and the availability of resources to meet those needs. The I&R service collects, analyzes and reports insightful data concerning inquirers and their needs in ways that are useful to themselves and their community partners. The I&R service establishes and uses a secure, confidential system for collecting and organizing **inquirer data collection** that provides a basis for describing requests for services and unmet needs, identifying **service gaps** and informing decisions about the scope of the resource database. Inquirer data includes information gathered during the original contact, follow-up, and **customer satisfaction/quality assurance** calls.

### ***Quality Indicators***

1. Data collected for I&R service analysis and reporting purposes are based on I&R agency policies and objectives, together with local, state, and/or national/federal requirements.

2. Inquirer data is always made available in aggregate form to protect the confidentiality of individual inquirers.
3. The I&R service maintains documentation on all inquiries, has a defined set of inquirer data elements that are used for reporting purposes and recognizes that inquirers have the right to withhold information.
4. The data collected provides enough information about inquirer needs, whether gathered through the original contact, during follow-up or via **customer satisfaction survey**/quality assurance surveys, to identify:
  - ✓ Referral patterns including information on aggregate problem/needs.
  - ✓ Service requests for specific programs and organizations.
  - ✓ Met and unmet needs.
  - ✓ Trends in community service provision and/or gaps in service.
  - ✓ Inquirer demographic data and demographic profiles.
5. The I&R service may use data collection and analysis strategies that employ **sampling** techniques. Sample size should also reflect the confidence level in the data presented. The chart below illustrates a range of appropriate sample size with such random samples gathered on a quarterly or monthly basis.

Call Center Annual Call Volume	Required <i>completed</i> samples with a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error.	Required <i>completed</i> samples with a 95% confidence level and a 3% margin of error.
5,000	357	880
10,000	370	965
30,000	380	1,031
50,000	382	1,045
100,000	383	1,056
250,000	384	1,063

6. The I&R service's inquirer data collection and reporting activities facilitate the analysis needed to inform:
  - ✓ The human service needs of inquirers.
  - ✓ Outreach to diverse communities.
  - ✓ Community **needs assessment**.
  - ✓ Community planning.
  - ✓ Allocation of funding.
  - ✓ **System advocacy**.

7. Data collected for reporting purposes may include:

- ✓ Total number of incoming contacts/inquiries by phone (incoming calls) answered by community resource specialists. These can be **transaction calls** (calls in which problems are addressed and for each problem, the type of service provided by the specialist such as information only, assessment and referral, assessment without referral, advocacy, crisis intervention, unmet needs); or **non-transaction calls** (calls answered by the specialist that are **hang-ups**, wrong numbers, incoming administrative or personal calls or other situations where there is no productive conversation between the specialist and the inquirer, and no assistance provided).
- ✓ Total number of I&R contacts/inquiries from calls and other sources (generally recorded in the **I&R software**) in which inquirer problems or needs are addressed. Included are:
  - Transaction calls.
  - Outgoing calls.
  - Face-to-face contacts (walk-ins or I&R interactions in other settings such as community facilities).
  - Email contacts.
  - Social media interactions.
  - Voicemail contact responses.
  - Online chat contacts.
  - Video relay contacts.
  - Regular mail contacts.
- ✓ The total number and types of problems/needs presented by inquirers.
- ✓ Geographic and demographic profiles of inquirers.
- ✓ The programs that received referrals.

8. The I&R service may also collect information about **ancillary I&R activities**, in addition to I&R inquiries, however that data should not be added to the overall contact/inquiry total without clear context. Included are:

- ✓ Website visitor activity (e.g., total visits, unique visitors, individual page visits, searches conducted).
- ✓ People accessing recorded information.
- ✓ Social media postings.
- ✓ Outreach presentations.
- ✓ Brochures and/or other publications distributed.
- ✓ Outbound advocacy calls.



- ✓ Outbound customer satisfaction/quality assurance calls.
- ✓ Outbound follow-up calls.
- ✓ Outbound calls to verify resource information.
- ✓ Community problems/needs reporting.

9. The reports generated by the I&R service include the following:

- ✓ Total number of inquiries.
- ✓ Total number of individuals served.
- ✓ Total number and types of problems/needs.
- ✓ The number and/or percentage of inquiries by call type (dispositions) such as:
  - Information only.
  - Assessment and referral.
  - Assessment without referral.
  - Crisis intervention.
  - Advocacy.
- ✓ Inquiries are recorded as:
  - **Met needs**; or
  - **Unmet needs**. A pattern of individual unmet needs may lead to identification of service gaps at the service delivery system level.
- ✓ The organizations and programs to which referrals were made.
- ✓ Follow-up results.
- ✓ Trends in community service provision/gaps in service.
- ✓ Geographic and other demographic information about inquirers in aggregate form (i.e., who people are and where they are calling from).
- ✓ Cross tabulations of types of problems/needs by geographic location and/or geographic location and the problems/needs within them.

10. The I&R service may also report on key performance indicators derived from its quality assurance and related activities, such as:

- ✓ Average times of transactions.
- ✓ Results of internal and independent **call monitoring** processes.

- ✓ Average answering times.
- ✓ Unmet demand (such as abandoned calls).
- ✓ Complaints and commendations.
- ✓ Case stories that illustrate composite examples of situations and outcomes secured by the I&R service.

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## SECTION 2: RESOURCE DATABASE

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I&R services develop, maintain, use, and disseminate accurate, up-to-date resource databases that contain information about available community resources including details about services provided and the conditions under which they are available. The resource database supports the inquirer's right to accurate, consistent, comprehensive and unbiased information and the ability of the I&R service to be a non-partisan, non-ideological and impartial information source for available nonprofit, government and for-profit services that meet the organization's inclusion/exclusion criteria. The resource database is used internally by community resource specialists to identify resources for inquirers and is maintained by resource database curators. Resource data is also available externally to other human services organizations and the public via an online database that is structured to make searching as intuitive and user friendly as possible.

### Standard 7: Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

The I&R service develops criteria for the inclusion or exclusion of human services agencies and programs in the resource database. The criteria address the human services needs of all groups in the community served by the I&R service, may include government, nonprofit and relevant for-profit organizations as well as entities such as support groups that may not be incorporated, and are uniformly applied and publicly available so that all users are aware of the scope and limitations of the database.

#### ***Quality Indicators***

1. The I&R service documents the inclusion/exclusion criteria for the contents of the resource database. The criteria address the human services needs of all groups in the community served by the I&R service; and the available resources which may include government, nonprofit and relevant for-profit organizations as well as entities such as support groups that may not be incorporated.
2. The criteria are consistent with and support the ability of the I&R service to maintain the resource database in accordance with the quality requirements of the AIRS Standards.

3. The document may assign priority ratings to specific types of services that are the most crucial to the mission of the I&R service and/or the focus of the most referrals. This enables the I&R service to focus the database updating process in terms of importance, especially in areas where resources are limited.
4. If the I&R service includes political cause and issue-oriented action groups in its resource database, the criteria strive for balance.
5. The I&R service does not charge a fee for the inclusion of any organization in its public resource database.
6. The inclusion/exclusion criteria include an appeal process for organizations seeking clarification on either the document itself or the application of the criteria.
7. The inclusion/exclusion criteria are approved by the board/governing/ or advisory body of the I&R service.
8. The organization's inclusion/exclusion criteria are reviewed and updated, at a minimum, every three years to ensure that they continue to meet the changing needs of the community. The review process combines an internal and external focus, and may include activities such as:
  - ✓ Assessing unmet needs.
  - ✓ Analyzing referrals made to organizations.
  - ✓ Discussions with community resource specialists.
  - ✓ Examination of demographic trends in the community.
  - ✓ Feedback from key stakeholders such as local funding bodies.
  - ✓ Engagement with human services agencies (e.g., by attending meetings of organizations representing different service sectors).

### **Standard 8: Data Structure and Data Elements**

The resource database contains **data elements** that provide information about organizations that meet criteria for inclusion, the services provided by each organization, and the locations where those services are available. Each resource database record has a **resource profile** that contains all mandatory data elements, where applicable (e.g., a mailing address is included only if one exists). However, the specific data elements that are seen by a particular group of users (e.g., resource database curators, community resource specialists, the general public) may vary. Note that 'data elements' are not intended to be equivalent to 'fields' within the context of software structure. Multiple data elements may be handled within a single field depending on the design of the software. Together, these form the **data structure**.

## **Quality Indicators**

1. **Mandatory and Recommended Data Elements:** The chart below lists the data elements for the Agency portion of an **organizational record**, **Site** data elements, where additional sites exist, and Services/Programs provided by the organization. The Mandatory or Recommended status of each data element is also indicated. Note that ‘Mandatory’ means that a data element must be entered *if that information is available* (e.g., if you need to provide documentation to apply for a service, then that information must be added. If no documentation is required, the field can be left empty). In the chart below, ‘X’ is a designation for ‘non-applicable.’

<b>AIRS Data Elements</b>	<b>AIRS Data Record Category</b>		
	<b>Agency</b>	<b>Site</b>	<b>Service/Program</b>
<b>Name</b>	Mandatory	Mandatory	Mandatory
<b>AKA (Also Known As) Names</b>	Mandatory	Mandatory	Mandatory
<b>Legal Status</b>	Mandatory	x	x
<b>Federal Employer Identification Number (EIN/FEIN)</b>	Recommended	x	x
<b>Licenses or Accreditation</b>	Recommended	Recommended	Recommended
<b>Street/Physical Address(es)</b>	Recommended	Mandatory	x
<b>Mailing Address(es)</b>	Recommended	Mandatory	x
<b>Phone Number(s) and Types</b>	Mandatory	Mandatory	Mandatory
<b>Website URL(s) including Social Media</b>	Mandatory	Recommended	Recommended
<b>Email Address(es):</b>	Mandatory	Recommended	Recommended
<b>Name and Title of Director/Manager</b>	Mandatory	Recommended	Recommended
<b>Description</b>	Mandatory	Recommended	Mandatory
<b>Days/Hours of Operation</b>	Mandatory	Recommended	Mandatory
<b>Physical/Programmatic Access for People with Disabilities</b>	x	Recommended	Recommended

<b>Eligibility</b>	x	x	Mandatory
<b>Geographic Area Served</b>	x	x	Mandatory
<b>Languages Consistently Available</b>	x	x	Recommended
<b>Documents Required</b>	x	x	Mandatory
<b>Application/Intake Process</b>	x	x	Mandatory
<b>Fees/Payment Options</b>	x	x	Mandatory
<b>Taxonomy Term(s) for Services/Targets</b>	Recommended	Recommended	Mandatory

2. **Database Record Administration Data Elements:** Data elements that relate to the database record itself and are purely administrative in nature are included in a separate table. Most are automatically assigned by the system and are not displayed when records are published. The exception is the date of last annual verification which many I&Rs choose to display.

<i><b>AIRS Data Elements: Record Administration</b></i>	
<b>Unique ID Number</b>	Mandatory
<b>Record Ownership Code</b>	Mandatory
<b>Date of Last Annual Verification</b>	Mandatory
<b>Date of Last Interim Change</b>	Mandatory
<b>Contact for Last Change</b>	Recommended
<b>Resource Database Curator for Last Change</b>	Recommended
<b>Record Status (Active/Inactive):</b>	Mandatory
<b>Record Inclusion (e.g. displayed online, in specific portals, directories, etc.)</b>	Mandatory

3. The AIRS data elements should match the schema used in the open source **Human Services Database Specification (HSDS)** developed by Open Referral or the **AIRS XSD Schema**. These are the standard languages that best enable resource database interoperability. I&R services are strongly encouraged to use software that publishes to and accepts data from these formats.

### Standard 9: Classification System/Taxonomy

The I&R service uses the **211 LA County Taxonomy of Human Services** (Taxonomy) to index and facilitate retrieval of resource information, increase the reliability of planning data, make evaluation processes consistent and reliable, and facilitate state/provincial and national aggregations and comparisons of data. If additional classification or indexing structures are used, these must be connected to the Taxonomy rather than functioning as independent indexing systems.

#### ***Quality Indicators***

1. The I&R service has a current Taxonomy license.
2. The I&R service customizes the Taxonomy by identifying the terms that will remain active for use and deactivating those that that will be unavailable for indexing and searching. These customizations (for example, the authorization of terms) are made without changing the basic structure of the Taxonomy or the related service definitions. The customization of the Taxonomy is reviewed at least annually.
3. The structure and contents of the Taxonomy are constantly changing in response to changes in the services and target terms it encompasses. The I&R service has procedures in place to update and integrate Taxonomy additions and changes on a regular schedule according to their policies.
4. The I&R service reviews and revises its **Taxonomy customization** following major updates and completely reviews/updates its version of the Taxonomy at least annually.
5. Requests for new terms, revised term definitions, new **See Also References** terms, and new **Use References** (including local ones if appropriate) are shared with the **AIRS Networker's Taxonomy Community** where they will be discussed by other peer members, reviewed by the 211 LA County Taxonomy of Human Services editor and considered for inclusion in the master system.
6. The I&R service uses software that supports the 211 LA County Taxonomy of Human Services and provides the basic functionality needed for the Taxonomy to meet the needs of community resource specialists and resource database curators including:
  - ✓ Incorporating the key elements of the field structure of a Taxonomy record (including

definitions, use references, and see also references

✓ The ability to search and display Taxonomy records in a variety of ways

7. The software incorporates the structure of a Taxonomy record and recommended structural elements to be used by community resource specialists and database curators. The table below indicates the recommendations:

<b><i>Taxonomy Term Structural Elements/ Functionality</i></b>	<b><i>Recommended Use</i></b>		
	<b><i>Software Requirement</i></b>	<b><i>Use by Database Curators</i></b>	<b><i>Use by Community Resource Specialists</i></b>
Taxonomy Term Name	Mandatory	Yes	Yes
Taxonomy Term Code	Mandatory	Yes	No
Taxonomy Term Definition	Mandatory	Yes	Yes
Taxonomy Term Date Changed	Recommended	Yes	No
Taxonomy Term Use Reference	Mandatory	Yes	Yes
Taxonomy Term See Also Reference	Mandatory	Yes	Yes
Taxonomy Term External Classification Terms	Recommended	Yes	No
Taxonomy Term Related Concepts (including codes)	Recommended	Yes	No
Taxonomy Term Facet (service, target, organization/facility, modality/delivery format, etc.)	Mandatory	Yes	No
Designation of Customized Taxonomy System (approved/used/deactivated)	Mandatory	Yes	Yes, except deactivated terms are not visible
Taxonomy Term and Use Reference name search (including partial word)	Mandatory	Yes	No

Hierarchical Taxonomy Term search	Mandatory	Yes	No
Ability to link/append Taxonomy Target Terms	Mandatory	Yes	No
Ability to export, print and report with various options	Mandatory	Yes	No
Specific Designation of Taxonomy System permission/rights	Mandatory	Yes	No
Taxonomy System change management process (incorporate XML version of Taxonomy System updates)	Mandatory	Yes	No
Custom Categorization of Taxonomy Terms	Recommended	Yes	Yes

### **Standard 10: Content Management and Indexing**

Through training, database management procedures and supervision, the I&R service ensures that resource database curators organize information about human services into database records that accurately and concisely reflect the agency, its locations and its services/programs; index the services provided using the 211 LA County Taxonomy of Human Services in accordance with consistently applied practices; and assign other search methods or filters in a way that accurately reflects the conditions under which services are available.

#### ***Quality Indicators***

1. The I&R service uses software that supports the AIRS Resource Database standards.
  - ✓ Information in the resource database is accessible in ways that support I&R service delivery.
  - ✓ The software module used by community resource specialists allows for search and retrieval by:
    - Organization, site and program name and related AKAs.
    - Type of services provided (using Taxonomy service terms including use references and see also references) with access to definitions.
    - Target population served, where applicable (using Taxonomy target terms) with access to definitions.



- Area served.
  - ✓ It is possible to narrow service searches by geographic area served, proximity to the inquirer's location and other filters such as age, gender, or language availability.
2. The I&R service ensures through training, coaching, and database audits that resource database curators understand:
- ✓ The human service delivery system including the sectors it comprises.
  - ✓ The differences between the public and private sectors.
  - ✓ How government, nonprofit and for-profit organizations are organized and funded.
  - ✓ The major types of service providers in their community.
  - ✓ The broad range of programs and services they provide.
  - ✓ How these organizations and the sectors they represent relate to one another and the people they serve.
3. The I&R service develops and uses a **style guide** that establishes rules for structuring information and writing narrative descriptions; and ensures that information within database records conforms to style guide rules and is clear, concise, consistent, relevant and user friendly. The style guide includes:
- ✓ Specific requirements for all data elements/data fields in use.
  - ✓ Consistent rules and phrasing for narrative data elements (e.g. organizational/program/AKA and other names, addresses, websites and social media, telephone numbers, hours and days of operation, languages, age ranges and other eligibility criteria, application/intake process, required documents and fee structures).
  - ✓ Respectful, person-first terminology and other preferred language conventions.
4. Resource database curators consistently follow the guidelines outlined in their style guide. They:
- ✓ Structure organization entries into agency, site, and service components (or other components permitted by the software).

- ✓ Designate agency, program and site names as required.
  - ✓ Use and differentiate between program names and **service group** names.
  - ✓ Ensure that address information is entered consistently to facilitate geographic location searches.
5. Resource database curators prepare well-written, concise narrative descriptions that reflect the format and writing style defined in the I&R service's style guide. Narrative descriptions:
- ✓ Encompass all relevant services provided by the organization.
  - ✓ Support Taxonomy (and other indexing) decisions, i.e., all services and service conditions that are indexed are also described.
  - ✓ Clearly and correctly distinguish **primary services** and **secondary services** and describe the relationship between them.
  - ✓ Clearly and correctly distinguish eligibility criteria for services and **target populations** served.
  - ✓ Correctly distinguish the agency's location and the areas its programs serve.
  - ✓ Accurately reflect other required information about the agency, its locations, and its services.
  - ✓ Avoid repeating phone numbers and other numerical data that have their own structured fields.
6. Database curators develop and consistently apply rules for indexing database records using the 211 LA County Taxonomy of Human Services. They:
- ✓ Use Taxonomy terms within their customized list that accurately reflect the type of service provided.
  - ✓ Use Taxonomy terms within their customized list that accurately reflect targets for service, when applicable; and only use target terms to modify service terms, not as standalone concepts representing a service.
  - ✓ Develop and adhere to internal rules for assigning target population terms in a consistent manner.

- ✓ Consistently use the same Taxonomy terms to index the same services and the same target populations throughout the resource database.
  - ✓ Index all primary services that meet the I&R service's inclusion/exclusion criteria.
  - ✓ Only index primary services, and avoiding indexing secondary services, **ancillary services**, **phantom services**, and **indirect services**.
  - ✓ Avoid using terms from multiple levels on the same Taxonomy branch, except in the target populations section where the practice is permitted.
  - ✓ Avoid using multiple service terms within the Taxonomy (**'double indexing'**) regardless of where they are located in the hierarchy to index a particular service.
7. Database curators analyze the needs of their community, develop customized filtering capabilities that reflect those needs and establish rules for organizing database records using search keys (such as legal status, age, gender, and languages) for filtering purposes. They:
- ✓ Understand the structure of geographic search options within their software and accurately reflect the areas in which specific services are available using the software's geographic system.
  - ✓ Choose and consistently use appropriate options for key fields (e.g., legal status, age, gender, languages) that accurately reflect the organization and the conditions under which services are available.
8. Documented procedures are in place for reaching out for **new resources**, acquiring information about them and, upon inclusion in the database, verification by the organization.
9. The I&R service develops and uses a standardized survey instrument to collect consistent information about new organizations considered for inclusion in the resource database.
10. Documented procedures are in place for gathering and integrating **interim information changes** (i.e., changes that occur between annual verification).
11. Resource database curators acquire the information they need to develop new database records or update current ones. They:
- ✓ Conduct an evaluation to determine whether new organizations meet established inclusion criteria, correctly apply the criteria to determine whether they should be included and follow approved notification procedures when an organization does not meet the criteria.

- ✓ Appropriately use material submitted by the organization or gathered elsewhere (e.g., website, questionnaire, social media scans, pamphlets, newspaper articles) to develop an understanding of the resource, its locations and its services/programs; document source material that is not in printed form; and verify all information with the organization before incorporating it into an entry.
- ✓ Identify the appropriate contact when an interview is required, ask clarifying questions in a concise manner and document key answers.

12. The I&R service has **update verification procedures** to ensure accuracy which include the name of the individual authorizing the update and the date of authorization. Changes and additions from all viable sources are reviewed by a resource database curator prior to posting. Updated records are retained until a more recent version is received.

13. During the updating process, the I&R service accelerates the processing of responses from higher priority organizations that deliver critical services to the community as well as those from organizations that receive the most referrals from the I&R service. The resource database curator engages in activities aimed at establishing positive, long-term relationships with these key organizations.

14. Organizations that do not respond after multiple attempts but cannot be deleted because they offer critical services, are updated via alternative methods (phone, website, or site visits). The I&R service does not require verification of the final update under these circumstances. However, documentation describing how the update was obtained and the reason for the decision not to delete the record are required.

- ✓ If updated by telephone, the name of the person who confirmed the information and the date are recorded.

- ✓ If by a website visit, information that the update was verified via the Internet and the date are documented.

- ✓ If by a site visit, the names of the people visited, and the date are recorded.

Once the resource database curator is satisfied that they have obtained the best information possible, and has documented how and when the update was performed as well as the reason for the decision not to delete the record, it is permissible to mark the agency as having received its annual review.

15. The update form or the accompanying cover letter has a statement that the I&R service reserves the right to edit information for brevity, clarity, and content, and to publish the information in a variety of media.

16. Resource database curators thoroughly proofread their work and eliminate spelling and grammatical errors.
17. The I&R service ensures that there are an adequate number of staff to properly maintain the resource database in accordance with their organization's established inclusion/exclusion criteria while ensuring that the internal resource database policies and procedures as well as the AIRS Resource Database Standards are being met.
18. The process for calculating the number of staff required to properly maintain the resource database involves an understanding of the:
  - ✓ Number of agency and program/service records being maintained.
  - ✓ Complexity of organizational records in terms of their maintenance challenges and the proportional weight of complex versus straightforward records.
  - ✓ Software structure and the number of steps needed to create and/or update records.
  - ✓ Time required for the additional, ancillary responsibilities assigned to resource database curators.
  - ✓ Relevance of the inclusion/exclusion criteria and the current extent to which those criteria are being met.
  - ✓ Unique geographic and related challenges (e.g., the inherent difficulties of maintaining resources for large rural areas or diverse metropolitan regions).

### **Standard 11: Database Quality Assurance**

The I&R service has a quality assurance review process to ensure that information in the resource database is accurate and complete.

#### ***Quality Indicators***

1. The I&R service uses a quality assurance process to evaluate records in the resource database for consistency and adherence to style guide requirements.
2. The I&R service regularly reviews the assignment of Taxonomy terms to resource database records to evaluate **indexing** consistency across organizational records and adherence to AIRS Resource Database Standards.

3. The I&R service has a documented process for verifying information in the resource database that involves multiple attempts to achieve a 95% verification rate within a 12-month cycle. This includes a mechanism for tracking the response rate and a way of evaluating the success of the methods used (e.g., mail/electronic survey, fax, telephone, site visits, follow-up correspondence and the use of various messaging techniques). Information that cannot be verified is considered for removal from the database.
4. The I&R service can generate a report that lists resource database records according to the date of last annual update. The report is run at least quarterly and, depending on the result, the I&R service develops a plan to bring the database up-to-date.
5. The I&R service has a documented process by which resource database curators provide feedback to other community resource specialists regarding important changes that have been made in the database.

### **Standard 12: Resource Database Data Collection, Analysis and Reporting**

The I&R service's resource database is the primary source of information about the programs and services available to the community served. The I&R service collects, analyzes and reports information that describe the types of services that are available, the organizations that provide them, and the specific areas in which services are available or unavailable in ways that are useful to themselves and community partners.

#### ***Quality Indicators***

1. The I&R service regularly reviews its resource database in order continue to meet community needs. This study includes analysis of its resource database in terms of the types of services available within various human services sectors, the number of those services, their locations and areas served, as well as the conditions under which their services are available, (e.g., the language(s) in which they are provided, their availability during evenings and weekends. The analysis also considers the problems/needs of the community as reflected in service requests by inquirers and the ability of community resource specialists to identify referrals for them.
2. The I&R service works with other community partners to integrate resource data and inquirer data with other relevant data sources in multiple ways; such as mapping with Census data, overlaying requests for particularly critical services showing the location of organizations that provide those services. (e.g., matching emergency food locations against areas populated by low income individuals and families or identifying the location of services for older adults in conjunction with Census data regarding the distribution of age groups within a community).
3. The I&R service reports key performance indicators derived from its quality assurance and related activities within the resource database (e.g. total organizational and program records

maintained, average times for processing and responding to requests, the number of interim changes made throughout the year, the number of new records researched and added to the resource database, and the results of completed quality audits).

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## SECTION 3: COOPERATIVE RELATIONSHIPS

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I&R services at local, regional, state/provincial, and national levels work cooperatively with one another to establish and maintain meaningful working relationships while also participating in the broader service delivery system in their own community.

### Standard 13: Cooperative Relationships within the I&R System

In communities that have both **comprehensive** and **specialized I&R** services, they work together to develop cooperative and respectful working relationships to build a coordinated **I&R system** that ensures broad access to information and referral services, maximizes the utilization of existing I&R resources, avoids duplication of effort and encourages seamless access to community resource information. I&R services with broader geographic reach (e.g., statewide, province-wide, regional, or national level programs) strive to develop similar working relationships within the area they serve.

#### ***Quality Indicators***

1. The I&R service participates in ongoing cooperative program planning and development activities which take into consideration community needs, existing resources, and the activities of other I&R services. Each I&R service:
  - ✓ Participates in efforts to identify community I&R needs.
  - ✓ Maintains current information about other I&R services and their activities.
  - ✓ Develops priorities for I&R program development.
  - ✓ Participates in existing cooperative I&R efforts.
  - ✓ Becomes a catalyst for new cooperative service arrangements.
  - ✓ Participates in decision making that addresses system-wide I&R issues.

2. The I&R service coordinates its service delivery with other programs in the area to avoid duplication of effort, encourage services integration and ensure that information and referral is broadly available to all inquirers. Comprehensive and specialized I&R services whose service areas overlap, develop, and define their working relationships and document them in written form (such as a **Memorandum of Understanding or MOU**). The objectives are to ensure that people needing services have access to the most appropriate I&R service to address system-wide needs. The agreements negotiated by agency leadership support:
  - ✓ Community resource specialists in partnering organizations coordinating their efforts with their colleagues to meet the critical needs of all inquirers in the community.
  - ✓ Broader development of collaborative relationships through peer-to-peer interactions on behalf of inquirers and communities (e.g. community events, resource fairs, and community programs).
  - ✓ Cooperative service arrangements such as coordinated after-hours coverage and linked websites.
  - ✓ Innovative methods of delivering I&R services within the overall system.
3. The I&R service participates in resource **database collaborative** or other data use partnerships (such as a **statewide/province-wide database**) as a means of avoiding duplication of database curation activities and achieving broader and more in-depth coverage of different types of community resources. When an I&R service has an agreement with organizations using its data, it includes conditions that protect the integrity of the resource data such as a time limit on the use of the data, an agreement that data cannot be repurposed without permission, and a description of the any updating responsibilities.
4. When considering major technological investments, (e.g. software platforms and telecommunications), the I&R service explores collaboration with other I&R services, either within their own geographical area or the broader I&R sector.
5. The I&R service participates in community-wide data collection, analysis, and reporting activities. Comprehensive and specialized I&R services, may combine inquirer data to provide a comprehensive picture of service requests throughout the system; or may contribute data for inclusion in a statewide/province-wide report.
6. The I&R service strives to make the I&R system more efficient and responsive by collaborating on functions such as reporting, staff training, and public awareness.



7. I&R services communicate with one another regarding promotional, marketing, or other communication efforts within the same media market or adjoining media markets, if there is a reasonable possibility that the public might inadvertently be confused.

### **Standard 14: Cooperative Relationships with Service Providers**

The I&R service develops cooperative working relationships with human service providers (e.g., food pantries and homeless shelters) and larger service systems (e.g., those serving individuals with mental health and substance use disorder issues). These relationships help to advance an integrated service delivery system that ensures broad access to community services, maximizes the use of existing resources, and facilitates the ability of people who need services to easily find the most appropriate provider. I&R services with broader geographic reach (e.g., statewide, province-wide, regional, or national programs) strive to develop similar working relationships within the areas they serve.

#### ***Quality Indicators***

1. The I&R service explores opportunities for collaborative service delivery with service providers, e.g., participation in case coordination, eligibility screening, appointment setting, initial intake, and systems reporting.
2. The I&R service works cooperatively with service providers to address issues that have a critical impact on the community as a whole, such as **disaster relief** and **disaster recovery**, homelessness, and health care service delivery.
3. The I&R service collaborates with other service providers in areas such as cross-training, awareness and outreach, knowledge sharing and other activities that mutually benefit service providers and their clients.
4. The I&R service collaborates with other service providers on community-wide data collection, analysis and reporting that enhance awareness of local problem/needs and improve client outcomes.

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## SECTION 4: DISASTER PREPAREDNESS

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I&R services have a role in meeting the needs of their community during times of **disaster**, acknowledging their role may vary depending on the population they serve, or the phase of the disaster, (i.e., preparedness, response, relief and recovery). The I&R service is prepared to assess and provide referrals for inquirers who are experiencing a crisis due to a disaster, or who want to offer assistance and contact the I&R service for a means to do so. Preparation includes development of an emergency operations and continuity of operations plan that enables the I&R service to continue to provide services during and after a disaster.

### Standard 15: Emergency Operations and Continuity of Operations Plan

The I&R service has written disaster plans that specifically address incidents common to the area, and comprehensively prepare staff/volunteers for most typical emergencies. There are two main components of effective disaster planning (some organizations have two separate plans to meet this requirement):

- ✓ An emergency operations manual that defines what constitutes a disaster as well as the organization's disaster preparations and response procedures articulating both internal and external stakeholder expectations. The manual describes the steps the organization will take to prepare for an emergency, manage operations during an emergency, and meet the needs of the community during and after an emergency.
- ✓ A Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP) references emergency preparedness and **mitigation** activities for the entire organization. The COOP includes business continuity strategies for all critical services (e.g. payroll, human resources, and technology), the plan for them to return to operations after the disaster, and also delineates the steps to be taken to prevent or minimize business interruptions before, during and after an emergency and to support long-term recovery.

### ***Quality Indicators***

1. The I&R service has emergency operation procedures in place for maintaining service delivery during and after an emergency that may occur in the same area in which the program is located or in an area that impacts service delivery. The I&R service has written procedures related to:
  - ✓ Continuity of mission-critical functions including:
    - Notification of activation of disaster plan.
    - Personnel Coordination:
      - Designation of key staff.

- Delegations of authority (e.g. communications, contracting).
  - Order of succession.
  - Expectations of personnel during duty and non-duty hours.
  - Designation of mission-essential functions.
  - Designation of alternative facilities.
  - Contact information for critical vendors and infrastructure (e.g. telephone service provider, building management).
  - Continuity of communications among staff before, during and after a disaster.
  - Securing access to vital records and databases.
  - Plans for reconstitution and termination of emergency measures.
- ✓ Procedures include response to various kinds of emergencies (e.g. fires, tornado, medical emergencies, bomb threats), such as sheltering in place, using protective equipment, working without power.
- Emergency evacuation of the facility, including:
    - Designated exits.
    - Designated external personnel meeting or assembly area.
    - Procedures for ensuring staff and visitors have left the building.
    - Damage assessment.
    - Gas, electricity, and water shut off instructions.
    - Procedures for assisting staff and visitors with a disability leave the building.
- ✓ Staff training and preparation:
- Equipment needed for staff and volunteers to maintain service delivery (e.g. go-kits/bags for remote or alternate locations).
  - Periodic drills at a minimum annually, that allow staff and volunteers to practice emergency procedures.
- ✓ Post-emergency activities such as:
- Debriefing staff/volunteers.
  - Addressing mental health fatigue and burn-out.
  - Documenting emergency plan challenges and how to improve them going forward (e.g. after-action review).
  - Reporting the volume of inquirer requests, and the met and unmet needs to emergency planners and the community.
2. The I&R service has procedures for maintaining service delivery (i.e., answering inquiries and continuing to update community resources) during and after an emergency including relocation or alternative modes of service delivery. The I&R service should have a **mutual assistance agreement** with at least one I&R service outside the area for maintaining service delivery before, during, and after an emergency. The agreement should include protocols for activation,

cooperative procedures for maintaining service delivery and training exercises and simulations. The agreement and protocols are updated annually and aligned with the I&R service's continuity of operations plan and emergency operations plan.

3. The I&R service ensures that its facility is capable of handling and/or adapting to increased needs during a disaster, particularly in situations where many volunteers will be working at the facility. (e.g. 24-hour environmental controls, cleanliness and sanitation, parking and security, and the ability to conform with building codes and standards).
4. The I&R service supports and encourages all staff to develop emergency plans for their own homes and families that allow them to better fulfill their agency roles in an emergency, secure in the knowledge that their families are properly prepared.

### **Standard 16: Relationships with Emergency and Relief Operations**

The I&R service participates in ongoing cooperative **disaster response** planning in their service area and establishes relationships within the community's **disaster services** network including a formal role within the community's emergency preparedness plan.

#### ***Quality Indicators***

1. The I&R service understands the command and control structure within their jurisdiction (i.e., the responsibilities and authority of officials at city, county, state/provincial and federal levels) and their own role and that of other organizations in the response, relief and recovery phases of a disaster. Obtaining nation training or certification for incident management for staff (e.g. **National Incident Management System (NIMS)** or Incident Command System Canada) supports acquiring competency in this area.
2. The I&R service seeks formal agreements with appropriate government and private sector emergency operations and relief agencies such as local offices of emergency services, **Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOADs)** and the Red Cross. The agreements outline the roles and responsibilities of all parties.
3. The I&R service actively participates in community meetings that address plans for **disaster preparedness**, mitigation, response, relief, and recovery.

## Standard 17: Disaster Resources

The I&R service develops, maintains, and/or uses an accurate, up-to-date resource database that contains information about available community resources that provide services in times of disaster. Database records include descriptions of the services organizations provide and the conditions under which services are available; and are indexed and accessed using the 211 LA County Taxonomy of Human Services and complying with AIRS Resource Database Standards.

### ***Quality Indicators***

1. The I&R service's resource database includes information about permanent local, state/provincial and federal disaster-related resources (i.e., organizations with a formal role in emergency response, a clearly defined disaster mission and/or a history of providing services during previous incidents).
2. The I&R service also includes information about organizations and services that have no formal role in emergency response but emerge in the context of a particular disaster. The I&R service monitors social media and mass media for information about new resources and changing situations. The I&R service verifies all information before sharing. A streamlined verification process, if used, must still provide a sufficient level of data validation to ensure accuracy.
3. The I&R service enables staff from other agencies to use the resource database to provide service delivery or resource database curation support by using the Disaster Services section of the 211 LA County Taxonomy of Human Services to index disaster-related services. Additional classification structures such as **keyword index** may supplement the Taxonomy but must be connected to the Taxonomy rather than functioning as independent indexing systems.
4. The I&R service updates disaster resources immediately prior to an anticipated disaster and throughout the response, relief, and recovery periods.
5. The I&R service has a written protocol and training for staff who are assigned to provide or assist with resource database curation.
6. The I&R service disseminates disaster-related information in accordance with pre-existing agreements with other organizations in the community.

## **Standard 18: Disaster-Related I&R Service Delivery**

The I&R service provides information, assessment, and referral services to the community before, during and following a disaster or other emergency. Service delivery may be provided under circumstances that are more challenging and stressful than normal operations; and includes assessing the needs of the inquirer, evaluating appropriate resources, indicating organizations capable of meeting those needs, helping inquirers identify alternative resources and actively participating in linking inquirers to needed services or volunteer opportunities.

### ***Quality Indicators***

1. The I&R service ensures adequate staff to meet potential increases in inquirer contacts and needs.
2. The I&R service has agreements with other I&R services that include provisions for possible relocation of staff and/or redirection of calls.
3. The I&R service has a written protocol and training for staff who are assigned to provide information and referral at local assistance centers or other off-site locations.
4. The I&R service ensures through training, monitoring and coaching that community resource specialists have the skills to respond effectively to people in crisis, work cooperatively with other organizations, remain flexible in a rapidly changing environment, are willing to work under adverse conditions (e.g., long hours, uncomfortable surroundings), are aware of their own stress levels and coping mechanisms, respond appropriately in face-to-face communications and work within the boundaries of their I&R role.
5. The I&R service ensures through training, monitoring, and coaching that staff understand the government emergency response service delivery system and the types of services people typically need before, during and following a disaster including:
  - ✓ Organizations that generally provide services in disaster situations.
  - ✓ Organizations that may be closed or otherwise unable to deliver services due to the emergency (e.g., government offices, the courts).
  - ✓ Atypical services people may need to access (e.g., open hardware stores, functioning ATM machines).

The I&R service also ensures through training that staff understand the structure of disaster resources within the database and/or other approved sources of disaster-related information.

6. The I&R service has a plan for promoting mental health and wellness practices for all staff working in disaster situations, including the provision of disaster stress debriefing.

## Standard 19: Disaster-Related Data Collection/Reports

The I&R service tracks inquirer requests for service and referrals, collects demographic information from inquirers and produces reports regarding requests for disaster-related services and referral activity.

### *Quality Indicators*

1. The I&R service collects and organizes inquirer data to support appropriate referrals, describe requests for disaster-related services, and identify gaps and overlaps in service.
2. The I&R service produces timely reports for the community and stakeholders regarding disaster-related referrals, access to services, service availability and unmet needs.
3. The I&R service produces an **after-action report** that documents the activities of the organization, including what worked well and what needs to be improved through revisions of the agency's disaster plan and/or additional training for staff.

## Standard 20: Disaster-Related Technology Requirements

The I&R service has technology in place that enables the organization to maintain service delivery during times of disaster or a localized emergency.

### *Quality Indicators*

1. As part of the organization's emergency operations and continuity plan, the I&R service has the technical ability to direct calls to another location (e.g., cell phones, home phones, or to another organization).
2. During a disaster or emergency, the I&R service has regular and emergency methods of communication between staff and management for use during calls, for after-hours contacts and when necessary for pre and post disaster communication (e.g., email, instant messaging, text/SMS messaging, satellite phones or mobile devices).
3. The I&R service has established relationships with their key vendors (e.g., telephone service, Internet service, website hosting vendor and software vendor) to ensure that the organization is given high priority for continued service in times of disaster.

4. The I&R service has the ability to access the resource database (e.g., via the Internet, a copy of the database on a computer, a directory or other print version) if regular access channels are not available.
5. The I&R service has a **risk management** and mitigation plan that identifies equipment, technical connections and other resources that may be impacted during emergency conditions.
6. The I&R service has an **uninterruptible power supply (UPS)** for all critical systems to continue operations on a short-term basis during a power failure.
7. The I&R service has an emergency generator or other power back-up that allows them to continue operations on a longer-term basis during a power failure. The I&R service has determined the length of time the back-up power supply will operate and has provided staff with information about the components of the organization's operations (e.g., which computers, telephones it will power).
8. The I&R service has back-up systems for their telephones (e.g., cell phones and chargers, or two-way battery-operated radios and spare batteries) to ensure ongoing access in situations where there is no local electricity.
9. The I&R service can remotely reprogram its phone lines and data network.

### **Standard 21: Disaster Training and Exercises**

The I&R service ensures through training, monitoring, and coaching that staff are knowledgeable about emergency operations and business continuity expectations. The I&R service participates in **disaster exercise** to test the organization's emergency operations and business continuity plan.

#### ***Quality Indicators***

1. The I&R service provides staff training that addresses the specific types of disasters common to the area; the organization's role and mission in times of disaster; the phases of disaster; federal, state/provincial and local response plans and resources; and other topics to help prepare staff for an emergency and ensure that they understand their organization's commitments.
2. The I&R service provides training on the organization's disaster preparedness procedures and protocols for all staff.
3. The I&R service provides training for staff community resource specialists that addresses the attitudes, skills and information required to meet the needs of inquirers in crisis during a disaster. The training helps community resource specialists understand the impact of disasters



on individuals and communities, and addresses the specific requirements of people with special needs, (e.g., individuals with disabilities and/or health conditions, language barriers, cultural differences or other applicable characteristics).

4. The I&R service provides training for resource database curators that addresses the types of pre-disaster resources that need to be included in the database as well as those that need to be added following the occurrence of an incident; use of the Disaster Services section of the 211 LA County Taxonomy of Human Services as a classification structure; and procedures for the collection, validation, maintenance and dissemination of disaster-related information.
5. The I&R service has a plan to quickly recruit, train and utilize volunteers or staff who are assigned to provide information and referral and database curation
6. The I&R service participates in community disaster exercises and monitors other disaster exercises opportunities, as appropriate.

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## SECTION 5: ORGANIZATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

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The I&R service’s **governance** and operational structure enables it to fulfill its mission. Activities include establishing itself as (or within) a legal entity, developing **policies and procedures** and an organizational code of ethics that guide the organization, adopting sound fiscal and personnel management practices, providing a safe and secure work environment, offering new hire onboarding and ongoing professional development, establishing and maintaining an effective technological infrastructure, increasing public awareness of the value of I&R services to the community, and developing and implementing an ongoing quality assurance and **evaluation** process.

### Standard 22: Governance and Oversight

The organization’s governance and operational structure enables the I&R service to fulfill its mission.

#### ***Quality Indicators***

1. The I&R service has (or is part of an organization that has) a governing body (e.g., a **Board of Directors**) that is convened according to the laws of its jurisdiction and its own bylaws. The governing body represents the diverse interests of the community and oversees the implementation of goals and objectives that ensure service quality and program **sustainability**.

If the organization operating the I&R service does not have a Board of Directors or if that Board is remote from the operation of the I&R service, an **Advisory Committee** of local stakeholders

provides appropriate oversight.

The governing body is responsible for providing:

- ✓ An adequate number of professional staff to meet key performance indicators.
  - ✓ Financial and technical support to provide the necessary tools for staff to do their jobs.
  - ✓ An annual budget, appropriate financial records and **audits** that are conducted by independent public accountants.
  - ✓ An awareness and promotion of the value of I&R services.
  - ✓ Executive staff who are accountable to the governing body.
  - ✓ Regular meetings that are documented according the bylaws and standard governance practices.
  - ✓ Accountability, transparency, and business continuity within the organization.
2. The organization has a mission statement that reflects the purpose and philosophy of the I&R service.
  3. The I&R service has a strategic plan that is regularly reviewed by the governing body and executive staff, in order to assess operational effectiveness and set meaningful goals, strategic objectives and desired outcomes. The strategic plan emerges from research, incorporates feedback from staff at all levels and considers external stakeholder recommendations. The strategic plan may include goals for continuous improvement that are ambitious in scope but are realistic given community circumstances and available resources.
  4. The I&R service uses best practices for quality measures which may include a secret shopper program, call monitoring calibrations and working with local stakeholders (e.g. local agencies, program funders, university partners, etc.) toward program and outcomes evaluations.
  5. The I&R service has formally adopted and regularly reviewed policies and procedures that articulate its core principles. The document also covers areas such as board/organizational governance, employee policies, protections for whistleblowers, fiscal regulations, data security, hiring and training practices; and is available to all staff.
  6. The I&R service participates in **public policy** activities that focus on issues that are important to its community and its stakeholders, and participates in activities that further the overall goals of the I&R service and the field as a whole. The I&R service creates reports that can be used for system advocacy in support of public policy goals.

7. The I&R service has a formal process for registering and attempting to resolve complaints from inquirers, staff members and the community. All complaints can be appealed to the governing body as a final step in the process. The I&R service guarantees protections for whistleblowers.
8. The I&R service has a Code of Ethics that establishes fundamental values and professional standards of conduct for all staff. These principles address relationships with colleagues, managers, the communities they serve and other human service professionals with whom they work. The Code of Ethics is approved by the governing body and included in the employee handbook or equivalent. All staff review and sign this document to demonstrate their understanding and agreement.
9. The I&R service has a statement approved by the organization's governing body prohibiting **discrimination** in all of its forms and provides training for all staff that addresses anti-discrimination practices to ensure their full understanding and compliance. The **nondiscrimination statement** should include equity and inclusion principles.
10. The I&R service has sound fiscal controls to manage revenue and expenses in a responsible and sustainable manner. All financial controls and procedures are consistent with generally accepted accounting principles and in compliance with legal requirements.
11. The I&R service has sufficient insurance coverage, including cyber insurance (to protect against possible data breaches), and personal and property liability/**indemnification** for board members, staff, and volunteers.
12. The I&R service provides appropriate, accessible, safe, and secure operational space, including areas for confidential interviewing, and equipment that facilitates the ability of staff to do their work.

### **Standard 23: Technology**

The I&R service uses **technology** that supports the ability of staff to meet operational goals, improve access, accommodate the communications preferences of inquirers, remove barriers to information and overall assure a positive client experience. Technology may include telephone and telecommunications systems (such as **ACDs**), computer systems and software applications, assistive technology for people with disabilities, instant messaging (IM), text/SMS messaging, online chat, video relay, social media and self-service mechanisms such as **automated attendant**/interactive voice response systems, community kiosks and searchable I&R databases on the Internet.

## ***Quality Indicators***

1. The I&R service evaluates and tests new methods of access and technical advances prior to implementation to ensure that service delivery is enhanced, and the privacy and confidentiality of inquirers are protected.
2. The I&R service reviews how different demographic groups in the community access information and creates technology goals for the organization that reflect changing inquirer needs and preferences.
3. The I&R service ensures that its public website and searchable online resource database and/or mobile app, is accessible by all individuals including people with disabilities.
4. The I&R service has a plan to update technology when needed.
5. The I&R service creates and retains a digital and/or paper copy of payroll, personnel, legal and financial records in compliance with applicable legal requirements.
6. The I&R service has information technology, cybersecurity and **cyberethics** policies and practices that address threats to inquirer privacy; safeguard critical client and resource data by controlling access, sharing, retention and disposal of data; secure physical IT assets; and provide related training for all staff. All policies are reviewed and updated at least every two years.
7. The I&R service conducts technology redundancy exercises annually and documents the results. The exercises highlight vulnerabilities in data back-up and system restoration protocols for all main technology databases and servers to ensure that data will not be lost.
8. The I&R service has access to professionals with technical expertise to ensure that the organization's technology is being appropriately maintained, and that provisions are in place to ensure a priority response to any breakdowns in key infrastructure.

### **Standard 24: Personnel Management**

The I&R service uses a person-centered approach to personnel management based on policies, procedures and tools that facilitate service continuity, quality, and consistency. Key elements include ensuring that staffing levels are based on demand, and an executive team that ensures positive and healthy relationships throughout all levels of the organization.

## ***Quality Indicators***

1. The I&R service has an organizational chart that shows levels of authority and the reporting relationships within the organization. If the agency is part of a larger organization, the I&R service is included within the chart.
2. The I&R service conducts **succession planning** to ensure continued effective leadership by providing for the development and replacement of key staff regardless of how an absence occurs (sudden, planned, temporary or permanent). The plan guides leadership transitions when an executive director or other key staff leave the organization or accept another role. The plan includes identification of potential replacements and strategies for developing current staff and/or hiring new individuals with the skills to meet future needs.
3. The I&R service has job descriptions for all employees and volunteers that outline duties, responsibilities, essential job functions and supervisory relationships. The job descriptions are reviewed every two years.
4. The I&R service recruits and hires qualified staff who exhibit competence, ethical behavior, compatibility with organizational values, a positive and caring attitude, and reflect the community served. The I&R service:
  - ✓ Disseminates listings for both employee and volunteer positions broadly to ensure that qualified candidates who reflect the **diversity** of the community are aware of open opportunities.
  - ✓ Compares each candidate's qualifications and experience to the job description using a standardized screening process.
  - ✓ Uses structured questions that are specific to the position and the values of the organization, to interview candidates.
  - ✓ Has an objective process for interviewing and evaluating candidates, including an assessment of each applicant's skills, knowledge, and aptitude prior to making a formal offer.
5. The I&R service provides ongoing supervision, **evaluation, mentoring**, and support of all employees and volunteers using standardized observation and performance appraisal forms. When performance problems are identified, they are documented and addressed in an individual improvement plan. If the improvements outlined in the plan are not met, the I&R service has a procedure for progressive discipline that includes terminating employment.

6. The I&R service complies with legal requirements for staff requiring reasonable accommodations, which may include assistive technology.
7. The I&R service provides tools and technology to support the ability of staff and volunteers to work remotely. When community resource specialists are working off-site, procedures are in place to ensure that there is no discernible difference in the quality of service. Personnel procedures and training opportunities are consistent with those available to on-site staff and volunteers. **Remote** I&R service delivery requirements include provisions for staff to:
  - ✓ Make three-way calls to connect inquirers to external resources including access to a language interpreter.
  - ✓ Contact emergency services while maintaining a connection with the inquirer.
  - ✓ Work in a distraction-free environment.
  - ✓ Access supervisory assistance including coaching, when required, and for supervisors to exercise quality assurance measures.
8. The I&R service has internal procedures that enable communication between and among management and staff, through a variety of activities including (e.g. regular staff meetings, online social media discussions or forums, in-person dialogue, collaborative problem-solving), to facilitate information sharing and input.
9. The I&R service conducts a comprehensive workplace **ergonomic** analysis at least every three years to identify and mitigate risk factors. The evaluation considers work activities, repetitive movement patterns, workstation design, workplace seating, work tools and equipment and the posture of staff.
10. The I&R service works collaboratively with staff to develop a workplace program that encourages positive lifestyle choices such as regular exercise and healthy eating, both inside and outside the workplace, as ways to reduce stress, burn-out and compassion fatigue, maintain healthy relationships at work, and improve staff retention.
11. The I&R service monitors employee turnover/attrition and reasons for leaving and has a process for identifying when the turnover percentage begins to impact service delivery and quality (e.g. exit surveys or interviews, and confidential staff surveys.).

## Standard 25: Staff Training

The I&R service provides training for new hires as well as existing staff and volunteers. The training reflects job descriptions for individual positions and is consistent with material in the **AIRS I&R Training Manual**, the AIRS Standards, and the Job Task Analysis for community resource specialists and resource database curators.

### ***Quality Indicators***

1. The I&R service has a training curriculum for staff and volunteer positions, including student interns. The modules have training goals and objectives that include both formal (e.g. written) and informal (e.g. role play) exercises to reinforce knowledge acquisition and skill development that must be successfully completed. The curriculum encompasses the tasks, knowledge and skills outlined in the AIRS Job Task Analyses for Community Resource Specialists (CRS), Community Resource Specialists – Aging/Disabilities (CRS-A/D), and Community Resource Specialists – Database Curators (CRS-DC).
2. The I&R service’s new hire and ongoing professional development training is consistent with the material contained in the AIRS I&R Training Manual.
3. The I&R service accommodates the diverse **learning styles** of staff and volunteers including visual, auditory, and kinesthetic learners.
4. The I&R service provides new hire orientation and onboarding for new staff and volunteers that addresses:
  - ✓ The role, mission, values, culture, and purpose of the I&R service.
  - ✓ The structure and policies/procedures of the organization including the role of the governing body.
  - ✓ The range of services provided, and the functions associated with specific positions.
  - ✓ The legal requirements that affect service delivery (e.g., abuse reporting, privacy/confidentiality).
  - ✓ Compliance training required by stakeholders and jurisdictions (e.g., **cultural competency**, sexual harassment, anti-**racism**, civil rights).

5. Following orientation, a staged training process includes:
  - ✓ Training periods that allow new community resource specialists to practice their skills in a supervised environment (e.g. job shadowing, role playing, observation), where duties are monitored, and coaching is available.
  - ✓ On-the-job training that involves increasing levels of responsibility until the individual is self-sufficient and able to handle day-to-day tasks independently.
  - ✓ Ongoing professional development that offers continuing education opportunities that focuses on broadening skills, deepening expertise, and expanding knowledge. Activities may include in-house training or external training such as continuing education classes, webinars or workshops offered at I&R conferences or other professional gatherings.
6. The I&R service evaluates newly trained staff using objective tools (e.g., written tests, quality monitoring forms and subjective measures (e.g., observation) to ascertain whether trainees have developed sufficient **competency** before assuming additional duties. Procedures are in place to guide decisions for trainees who do not demonstrate the required competency within a specified period of time such as completing a review at the end of the probation period that includes coaching and feedback regarding performance and expectations moving forward.
7. The I&R service evaluates the effectiveness of its training program and the performance of its trainers, and modifies the training based on feedback and evaluation.
8. Certification and recertification are included in the ongoing professional development plans for all staff and volunteers. Community resource specialists, resource database curators and other staff seek to obtain professional credentials such as AIRS Certification through organizationally recognized state, provincial/territorial or national programs.

## **Standard 26: Promotion and Outreach**

The I&R service operates an **outreach** program to increase public awareness of the organization, the services it provides and the value and impact of I&R on individuals, families, and the broader community. Outreach is tailored to reach and address the diversity of people living in the community and care is taken to avoid creating a demand that the I&R service is unable to meet.



## ***Quality Indicators***

1. The I&R service sets goals that establish outreach objectives (e.g., to increase the number of inquiries from a particular county by 5% over the next year) and establishes a process for tracking effectiveness (e.g. examining demographic and referral data).
2. The I&R service structures its outreach activities to target specific populations within the community (e.g., faith-based organizations, diverse cultural communities, law enforcement, schools) and establishes a process for tracking the number of targeted populations engaged.
3. If the I&R service is part of a larger organization or has staff working in other departments, outreach plans and objectives are coordinated to ensure that all staff are aware of commitments made, capacity to respond and community expectations.
4. When multiple I&R services operate in the same media market, they keep each other informed about any pending awareness, marketing, and public relation campaigns prior to the campaign's launch. This communication helps I&R services to prepare for any potential increase in demand or confusion that may arise from inquirers. If the two I&R services are focusing on the same target groups, they explore collaboration.
5. The I&R service publicizes its services to people in the community who may experience barriers to accessing services due to factors such as disabilities, social isolation, housing instability, and language or cultural barriers.
6. The I&R service improves public relations by communicating regularly with community service providers, government officials, and local planning bodies and by participating in various community activities (e.g. community resource fairs, cross-sectoral collaborations, and community planning meetings).

### **Standard 27: Quality Assurance**

The I&R service has a quality assurance process that assesses the effectiveness of its services, its appropriate involvement in the community and its overall impact on the people it serves. Quality assurance is included in all aspects of the I&R service (service delivery, resource database, reports and measures, cooperative relationships, disaster preparedness and organizational effectiveness. The I&R service uses its performance and quality data to assess operational effectiveness, enhance decision making, improve accountability, set meaningful goals and strategic objectives and articulate outcomes in key areas of its operation. Key performance indicators (KPIs) and associated **metrics** are defined,

measured, and aligned with the AIRS Standards as well as stakeholder expectations. KPIs may include individual and programmatic metrics which are developed in consideration of available resources. The quality assurance process evolves as the I&R service builds its capacity to assess its program areas, and encourages input and support from all levels of the organization.

### ***Quality Indicators***

1. The I&R service identifies, defines, and regularly measures program and **key performance indicators for service delivery**, that are aggregated and averaged on a regular basis. These indicators may include:
  - ✓ Call volume.
  - ✓ **Abandoned calls.**
  - ✓ **Average abandonment rate.**
  - ✓ **Average abandonment time.**
  - ✓ **Occupancy rate.**
  - ✓ **Average speed of answer.**
  - ✓ **Service level.**
  - ✓ **Incoming call patterns.**
  
2. The I&R service identifies, defines, and regularly measures program and service key performance indicators (KPIs) for their Community Resource Specialists which may be reviewed for individual staff as well as aggregated and averaged. These indicators may include:
  - ✓ **Average call handling time.**
  - ✓ **Average talk time.**
  - ✓ **Call quality.**
  - ✓ Customer satisfaction.
  - ✓ **Data completeness.**
  
2. The I&R service identifies, defines, and regularly measures program and **key performance indicators for resource database curators**, which may be reviewed for individual staff as well as aggregated and averaged. These indicators may include: New Agency/Program outreach.
  - ✓ Interim data changes.
  - ✓ **Resource database record audits.**
  - ✓ **Resource database responsiveness.**
  
3. The I&R service identifies, defines, and regularly measures program and service outcomes in order to better understand and illustrate the role it plays in connecting inquirers to organizations that provide the services they need. The organization is responsible for the accuracy and relevance of the service it provides for inquirers but does not measure or evaluate the quality or impact of the service providers to whom inquirers are referred. Outcomes information is obtained via direct follow-up with inquirers, data partnerships, electronic

surveys, case studies and impact stories and other measures. Examples of **outcome measures** include, but are not limited to:

- ✓ Customer Satisfaction Rates - % of satisfied inquirers or agencies.
  - ✓ Connection Rates - % of inquirers whose needs were partially or fully met.
  - ✓ Penetration Rates - % of the community that is aware of the I&R services based on the service area population.
  - ✓ Improvement/Impact Rates - % of people whose situation has improved as a result of their interaction with the I&R service.
  - ✓ Case studies and impact stories are a description of an inquirer's situation and contact experience (e.g. general demographics such as age, gender, location, etc., steps taken to develop rapport, assessment process, problems overcome, actions taken, referrals made, supplementary follow-up/advocacy provided).
4. The I&R service annually gathers feedback from organizations included in the resource database to measure the organization's level of satisfaction with the accuracy of the information contained in their record, their familiarity with the I&R service's resource database, and their assessment of interactions with the resource department. This feedback may be gathered as part of the annual update process or through a separate survey. Results are used to improve the resource database and the update process. Survey questions may include:
- ✓ How satisfied are you with the listing of your organization's information in the resource database?
  - ✓ How satisfied are you with the update process?
  - ✓ Are you aware of the online database?
  - ✓ Do you or your staff use the online database? If so, how often?
  - ✓ How would you rate your experience using the online database?
  - ✓ If you have interacted with the resource database department, how would you rate your experience?
5. The I&R service also involves representatives and members of the community in their quality assurance process and uses the feedback received to make improvements and program modifications. Methods may include:
- ✓ Online surveys with community agencies and/or the general public.
  - ✓ **Focus groups.**
  - ✓ Community meetings.
  - ✓ Third party research and reports.

6. The I&R service ensures that key staff are trained on quality improvement strategies; and may employ an internal quality team or task force to review, monitor and implement quality changes.
  
7. The I&R service strives to secure and retain accreditation by a nationally recognized body, as well as encouraging staff to seek individual certification in their profession.

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## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

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The Glossary of Terms contains definitions for terminology that appears in the *Standards and Quality Indicators for Professional Information and Referral*. A Glossary has been included in each edition of the Standards, and many of the original terms and definitions continue to evolve. Similarly, we are grateful to many varied sources of expertise and wisdom.

Please note that terms for individual resource data elements and their definitions are located in an indented section under 'Data Elements' rather than distributed throughout the Glossary. Note also, that there is a second gathering of terms under 'Key Performance Indicators' – which reflects many call center issues.

**211 LA County Taxonomy of Human Services:** The classification system maintained by 211 LA County and used as a common language for the I&R field. The Taxonomy is used to index and facilitate retrieval of resource information, increase the reliability of planning data, make evaluation processes consistent and reliable, and facilitate national comparisons of data. It can be accessed at [www.211taxonomy.org](http://www.211taxonomy.org).

**Abandoned Calls:** Incoming calls that are terminated by the inquirer while in queue, and before the call is answered by a community resource specialist.

**Accessible:** Without physical, cultural, financial or psychological barriers to service. Alternatively, having the legally required features and/or qualities that ensure entrance, participation and usability of places, programs, services and activities by individuals with a wide variety of disabilities.

**Active Listening Skills:** A set of skills that helps people become more sensitive, compassionate and objective listeners. Central concepts include listening to the emotional as well as the factual content of what someone is saying, providing a fresh perspective on a problem or issue by giving feedback, being non-judgmental, and developing empathy, i.e., an active understanding of another person's situation and feelings coupled with a strong concern.

**Advisory Committee:** A formally constituted group of local stakeholders that provides information about community needs and issues, recommendations regarding program planning and development activities and other forms of support that helps to ensure that the agency maintains effective connections with the people it serves.

**Advocacy:** Programs that intercede on behalf of individuals and/or groups with their permission to ensure that they receive the benefits and services for which they are eligible and that organizations within the established service delivery system meet the collective needs of the community.

**After-Action Report:** A focused, post-incident or post-exercise review whose purpose is to capture observations related to disaster response system performance, both positive and negative, and to document recommendations for future improvements in a report that identifies specific corrective actions, assigns them to responsible parties and establishes targets for their completion.

**Agency:** An organization that delivers services. An agency can be incorporated, a division of government, or an unincorporated group that offers, for example, a food pantry or support group. The agency is the main location of the resource where the administrative functions occur, where the organization's director is generally housed and where it is licensed for business. An agency may or may not deliver direct services from this location.

**AIRS Accreditation:** The professional credential that is awarded internationally by AIRS to I&R services that apply as formal recognition that they are operating in accordance with the *Standards and Quality Indicators for Professional Information and Referral*.

**AIRS Certification:** The professional credential that is awarded internationally by AIRS to individuals who successfully complete the applicable certification program for I&R practitioners: the Certified Resource Specialist (CRS), Certified Resource Specialist – Database Curators (CRS-DC), and Community Resource Specialist Aging/Disabilities (CRS-A/D) programs. Certification is a measurement of documented ability in the field of I&R reflecting specific competencies and related performance criteria, which describe the knowledge, skills, attitudes and work-related behaviors needed by I&R practitioners to successfully execute their duties.

**AIRS XSD Schema:** This standard structure for I&R resource databases uses XML (eXtensible Markup Language) which is a recognized language for the development of customized data standards.

**AIRS I&R Training Manual:** A comprehensive publication developed and published by AIRS that provides an introduction to the practice of information and referral. It is primarily intended as a guide for new staff and the foundation for the initial orientation and/or training programs of information and referral (I&R) providers, but can also be used as a reference tool and refresher for more experienced staff.

**AIRS Networker:** A Web 2.0 tool powered by Higher Logic with social networking/media applications that allows AIRS members to work together in a wide variety of online communities and collaborations. The tool supports the creation of searchable resource libraries, public and private discussion groups, blogs, searchable directories and private online communities.

**Ancillary I&R Activities:** Information the I&R service may also collect in addition to I&R inquiries, but whose numbers should not be added to the contact/inquiry total unless the figures are recorded individually and can be separated out. Included are:

- Website visitor activity.
- People accessing recorded information.
- Outreach presentations.

- Brochures and/or other publications distributed.
- Outgoing advocacy calls.
- Outgoing customer satisfaction/quality assurance calls.
- Outgoing follow-up calls.
- Outgoing calls to verify resource information.
- Community problems/needs reporting.

**Ancillary Services:** Agency activities that are not core services and are not worth spending the time and effort to index, e.g., an agency newsletter.

**API:** This is the acronym for Application Programming Interface which is a software intermediary that allows two applications to talk to each other. When bringing up a map or a weather forecast, or registering for an event using your Google or Facebook profile, you are using an API. Within I&R, it generally refers to how a search in one system, may directly pull up a live resource database record from within an I&R website.

**Assessment and Referral:** The assessment and referral process consists of active listening and effective questioning to determine the needs of the inquirer, clarifying the need, identifying appropriate resources, selecting appropriate delivery modes, making referrals to organizations capable of meeting those needs, and providing enough information about each organization to help inquirers make an informed choice. In situations where services are unavailable, the I&R service engages in problem solving to help the inquirer identify alternative strategies.

**Assistance Without Referral:** The disposition or outcome of an inquiry in which the Community resource specialist provides requested information, e.g., a phone number, or other types of assistance but no referrals; or, following assessment, helps the inquirer identify alternative sources of support, e.g., a family member or their church. This is often referred to as ‘problem-solving’ within an I&R context.

**Automated Attendant:** A menu-driven system accessible by telephone that allows inquirers to select and listen to prerecorded information about specific types of services.

**Automatic Call Distribution (ACD):** A programmable component of a telephone system that automatically distributes calls to one or more groups of Community resource specialists based on criteria specified by the I&R service. ACD systems generally process incoming calls on a first in/first answered basis but can also manage routing based on the characteristics of the call. Most ACDs are now cloud-based.

**Average Abandonment Time:** The average time that callers wait in queue before abandoning.

**Board of Directors:** The governing body of an organization that is responsible for program planning and evaluation, policy setting, personnel administration, program oversight, public relations and fiscal management.

**Call Monitoring:** The process of listening to the calls of a community resource specialist for the purpose of assuring that a quality service is being delivered. It involves an experienced supervisor/mentor listening to both sides of the call and providing detailed feedback and support.

**Call Monitoring Policy:** A formal policy that outlines the process by which employees will be notified of the call monitoring guidelines, both during the hiring process as well as on an ongoing basis, the tools and instruments to be used and how reviews/scores of calls will be communicated to the staff.

**Call Recording and Review:** Remote monitoring of calls that is accomplished through a call recording system which can be programmed to record all calls or to take a random sampling of calls handled by each specialist at different times of the day and week.

**Call Type:** The nature of the service that Community resource specialists provide for inquirers. Call types include:

- ✓ Assessment and Referral
- ✓ Assessment Without Referral
- ✓ Information Only
- ✓ Crisis Intervention
- ✓ Advocacy

**Calls:** A connection over a telephone network between the calling party and the called party. Included are both incoming calls (calls initiated by inquirers) and outgoing calls (calls initiated by community resource specialists). When inquirers make incoming calls, they can be routed directly to a specialist, placed in a queue to await the next available specialist, be invited to listen to a recorded message about available services, be offered the option to leave a message for a callback or, if there is no space in queue, receive a busy signal and be forced to call back.

**Calls Answered:** Calls that are routed to an ACD queue and answered by a community resource specialist. Calls Answered may be either

- ✓ Transactions that involve an I&R activity (**information provision**, assessment and referral, advocacy, crisis intervention), or
- ✓ Non-Transactions (e.g., abandoned calls, wrong numbers, phantom calls, administrative calls, personal calls, calls transferred to other programs).

**Calls Offered:** Calls Received that are placed in queue by the ACD and presented to available community resource specialists. An offered call will be either answered or abandoned in queue. Once answered, it will either be a Transaction Call or a Non-Transaction Call. (Calls Offered = Calls Answered + Calls Abandoned)

**Calls Received:** Calls coming into the I&R service that are connected to an ACD. Depending on the options provided by the phone system, the calls may be disconnected for unknown reasons without being abandoned, forwarded to other programs (if a particular option is selected by the inquirer from



an IVR menu) or entered into a queue where they are offered to an available community resource specialist.

**Case Management:** A service that develops plans for the evaluation, treatment and/or care of individuals who, because of age, illness, disability or other difficulties, need assistance in planning and arranging for services; assesses the individual's needs; coordinates the delivery of needed services; ensures that services are obtained in accordance with the plan; and follows up and monitors progress to ensure that services are having a beneficial impact on the individual.

**Case Coordination:** Communication, information sharing, and collaboration that occurs regularly with case management and other staff serving the client within and between agencies in the community. Coordination activities may include directly arranging access; reducing barriers to obtaining services; establishing linkages; and other activities recorded in progress notes.

**Certified Community Resource Specialist (CRS):** A professional credential awarded internationally by AIRS to individuals who have demonstrated the knowledge, skills, and understanding required by community resource specialists to successfully execute their responsibilities.

**Certified Community Resource Specialist Aging/Disabilities (CRS-A/D):** A professional credential awarded internationally by AIRS to individuals who have demonstrated the knowledge, skills, and understanding required by community resource specialists to successfully execute their responsibilities in the area of aging and disabilities.

**Certified Resource Specialist – Database Curators (CRS-DC):** A professional credential awarded internationally by AIRS to individuals who have demonstrated the knowledge, skills, and understanding required by database curators to successfully execute their responsibilities.

**Challenging Inquirers:** This describes inquirers who are difficult to serve based not on their situation but on their behavior. Challenging behaviors may involve being angry, disrespectful, rude, belligerent, manipulative, racist, sexist or homophobic. Sometimes these inquirers can be extremely manipulative and make multiple calls within a short period of time. I&R agencies run the danger of having telephone lines blocked by inappropriate calls, unless limits are established and maintained.

**Chat:** An online service delivery option that allows I&R programs to communicate or 'chat' in real time with visitors to their website. Also sometimes called 'live support', these applications are commonly used to provide immediate customer support and information to clients and customers. Exact features and functions of live support are application specific, however common features include real time visitor monitoring, custom chat windows, invisible traffic analysis, website integration and secure administration controls.

**Clarification:** This is a stage in the I&R process. Once rapport has been established and the initial assessment completed, clarification ensures you have an accurate understanding of an inquirer's problem to better identify an appropriate solution.

**Classification System:** A structure for categorizing available information within a particular area of knowledge in a systematic, unambiguous way. A good classification system enables people searching for information to locate the materials they need quickly and easily. The *211 LA County Taxonomy of Human Services* has been accepted as the common language for human services in the field of I&R.

**Client Advocacy:** Intervention by the I&R service on behalf of specific individuals to ensure that they receive the benefits and services for which they are eligible. Inquirer advocacy efforts seek to meet individual needs without attempting to change social institutions. For purposes of these standards, this does not include system advocacy or legislative advocacy (lobbying). Forms of inquirer advocacy include:

- Making the initial contact with a service provider to verify eligibility or service availability, notify them of the inquirer's forthcoming contact or schedule an appointment.
- Initiating a warm transfer, i.e., using 3-way calling technology to contact an agency and introduce the inquirer and her or his situation before ending their participation in the call.
- With the organization's permission, listening in on a call or sitting in on an interview while the inquirer attempts to explain the situation, providing assistance only when necessary.
- Representing the inquirer when s/he is unable to state his or her own case when, for example, the individual faces barriers to successfully accessing services (e.g., language, age, physical or intellectual disabilities, communication impairments, emotional situations, mental health issues or poverty).
- Negotiating on behalf of the inquirer when a request for service has been denied in situations where it appears there are facts unknown to the agency or that the agency has acted in violation of its own policies or the law.
- Escalating the intervention by speaking with a senior manager regarding the inquirer's situation.

**Cloud Computing:** The delivery of computing as a service rather than a product, whereby shared resources, software and information are provided to computers and other devices as a utility (like the electricity grid) over the Internet. Cloud computing provides computation, software, data access and storage services that do not require end-user knowledge of the physical location and configuration of the system that delivers the services. Users can access their data from anywhere rather than being tied to a particular machine.

**Coaching:** A learning approach that involves the use of positive feedback, active listening, questioning and problem-solving skills to ensure a positive learning climate.

**Code of Ethics:** A document that establishes fundamental values and professional standards of conduct for staff in their relationships with their colleagues, their employers, the people they serve, the human service professionals with whom they interact and the community as a whole.

**Competency:** A knowledge, skill, ability or trait that is needed to succeed at a particular task or job.

**Comprehensive I&R Service:** I&R programs that maintain information about the full range of human services and which function as the primary source of information about and linkage with human services providers in their community.

**Confidentiality:** The requirement that the I&R service does not disclose identifying information about inquirers, their requests and the resources given to them except under specified circumstances. Information about an inquirer must not be shared with others unless disclosure is required by law or court order, explicit permission has been secured from the person to do so and documented, or the person is in danger of harming him or herself or another.

**Credentialing:** A generic term that encompasses licensing, certification, accreditation and other standards-based processes that recognize competence on the part of individuals in a particular profession or occupation or organizations in a particular area or field of interest. Certification and accreditation programs are voluntary, private initiatives whereas licensure is generally a government regulatory requirement which mandates that individuals or organizations be licensed in order to conduct their business.

**Crisis:** A state of acute emotional distress in which an individual experiences a temporary inability to cope with a situation by means of their usual problem-solving behaviors. People in crisis include individuals discussing suicide, homicide or assault; victims of domestic abuse or other forms of violence, child abuse/neglect or elder abuse/neglect; sexual assault survivors; runaway youth; people experiencing a psychiatric emergency; people in crisis with substance use disorders; and others in distress.

**Crisis Intervention:** A service that provides immediate assistance to people who are in acute emotional distress; who are or perceive themselves to be in life-threatening situations; who are a danger to themselves or to others; or who are hysterical, frightened or otherwise unable to cope with a problem that requires immediate action. The objective of crisis intervention is to identify and defuse the critical nature of the situation, ensure the person's safety, and return the individual to a state of equilibrium in which s/he is capable of identifying and seeking solutions to the problem.

**Cultural Competency:** An awareness of one's own cultural assumptions, behaviors, beliefs and unconscious biases that brings an ability to interact with and understand people from other cultures without imposing one's own cultural values. The ability to effectively operate in different cultural contexts.

**Culturally Appropriate:** The ability to provide assistance in ways that are helpful, effective and strengthening to those served through understanding of and respect for diverse cultures.

**Customer Satisfaction Survey:** A survey process that allows organizations to measure customer or client satisfaction with their products and services, identify emerging or unmet needs, identify and prioritize needed changes and track the effectiveness of changes with the objective of maximizing

customer retention, improving customer loyalty and better positioning themselves among prospective clients.

**Cyberethics:** An umbrella term that covers a variety of topics including privacy and security, copyright and intellectual property rights, access, usability and appropriate uses of technology. Cyberethics encompasses user behavior and what networked computers are programmed to do, and how this affects individuals and society. Examples of cyberethical questions include: "Is it OK to display personal information about others on the Internet (such as their online status or their present location via GPS)?", "Should users be protected from false information?", "Who owns digital data (such as music, movies, books, webpages, etc.) and what should users be allowed to do with it?", "How much access should there be to gambling and porn online?", "Can all audiences access the information?", and "Are websites tested on all modern browsers?"

**Data Elements:** Distinguishable, defined units of information that are contained somewhere within a resource database. A Data Field, by contrast, refers to the specific place ('container') in which that information is stored. The AIRS Data Element Standards address Data Elements and identify those that are required and recommended, but do not specify how that information must be structured or stored in the resource database – those decisions are left to the individual I&R service.

- **AKA (Also Known As) Names:** Names other than the legal name by which an organization, a site or a program/service is known. Example include acronyms, former names, popular names or other alternative names.
- **Application/Intake Process:** The steps an individual must take to register for service with a service provider. In the resource database, a narrative that describes the process by which people access the service(s) included in the service group, including the hours for intake.
- **Contact for Last Change:** The name and title of the person at the agency/organization who is responsible for verifying the accuracy of information in the database record and/or who provided the last change.
- **Date of Last Interim Change:** The most recent date any piece of agency information was changed and verified by the agency.
- **Date of Last Annual Verification:** The most recent date the agency was contacted with all agency information verified, usually the date of the annual survey.
- **Days/Hours of Operation:** The times during which a service is open. The days/hours of operation for an organization, a site or a program, may all differ.
- **Description:** A brief narrative describing the main purpose or role of either an organization, a site or a service/program.

- **Documents Required:** A narrative list of the documents that are necessary to enroll in/apply for a service. Examples: Photo ID, postmarked piece of mail to verify residency, birth certificate, police report.
- **Eligibility:** The guidelines a service provider uses to determine who is qualified to receive services. Eligibility can be stated in terms of requirements, e.g., “The individual must be a single parent” or exclusions, e.g., “We do not serve people who are homeless”. In the resource database, a description of specific conditions that must be met in order to qualify for a particular service or group of services, or specific conditions that exclude certain people. If there are no eligibility requirements/exclusions, the text should read “No restrictions”. If eligibility is not a separate field in the database, eligibility information is typically found in the service group description.
- **Email Address(es):** An electronic mail address for the organization or one of its sites that the public can use to direct online/electronic correspondence. Whenever possible, the agency email should be the official email address for the agency or site rather than for a specific person within the organization.
- **Federal Employer Identification Number (EIN/FEIN):** A unique, nine digit number (XX-XXXXXXX) that the IRS (United States Internal Revenue Service) assigns to all organizations in the U.S. that are required to file a business tax return, regardless of whether they have employees. The EIN can be used to facilitate record matching to eliminate duplicates when records maintained by different local I&R services are combined in statewide I&R databases, or to link I&R records with those in databases maintained by organizations outside the I&R field.
- **Fees/Payment Options:** A description of the fees an organization charges for its services. Typical phrases include ‘sliding scale’ and ‘no charge’ or ‘fixed fee.’ Specific dollar amounts are generally omitted.
- **Geographic Area Served:** The primary geographic unit(s) an organization is responsible for serving. In the resource database, the physical area (‘service area’) covered by a specific service/service group and/or service site. Only those who reside in the area may be served. A Geographic Area Served may represent one ZIP/postal code, a city, a town or other geographic area such as a congressional district, a state/province or a region including several counties.
- **Languages Consistently Available:** The specific languages, other than English, in which the service is delivered. In order to facilitate searching by language availability, some I&R services structure language information in a format that supports the ability to filter data.
- **Legal Status:** A designation indicating the type of organization or conditions under which the organization is operating, i.e., a private, nonprofit corporation, a for-profit (commercial,

proprietary) organization, a government (public) organization, or a grass roots entity such as a support group that is not incorporated and has no formal status as an organization.

- **Licenses or Accreditation:** The names of licenses or accreditations secured through a recognized external credentialing entity.
- **Mailing Address(es):** The address at which the agency or one of its sites receives mailed correspondence if different than the street address.
- **Name:** The full legal name of the organization, the name of a location or the name of a program/service. In certain cases, rather than the full legal name, a decision can be made to use the name under which the organization is more commonly known or is 'doing business as' (e.g., using YWCA instead of Young Women's Christian Association).
- **Name and Title of Director/Manager:** The top administrator for the organization; the person who is responsible for the overall operation of the organization (as distinguished from the top volunteer administrator such as a board president).
- **Phone Number(s) and Types:** The phone number(s) through which a particular agency, site or service can be reached. Phone data include phone numbers, extensions, phone types (e.g., Voice, **TTY/TDD**), and phone functions (e.g., administration, intake).
- **Physical/Programmatic Access for People with Disabilities:** The structural features of the facility that either support or hinder access to the site/location for people with physical disabilities.
- **Record Ownership Code:** A code that identifies the organization responsible for maintaining the record. It is used to facilitate combination, in a single consolidated database, of records maintained by different organizations. In some resource databases, the record ownership code may be combined with the Unique ID Number to create one distinct code identifying both the agency and its record owner.
- **Resource Database Curator for Last Change:** The name of the resource database curator responsible for the last change to a particular record.
- **Record Status (Active/Inactive):** A resource database record may be identified as either 'active' (meaning that the record may be retrieved in a search) or 'inactive' (meaning that the record has been 'switched off' by a database curator and will not be retrieved in a search).
- **Record Inclusion (e.g. displayed online, in specific portals, directories, etc.):** This designates whether a resource record may be included in certain displays/directories and omitted from other

- **Street/Physical Address(es):** The main address from which the agency and/or site(s) operate. While main sites may or may not be locations where services are delivered, additional sites or branch offices are almost always service provision locations. The physical address may have several components including multiple address lines, city, state/province and ZIP/postal codes.
- **Taxonomy Term(s) for Services/Targets:** The Taxonomy term (or combination of terms) that are selected to represent the service(s) in the service group. A separate term or linked set of terms should be chosen for each service in the service group.
- **Unique ID Number:** A distinct code (alpha and/or numeric) that is used to identify each agency, site, service group and service site.
- **Website URL(s) including Social Media:** A URL specifies the location of a file or resource on the Internet. In the resource database, the agency URL should include the official, main website for the agency or site, in addition to other Internet addresses that people can use to access social media applications maintained by the organization (e.g., a Facebook or Twitter page) that contains information that is appropriately formatted for that medium.

**Data Structure:** The way data elements are organized and stored in a database.

**Database Collaborative:** A group of I&R services that agree to share responsibility for maintaining information about local community resources as a means of avoiding duplication of database maintenance activities and achieving broader and deeper coverage of different types of community resources.

**Disaster:** A large-scale emergency that disrupts the normal functioning of a community.

**Disaster Exercise:** A simulated emergency in which staff of various agencies perform the tasks that would be expected of them in a real emergency.

**Disaster Preparedness:** Activities, programs and systems developed prior to an emergency that support community readiness and resiliency assessment; development and testing of disaster plans; training of staff in plan implementation; establishment of collaborative arrangements with other service providers; provision of suitable warning systems; identification, procurement and/or collection of the facilities, equipment, supplies and trained personnel that will be necessary for responding to an emergency; and development and dissemination of information and/or training about how individuals and organizations can prepare for a major disaster or large-scale emergency that disrupts the normal functioning of a community.

**Disaster Recovery:** Longer-term assistance for people who have suffered injuries or incurred losses due to an incident with the objective of facilitating the return of the community to its pre-disaster condition and/or rebuilding the community in a way that makes it less vulnerable in the future.

**Disaster Relief:** Services that facilitate the exchange of information and/or provide short-term

assistance, usually in the form of food, clothing, blankets, temporary shelter, furnishings, small appliances or temporary financial aid, for people who have suffered injuries or incurred losses due to a major disaster or large-scale emergency that disrupts the normal functioning of a community. The objective of disaster relief is to help individuals sustain their lives during the immediate aftermath of the event.

**Disaster Response:** Actions taken before, during and after the onset of a major disaster or large-scale emergency to end the emergency, preserve lives, limit damage, ensure the availability of critical services and reduce the probability of secondary effects.

**Disaster Services:** Emergency planning, preparedness, mitigation, response, relief and/or recovery services prior to, during and after a major fire, flood, hurricane, earthquake, tornado, tsunami, volcanic eruption, landslide, mudslide, snowstorm, drought, famine, explosion or nuclear accident, the outbreak of civil unrest, or other large-scale emergency of natural or human origin that disrupts the normal functioning of a community; or a localized incident such as a house fire which has made residents homeless. There are four recognized phases of disaster work: preparedness, mitigation, response and recovery.

**Discrimination:** The conscious or unconscious act of dealing with people on the basis of prejudicial and predisposed attitudes rather than individual merit. The denial of equal treatment with respect to issues such as public accommodation, education, employment and housing is a crime.

**Diversity:** The recognition and acknowledgement of individual differences, and all the ways that we are unique and different from each other. Diversity recognizes differences, respects differences and strives to celebrate them.

**Double Indexing:** The practice of using two or more service terms from either the same branch of the Taxonomy ('vertical' or 'intrabranh' double-indexing) or from different areas of the Taxonomy ('horizontal' or 'interbranch' double-indexing) to index the same activity.

**Empowerment:** The process of helping individuals, families, groups or communities to increase their personal, interpersonal, political, social and/or economic strength or position and to develop influence that may impact their circumstances. In an I&R context, the process of helping inquirers understand their own situation and the steps that need to be taken to obtain needed services so that they can follow through on their own behalf. Empowering individuals also gives them the tools to handle similar situations or other issues that might arise in the future without assistance.

**Endangerment:** Situations in which an individual's safety or well-being may be at risk.

**Ergonomics:** This is the science of designing workplaces and equipment to avoid discomfort and injuries, to provide improved human performance and productivity.

**Evaluation (Program):** The systematic process of reviewing services provided by an organization in



relation to its objectives and standards to assess how well the program is working, and to identify ways to improve overall operation of the individual I&R service and/or the I&R system as a whole.

**Evaluation (Staff):** The systematic process of reviewing the work of individual employees and volunteers in accordance with their job descriptions to provide feedback on performance and to maintain a high level of quality in service delivery, database maintenance and other I&R functions.

**Faith-Based Organizations:** Religious congregations, and religion-based social service organizations (e.g., Catholic Charities or the Salvation Army) and other types of organizations that might have a religious affiliation or identity.

**False Hits:** In database searching, an irrelevant entry or record retrieved in a keyword search. False hits (also known as 'false drops') are more likely to occur when searching a full-text database instead of within the confines of a defined controlled vocabulary.

**Filters/Search Keys:** Filters are search keys that are applied to service searches and narrow the selection of records that are displayed on a match list. Customized filters/search keys include such things as language, hours, fee structure.

**Financial Audit:** A formal periodic examination of the accounts and financial records of an organization or program, generally performed for the purpose of verifying that funds were used as they were intended and in accordance with standard financial management practices.

**Focus Group:** Meetings, generally one to two hours in length, during which eight to 12 people are interviewed as a group to test a new idea or evaluate a product or service.

**Follow-Up:** The process of contacting inquirers to determine whether their needs were met and if not, why. The term "follow-up" is used in two contexts within I&R. There is "follow-up" that is driven by the situation of the individual inquirer to make sure that a vulnerable person with an essential need gets the help they require. There is also "follow-up" that is conducted with a larger and more random sample of inquirers and is driven by the need to better understand overall I&R service outcomes and the effectiveness of the I&R service being provided. One is an integral part of service delivery; the other is an aspect of program evaluation and quality assurance. In both cases, additional assistance to the inquirer in locating or using needed services may be required.

**Governance:** The legal authority of a board to establish policies that will affect the life and work of the organization while holding the board accountable for the outcome of such decisions. More broadly, governance deals with the processes and systems by which an organization or society operates. It embraces both the institutions of the state and their inter-relationships as well as the habits, cultures and norms that inhabit those institutions.

**Hang-Ups:** Calls that are terminated by an inquirer or a community resource specialist while they are in the process of talking to one another. Hang ups are distinguished from abandoned calls in that they

occur after a connection has been established between the inquirer and a community resource specialist, whereas an abandoned call occurs while the inquirer is still in queue.

**Human Services:** The activities of human services professionals that help people become more self-sufficient, prevent dependency, strengthen family relationships, support personal and social development and ensure the well-being of individuals, families, groups and communities. Specific human services include ensuring that people have access to adequate food, shelter, clothing and transportation; financial resources to meet their needs; consumer advice and education; criminal justice or legal services; education and employment; health and mental health care including substance abuse services; and environmental protection; both routinely and in times of disaster or other emergencies. Human services also facilitate the capabilities of people to care for children or other dependents; ensure that protective services are available to those who are vulnerable; provide for the support of older adults and people with disabilities; offer social, religious, and leisure time activities; provide for the cultural enrichment of the community; and ensure that people have the information they need to fully participate in community life.

**Human Services Database Specification (HSDS):** This is an open-source data exchange format (basically a technical specification on the fields and structure of a resource database record). The schema was developed by the Open Referral project (drawing from an original AIRS XSD schema), and is the most widely accepted structure that allows for the interoperability of resource databases, and for data to import/export through APIs.

**I&R Inquiry:** Any mediated/facilitated interaction with a community resource specialist related to the provision of information and/or referrals. That interaction can be via a spectrum of access methods including telephone calls, face-to-face (walk-ins and service in other settings), instant messaging (IM), text/SMS messaging, online chat, video relay/chat and regular mail.

**I&R Process:** The I&R process can be seen as having many stages and elements depending on the complexity of a particular situation. However, at its simplest, it can be divided into five basic stages:

- ✓ Opening the call ('contact') and establishing rapport (a 'connection').
- ✓ Assessment of the situation.
- ✓ Clarification to ensure an understanding of the situation.
- ✓ Providing appropriate information and/or referrals.
- ✓ Closing the call.

**I&R Service:** An organization (or program within a larger organization) whose primary function is to link people in need of human services with appropriate service providers who can meet their needs. I&R services may be comprehensive covering the whole range of human services or may specialize in resources for a particular population, e.g., people who are homeless, people with disabilities, older adults, people with AIDS. The Taxonomy definition for "Information and Referral" is as follows: "Programs whose primary purpose is to maintain information about human service resources in the community and to link people who need assistance with appropriate service providers and/or to

supply descriptive information about the agencies or organizations which offer services. The information and referral process involves establishing contact with the individual, assessing the individual's long and short-term needs, identifying resources to meet those needs, providing a referral to identified resources, and, where appropriate, following up to ensure that the individual's needs have been met." Also known as Information and Assistance Provider (in the aging network) and Resource and Referral Agency (in the child care arena).

**I&R Software:** A computer application developed for sale to information and referral/assistance organizations that automates the process of linking people in need of human services with appropriate providers who can meet their needs, and of maintaining community resource information to support the service delivery process. Features generally include resource database maintenance, call transaction processing, database searching, geo-mapping, directory production, survey management, taxonomy/database table maintenance, report generation and other similar functions.

**I&R System:** A collaborative group of comprehensive and specialized I&R services that have agreed to coordinate their resource maintenance, service delivery, publicity and other functions to avoid duplication of effort, encourage service integration and provide seamless access to information about community resources for people who need it.

**Identifying Information:** Information about inquirers (e.g., name, address, telephone number, Social Security Number) that makes personal identification possible.

**Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria:** The guidelines an I&R service uses to determine the scope and content of its resource database. Inclusion criteria specify the types of organizations that are priorities for inclusion and, if exhaustive, list the only types of organizations the resource database will contain. Exclusion criteria specify the types of organizations whose inclusion is prohibited.

**Indemnification:** Protection for the directors, officers, board members, personnel and volunteers of an organization against any civil or criminal action, suit, or proceeding resulting from their activities with the organization.

**Independent Access to Resource Information:** Gateways to community resource information that allow end users to conduct their own searches without speaking with a community resource specialist or other professional. Included are print and electronic directories, public access copies of the resource database and access to the database via the Internet.

**Indexing:** The process of assigning to records in the resource database descriptors and/or codes that can be used as search keys. Examples include service and target population terms/codes from the 211 LA County Taxonomy of Human Services, geographic codes/descriptors for the area served and language codes.

**Indirect Services:** Services to which an agency may facilitate access, but not a service that the agency provides itself.

**Information and Assistance (I&A):** Originally defined within the Older Americans Act as a service for older individuals that:

- ✓ Provides the individuals with current information about opportunities and services available in their communities including information relating to assistive technology.
- ✓ Assesses the problems and capacities of the individuals.
- ✓ Links the individuals to available opportunities and services.
- ✓ Establishes follow-up procedures to ensure that the individuals receive the services they need and are aware of the opportunities available to them.
- ✓ Serves the entire community, particularly older individuals with the greatest social need, older individuals with the greatest economic need and older individuals at risk for institutional placement.

In practice, I&A is not population specific, expanding to serve all people who require assistance in accessing services, and their caregivers. I&A involves an in-depth process and enhanced service that includes individualized access assistance, extensive follow-up, and individual advocacy, if necessary and requested (e.g., assistance in completing and submitting an application, or providing a warm transfer for a consumer who needs supportive assistance to connect to a resource). I&A is also associated with self-direction and the flexibility to provide I&A in a variety of settings using a choice of communication avenues based on consumer preference (e.g., at home, via email/e-chat or video conferencing using Skype).

**Information Provision:** The process of providing descriptive information about a service provider to the inquirer in response to a direct request for such information. Information can range from a limited response (such as an organization's name, telephone number, and address) to detailed data about community service systems (such as explaining how intake works for a particular agency), agency policies and procedures for application.

**Informed Consent:** The explicit granting of permission by an individual or her/his legal guardian to an I&R service (or other service provider) to take a specific action, e.g., release personal information to another or engage in advocacy on the person's behalf. The consent is predicated on full disclosure of the facts enabling the individual to make a decision based on knowledge of the risks and alternatives.

**Inquirer Data Collection:** The systematic process of recording and organizing essential information about inquirers, their needs, the referral(s) made on their behalf and follow-up results, when available.

**Inquirers:** Individuals and organizations seeking information about or linkage with community service providers through the I&R service.

**Inquiry:** Occasions on which individuals and organizations seeking information about or linkage with community service providers contact an I&R service for assistance.

**Instant Messaging (IM):** A program that allows two or more people to communicate with one another

over the Internet in real time. While most IM exchanges are in text, some IM programs also offer streaming audio-visual conferencing and voice. IM can also refer to messages sent by instant messaging, or to the act of sending an instant message.

**Interactive Voice Response Systems (IVRs):** An automated telephony system that interacts with inquirers, gathers information and either sends it to the ACD which routes calls to an appropriate community resource specialist or provides access to information selected from a pre-recorded menu. An IVR system accepts a combination of voice telephone input and touch-tone keypad selection and provides appropriate responses in the form of voice, fax callback, email and perhaps other media.

#### **Key Performance Indicators (Service Delivery):**

- **Service Level:** The percentage of calls that are answered within a specified threshold, for example, “Our service level last month was 80% of calls being answered within 48 seconds in comparison to our goal of 80% being answered in 40 seconds”. Service Levels are often expressed in an abbreviated form – e.g., 80/40 or 80/50. There is no established standard for commercial or government call centers; it all depends on the nature of their business. A reasonable objective for an I&R service is 80% of calls handled in 90 seconds or less.
- **Incoming Call Patterns:** For example, increases and decreases in volume from year to year. What activities (e.g. new outreach, disasters affecting the local community) impact changes in volume? Do staffing schedules reflect call patterns? What are the patterns among different modalities (e.g., text, chat, telephone contacts)?
- **Average Abandonment Rate:** The percentage of offered calls that are terminated by inquirers before being answered (for example, 8% or less). An abandonment rate generally includes a threshold that excludes calls from people who hang up too quickly. The I&R service’s telephone system is set to allow a allows a threshold of 20 or 30 seconds to filter out incomplete calls.
- **Average Call Handling Time:** For example, 10-13 minutes. Average call handling time includes the cumulative talk time, hold time and after-call work for each call answered. Each call, email, chat, and text answered by the I&R service includes an assessment, provision of information and/or referrals and other types of assistance required by the I&R service. Community resource specialists are evaluated using their individual performance metric record and the information is referenced in all performance reviews as well as coaching and monitoring sessions. The average call handling time reflects the requirements established by the I&R service and the training provided for resource specialists as well as funder expectations.
- **Average Speed of Answer (ASA):** The average time it takes an I&R service to answer a call once it has been placed in queue.

- **Average Talk Time (ATT) and Average Handle Time (AHT includes on-hold time and after-call work):** For example, an ATT of around 7-9 minutes with AHT of around 10-13 minutes. Note that these figures may vary considerably depending on the focus, objectives, and funding of the I&R service. Both the ATT and AHT reflect community and stakeholder expectations and are measured for both individuals and teams.
- **Call Quality:** For example, 85%-100%. An assessment of the quality of recorded calls monitored by a supervisor listening to the call remotely. The assessment includes both technical skills (e.g., standard greetings employed, confidentiality respected, documentation completed) and soft skills (e.g., establishing rapport, client engagement, friendly tone, active listening, affirmative statements, empathy) demonstrated by the specialist. The assignment of a quality score following a coaching session allows the resource specialist to highlight positive behaviors as well as those in need of improvements in their performance. If possible, the I&R service also contracts with a third-party to conduct regular secret shopper/mystery calls. This KPI reflects the average results on all scored monitoring forms.
- **Customer Satisfaction:** For example, 85-100%. Customer satisfaction surveys are generally conducted immediately following a call using either an automated instant survey or a later QA follow-up call (a secondary touch) generally made by a different specialist. Questions focus on the performance of the community resource specialist on the initial call. Applicable questions include:
  - ✓ “Did the community resource specialist you spoke with understand your needs?”
  - ✓ “Did you get the help you needed from the specialist?”
  - ✓ “Were you satisfied with the service you received?”
  - ✓ “Would you recommend this service to family and friends?”
- **Occupancy Rate:** For example: 65% - 85%. The percentage of logged-in time when community resource specialists are engaged in work-related activities. Long term, occupancy rates above 85% are indicators of potential staff burnout and the probability of inferior service delivery.
- **Schedule Adherence:** The percentage of time community resource specialists follow their assigned work schedules (for example, 80% or higher). The percentage of time community resource specialists follow their assigned work schedules. Work schedules specify the times specialists are expected to be on the phones versus engaging in other identified activities such as taking breaks, going to lunch, attending meetings, or participating in training/coaching sessions.

#### **Key Performance Indicators (Resource Database):**

- **New Resource Outreach:** In addition to updating the current resource database, database curators should pro-actively seek new organizations and programs that meet their

inclusion/exclusion policy criteria in order to ensure the most options are available to inquirers. The I&R service establishes priorities by identifying the types of programs not included in the resource database( by referencing call data that reflects service gaps) and a target for the number of new agencies/programs they would like to add every year. Research methods may include scanning social and traditional media, attending meetings with other human services providers and targeted outreach to organizations currently in the database to ask about new providers in their area of expertise.

- **Interim Information Changes:** In addition to updating current resource database entries via an annual survey process, database curators should follow up on changes that come to their attention during the interim, verify that the information is accurate and enter the change in the agency's database record. The information may come from their own community resource specialists who have encountered the change in conjunction with a referral, from social and traditional media sources or from the organization itself. The I&R service tracks and can report on the number of interim changes made each year.
- **Resource Database Record Audits:** For example, 85%-100%. The I&R service conducts a regularly scheduled internal quality audit of random resource updates completed by database curators which includes an assessment of:
  - ✓ The number/percentage of records that meet inclusion/exclusion criteria and the number, if any, that do not.
  - ✓ Adherence to style guide rules.
  - ✓ Record completeness (missing data).
  - ✓ Grammar and spelling errors in any of the text fields.
  - ✓ Accurate indexing percentage versus indexing problems.
- **Resource Database Responsiveness:** For example, 2-4 days working days. What is the average time (during business hours) for database curators to implement verified changes? When developing this KPI goal, the I&R service factors in resource database complexity and staffing levels.
- **Data Completeness:** For example, 85-100%. Community resource specialists are evaluated based on how completely they document their contacts with inquirers. The I&R service has data collection requirements for inquirer contacts and compares the data collected against the requirement for every call. This metric only covers the completeness of data entry and not the accuracy of the data. Accuracy is measured by reviewing the record and comparing it to the call recording.

**Keyword Index:** A keyword index is a separate classification structure that is generally organized alphabetically and requires its own field. The resource specialist chooses one or more keywords in addition to Taxonomy terms. Community resource specialists can conduct searches of the keyword index as an additional option. Use of keywords is acceptable according to the AIRS standards, but only

if they are connected to the 211 LA County Taxonomy of Human Services and do not function as a separate, stand-alone classification structure.

**Keyword Taxonomy Search:** A keyword search of the Taxonomy itself (sometimes called a word search or a word/phrase search) allows the user to enter a word or phrase and retrieve all Taxonomy terms that contain it. Ideally, this type of search also retrieves use references containing the word/phrase.

**Learning Style:** A composite of cognitive, affective and physiological factors that serve as relatively stable indicators of how a learner perceives, interacts with and responds to the learning environment. Included in this definition are perceptual modalities, information processing styles and personality patterns.

**Legislative Advocacy:** Attempts to influence the introduction or review of pending bills, ordinances or administrative rulings with the objective of having an impact on the passage or defeat of such legislation or its content.

**Mandatory Reporting:** The legal obligation to report specific forms of child abuse, elder abuse and other endangerment situations to a government authority when a person suspects that a reportable incident has occurred. State laws in the U.S. outline specific reporting requirements for professionals if they have information related to public or private safety issues. For example, certain professionals are required to report to state authorities if they see evidence of child abuse or neglect or elder abuse or have knowledge that someone is likely to be dangerous to themselves or others.

**Memorandum of Understanding (MOU):** A written agreement that clarifies the nature and extent of the working relationship between different organizations, groups or departments.

**Mentoring:** A developmental partnership through which one person shares knowledge, skills, information and perspective to foster the personal and professional growth of someone else.

**Met Needs:** Services are available and referral(s) are provided or assistance without referral is made available to an inquirer in response to a statement of a problem/need (problem solving) or a request for information.

**Meta-tagging:** Meta tags are small snippets of text that are embedded within the code of a webpage. These tags describe the contents of a page, and to allow it to be more accurately retrieved. Online search engines search meta tags in order to quickly identify the information on a webpage.

**Metrics:** Quantitative measures of performance or production. In a call center context, 'metrics generally refers to statistics generated by the ACD.

**Mitigation:** Activities undertaken in preparation for a disaster or large-scale emergency that will prevent or reduce loss of life, personal injury and destruction of or damage to property when an



incident actually occurs. Mitigation includes any activities that prevent or reduce the chance of an emergency occurring or lessen the damaging effects of unavoidable emergencies; and seeks to fix the cycle of disaster damage, reconstruction and repeated damage.

**Mobile-Friendly:** Websites whose content is easily readable on mobile devices such as smart phones and tablets. Mobile-friendly websites avoid software that is uncommon on mobile devices (such as Flash), use text that is readable without zooming, size the screen so that users aren't forced to scroll horizontally or zoom, and place links far enough apart that the correct one can be easily tapped. Websites can be checked for user friendliness through applications such as the [Google Mobile-Friendly Test](#).

**Multi-Channel Services:** I&R services that are available to the community in-person or via telephone, email, instant messaging (IM), text/SMS messaging, online chat, video relay service, social media or other alternative methods of contact.

**Mutual Assistance Agreement:** A standing agreement between organizations with different service areas but similar missions, e.g., information and referral programs or fire departments in different counties, to provide resources (facilities, personnel, equipment and expertise) to one another in cases where a disaster overwhelms the resources of one of the partners. The primary objective of Mutual Assistance Agreements is to facilitate rapid, short-term deployment of emergency support prior to, during and/or after an incident. The agreements need to be in place prior to a declared disaster so resources can be available if needed and to make it easier to obtain FEMA or state reimbursement. An agreement must also be in place between the local I&R and the emergency management agency, and assistance must be formally requested per that agreement.

**National Incident Management System (NIMS):** A comprehensive, nationwide systematic approach to incident management that supports the ability of government agencies at all levels, the private sector and nongovernmental organizations to work seamlessly to prepare for, prevent, respond to, recover from and mitigate the effects of incidents, regardless of cause, size, location or complexity in order to reduce the loss of life or property and harm to the environment. NIMS provides a scalable and flexible framework with universal applicability that promotes all-hazards preparedness and enables a wide variety of organizations to participate effectively in emergency management/incident response.

**Needs Assessment:** An initial survey undertaken to determine the special service needs of a defined population.

**Nondiscrimination Statement:** A statement approved by an organization's Board/Advisory Committee that prohibits discrimination in all of its forms, and documents the intention to comply with all laws, orders and regulations addressing this issue.

**Non-Transaction Calls:** Incoming calls answered by a community resource specialist that do not involve an I&R activity (information, assessment and referral, advocacy or crisis intervention). Examples of non-transaction calls include hang ups, wrong numbers, incoming administrative or personal calls, or other similar situations.

**Organizational Record:** A record in an I&R resource database that includes all of the data elements that define the organization and its services, programs and locations at which the services are delivered.

**Outcome Measures:** The process of assessing the benefits or changes for individuals or populations as a result of participating in program activities. Outcomes may relate to knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, behavior, condition or status.

**Outreach:** Generally, the systematic effort to provide services beyond conventional limits as to a particular segment of the population. In an I&R context, special activities undertaken by the I&R service to ensure that specific target populations and/or community organizations are aware of the services that are available through the I&R service and system and/or the broader community service delivery system.

**Person-Centered:** This describes an approach that allows individuals to be engaged throughout the I&R process, especially in the final decision-making moments, so that the outcome reflects their options, preferences, values and resources.

**Phantom Services:** Services that the agency purports to offer, but probably does not have the resources to actually provide in a sustained way.

**Policies and Procedures:** Policies are principles, rules and guidelines formulated or adopted by an organization to reach its long-term goals. They are designed to influence and determine all major decisions and actions, and all activities take place within the boundaries set by them. Procedures are the specific methods employed to express policies in action in day-to-day operations. Together, policies and procedures ensure that a point of view held by the governing body of the organization is translated into steps that result in an outcome compatible with that view.

**Practices:** Established actions or ways of proceeding in the regular performance of organizational duties. Policies and procedures often guide practice.

**Primary Services:** Primary services are the entry point services that an individual can obtain without being required to enroll in other services, whereas secondary services are those available only to individuals already receiving primary services. A job training program may, for example, also offer vocational assessment to help people determine the type of employment for which they are suited and job placement assistance following training in addition to the training itself. Unless people who are not receiving job training can access them, the vocational assessment and job placement are secondary services. The only primary service is job training.

**Problem Solving:** The process of exploring alternative solutions with an inquirer when no referrals are available and, in some cases, trying to overcome resistance to options, such as a reluctance to ask for assistance from family members or friends. Problem solving occurs within the context of assessment without referral.

**Procedure:** A specified series of actions or operations that have to be executed in the same manner in order to obtain the same result under the same circumstances (for example, emergency procedures).

**Program:** Sometimes agencies provide a group of services (some primary and some secondary) and organize them as a program. One organization's job training program may, for example, also offer vocational assessment to help people determine the type of employment they are suited for and job placement assistance following training in addition to the training itself. This is a richer program than one that simply involves training. Another example is a domestic violence shelter. One shelter may only provide a safe place to stay for residents. Another may have counseling, assistance in obtaining a temporary restraining order (TRO), a program for the woman's children, etc. While services are essentially the same across organizations, the definitions of programs may differ significantly.

**Protocol:** Internal operational documents that provide standardized, step-by-step instructions for carrying out a particular action. Protocols explain what will be done, when, how and why; and while they are generally disseminated in written form to staff, they are not necessarily formally adopted by the organization's governing body.

**Public Policy:** A course of action advocated by a group of individuals and/or organizations that proposes changes in specific laws, regulatory measures, actions or funding priorities supported by a public agency.

**Quality Assurance:** A system of procedures, checks, audits and corrective actions that are undertaken to ensure that an organization's products and services meet the expectations and needs of the people they serve. For information and referral programs, quality assurance relates to service delivery, the resource database, reports and measures, disaster preparedness, cooperative relationships and organizational effectiveness.

**Quality Indicator:** An agreed-upon process or outcome measure that is used to determine the level of quality achieved. A measurable variable (or characteristic) that can be used to determine the degree of adherence to a standard or achievement of quality goals.

**Queue:** The component of the telephone system that holds callers until a community resource specialist becomes available. Callers who have waited the longest are generally the ones who get their calls answered first. The queue can be adjusted to meet community needs or program priorities.

**Racism:** A set of attitudes that defines people based purely on their race, color, religion, origin or ancestry and contends the supposed superiority of one race above another. Discrimination, on the other hand, relates to an act that usually stems from racist outlooks.

**Rapport:** An intuitive bond that is based on the presence of trust, harmony and mutual respect in a relationship and a sense that the parties understand and share one another's concerns.

**Referrals:** Organizations identified by community resource specialists that meet the assessed needs of the inquirer and provided to the inquirer at the conclusion of the inquiry. The definitive element distinguishing a referral is that the inquirer is aware of a problem but requires assistance in determining the specific nature of her/his need and specific solution options that may be available to resolve it (as stated or redefined).

**Remote Working:** A work arrangement that allows at least a portion of scheduled work hours to be completed from a location other than the standard place of work (office) with work at home generally available as one of the options.

**Rescue Services:** Active intervention to save an individual's life when a lethality assessment reveals that life threatening acts have already been set in motion, particularly in situations where the individual is unable or unwilling to provide a telephone number or address to make rescue possible. Strategies may include using caller ID to locate the inquirer, calling a third party if appropriate, or sending the police or a mobile outreach team.

**Resource Database:** A computerized body of information about community resources maintained by the I&R service that can be accessed in a variety of ways including alphabetically by organization name, by type of service provided, by target population served, by geographical area served and by other filters. Information in the database is structured into records (one or more for each service provider) with fields that reflect data element information gathered using a standardized resource profile. The resource database supports the I&R process but also serves as an inventory of human services for the community.

**Resource Profile:** A standardized set of information that is gathered about each service provider in the resource database. Included are data elements that describe the organization itself (e.g., legal status, licensing/accreditation information), the services it provides, the targets for service, the conditions under which services are available (e.g., eligibility criteria, application procedures, hours, fees) and the locations at which services are delivered.

**Risk Management:** The process of identifying, assessing, monitoring and managing material risk that can cause harm to the financial well-being, property and volunteers of an organization.

**Safety Risk Assessment:** An evaluation based on research of how dangerous a situation is and addresses issues such as the person's intention, method, timing and state of mind. Questions include: Has the person already taken steps toward suicide? Have there been previous attempts? Does the person have a specific plan? Are the means to carry out the plan readily available? What is the likely timeframe for a life-threatening? Are there other risk indicators such as depression, hopelessness, feelings of isolation, substance use disorders, significant recent loss? (Sometimes calls a lethality or suicide risk assessment).

**Sampling:** A sample is a subset of representative individuals drawn from a larger population. For example, if you are researching the opinions of voters in a constituency, you would survey a sample of 500 rather than 50,000. I&Rs would generally use a random sampling method.

**Secondary Services:** Secondary services are available only to individuals already receiving primary services. Primary services are the entry point services that an individual can obtain without being required to enroll in other services. A job training program may, for example, also offer vocational assessment to help people determine the type of employment for which they are suited and job placement assistance following training in addition to the training itself. Unless people who are not receiving job training can access them, the vocational assessment and job placement are secondary services.

**See Also References:** These identify related but not identical terms in other parts of the Taxonomy. They help to ensure that users find the most appropriate term. The See Also reference points to other possibilities.

**Self-Determination:** The right of inquirers to make their own choices and decisions at each step in the I&R process.

**Service Gaps:** Services needed by people in the community that are not adequately provided by organizations that are part of the local service delivery system. Services may be unavailable altogether or they may be available but on an inadequate basis, e.g., they may be too expensive, not available in the needed language(s), not available during non-working or other convenient hours or have eligibility criteria that exclude the inquirer. Service gaps are usually identified when there is a pattern over time of individual unmet needs.

**Service Group:** I&R services often group similar agency services into a 'Service Group' for ease of data entry, management and display; and assign a name (Service Group Name) to the services represented in the cluster. Service group names should be indicative of all of the services within the cluster, should be user-friendly (i.e., avoid jargon or terminology not easily understood by the general public), should be unique within the agency entry and should not duplicate the program name if one exists.

**Services:** The discrete types of assistance an agency delivers to its clientele. Operationally, services are specific activities that can be classified using Taxonomy terms. Specific types of services are essentially the same no matter what organization is providing them.

**Sites:** The physical locations at which clients access services provided by an agency. All agencies have a main site; many have additional site locations or branch offices.

**Social Media:** Online technology tools broadly known as 'social media' that enable people to create and share content which may include text, images, video, audio and multimedia communications. Social media enable shared community experiences, both online and in person; and allow people with basic computer skills to tell their stories using publishing tools such as blogs, video logs (vlogs), photo sharing, podcasting (audio stories broadcast from the Internet or downloaded to a computer or portable media players) and wikis (collaboratively edited Internet pages). They can also help to filter

and organize the overwhelming amount of information on the Internet.

**Specialized I&R Service:** Programs that maintain information about community resources that are appropriate for a specific target population and which link individuals who are in need of specialized services with appropriate resources, and/or provide information about agencies and organizations that offer specialized services.

**Standards:** Reference points that define expected practices within a field and can be used to measure the extent to which individual organizations are in compliance with those requirements.

**Statewide/Province-wide Database:** A collection of local I&R databases maintained in a standard format that have been consolidated into a larger database with statewide or province-wide geographic coverage.

**Style Guide:** A manual that establishes rules for structuring, writing and indexing resource database records; and helps to ensure that information within database records is clear, concise, consistent and relevant.

**Succession Planning:** A process for systematically and deliberately preparing for future changes of leadership in key positions within the organization. The process may identify potential replacements and provide strategies for developing and/or hiring individuals to meet future needs.

**Supported Access to Information/Services:** Situations in which inquirers receive assistance and support from a community resource specialist, case manager or other professional who makes an assessment of their situation, identifies appropriate resources to meet their needs, contacts those resources, and/or arranges for them to receive services.

**Sustainability:** The ability of a program to provide quality services to its clients, expand its scope of services and client base, increase or maintain demand for services, and generate income from the program and through local funding mechanisms while decreasing its dependence on funds derived from external donors.

**System Advocacy:** Actions taken by the I&R service to seek changes in community conditions, structures or institutions when modifications in the service delivery system as a whole are required to ensure the adequate availability of essential community services, to contribute to human growth and development and to prevent unwitting support of conditions which are injurious to individuals and families who are residents. The objective of system advocacy is to make changes that are required to benefit the community rather than focusing on the needs of a particular individual, family or group of residents.

**Talk Time:** The time a community resource specialist spends with a caller from the second the call is picked up to the second it is disconnected less Hold Time. Note that some ACD systems include Hold Time as part of the overall Talk Time figure and differentiate between Active Talk Time (not including time on hold) and Regular Talk Time (including time on hold).

**Target Populations:** The individuals for whom a particular service or group of services is intended. Target populations are generally described in narrative form (e.g. “Targeted, but not restricted to, Indigenous Americans”), in the eligibility or description fields. Target populations can also be pinpointed when indexing by choosing a Target Population term from the Taxonomy to append to the selected service term(s).

**Taxonomy Customization:** The act of choosing which Taxonomy terms should remain active for indexing and searching purposes and which should be deactivated making them invisible to resource specialists doing data entry, community resource specialists and other end users.

**Technology:** In an I&R context, telephone systems, telephony, telecommunications, email, instant messaging (IM), text/SMS messaging, online chat, video relay/chat, voicemail, social media, I&R software packages, electronic directories and self-service mechanisms such as automated attendants/interactive voice response systems, fax-on-demand, video relay services, community kiosks and searchable I&R databases on the Internet.

**Text Messaging:** The transmission of brief written text messages to a device such as a mobile/cellular telephone, pager or personal digital assistant (PDA) using SMS (Short Message Service) or MMS (Multimedia Message Service).

**Transaction Calls:** Calls answered by a community resource specialist that involve an I&R activity (information provision, assessment and referral, advocacy, crisis intervention). Transaction calls are characterized by direct contact between the Community resource specialist and the inquirer concerning a problem/need of either the inquirer or a third party during which one or more of the stages of the I&R process are completed (e.g. Rapport, Assessment, Clarification, Information and/or Referral Provision, Closure). Basically, calls in which I&R takes place.

**TTY/TDD Equipment:** Equipment (variously known as TTYS, text telephones, TDDs and telecommunication devices for the deaf) or other specialized telecommunications devices such as voice carry-over telephones, amplified telephones, voice-activated telephones, sip-n-puff telephones, telebrailers or large visual displays that are used at home or in the office by people who are deaf or hearing impaired, have speech disabilities or limitations, or need to communicate with a person with a hearing impairment or speech disability.

**Uninterruptible Power Supply (UPS):** A bank of batteries and an electronic module that can be used to protect computer system components in case of a power failure.

**Unmet Needs:** Individual instances where no resources are available to meet an inquirer’s assessed needs and no referrals can be made. A pattern of individual unmet needs may lead to identification of service gaps at the service delivery system level.

**Update Verification Procedures:** Procedures that can be used to validate the accuracy of suggested changes in an organizational record e.g., obtaining a signature on an agency update form.

**Use Reference:** Synonyms for preferred terms that allow users to easily find a type of service without knowing the exact wording used in the Taxonomy; or to find the preferred term using their own terminology.

**Video Relay Service:** Programs that allow people who are deaf or have a hearing impairment and feel more comfortable expressing themselves through American Sign Language (ASL) to conduct video relay calls with family, friends or business associates through a certified ASL interpreter via a broadband Internet connection and a computer equipped with a video camera. The video interpreter signs the telephone conversation with an ASL user and voices to a hearing person via a standard telephone allowing the participant to see expressions and gestures during the call.

**Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOADs):** Consortiums of non-profit organizations within a state with a shared specialized focus in being active in disasters. Organizations individually and collaboratively provide capabilities to incident management and response efforts at all levels.

**Warm Transfer:** A call transfer situation in which the Community resource specialist stays on the line until the other individual picks up, introduces the inquirer and either conferences the call to continue a three-way discussion or drops off the line allowing inquirer to discuss their situation privately with the other individual.



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## AIRS STANDARDS REVISION PROCESS

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AIRS reviews and revises the *Standards and Quality Indicators for Professional Information and Referral* at least every three years. Changes to the AIRS Standards, accreditation, and certification programs have an impact on each other and must be addressed in regular cycles to ensure they are in alignment.

Essentially, the Standards should:

- ✓ improve the quality and consistency of I&R services provided to individuals, families and communities.
- ✓ support long-term service sustainability through improved governance, community collaborations and operational efficiencies.
- ✓ embrace all appropriate models of practice rather than limiting compliance to a single model. AIRS must support creative alternatives that achieve the desired outcome of quality performance.
- ✓ not be accessibility burdensome in order to ensure the desired outcome. The bar should not be set so high that only a few I&R services can implement a Standard when a lesser requirement still constitutes quality service.
- ✓ be achievable by all I&R service providers.

Essentially, the process involves:

- ✓ the AIRS Standards Committee convenes a group of subject matter experts representing a broad expertise and representation of the field.
- ✓ all AIRS members receiving a time-limited invitation to submit their recommended changes, removals and additions to the current edition of the Standards.
- ✓ the committee reviewing any and all received recommendations from the field, and also conducting a line-by-line review of the existing text. In some areas, additional subject matter experts may be invited to participate on certain sections.
- ✓ Eventually, a final draft is shared back to members for a final review.
- ✓ The AIRS Board approves the final version recommended by the AIRS Standards Committee

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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AIRS would like to thank the AIRS Standards Committee, under the leadership of chair Pamela Hillier, for developing the 9<sup>th</sup> edition of the *AIRS Standards and Quality Indicators for Professional Information and Referral*.

Cathleen Dwyer  
CDK Consulting  
New York, New York

Olivia Harvey  
Junction Center for Independent Living  
Norton, Virginia

Clive Jones  
AIRS Executive Director  
Victoria, British Columbia

Pamela Hillier  
Chair, AIRS Standards Committee  
Community Connection  
Collingwood, Ontario

Edward Perry  
2-1-1 Tampa Bay Cares  
Clearwater, Florida

Linda Daily  
Linda Daily Consulting  
Oak Island, North Carolina

Georgia Sales  
211 LA County  
San Gabriel, California

Nancy Berg  
Biddeford, ME

Jennifer Pollak  
Chair, AIRS Accreditation Commission  
211 Michigan  
Lansing, Michigan

Nanette Relave  
Chair, AIRS Certification Commission  
ADvancing States  
Washington, District of Columbia

Joshua Pedersen  
United Way Worldwide  
Alexandria, Virginia

Vicki Mize  
United Way of Tarrant County/2-1-1  
Arlington, Texas

Kristen Buckley  
Kids Help Phone  
Toronto, Ontario